Numinous Connections: Poetry in the Hospice

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Abstract

This thesis offers a distinctive approach to writing poetry which has been developed within the context of the author's/researcher's observations of, and participation in, end of life care. It will be argued that poetry can have a unique role in supporting patients within a hospice setting. It emerges that there may be a further role of the poem as 'memorial art'. The practical base to the research has been writing poetry based on conversations with, and the creative artwork of, hospice patients throughout a period of over three years. These working methods have enabled the author to produce a substantial collection of poetry, presented at the start of the thesis, as the prime evidence of the value of the approach.

In this research context the ‘numinous’ is interpreted from its extended definition as relating to transcendence, wonder and otherness. Particular components of the writing practice have formed a ‘numinous poetics’. The numinous as a focus in this research has emerged through careful and scholarly reading and reflection as part of the author’s response to the perceived qualities and value of the poems as they were written. Seeking for the ‘numinous’ was not a prelude or prescription for the research but a consequence of it. It encompasses cognitive, linguistic and literary components, and further draws from the often numinous experience of a poem’s inception whilst talking with an individual patient. The numinous is argued to be of particular value to inform the creative representation of a patient’s life at a time when a more simplistic presentation of meaning and understanding may prove inadequate. The research details the poetics of the various components, and documents the writing experience to demonstrate the potential to other writers choosing to work in hospice settings.

Following the Creative Work of 93 poems beginning the thesis, Chapters 1 and 2 introduce the numinous approach and outline components of numinous poetics. Chapter 3 details the development of particular techniques and skills by specific examples, and then Chapter 4 fully explains the practice and key learning points gained as a hospice poet. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with further key issues regarding the role of the poet and the case for this approach to be integrated within the end of life care aims regarding a 'good death'.
Acknowledgements

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Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Barbara, for her love, great patience and help throughout all this work, and for the achievement that we share in it together.
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Poetry in the Hospice –

Introduction to the Thesis Creative Work

This thesis begins with a collection of 93 poems, selected from over 150 written during over three years as a poet at Bolton Hospice. The research work has been, above all, based fully and practically upon this applied writing activity in the hospice. The poems are the result of conversations with patients and from observations of their art and creative activities, as well as from wider work of the hospice involving volunteers, staff training and public awareness*. Since completing the research, I continue in my role of hospice poet, as well as contributing to hospice training, education and service development work.

This collection of hospice poems is presented at the beginning of the thesis since it is the main achievement of this research. It also represents the creative evidence and support for the thesis argument in the subsequent seven chapters.

Of the 93 poems in the collection, the majority are inspired by individual patients, utilizing my application of a numinous poetics to personal narratives. Others are based on group creative activities and conversations or support and affirm the hospice, its staff and volunteers. There are a further 22 examples of hospice poems incorporated in the thesis commentary, within Chapters 4 and 5.

* All patients’ names used in the thesis poems have been changed in accordance with hospice policy on public use.
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A Scarf

A scarf opens conversations.
A gift exchanged for a name,
you can never have too many.

The girls were whistled at,
cycled on, smiled at each other.
Smile even now at the lads’ faces.

Nursery rhymes on a graffiti wall.
Toe nail, donkey tail. Laughter.
You made up what you needed to.

A cat called dog, or scuttle. Ted.
He was good at keeping promises.
Will you pass this poem on?

The way silk glides over the skin,
you can never have too many scarves.
What Moves Me

Shaken, disturbed, moved to tears,
mixed up, detached, not quite here.
Dissociated, agitated, somewhat stretched,
isolated now, a bit of a rift.
Flattened, squashed, out of kilter,
taken a knock, sinking lower.
Out on a limb, groping along,
into a spin, it’s all gone wrong.
Got it together, out of the rut
follow a dream, making the cut.
On the right path, crossing the bridge,
flying high, out of the cage.
I needed a jolt to take the view,
metaphors help to pull you through.
Mill Girl

I remember
work, barefoot, in the ring room.
Mice would run over your toes.
A lad played the fool, shot an arrow,
on my forehead’s the scar. It still shows.

I remember
diving low when the belt broke,
like a flailing machine in a rage.
Such fun though, at the works panto.
Me! A Chorus Girl! Danced on the stage!

I remember,
we had Ghandi up in Rochdale.
Wisdom sees how the threads are joined up.
Then Gracie would sing out our sorrows
as the gates of the mills were drawn shut.

I remember,
I’ve since been to Disney,
seen more sights, more cities and hills,
but for memories, for life and for laughter
I’ll still take a ride to those mills.
I'd Do It All Over Again

Wink. The Land Girl began to harvest in Devon. Feeding a nation at war, driving trucks, dodging the warden's tongue. Cycling free in the wind.

'Please come back as you are going.'
Mother had a distaste for tray-baked sympathies. 'We don't eat funeral cake.'

Tissue wrapped, flowers, leaves, rich russets and ochres.
One leaf, Eric's Black Grape, now held in fingers finely scarred by thorn and scythe. They'd been bandaged with leaves in the war.

Eisenhower saw the thin milking coats and gave out fur-collar flight jackets. War ended. Churchill demobbed the girls, but never issued trousers. They marched, to pain the rump of Downing Street. A toast in Whiteways cider. Mother never knew.

'Will you help me choose a watch in Prestons?'
Time wraps up the leaves, the precious and the fragile. Wink. 'I'd do it all over again.'
On a Walk

I loved walking.

National Service; porters, artisans,
public school types.
Wings from the Air Army.

Years spent Scouting,
growing lives of younger men.
There's more to Scouts than tying a knot;
but you need to tie a knot.

The bits found in pockets. A white
hat bobs along a line of hedges.
Footsteps echo,
a brother, a stranger.
Sparking match heads, the hot
steps of Montmartre's summer.
The broadminded French; wearing
bikinis there long before Bolton.
I try to light a cigarette riding pillion.

Destinies. Fingers run over them,
a map, a piano. It's important

to finish the walk.
Art Group

What colours?
Tape tracks bare landscape,
a new American grid. Roads,
pressed down. Limits.
A platoon of subversive paints.
Artists flick phrases.

Plunge into blue, technical cyan.
Sponges hop, stipple, jump.
Capable hands lip-kiss pink canvas,
magenta spiders scrabble the frame.

Horizons. Orange, green and yellow
fly the sculptured depressions, emptied
of irresistible chocolates. Coffee.
Fingers pull, tease roads into view.
You’ve spent so much time

You’ve spent so much time with me. You listened, you sat there waiting for me to think; and you picked up my pen, more than once. Thank you.

The end may be ok now. I’ve said what I’ve needed to say, put some bits and pieces together; and that rose has opened. I didn’t think I would see it this week.

Thank you for caring enough not to cry, for even making me laugh and for getting the slippers. I liked the slippers. You stepped into my questions and left your own behind.

I’d given up asking why weeks ago. How and when just sort of looked on bewildered. You helped me to chisel what into something I recognised as me. And they will too. Thank you. You’re a star.
Chutney Promise

Bramley, date and onion.
This mother’s recipe,
fine rain, shimmerings of sun.
One to have
in the cupboard,
a season’s store.

The apples must be Bramleys.
A batch for a generous spring.
It keeps well, though rarely.
You can make it without me.

Things That Move

The wheels of a bolly cart.
The flat iron slides, slides.
Glow. A Bushfire cigarette.

A motorbike and sidecar.
Singapore flying boats.
Malayan bandits run, run.

The troop ship Lancaster.
A train for a demob suit.
Cruising the country in a Morris.

A forklift truck.
The twist of a steel thread.
Lips. Lips ask questions.
Not For Sale

A Vauxhall kindled car passions.  
Practical prestige, technical tricks,  
wise investments, miles travelled.

The 323i Coupe, sacrificed to  
practicalities. It would have made  
a better drive to Christies.

A bit of maintenance, a few miles yet.  
The poet-valet puts polish on paper.  
A nice shine. I can drive it from here.

Master Upholsterer

Skilled diagnosis. Symptomatic  
creak, scuff, crease.  
Torn, bruised; love’s polish.

A tweak here, there,  
padding, camouflage.  
A few years more, perhaps.

Could take it all apart,  
frame, joints, springs.  
A restoration, possibly.

Fixing the fixable.  
Or leave the creaking frame,  
the slow sigh of old leather.

Time’s weathering,  
it tells a story. It  
needs to tell its own.
**Lines**

Technique. The long pole, deep waters. Ready, fight, swim. Be early; be still.

Concentration, the Great Rod Race. Pounds, points. Kit to out-clever the catch.

Packing up, pensive walk, winners, losers; lines tie, test. Lines break.

**Background**

Dibble the tottering towers mop a splodge from tramlines muddy puddle frames to the famous.

A stipple at Hall i’th Wood careful swirls to the Infirmary Daubhill blobbed a bit.

Girls at work. A giggle, a grumble, giving a tint to the town.
**Garden Haiku**

seeds in a pocket
gleaned in last year's autumn sun
discovered promises

love is a seed word
flowers, the passion of youth
ploughs turn wisdom deep

leaves blown in winter
memories whirling together
feed another spring

young shoots are tender
careful lifting by the roots
choose a dwelling place

pruning, winter-worn
wind-torn tangles of the past
finding diamond tips

winter's prophecy
roots explore the absences
the sun warms the soil

some lies are buried
some will be blown on the wind
flowers speak forgiveness

scorch-frost shimmering
moonlight invades the bare earth
a silent promise

Another year turns
Tendrils cling against the rain
to taste the sunshine

catkin-pretty smiles
bougainvillea laughter
pomegranate smirk

**Bolton Haiku**

wandering to Reebok
Dibnah demolitions on
all but memories

trolley bus round Le Mans
cobble-rumble mutterings at
Aspinall's ransom

train tracked to tunnel
lost Zeppelin drops on Daubhill
headline history. Phew!

pint, port and lemon,
a kiss in the Man and Scythe
walk me home again

tram-car, trolleybus
pennies spent on memories
the last time to ride

Gower, Hick Hargreaves, Croal
spin, weave, trim; leave.
Memories to make a warm coat

hunting elephants
somewhere in the who-knows-why Google-gems; lost friends

Rivington Pike hike
mill, meadow, horizon
sunset, then sunrise

digging for victory
the lobby recipe includes
a sense of humour

cobbles, kerbs and clogs
clap-rattling of cotton mills
coal fires spit the echoes
Childhood Snapshots

Quizzical street-crowd,  
a postcard-size screen.  
TV crowned at a Coronation.

Bunker-home at midnight  
singing, the bomb screeching,  
wrapped tight in grandma.

Sirens, start the day and  
cut detention short.

A lad's letter through railings.  
Branded, grounded.  
He was just dreaming of a kiss.

Full time work at fourteen,  
less than half a lad's pay.  
Stretchers, another war.
**Allotment**

Sherry in the shed. Sweet.
A scribbled dahlia floats, distracts
the growling wind. Grump.

Potato patch. Pricking out pickling onions.
Perimeters argue with weeds. In the far
corner, a platoon of cornflowers
top crowned with iris tricolours. War.

Sweated freedoms. Packets of seeds,
barricades to rationed depressions.
Patterned, prim, shabby cultivations,
celebrations of earth. Dig. Hoe.

Slatted compost corner, warm,
oozing riches, steaming resurrection,
promises from the smallest leaf or root.
Long marrows swell on the black shoulder.
Memories for Maureen

Scrabbling over coal rucks.
Winter gems for warmth
swapped for a penny sweet bag.

Winter's mischief, squeaking foreheads
against damp window-fronts.
A shopkeeper squeals louder.

Walks in summer's lazy days,
skirt stains from blackberry scrambles.
Whites scrubbed pure for Sermons.

Streets clattered with clogs,
crowds heaving to the clattering mills.
A girl cycles smiles to a tannery.

Light Leathers, Brown 242 and 248.
Saving in the war for a husband's return.
Scars, sorrows and changes.

A life remembered; through names like
Shaw, Greenhalgh, Walker, De Haviland,
and years as a St John's first-aider.

A good life, says Maureen, a good life;
and still the smile of mischief
to find fun in winter's days.
Laughter, an envelope for Alice.  
You slipped off the rocks, soaking wet,  
walking, seaweed and smiles.  
Stunned silence, the pit gates closed the last time, the winding gear had stopped.  
For Jim, significance, framed.  
Envelopes, names. The roar of a Yorkshire waterfall. Sally. Collected sulks for Edward (add more, they won't come out!)  
An old pen in Peter's, it will write for him.

A shoe box, 'curiosities'; whys from dozens of years. Quirks, coincidences, shreds, sadness, tears; unused tickets, torn moments. Don't shake the box.

A tin of gems, uncut. Inheritance, foil-wrapped, they will not tarnish on open palms. Echoes, footsteps. The squeeze of the hand, on some unknown day. Dates, a birthday meal, a holiday, a romance. Unwrap others for a few words; sorry, more than once, hoorays, winners from Scrabble! One goodbye.  
It isn't in yet, waiting; we need to talk about where. It will be the last one in.  
And harder to unwrap, for some time.
Cross Craft

Gathering, long-suffering.
Clear plastics, pots, paints.
What are we going to do?

Scrudge, scumble, scribble,
scratch, swirl, smudge.
Craft an acrylic Easter.

Hills to climb; walking,
talking, through flowers and
friends. Carrying a cross.

Seeds shaken from a pocket,
frittered from footpath vagrants,
sentinels who feed the poor.

Yielding palms, voiceless
eloquence. Clouds gather,
grief waits and waits.

Remembering, glinting foils.
Remembering, garments.
Plant again that splendid oak.
Court Usher

My best job, shepherding.
Judges, jurors. The right box.
Witness or wayward; calm, gentle coercion to the courtroom.

Process, diplomacy,
justice. Drama.
Decided? Not yet, please wait.
You can go in now.

A job by patient persistence.
Writing, waiting, writing, waiting.
Yes! My best job ever.
You can go in now.

A long time with the jury out.
A verdict, a reprieve?
New evidence.
You can go in now.
Bookbinding

A spine, words, a cover.
The cover can make a book appealing, approachable.
The spine holds it together.
The words; the words are you.

I'm only a nurse, an editor of alternate minds, an encourager, a corrector, a suggester for you to get your story together again. The words; the words are you.

Then we'll send you home prepared. Your own pen, plenty of paper. It's your story. There is always another chapter. The words; the words are you.
Buttercup Fields

Buttercup fields in summer.  
A rare sight since pristine efficiencies and pesticides.

Dens in the hedgerows.  
Children's laughter, common as sparrowsong. The song has gone.

Hours roaming, wooded paths,  
skirting the fence, the big house.

The beginnings of decay.

Still fresh are the chases.  
Groundsmen, farmers. Run fast.  
The heart thumps in a frame. Yes,

I smile at buttercups.
Eleven Eleven

Shell shocked earth.
A strange bounty. Poppies grew to
remind the world. Sacrifice.

Beautiful. Hundreds, thousands,
tall in the fields. Hopeful,
open faces, waving in the wind.

The grace in loss. Flowers die,
seeds scatter, are pulled in; hard
rain, the plough of grief. Buried.

Poppy seeds. Decades. Deliberate and
surprising times to remember. Hopeful,
open faces, waving in the wind.
**Only Salt**

Seven separate tubs,
creation's memories.
Salt-grit, brushed from silk,

soaks colours, fingers
through fibres, shimmers surprise.
Purity tainted blue, green, magenta.

Salt. A simple form, performs,
functions; taste, tincture, react.
A life involves destruction.

Salt, a destiny to dissolve,
die, flow the rivers and seas.
The sun distils a resurrection.

Coarse salt. Pure white.
Shell Art

A table. A choice.
Years shifting in moon-pulled
seas. Mollusc, gastropod,
heaving tides, filtering lip,
manna and microbe.

Turkey Wing, Lion’s Paw, Coquina,
Pecten Raveneli, Imperial Venus,
Egg Cockle, Pen Shell, Rose Petal Tellin.

Island shores, rattling tokens.
The sea’s bones of sacrifice.
Abandoned spaces; childhood memory,
romance, quiet musing. Something lost.

Calico Clam, Buttercup, Angel Wings,
Elegant Dosinia, Zigzag Scallop,
Beaded Periwinkle, Alphabet Cone, Nutmeg.

Assembled, clean, sanitised of sea,
pristine as the waiting frame. Names and
shapes for decoration. Hands move, disturb a
generous glue. Fingers savour the smooth, the
spike. Wait. Wait; the shores will be silenced.

Lightening Whelk, Apple Murex, Wentletrap,
Lettered Olive, Fivespeckled Serith, Paper Fig,
Slipper Shell, Baby Ear, Jewel Box, King’s Crown.
Carborundum

How did we manage? An inside water tap was luxury then. Hard work moved us from the house behind the pawn shop.

A house behind Whittaker's in Salford. We had a front parlour then. I think now of some of the things we've lost.

Toasting forks and farthings. Ajax, mangles, Dolly Blue bags. Mum slips two bob to a down and out.

In the war I worked at Carborundum. A reserved occupation, fighting battles with abrasives. I met my husband there.

Carborundum. It's a lot more than just silicon carbide when sintered over so many years.

I just think it's a lovely word for a story. A word for grind and sharp and polish. And now they grow diamonds from it*.

*Moissanite. Naturally only found in meteorites but synthesised now as silicon carbide to simulate diamond.
Ninety

I first volunteered at ten years old, playing the piano at the church. I still have the books I was given. By eighteen I was a shorthand typist. Just a pound a week in wages then. It doesn't take much to be nice to people.

I worked in Windsor in the war. Weekends at home. The bombs fell. One night there were seventeen homes blazing around us all night. Dad said "It feels like the end of the world". It doesn't take much to be nice to people.

Windsor did bring me a Grenadier Guard. Loved him, married him and lost my job. That was the rule then. No questions. Children and home. Back to office work when they'd grown up. Retired at sixty. That was the rule then. No questions. It doesn't take much to be nice to people.

Spent twenty years more working, in Bolton Market Hall, until a new owner preferred dolly-birds. Redundant at eighty. These ten years now I've walked to the hospice. It's good to help people to find their value, help them to see their picture on the wall. It doesn't take much to be nice to people.
Flowers for Linda

All of Africa
broken flowers, slice,
shred of petal,
pollen dusted paths,
dried, lifeless detritus
restored memories.

Moments, fires burning,
villagers turning days,
endless years.
Platform Boot

Walk back
to the 1970s,
two or three
inches the hei-
ghts of fashion.
Celebrate.
Hundreds of
pairs congre-
gate in a two-
dimensional
stomp. Perspectives overlap. Collage
of boot-couture,
loose boots, lying boots, stepping out
boots. Jackson-Pollock-lady prepares a
colour flood, after wrestling with glue.
Other fingers nail-scrap metallic patterns,
gouache layers give
way to art. A honey - hot
whiskey, and it's done.
The Dignity of Paper

Score, word, image,
begin this pristine presence.
Edifice within space, the
cannon of consciousness.
Syllabus of self. Folio,

quire, ream, bundle, bale,
tidied by the bonefolder.
Pressed. Wait, for the gilded
invitation to read the story.

Pancake

A week after Valentine's we're
being sweetened with pancakes.
A day to indulge the bulge. Choices.
Bowl-armoury of syrup and jam,
chocolate and sugar, walnuts and
strawberries (two-a-day today).
Lemon. Sour to sharpen the taste.

There's a call for co-conspirators to
mix in the kitchen. The demonstration
flip-flop gets applause as it stays in
the pan. Why do you stand on one leg
to throw one? It goes quiet. Savouring
pancakes, no talk of giving up.
Chalk Landscape

Torn paper, a vein-frayed horizon that walks the page.
A bequest, a landscape.
Fingers move the pastels like a fluid,
tip-smudge and nail-scratch. A celebration.
Art, with energy that ripples in a coffee cup.

Boot Collage

Flood colour catches edge, crease and corner.
Capillary definition.
Puddles of purple sit amongst broad calves,
tissue insteps slither a snakeskin turquoise.

It all seems flimsy.
Gloved fingers pull with fretful impatience,
another hand swabs the excess. It will be dry soon. Then you will listen to the strutting heel strike.
Fog

Fog isn't what it used to be. 
Hear the wheels, the rolling 
ghost, No. 26, incuriously on 
time. A walk home after work, 

a walk without a landscape. 
We linked arms and the laughter 
swirled around our faces. 

A walk past the corner shop 
where mum dressed for delicacies. 
The taste of warm mussels. 

The fog devours the echoes, 
deflates the whine and hum 
of the street. We called them 
'pea-soupers' back then.
Abstract Expression

The bristle-less brush,
jitter-paint pastels.
Repellent sticky-tape
regulates creativity.

A hygienic wipe to the running ochre,
a purple stumble, an edge in red.
Measle mottling and stutter-blue stabs.
Five hands rip and reveal a result.

A fine mess
delicately blitzed.
Patient intensity,
meticulous freedom.

An artistic prescription for pain relief.
A measure of oxymoron concentrate.
Auction Box

The carved bedding box
a reminder of childhood.
Shanghai. VJ Day. It went
for little at the auction.

How much for the first
taste of candy and coke
at six? The bosun's chair
ride onto HMS Belfast?

The box could only hold
so much. What you collect
to keep are the cheerful
mornings and open faces,

places beneath a bright moon
where the gavel stays silent.
Acting


Whisky is lots of cold tea. The smoke swirls but that isn't real, herbal cigarettes smell so foul. I've lost all my hair again.

Professor Higgins' mother, Mr Brownlow's Housekeeper. A guest in Faulty Towers. I'd rather play cantankerous.

I just listen. 'Is it underneath the willow tree, that I've been dreaming of?' Acting. I was to appear in Calendar Girls.
Washing Words

The line from the back door runs to the wall, sheets flutter over the shelter. My father still has one, an odorous store. Home fires continue to burn.

Pants to all wars. It was all for nothing. Objectors, conscientious not cowardly. War, war, a life cut too short. A sixteen-year-old in the trenches.

Red white and blue, God save the King. My uncle served as a medic. Granddad took water out to the front returning, each day, carrying bodies.

Pride and Respect. A father wounded, mum’s got the postcards from France. They hung out their washing on the Siegfried Line then the poppies grew from the earth.
Forgetting

Lapis Lazuli, Vermillion,
Gamboge, Ostend Red.
Tissue in a Wiltshire tray.

Purple Flax field, Scarlet,
Verdigris, Degas' Pastels.
Rough-rippled PVA texture.

I stand shouting at a notice
board, about something forgotten.
A packet of gold leaf waits.

Opioid Receptors

Happiness has a name.
A trickling alleviation, a
magic against the morose.

The side effects? Cynicism,
pharmaceutical onslaught,
reasons not to care anymore.

Whisper the word 'Shalom'.
Inner self, disconnected, world
without translation. Patient.

Peace, wholeness. The muse
(now claiming minimum wage)
insures against litigation.

Happiness had a name, which was
always understood as a question.
Gold Leaf

Brush burnished, 
distressed attraction. 
Kettle Copper. Melt.

Silver squares, regular 
meanderings. Scraggy. 
A smile, frustration,

flakes spin and flick on 
paper palisades. It's 
all about proportion.

The Gold is Real.

Pictures

A fence, a bridge, hieroglyphics, 
overlaid steps and steps. Snow on a 
mountain. A ship of war, a trawler, 
blue sea. Sunset through the rocks. 
Paint bullets splatter, sparks of energy. 
Tree. Autumn. A cottage in the woods. 
Charcoal sketch, a collection of petals 
as friends. Tulips, daffodils, snowdrops. 
Spring acetate, a cartoon. A Fimo Santa. 
Shells barnacled to a board, a dark mill. 
Cobbles, a face at the window, twin 
peaks, clouds hover, torn textiles, weft, 
weave. Historic flower-faces, handprints. 
Feather flakes, cancer, motor 
neurone disease, a fence, a bridge.
Not pastel intensity

I wish to colour myself in a purposeful paint.
Moon violet, Waterfall, Galactic, White Pearl,
Platinum. Black is Black.
I am pearlescent, I am iridescent ink. I hold the brush.

Vibrant, space-filling, random running, misbehaving under atomised jets.
Hands beneath the frame tip this way and that. Like a Ouija board, the picture spells me out: abstract.

Sock Monkey

The charm is in the imperfection, wobbly stitch, raggedy smile, button eyes, a remodelled heel.

There's a teenage trend for odd socks. Rebellion, a donation to the sock conjurer, a laziness in matching pairs. She throws the odd ones back in, go fetch!
The machine glurps, spins.

Surprise smiles are thrown at the monkey. Lost, odd, redeemed as a pair, a mirror given away.
Honey Bottler

One, weaving through the dance, frenetic busying, building, journeying, storing.


Olympic Gingerbread

The maker has a recipe, a secret ingredient. Mix and mould. A torso, an athletic arm, sturdy shoulders. Sprint, marathon, throw. Lift.

Test spice and supple warmth. Cold set, butter brittle. Decorate and admire the winner's mark. Then the finality of break and bite to taste, to savour the secret.
**Poppy Scarf**


Confident stab. A black heart obliterates a centre, melts into perspective. The dark hollow that questions, waits for fine fingers. An accurate scatter. Rock salt sacrifice.

In time the magic finishes each pollen faced wind-flower. But now, this instant, these crystals sparkle, uncut diamonds against death.

**Punk Monkey**

‘Cut the arms out of your socks first.’ Socks of sorts. Repurposed pair accessorised by non-punk pink, plush cottons, plush pink hair, Mohican spiked (must blow-dry). There’s a better place for the ears.

Why the Quaker stitch? To redeem, getting through the eye of the needle, to be well filled and styled. Leather cuffs and a bow tie to finish. The glue dries whilst I go and pray.
The Tree

It's very hard to count the leaves. Impossible. You miss one, count one twice. Start again. Oh.

Each one is carefully crafted. Concentration with colours, hand with hesitant touch.

A picture, a mirror, a ticket. A question, a question. What do you put on a tree?

Friends, children, nephews, nieces. Family faces, not all of them smiling.

A path, a day, a talk. A poem, a song, a painting. Ribbon tied. Practical. Symbolic.

Each leaf has a frame. Count one twice, miss one. Count a ribbon, a question.
Silk Resistance

'I insist' (such a word can not begin another way) 'on full strength vibrant colour.'

A choice of weapons, a water cannon, salt rocks rattle a warning. Atmosphere.

A sequin scavenger distracts (just for a moment, this is serious). The silk surrenders. Ready.

Heliotrope Purple, Stem Green, Pink. Cannon, sweep, strike, flourish. The resistance awakes.

Silk fibres shift and snatch, pull. Affray. Subversion, a camouflage of privacy glass so

the silk now owns the image.
I insist on surrender. Insist? Art cannot be about who is going to win.
Delights

Walnut Caress
A look at the menu
Fudge Dimple Dream
Colours on canvas
Toffee Fudge Fun
Consultant review
Coffee Mint Magic
A memory, a tale
Caramel Hearts
A test and a talk
Strawberry Kiss
Pain management tips
Hazel Secrets
Have I thought about when?
Orange Whisper
Telling my family
Truffle Tongue Twist
Making a list
Melting Moments
Smiling through windows
Chocolate Delights
Mischief

Scrubbing a boy with Vim
doesn’t remove the mischief.
Potato scrumping, a pillowcase full,
aiming stones at chimneys.
Cliff climbing to chalk our names,
the big grins of two brothers.
Chased off the graveyard for
playing conkers. A wild escape over
a wall. James Bond never landed
in a store of pig manure. More Vim.

Growing up down the pit. Ten
pounds, ten shillings and sixpence.
My first week’s wage. Then noise,
dirt, miles carrying the explosives.
Shovelling until the seam runs out.
Smiling at a pile of feathers.
Wrapping

Is the wrapping important?
Blue in, white out.
Keep going, keep going.
Shimmering papers, a lens,
thirty years of banter.
Wrapping up a thought.

Going off to fish. A long brew.
Bringing dinner home. Trout.
It’s looking at me. Head. Tail.
Pan, five minutes, olive oil, butter,
salt. Oven, ten minutes, fennel.
Serve with mushrooms, cream.

A silk bow to finish. Good books,
good books. Wrapping. The
best way to disguise a surprise.
**The Dragon’s Scarf**

A scarf for the ‘Dragon’. Ha!  
Make a colour, a red-blue purple. But you can never tell.  
A hidden pigment, a lurking yellow steers the eye to brown. Not now.

Painting the paint-wash, the flat, the crease and fold of character, veins of trapped intensity, twist, writhe. A surprise crystal glints a promise, resembles pox at first, before beauty develops.

We talk about roses, about aggressive pruning. Cardinal Richelieu, the rule of art.
The Chandler’s Sky

The Chandler’s sky. Star store of the celestial, the infinite imaginings of gods, of myths and mysteries. The names hang high. Choose an eagle, an epic tale, beast, warrior, tragedy. Technicians check the stock, track their numbers, rail against romance.

The Chandler’s provisioning, knowing which ships will call, anticipating need, accident. Some royal decree. Now, you seek a new word, search the night deserts, arched upon a high plateau away from city neon. You wish to complete the list for the journey.

On its way for thousands, millions of years. Wait. See. It will arrive.
Sacred Space (Hospice Meditation)

This room, there is perhaps a label on the door- 'chapel', 'prayer', 'reflection'- this room is set apart for this poem. This room is only for this poem. No doctor’s chart or nurse’s check. No diagnostic bleep or treatment list. There are other rooms, rooms for drugs and dressings, assessment and care.

This room is set apart for this poem. Be here, just here. Attend to the art of life. Set apart in yourself the same place, your own poem. Your poem above pulse or breath or the body’s creak or curse, wheeze or wobble. Set apart the poem you.

There is a word that is used for ‘set apart’. Holy. Holy; in this room, there is this room in you. Sacred space in sacred space and this poem in this room and this poem in you. Be here and begin. Begin in your room with a word. A name, the first word of a poem; the first word of a poem is your name in this space in

here. Begin… and that is art. The art of being, the being of you. Now. Here. Now.


_Terry’s Haikus_

Choices on menus
unknown and unfamiliar
chance to be amazed.

Fishing holiday
knowing your Cod from Pollock
casting out again.

Puffin colony
leathered wings, fish-pearl offerings.
Soon to fly alone.

Stories of places
far away delicacies
still sweet in his voice.
Conclave


Nothing from above. The clouds are defined by what's inhaled from a spurned horizon, from the stiff-white cliff.

Scorn and pain, an impastoed face, a sigh. Over-brushed layers of black that are never finished.

A place of shelter, a gathering in a room where the walls are words and the door is the lung of all questions.
**Total Quality Management**

We make it better when we make it to fail. Strategy. Process. The birth of a child as sparrow-song seals a memory. Good. Pray a letter of thanks to the supplier, again.


Helicopter Anarchy

Assemble a helicopter. Numbers.
Frame, fuselage, struts and stays.

Fascination, frustration, in the order.
The unexpected bit still here when it should be in there. Too late.

I ordain the spare as decoration, as an adornment of rule-breaking for unnumbered identity. This way

there is more fun, more fear in flying. Directions are numbers. Destinations? Search for a name.

Asiatic Dragon

Sharpenings. The graphite dross.
The small shoulders of the Asiatic Dragon. It would also look good as a henna tattoo.

Fine pencil work continues. Where does your dragon fly to? Comedy in horns of red hair, then washing out the devil.

We didn’t have funds for a honeymoon. Back to work, later. Do you want a schooner of sherry now? Rich. A full range of pencils here.

The softest grey melts under fingers, a place for the dragon to land.
Picnics

Memories are like picnics. No particular idea of a menu, you fill your basket with what you have,
hunt the back of the cupboard for favourites to savour, decide on salads and delicacies. There
are routine multipacks, obligatory bananas, a possible detour to pick strawberries on the way.

Picnic quizzes. One, who packed it all together, have we got it all? Two, where shall we eat?

Someone says ‘I didn’t know you could still get Waggon Wheels’ or ‘Why is it only on picnics that
I can eat custard with my fingers?’ Once we had a picnic on the harbour wall and fought off all the seagulls.

And then the time under the big sycamore when it rained and rained. We all gave up and danced out in it.

Picnics. They’re meant to be about food and adventures. What I remember most is just that you were there.
Getting There

First aid competition. What a thought! Points for neatness, safety and not killing the model. The purpose of learning. Get it right.


Courted in grey flannels, travelled together on trains. Isle of Wight, Isle of Man, Lowestoft. Holidays, holding hands, getting there. Got it right.
Flow

View through a window,  
misty glass in need of a clean.

Artist. A smock and black beret.  
Making do with clinical blue.

Paint is a contest. Green-orange  
wrestle. Creative thrift-mix.

Focused on the tip of the brush.  
A swirl, light moves. Time stops.

Immersed, absorbed. There is  
nothing and there is everything.
**Slow Time**

A landscape made of massaged pastels. It relaxes, as life that sighs in slow time. A rose in the centre is ready to drink. White chalk highlights cliffs and windows.

The things that mill in my head flow into my fingers. Colours become inseparable. A pool forms. It is an invitation. Random or organised. If I could just get my feet right.


The circumstances of creation. A stethoscope arrives. We talk about a hen with no eggs and then some, about allergy to butterfly wings. Hands are busy with the magic of slow time.
The Cricketer

Detailed deliveries, an unplayable leg-spin, a cameo innings. Keeping the bails straight on younger shoulders.

Articulating wickets and wins within catalogues: Berry, Hilton, Barber. How do you count encouragements on these woven fields of village life?

A reveller in ideas and histories right up to the end of the game; he puts his pencil down, seeing the bails lifted, with a modest, meticulous smile.

More Small Things

Dolly Blue, a Sheila-Maid, possers, wood or zinc. Water boiling in the tub, starch the final rinse.

Cute toy pegs to hang the words. Washing day was cold, the drying clothes took all the heat, I hated coming home.

Conversations turn to art, pouring out magenta. A mix that colours medicine, wrapped around for pleasure.

Watch the fire-clouds gather, a stippled mountain-side. Gesso, thick, an off-white umber, strength against the tide.
Bealach na Ba

Five miles of freedoms and terrors. Applecross welcomes already, each jackknife a tick of achievement. Yes.

The view to Skye’s Black Cuillin. Another prize from the summit’s switchbacks, the road clinging to the pass like a stack of smiles.

West Highland cycling through crags and cotton grass moors. Visiting the face of the moon. Prostrate in the sun, watching eagles.

Waiting for the ferry from Mallaig, the terminus of trains and everyday toils. Sublime, other-worldly, nothing else like the downhill wind on your face.

Knutehytta

Some places you never really leave. Part of me still sits on the terrace or strolls the edge of Jakobs Dam. The pure air is insistent. A union in a needle-leaved, boreal landscape.

This silence remains. I am never sure if my ears or my eyes hear the easy soaring of the eagles’ wings. There are no songs. I am enchanted and you are with me.

We gaze to the southwest horizons, to Skrim and Telemark, sanctioned by the wilds of tree and snow. Those far granite hands fix and crack the sky, cradle the cloud and the mist.

I am enchanted and you are with me. Here. We never needed to talk about returning.
This is My Prayer for You

A flower bulb, a buried fist, in winter.
A struggle, against a season’s choking,
now breaks free in steel-sharp air.
The hill road turns, twists from sight.
You hear a drum, you hear a drum.
Sound, with its own horizon. Follow.
This is my prayer for you.

Sparrow song, fine dry air,
notes, dancing off harebells through sifting grass. Whisper, whisper.
Shoe size, hope, childhood shadows.
Things known and never spoken.
A hand that touches a hand.
This is my prayer for you.

Dark clouds, gathered pains that rise from shed tears.
A single seed drinks a promise.
An old face that ought to show grief.
Girls weaving secrets, a strand of hair, an unconscious caress. You remember.
This is my prayer for you.

The new-born sleeps, sleeps still tasting the peace in mother’s milk. You see small fingers ripple and you join in the dream.
The silence to savour the mysteries, that pure space in the hour before dawn.
There will be a word that wraps a gift.
This is my prayer for you.

An empty house, a disused path.
Small griefs as cobwebs, untidy places to hold the glint of morning dew.
The best stone skims its perfect arc across a breeze-calm sea. You only remember because you let go.
This is my prayer for you.


**Morris Oxford**

The last in a series started in 1913. Evolution through bullnose, flatnose, sixteen, twenty and all the Farina style to Mark VI, with reduced fins, 1622cc.
The ride to work, to work the land.
The faithful with fake wood trim.

The doctor said I had to stop. It had to go.
A lady asked to buy it and we parted.
I see her sometimes. I would like to smile.

**We Talk**

You can’t beat a cup of tea, or mushy peas made the proper way.
Children get on with their lives.
Holidays, Jersey, all past now.

We talk about Norway, fjords of fractured rock, of wilderness in Finnish tundra. It is a prelude to music, to the Halle and the stars.

A quip about jungle training, in Farnworth, then questions on seeds.
Holding a catalogue of possibilities, choices made from taste and travel.
My Father

A building. Not a monument to the past, but something that is now. Built upon a rock. Tall, as wide as the arms of a hundred fine men. There are windows.

The face of a father, able to cry another's tears. 'I love my daughters' comes the voice from the windows. Inside, the finest wood-carved walls. 'Five daughters. I am so proud.'

Neat and navy-black cloth, a sherwani, a Boski suit. Hands upon a hookah pipe, shisha smoke drawing that deep, deep smell. I have a yearning to see, through his eyes, the possibilities of peace. What he lost taught him how to love. See, there is a small boat to step upon, a dwelling, cushions to curl into as a place to dream, to dream. The water pulses against the boards. The night is breathing. This is not sleep, it is a place to quench the thirst for dreams and then, upon the morning shore, to miss him less and love him more.
**Poppy**

The flower we use to remember
reassembled on a sheet of acrylic.
Light penetrates the translucent red.

Petals of such delicacy. Short-lived
breeze-flickered in the sunshine. Cut
stems wilt so fast. We rely on pictures
when we cannot walk the fields.
A chorus of hands has made all these
here. Just the centres to be applied so

you hand me a loaded brush of thick
black paint. The bullet, the full stop
careful completion of the heart.

**Talking**

I'll talk to anybody. A friendly
face welcomes conversation.

The sounds of Sunderland
have travelled quite far.

Train journeys. Tablets
rattling and rattling in a box.

A destination, just sitting together
watching the fields. Watching

the tide of the wind sweeping
across the ripened barley.
Boxes

'I need to find a heart'. Amongst the trinkets the mind goes rummaging. A little-used book on plain cookery.

There are fancy silver frames, a cute snuggle bunny, scarves and beads and several sequinned collections.

A card with a lipstick kiss. It carries texture and words that seem to breathe. This ring was always on your finger.

A box of choices and never having to choose. Balloons, and the dissonant noise of a party, to say goodbye.

More Boxes

There is a blank canvas, a space for a picture at Christmas, a mask may be for a ball, or for hiding.

The small bag for toys and tears. Labels, to tie on something lost. A box of notes with questions.

Familiar music, faded flower petals, stones in glitter bags as wedding favours. Baubles, a reminder of fine fingers.
Sparking Clogs

Call me anything, just
don’t call me too early.
Beginning a family tale

by staring into the fire,
the flames are the pictures
you want to walk into.

Clog steel sparks around
the workhouse and the mill.
Now, in the evening light,

only a sign swings above a door.
The stories chatter inside,
argue which bit was Townleys*.

It changed. The pauper, the
soldier, the patient, sleep still
within the tidy catalogues.

The Church Army lad walks on,
mesmerised, marching to his drum.
Vapours hiss, entwine, ignite.

A voice calls along a corridor.
We trade footsteps until there is
a face, a name, the need of a smile.

*Townleys: built as a Bolton workhouse, an army barracks in WW1 and finally converted to a hospital in 1929
Winter Almonds

It feels like winter
waiting within the unknown
to write the endings.
We talk about seeds, soil,
the sweet and bitter almonds.

Spade sharpened, roots cut.
Solace in the clearer skies
walking past the drills.
Solace in these fallow fields.
What, now, of the watchful child?

What rests in my hand?
This season of all questions
please sit here and pray -
the endings need beginnings
and hard to tell the difference.

A Flower

The day ran by. A flower,
a contemplation. The voice
within a conversation separates
as mist around a waterfall. It is
air, moist, cold, fresh.

A kingfisher spark. It darts, flies
within the voice, then stops, as if
to sing, upon a broken stem.
The water flows. There is no reply.
There is the whisper of the clouds.

Draw last breath, last
fragrant inspiration of all
the words, of all the words
that ever drenched this earth.
The Work of Art

Paint poured, viscous, swirl-spread, then covered. A technique with cling-film, an art-bondage, to push these colours about. Veins tense beneath the skin, the sweet protest from the land of the paper.

This is the geography of art, the valley the ridge, the sweep of the pastures towards each chromatography. There is a diagnosis of the shore as it seeps into the limits of the sea. My eyes flick between the white lagoons and the central dark lake.

I think about the freedom of the morning, about the peeling away of a different story.

The Chasuble

Beginning with uninterrupted green, something out of nothing so that time stands still, invented, not wasted.

A plan to be surrounded by accidents of the majestic. A gift, an easel and canvas impatient for adornment, precedes but does not distract. The chasuble is spread out with stitched hem, a frame to the small house, the garment for a journey.

Around tie-dye islands, the stamp prints populate with overloads of colour. Such excess flickers to become something else.

As you imagine the movement, the arms in praise, a new and ordained beauty is present before the silence of the broken.
Travelling

Things you remember whilst travelling. Wrexham to Dunham Town. I stopped four years at an orphanage. At eight I came home. Mum had a bigger family.

Long rows of veg. Struggling mine-workers and holding mum’s hand at the gates. We stood there for ages, waiting to rescue the pay-packet from disaster.

A thick rice pudding to share, a squabble of skin and jam. At school I ducked from a flying blackboard-duster. Me Sir? Did I really talk that much?

The windows fly past at speed. It was better when you were next to me. The slow climb, into a tunnel, then out into the sunlight. Dazzled.

We met at a fuel stop. You returned, stopped again, asked me to the Palais. We danced. Now, I’m still looking out through windows, bright eyed and smiling.
Agnes

‘Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or...’ [David Copperfield]

The hottest summer for thirty years, 1949, carrying my first child. Carrying memories of my own childhood, field and farm with never a space for boredom, ever. That thing I cannot remember.

Westhoughton Senior Girls; our motto, Service Before Self. A misheard composition on ‘Four Laying Hens’. I did listen to the wheat in the thresher, the flap-flapping belt, the bags that groaned on broad backs. They are silenced now by the modern and the motorway murmur.

School finished for me at fourteen. I avoided the thing I cannot remember by scampering with friends amongst the pit rucks, fell from the steeper workings to gash a leg. A bandaged interview, to get a first job, in the office at Taylor’s rope works. Shorthand typing, lessons at half-a-crown each week. Remington, Underwood, Mr. James and Mr. Jonathan.

My husband loved me so, and also electricity. Together we were coal merchants, green-grocers, family. I went back to ‘school’, enjoyed my A-level in English Literature. The classic stories are best. I’ve never stopped reading...
Trucks and Travelling

My granddad taught me to build a bike, to make each wheel run true and then set out, enjoy the ride.

I travelled, I built, I worked it out. A lot of trial and error. Study it. Tackle anything. That’s the way of an engineer.

Lights and sounds and electronics. Leaf springs and shock absorbers. Memories in models; the best you can buy are Tamiya. Spot on.

A trans-continental Road Train. A Globe Liner. A Wrecker Truck. HMS Matabele and a Supply Vessel, both built, balanced, but yet to sail.

There was a real Zephyr Mk. 2 that I left in Australia with a note. ‘The keys are inside, yours to take if you want it.’ I was going home.
I Am

Because I can
I shake things up, meta-spin
within a mind, prime
fear or fun, make
meta-splat or spatchcock-think
with stretch and spice. Therefore

I am sifting through this sand.
Bits of time cling to my hand.
[I live because I die]
I dispense the seconds back
onto the beach, a different order.
Somebody notices; I am happy
to be unsure. Politics, the radio
is on, inventing the ‘squeezed middle’
and my smile. I choose how I listen,
half listen, half invent. Time spent
because, because I can,
I am.

Becoming

Another evening
in the silence of a place
becoming something new.

Unformed histories, a
murmuration, seconds of
existence, insequent,
innumerate. A chaos
to hold the signature of art
then let it go.

The silence of a place
that is devoid of fear. Everything
settles amongst the reeds.
Desired Things

Placid, omnipotent, persistence,  
the saviour of derelict genius.

A path amongst treasured friends.  
Testaments of virtuous mirrors.

To finish the morning marathon,  
gaze out, to a world that diminishes.

Avoiding the trickery of malice,  
the feigned obedience of avarice.

Resourcefulness. The pill box  
resurrected now for fish hooks.

The grandeur of the Duomo.  
Hear cathedrals of Italian jazz.

My hand senses the patina of leather,  
a story persisting in the smallest scars.

The Hallway

A reasoned reception, a hesitant  
refuge, where the stopped time  
is challenged by an unbelieving

bilious face. Hallways have  
doors, some are labelled.  
There are clues of footfall

or a film-reel runs disturbed by  
panelled screens. Some fidget,  
some are fascinated. Those who

watch will see a child choosing to  
play on this floor, the biggest clear  
space uncluttered by collections.

A utility of the temporary to explore  
how a ball bounces. Once inside,  
the door with all the light is the exit.
Being With

Suppose, we do not speak,

or what if I just listened?
As we move I can hear the
pull of the oars, the water

drum-lapping the sides. The
air is chilled by something.
I liked the stories best, the

mischief of well-spent youth,
how you never quite travelled alone,
steering through interfering squalls.

You describe the views of
places I only thought I knew.
So what was I doing here?

The question stays in my head.
For a while we move away, out
into the open water. You tell me

you are fearful, tell me questions
that have no answers. I reach out
my hand, it rests on your arm.

The oars are now still by the shore.
One farewell gaze, unbroken, on the
sea that forms my words. Thank you.
The Struggle

This road will lead to famous words
beside the lake, beneath the trees.

For centuries now on coach and
cart such wheels have turned

for man, who well knows this way and
how steep it is to split his will. Ahead

that almost mocking pinnacle of
stone which points to beauty and to
dead, two brothers lost beyond
its silhouette. Now all pass by,

but not for slate and ore, romantic
hopefuls, tick-list tourists, blinded

in their time escaping measured roads.
They find the journey of their choice

goes where it will, the road behind
them now reduced to just a name.

‘The Struggle’, said the sign to me.
Unlikely, now, that I return the same.
Thesis Commentary: Numinous Connections

Chapter 1.  Introduction and Definition

Why is some poetry so fascinating, compelling and mysterious, so resistant to rational analysis? How might we learn from this and is there a particular role that such poetry might play in end of life care? I am a church minister, as well as a poet, yet I choose the word numinous not for its religious connection but because it most appropriately enters us into ideas of wonder, mystery and ‘otherness’. In my voluntary role as a hospice poet I have come to develop an approach, which I term ‘numinous poetics’, to write poetry for patients. Throughout this creative research I have written very many poems indeed. They have all been formed as part of the development of the poetics; they stem from the stories and ideas gained in talking with patients, as well as from observing individual and group creative work in the hospice.

For two and a half years prior to the hospice work, I wrote a large number of poems as part of weekly writing workshop activities. The various groups, which I led, were at BASIC (Brain and Spinal Injuries Charity) at Hope Hospital, in a secure mental illness unit at Prestwich Hospital and at START in Salford, an arts centre for the recovering mentally ill in the community. Some of these early poems appear in Chapter 3 of this thesis. However, the last three years of this research has been focussed exclusively on poetry in Bolton Hospice. This writing activity has provided the inspiration for all that is in Creative Work which began this thesis. I am totally indebted to patients, staff and volunteers for their stories, their encouragement and their support.

This chapter will introduce the definition of numinous and indicate my particular understanding and use of it as applied to writing poetry in the hospice.
The Numinous; a definition

Numinous – from the Oxford English Dictionary

Numinous, adj. (and n.)
Pronunciation: Brit. /ˈnjuːmᵻnəs/ , U.S. /ˈn(j)umənəs/
Forms: 16 18–numinous, 18 numynous.
Etymology: < classical Latin nūmin-, nūmen numen n. + -ous suffix. In sense 2 after German (das) Numinöse, (das) Numinose (noun), numinös (adjective)
1. a. Of or relating to a numen; revealing or indicating the presence of a divinity; divine, spiritual. Also as n.
b. In extended use: giving rise to a sense of the spiritually transcendent; (esp. of things in art or the natural world) evoking a heightened sense of the mystical or sublime; awe-inspiring. Also as n.
2. Psychol. Relating to the experience of the divine as awesome or terrifying; designating that which governs the subject outside his or her own will. Also as n. Cf. numinosum n.

Rudolf Otto proposed two aspects of the numinous: 'mysterium tremendum, which is the tendency to invoke fear and trembling' and the 'mysterium fascinans, the tendency to attract, fascinate and compel'. In the natural world and in response to art the human mind experiences the uncanny, the otherness, the secret life revealed; we find that sense of submissive amazement. Something transcends what we know ourselves to be. Mircea Eliade referred to a 'nostalgia for paradise' as an innate human condition.

The numinous is a human response of a special type in that it is 'non-rational' yet very really experienced. Contemporary psychoanalysis uses Jung’s ideas, understanding the numinous as being unsettling at the deep level of the psyche, and having a sense of the completely other. Casement and Tacey reveal the recent broad interest in the numinous in their wide ranging study:

Contributors to the present book are interested in exploring the numinous in the human psyche, in clinical work, world events, anthropology, sociology, philosophy and the humanities. In other words they are interested in tracking

the diffuse awareness of the numinous in modern and postmodern life, through a multi-focal lens of different yet complementary perspectives.\(^4\)

This thesis uses the term numinous from the perspective of a writer in end of life care as I develop a poetics that values wonder, mystery and ‘otherness’. The term best describes the reader’s response of feeling involved in something wonderful and transcendent that does not need to be explained. I will argue in later chapters that such response by a reader is dependent upon certain ways that a creative work is able to draw the reader into the otherness that it somehow represents. My poetics for end of life care does not seek to explain or evaluate its subject. Most importantly, it seeks to achieve a numinous representation, a well-crafted poem about patient, about some aspect of their life or creativity.

I first came across the word ‘numinous’ some twenty years ago when reading C.S. Lewis’s book *The Problem of Pain*; I can still remember enjoying the sound of the word when it was new to me. Lewis’s explanations of the numinous (he uses it as a noun) seemed very well put. At that time they provided me with a frame to understand a dimension of emotional perception rekindled in my newly found Christian faith. I find myself returning to his words again as I set out to explore the 'numinous connections' that are the concern of poetry:

> Suppose you were told that there was a tiger in the next room: you would know that you were in danger and would probably feel fear. But if you were told ‘There is a ghost in the next room”, and believed it, you would feel, indeed, what is often called fear, but of a different kind. It would not be based on the knowledge of danger, for no one is primarily afraid of what a ghost may do to him, but of the mere fact that it is a ghost. It is ‘uncanny’ rather than dangerous, and the special kind of fear it excites may be called Dread. With the Uncanny one has reached the fringes of the Numinous. Now suppose that you were told simply ‘There is a mighty spirit in the room’ and believed it. Your feelings would then be even less like the mere fear of danger: but the disturbance would be profound. You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking- a sense of inadequacy to cope with such a visitant and of prostration before it - an emotion which might be expressed in Shakespeare’s words ‘Under it my genius is rebuked’. This feeling may be described as awe and the object which excites it is the Numinous.\(^5\)

\(^4\) *The Idea of the Numinous: Contemporary Jungian and psychoanalytic perspectives*, ed. by Ann Casement and David Tacey (Hove: Routledge, 2006), p. xvi. My literature searches have identified much that is concerned with the numinous in religious experience and analytical psychology but nothing has been identified specific to the practice of writing poetry of direct relevance to my own approach.

Lewis attributes the origin of the word numinous to Rudolf Otto and argues that the dread and awe of the numinous are of a quite different dimension from fear. He finds that it is basic to concepts of aesthetic appreciation and offers it to us as 'a direct experience of the really supernatural, to which the name ‘Revelation might properly be given’.\(^6\) Lewis and Otto approach the meaning of numinous substantially from the point of view of belief in the supernatural and human predispositions to religious thought. However, both acknowledge that the same dimension encompasses other uses of the term. Numinous experience is not thought to be exclusive to the religious. Its definition includes 'giving rise to a sense of the spiritually transcendent; (esp. of things in art or the natural world) evoking a heightened sense of the mystical or sublime; awe-inspiring'.\(^7\) Carl Sagan experienced the term in a secular context when he described the awe and wonder of the universe.\(^8\)

To explore further what I understand by the numinous I will explain the idea of the non-rational (as distinct from irrational); that is, types of emotional/mental response that are broadly experienced as normal and reasonable by humans, yet are resistant to rational process in explaining them. The idea of non-rational thinking may be understood better through the following two stories which I have written as illustration:

My elderly aunt has suffered with mental decline for many years and is being admitted to a care home. A solicitor attends the home and we are drawing up papers to set up a power of attorney to manage my aunt's affairs. I am required to sign a form and, not having my own pen, I am offered one by the solicitor. 'Curious pen that,' he comments as he hands it to me, 'it used to belong to Harold Shipman. A colleague of mine was on his defence team; it has written thousands of prescriptions apparently!' I am suddenly very uneasy about signing the form.

A young couple have been engaged for just two weeks. Steve had proposed to Jenny in a very expensive restaurant on a romantic trip to Paris; he went down on his knee in the middle of the diners to rapturous applause. However, Jenny lost the ring somehow at the beauty salon where she worked, constantly taking it off to protect it from nail-glue apparently. Jenny was devastated but Steve claimed on the insurance and the jeweller was able to provide an absolutely identical ring, indistinguishable from the one Jenny had lost. Good, except that it was not the same of course, not the ring

\(^7\) *Oxford English Dictionary*.
that Steve had proposed to her with. Jenny at first wanted a repeat trip to Paris but compromised with a good local Italian restaurant. Steve didn’t get his choice of a table in the corner!

The human mind may find threat or value in an object, a place or a person, that is non-rational yet very significant. The reactions to objects in the two examples above would be understood and fully accepted by the majority of people (and not totally rejected as trivial superstition). The human mind is able to make attributions, for example of threat or value to an object or person, and these attributions can bring aesthetic, motivational or protective benefits. The ‘Shipman pen’ of my story, is just a pen; but it simultaneously represents or embodies the evil of its previous owner. A diamond ring is also inert, but its presence at a betrothal makes it a kind of sentient witness to love. It is valued for far more that its material state. These types of mental responses raise questions which have led me to research cognitive sciences, as they relate to the numinous (for example regarding reader-response to cognitive shock and dissonance within a text). Chapter 2 details my exploration of four cognitive components able to inform the poet’s understanding of numinous experience.

The philosophy of aesthetics will also contribute to a framework for the numinous applied to poetry. Anja Steinbauer writes,

The importance of aesthetics to philosophy can, on reflection, not be denied: if philosophers want to explore what it means to be human, they must study this mysterious and significant ability of human beings to make aesthetic judgements. Why do we, for instance, claim that a sunset is beautiful? How do we decide this and what does it mean?

However, as I consider Steinbauer’s question (and particularly thinking of my own applied writing), I would argue that it is mystery and the inexplicable that maintain aesthetic value. The best art, a poem, a sculpture or a painting, has the potential to draw those who experience it into itself, to stun into silence and not demand intellectual response. Keats used the phrase ‘negative capability’ in a letter to his brothers, quoted below. This was in criticism of Coleridge whom he thought sought knowledge over beauty:

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9 please see references to cognitive shock in the next chapter.
http://philosophynow.org/issues/57/Aesthetics_and_Philosophy_A_Match_Made_in_Heaven [12 June 2012]
I had not a dispute, but a disquisition, with Dilke, upon various subjects; several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously -- I mean Negative Capacity, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.

This same rejection of the quest for knowledge in the face of beauty is part of George Steiner’s views. He puts forward a case for art and literature as ‘presence’, which is degraded by analysis and he asks for a work of art to be responded to by another work of art. Whilst Steiner’s arguments are difficult and complex, there are two particular ideas that I have taken from his work and brought into my numinous poetics. Firstly, that of allowing his idea of art as ‘presence’ to further inform ‘otherness’ and transcendence to the extent that it is possible to ‘believe’ in the reality of the poem. Secondly, if we consider the self creatively as a work of art, my response to the patient with another work of art achieves a valuable ekphrasis. If I can craft a poem with a sense of the numinous, I argue that this offers support of particular significance to a patient at the end of life. These arguments are taken further in Chapter 5.

12 George Steiner, Real Presences (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), pp. 3-50.
The Numinous; embracing awe, paradox and epiphany.

In understanding how the numinous may be experienced through poetry, I will clarify how the terms awe, paradox and epiphany might be seen to interrelate with the numinous.

Awe may be distinguishable from the numinous principally by its transience and emotionality (although research by Rudd, Vohs and Aaker has indicated that the benefits of an experience of awe can be lasting and valuable, in improved life satisfaction\textsuperscript{13}). The definition of awe is brought closer to the numinous by context and aspects of faith or belief that produce a possibility of permanence. Keltner and Haidt identified two central features of awe: perceived vastness and a need for cognitive accommodation.\textsuperscript{14} A profoundly novel sensory experience or perception that cannot be so accommodated produces the experience of awe. Where the subject makes an ascription to a higher power we can clearly extend awe to meet the definition of numinous in the religious sense (as referred to in quoting C. S. Lewis earlier). In a non-religious sense a piece of poetry or prose may invoke a novel image in the mind of the subject so as to be surprising and confusing; where the accommodation becomes a submission to an altered reality (as opposed to making an interpretation to fit the known) then the response may be said to be numinous. Keltner and Haidt conclude, in discussing awe and human art, that ‘Works that challenge and involve obscurity are more likely to induce awe’.\textsuperscript{15} My numinous poetics therefore, may help to generate such challenge and obscurity in the otherness of the poem. If I consider the poem’s overall image as a landscape, then my aim should be to draw the reader in to experience, and ‘believe’ in, the poem’s alternative reality. The poet Keith Douglas, in questioning the definition of poetry, had in mind a reverence for the eternal. He wrote: ‘For it is anything expressed in words, which appeals to the emotions, either in presenting an image or picture to move them; or by the music of words affecting them through the senses; or in stating some truth whose eternal quality exacts the same reverence as eternity itself’.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Keltner and Haidt, p. 310.
\textsuperscript{16} Keith Douglas ‘Poetry is Like a Man’ in \textit{Strong Words} ed. by W. N. Herbert, and M. Hollis, (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 2000), p. 113.
Paradox, by definition, is contradictory, confusing and resistant to understanding, yet where the poet uses it well the results can be unsettling in a productive way. An important book which discusses paradox is *The Well Wrought Urn*.\(^{17}\) Brooks argues for the poem to be 'read' in a way that neither discards personal views or beliefs, nor permanently adopts the beliefs of the poet in rational acceptance. What he asks is for the reader to

…so far suppress his convictions or prejudices as to see how the unit meanings or partial meanings [in the poem] are built into the total context.

I take it that this is what I. A. Richards means (or ought to mean) in the passage in his *Practical Criticism* where he says '...the question of belief or disbelief, in the intellectual sense, never arises when we are reading well. If unfortunately it does arise, either through the poet's fault or our own, we have for the moment ceased to be reading and have become astronomers, or theologians, or moralists, persons engaged in a quite different type of activity.' The point is not that when we read a poem we put to sleep all our various interests as human beings - the reason for Richards' demurring at Coleridge's metaphor of a 'willing suspension of disbelief'. The point would be that in 'reading well' we are willing to allow our various interests as human beings to become subordinate to the total experience.\(^{18}\)

This idea of the 'total experience' of the poem is very important. Paradox does share with the numinous the non-rational - that sense of challenge in something to be true that cannot be true. But paradox is a component, not the whole of the numinous. The reader's total experience (including aesthetic detail, drama, paradox, narrative imagination, deixis and text-worlds\(^{19}\)) can result in the numinous response to, and their own sense of presence in, the world of the poem.

By epiphany James Joyce means the significance of the trivial, the 'sudden spiritual manifestation' of finding the profound in something ordinary.\(^{20}\) Epiphany is similar to awe in that sense of a perceived vastness and need for cognitive accommodation. The sense of vastness can come from a small, everyday detail which has a sense of connection with something much greater. An object is elevated to a radiance

\(^{18}\) Brooks, p. 253.
\(^{19}\) Discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis

'This is the moment which I call epiphany. First we recognise that the object is one integral thing, then we recognise that it is an organised composite structure, a thing in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognise that it is that thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany.’ [http://theliterarylink.com/joyce.html](http://theliterarylink.com/joyce.html) [2 June 2013]
and an inexplicable fascination. Art objects, such as Jeff Koons’ ‘Three Ball Equilibrium Tank’,\textsuperscript{21} can achieve this; epiphanies are found within individual points, moments, objects, they are doorways to step into the numinous rather than the numinous itself. For example, Carol Ann Duffy’s poem ‘Grief’\textsuperscript{22} points to the epiphany of grief that is seen as a gift. Yet it is the sense of the world of the poem that sustains a numinous quality, working and extending the meaning of what is said, with grief as a teacher, grief as ‘love’s spinster twin’.

When approaching a poem to identify aspects such as awe, epiphany and paradox we can never see them as distinct elements but as relational – interactions that produce an effect. One very interesting idea is the concept of flow, as developed by Csikszentmihalyi. He defines flow as an optimal experience that is ‘an automatic, effortless yet highly focussed state of consciousness’.\textsuperscript{23} Flow is like awe in the way that a disruption of time is perceived. However, it is the idea of being so absorbed in a new creative view that makes me also associate this state with Joyce’s epiphany experience of a ‘sudden spiritual manifestation’ of an object. Was James Joyce in a psychological state of flow when he realised the soul of the commonest object such as the clock in the Ballast Office? \textsuperscript{24} Brooks’s arguments on paradox relate to the ‘total experience’ of the poem. If a poem or a work of art is so compelling in optimal experience then flow becomes part the aesthetic sense that frames the overall achievement. Csikszentmihalyi presents flow as a transient experience, although one to be creatively pursued and repeated as an affirmation of being part of an entity greater than ourselves.\textsuperscript{25} In a numinous poetics, all of a poem’s components can work together to achieve a sense of completeness, of intrinsic or eternal value. I discuss aspects of flow and creativity in Chapter 6 in relation to hospice poetry.

\textsuperscript{25} Csikszentmihalyi, p. 2.
Conclusion to the Introduction.

My research has explored the ways in which a poem works and I have chosen four cognitive components to include within my numinous poetics for writing in the hospice. These cognitive components are presented in Chapter 2 and applied, together with other components, to the writing of poetry in Chapter 3. Whilst I will subsequently argue that deixis is highly significant in achieving the numinous, it is narrative psychology that has directed me to the relationship between creative thought and personal significance so valuable in end of life care (presented in Chapter 4, 5 and 6).

Perhaps it is through mystery that we can become more fully aware of ourselves; James Geary bases his book on metaphors on a dictum ‘I is an Other’, which the poet Rimbaud declared as his own poetic vision. ‘Everything can be seen – and for Rimbaud everything should be seen – as something else’.26 To see something as something else and to hold both views to be true is surely the basis of paradox and metaphor, a coexistence that has always been part of good poetry. Jeffrey Wainwright’s recent book of philosophical poetry acknowledges this: ‘There are, I’m convinced again, surrounding worlds’.27

How does the human ability for metaphorical thought and aesthetic appreciation relate to the application of my research to a hospice setting? I will argue in the coming chapters that the individual’s sense of self is essentially aesthetic, a personal mythology of creative views. The reflection of self through poetry is, in my view, most powerful when it achieves a sense of the numinous (that is, resting upon aesthetic mysteries as opposed to any catalogue of a life’s objective achievements). The principal focus of my hospice work is to celebrate an individual’s personal identity and creativity; poetry that is able to access the wonder of a life portrayed, through a numinous poetics, will be valuable to patients (and their families) in the affirmation of personal significance. Whilst the work of Rudd, Vohs and Aaker has argued that awe is beneficial to well-being,28 I must emphasise that my research is not aimed at establishing a clinically therapeutic method for poetry in a hospice setting. My personal approach to writing in a hospice day-

centre is presented within Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 explores wider aspects of poetry in the hospice (and returns to questions of the ‘therapeutic’). An argument for further developing poetry writing in end of life care services is presented in Chapter 6.
Chapter 2. Do Poets Need to Know About...

Do poets need to know about the workings of the human mind? There are certain areas, which I have identified from the cognitive sciences, that support my argument for a numinous poetics and these do, I hope, equip me to control the image and drama when writing a poem. Each of the following disciplines is a substantial subject in its own right and it is not appropriate to describe them exhaustively. My aim is to draw out those aspects that are valuable to poems in the Creative Work and relevant to the role of poetry in end of life care. I will begin each one with my foremost reference text(s).

Cognitive Poetics

Peter Stockwell's *Cognitive Poetics* is my principle text for this subject, which applies principles of cognitive linguistics and psychology to the interpretation of literary texts. It is like New Criticism in its close reading of text but also gives importance to stylistics, context, cultural frameworks and reader-response. A cognitive poetics approach includes many aspects of conceptual metaphors and deixis. Since these are areas that I address in a later section, I will focus now on some other key terms used in Cognitive Poetics study, including schema, scripts, and foregrounding.30

Schema refers to an organized pattern of thought or behaviour. It can also be described as a mental structure of preconceived ideas (schematized knowledge) that is dynamic in absorbing new information to develop it or rejecting that which is contrary to it. Examples of literary schema may be found in genres of war, Victorian or science fiction writing. For each of these the schematized knowledge will exist with differing components of landscape, character or even the scientific laws and the social structures that operate. Such schematized knowledge enables a given text to be processed cognitively. Scripts are the more detailed sets of components that enable a schema to be identified and understood. Cognitive poetics uses the term script as a 'socioculturally defined mental protocol for negotiating a situation'.31 Writing about war may be signified by the inclusion of weapons, uniforms, death and so on. Scripts are not just within genres; texts describing getting dressed or washed, having an argument or sleeping, are identified by detailed physical or

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30 Ibid., see discussion in Chapter 6, pp.75-89.
31 Ibid., p.77.
emotional components. How a text is read depends on script knowledge and schema identification. A piece of writing is able to add to or challenge script and schema knowledge. Cognitive poetics also identifies schema disruption. This is especially interesting as an opportunity for identifying numinous aspects of a text. For example, Keith Douglas in ‘How to Kill’ introduces disruptive beauty, tenderness and amusement into a war poem. His line ‘How easy it is to make a ghost’ is a cognitive shock of observed detachment. My view is that the skilled poet can create cognitive shocks from such extreme schema disruptions. Sylvia Plath, for example, achieves this with ‘a bag full of God’ in her poem ‘Daddy’. Fleur Adcock uses a script of natural decay of a bird in her poem ‘Advice to a Discarded Lover’ and brilliantly sets up the sentence ‘In you / I see maggots close to the surface’.

**Advice to a Discarded Lover**

Think, now: if you have found a dead bird, not only dead, not only fallen, but full of maggots: what do you feel – more pity or more revulsion?

Pity is for the moment of death, and the moments after. It changes when decay comes, with the creeping stench and the wriggling, munching scavengers.

Returning later, though, you will see a shape of clean bone, a few feathers, an inoffensive symbol of what once lived. Nothing to make you shudder.

It is clear then. But perhaps you find the analogy I have chosen for our dead affair rather gruesome – too unpleasant a comparison.

It is not accidental. In you I see maggots close to the surface. You are eaten up by self-pity, crawling with unlovable pathos.

If I were to touch you I should feel against my fingers fat, moist worm-skin. Do not ask me for charity now: go away until your bones are clean.

Fleur Adcock

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Here is an example of a creative metaphor (the discarded relationship seen as a decaying bird) which is one of the devices which Cognitive Poetics identifies in foregrounding.

Foregrounding within the text can be achieved by a variety of devices, such as repetition, unusual naming, innovative descriptions, creative syntactic ordering, puns, rhyme, alliteration, metrical emphasis, the use of creative metaphor, and so on. All of these can be seen as deviations from the expected or ordinary use of language that draw attention to an element, foregrounding it against the relief of the rest of the features of the text.33

Adcock’s poem, above, brings the dead bird’s decay into the foreground, uses direct speech to the reader and innovative description (‘creeping stench / and the wriggling, munching scavengers’) and then works the metaphor with the detailed image foremost in the reader’s mind. The ability of a poem to defamiliarise is a key to the presentation of a new view, the fresh, the imaginative or the compelling. Being aware of the way in which schemas and scripts operate will give the poet added skill in overlaying mental spaces. Such overlays can produce ‘blended spaces’34 of reality and unreality. The idea of mental spaces relates to deictic shift and text-worlds, discussed in more detail on pages 91 to 94 of this thesis.

Stockwell argues for the value of Cognitive Poetics in stylistics and critical theory and points to more recent attention to aesthetics and the emotional involvement of the reader. He writes ‘Cognitive poetics is (and should be) a hermeneutic theory with an integral poetic dimension, in order to capture the interaction of meaningfulness and felt experience in literary reading’.35 The elements of schemas, scripts, cognitive disruptions, and so on, will give the poet insight into the ‘being’ of the poem and point to how the poem achieves its value. To take an idea from Ian McMillan, this would be like allowing for the aesthetics of the unsolved Rubik’s Cube,36 enjoying it without the need to wrestle endlessly towards a solution. I have learned, through studying cognitive poetics, how I may write to surprise and refresh a view of a patient’s life, moving away from rational value and towards the aesthetics of a mystery. This is of particular value for a numinous poetics applicable to hospice writing.

34 Ibid., p. 97.
36 Research Group discussion at Univ. of Bolton with Ian McMillan, Professor of Poetry, Oct. 2011.
Conceptual Metaphors

Metaphors We Live By by Lakoff and Johnson\(^\text{37}\) is the key text for my study of conceptual metaphors together with I is an Other by James Geary.\(^\text{38}\) Metaphors provide cognitive structures for everyday understanding. We see one thing in terms of another. Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate the systematicity of metaphorical concepts such as ARGUMENT IS WAR\(^\text{39}\) – appearing in common usage as, for example, ‘standing your ground’, ‘strategy’ and ‘advancing’ or ‘defending a position’. Other common examples of metaphorical systems are in TIME IS A COMMODITY (‘saving time’, ‘wasting time’) and LIFE IS A JOURNEY (‘dead end job’, ‘marriage on the rocks’, ‘on track’, ‘feeling lost’). There are conceptual metaphors that are orientational. Systems of understanding that are vertical are HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN and UNKNOWN IS UP; KNOWN IS DOWN. Examples in common use are ‘high spirits’, ‘fell into depression’ and ‘up in the air’, ‘the matter is settled’, ‘out of the blue’.

Conceptual metaphors may also be seen as experiential and embodied, which is to say that what is intangible (e.g. such conceptual terms as life, argument or knowledge) is understood in physical experience, as demonstrated for example by Adcock’s poem above. James Geary devotes a chapter to ‘Metaphor and the Body’\(^\text{40}\) and makes specific reference to emotion. STRONG EMOTION IS HOT; WEAK EMOTION IS COLD is clearly based on the actual physical sensation of temperature that accompanies the emotional state (‘burning with passion’, ‘cold shoulder’). Similarly we see embodiment in the links between spiritual cleanliness and physical cleanliness – a feature, of course, with all major religions in either baptism or sacraments of washing.

The poem ‘Reservoirs’ by R. S. Thomas is a powerful and disturbing poem about the abuse and destruction of Welsh landscape and culture. In the poem I readily identify the conceptual metaphors SADNESS IS DOWN and KNOWN IS DOWN,


\(^{38}\) James Geary, *I is an Other – The Secret Life of the Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011). Ortony’s *Metaphor and Thought*, detailed in the bibliography, has also been useful background reading.

\(^{39}\) This thesis follows the standard practice in cognitive linguistics of capitalizing conceptual metaphors for identification. The examples quoted in discussing all the conceptual metaphors can be found in the metaphor index on the Berkeley University web resource page; see reference link footnote 89 on page 125.

\(^{40}\) James Geary, *I is an Other*, p. 94.
which support the text of buried emotion, pain and history; ‘reservoirs that are the subconscious’ are filled with ‘tears down the hills’ side’. Body references (expression, faces, decay, elbowing and grave) work with this metaphorical orientation to magnify a personal sense of loss. This sets up ‘English scavenging among the remains’ to be so much more disrespectful and opportunistic at the death of Welsh landscape and culture.

**Reservoirs**

There are places in Wales I don’t go:
Reservoirs that are the subconscious
Of a people, troubled far down
With gravestones, chapels, villages even;
The serenity of their expression
Revolts me, it is a pose
For strangers, a watercolour’s appeal
To the mass, instead of the poem’s
Harsher conditions. There are the hills,
Too; gardens gone under the scum
Of the forests; and the smashed faces
Of the farms with the stone trickle
Of their tears down the hills’ side.

Where can I go, then, from the smell
Of decay, from the putrefying of a dead
Nation? I have walked the shore
For an hour and seen the English
Scavenging among the remains
Of our culture, covering the sand
Like the tide and, with the roughness
Of the tide, elbowing our language
Into the grave that we have dug for it.

*R S Thomas* 41

What does the reader take away from this poem? Lines 2, 3 and 23 are most important. The text frames the orientational metaphors to place the sense of loss in history with ‘subconscious / Of a people, troubled far down’ and ‘language / Into the grave that we have dug for it’. I have found it to be most informative as a poet to have a clear understanding of how conceptual metaphors operate and to see the opportunities, and difficulties, they can create. Thomas’s poem ‘Reservoirs’ is all the more powerful for its combined use of embodiment and orientational metaphors. The resulting sense of the numinous of this poem is to leave readers

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‘troubled far down’, perhaps identifying with the ‘people’, without knowing how or why they feel such empathy.

In my hospice work I have found a particular benefit, in understanding conceptual metaphors and embodiment, to present new ways of seeing. It may be that, for a patient faced with degradation of the body, the ability, through poetry, to glimpse their own presence in art is especially poignant.

**Deixis (with Deictic Shift Theory and Text-World Theory)**

Deixis is a subject studied in cognitive linguistics and discourse analysis and of particularly interested is how it helps to study the position and *movement* of the reader in relation to the text. *Cognitive Poetics*[^42] is again a main source for this subject together with Lesley Jeffries’s chapter ‘Point of View and the Reader in the Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy’.[^43] Jeffries looks at the poetry of Duffy on the basis that ‘my overwhelming feeling is that [her poems] draw me in as a reader’.[^44] She uses the terms deixis and deictic shift from the field of cognitive linguistics, to analyse her poems and to discover how her poetry achieves this effect. Stockwell’s book also draws from linguistics and has a chapter on ‘Cognitive Deixis’[^45] which explores how the point of view can shift between characters, times and places in a text and how a reader is able to understand this shift. Jeffries argues that the use of frequent deictic shifts, together with high proximal deixis of the text (i.e. nearer to the centre), entices readers into the ‘here and now’ of the poems and places them nearer to the deictic centre. She writes ‘Duffy exploits the deictic systems of English in a number of ways that enable the reader to take up a position in relation to the substance of the poems, whether or not the reader is being addressed or included directly’.[^46]

*Cognitive Poetics* explains the close relationship that a reader is able to build with a literary text utilising a framework called Text World Theory.[^47] This is developed to understand the cognitive processing of human discourse and aims to learn from

[^42]: Peter Stockwell. *Cognitive Poetics; An Introduction*.
[^44]: Lesley Jeffries, p. 54.
[^45]: Peter Stockwell. *Cognitive Poetics; An Introduction*, pp. 41-57.
[^46]: Ibid., p.57.
[^47]: Ibid., pp.136-149.
this and apply it to literary reading. What is especially useful in an understanding of
the numinous response is, firstly, the idea of world-building. In the poem
‘Reservoirs’ (above, page 90) the use of anaphoric referencing is interesting in that
seven of the poem’s 22 lines begin with ‘Of…’. Each use carries back to
‘Reservoirs…/ Of…’ and helps to present a world of a personified landscape,
capable of expression and emotion and tears. Secondly the idea of sub-worlds is
valuable. These can be

Deictic Sub-worlds, (such as flashbacks, scene shifts, alternative voices),
Attitudinal Sub-worlds, (alteration of desire, belief, and purpose) and
Epistemic Sub-worlds, where the text can present possibilities or the
hypothetical.

In ‘Reservoirs’ there is the deictic sub-world of the subconscious, present as a
sinister coexistence of the poem’s world and the physical ‘watercolour’ landscape.
The world of grief is an attitudinal one built from many references to death and
decay and which is referenced by ‘…the English / Scavenging…’. The epistemic is
introduced with the question ‘Where can I go then…?’; asking the reader to explore
possible answers. There is an attitudinal sub-world of guilt and this is left with the
reader at the end of the poem. This is built from words of ‘subconscious’, ‘troubled’,
‘revolts’ and the final ‘the grave we have dug’.

I will now look further at text-worlds and deixis in Duffy’s poem, ‘Spring’.

Spring

Spring’s pardon comes, a sweetening of the air,
the light made fairer by an hour, time
as forgiveness, granted in the murmured colouring
of flowers, rain’s mantra of reprieve, reprieve, reprieve.

The lovers waking in the lightening rooms believe
that something holds them, as they hold themselves,
within a kind of grace, a soft embrace, an absolution
from their stolen hours, their necessary lies. And this is wise:
to know that music’s gold is carried in the frayed purse
of a bird, to pick affection’s herb, to see the sun and moon
half-rhyme their light across the vacant, papery sky.
Trees, in their blossoms, young queens, flounce for clemency.

Carol Ann Duffy

This poem has a wonderful combination of mysterious images, close details described in the present tense and powerful personifications, with the reader as voyeur. There is the sense of a believable, yet mysterious, world. I notice also the mesmerizing use of repetition that begins in the last line of the first stanza with ‘rain’s mantra of reprieve, reprieve, reprieve.’ The following stanza continues the mantra effect with the repeated ‘hold’, the assonance of ‘grace’ and ‘embrace’, and of ‘lies’ and ‘wise’. The text uses all these components of deixis to place the reader in the poem with the two lovers.

Through the study of deixis I have realised the particular value to a numinous poetics, where I can strive to create a different world, that of the poem, where the hospice patient may sense a representation of themselves. Where a text is able to draw a reader into its ‘landscape’, and blend a number of sub-worlds, then the reader may be fascinated, compelled and unsettled. From both my research reading in deixis and my poetry activities in the hospice, I have identified six key aspects of poetry that engage the reader in the world of the poem.

- **Proximal deixis:** ‘here’, ‘this’, ‘now’, ‘we’.
- **Text addressed to the reader (imperatives, instructions and questions):** ‘you’ as addressee.
- **Closely observed detail, especially in the present tense, topics of shared experience with the reader.**
- **Believable, yet novel or mysterious images.**
- **Personifications of surroundings.**
- **Intimacy and voyeuristic description.**

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The skill of the poet in engaging the reader in a text-world, managing the shifts between and overlaying other worlds, can produce numinous response. I have used the above aspects of deixis and text-worlds within my numinous poetics, presenting patients with a poem/world formed from remembered details of their lives.

**Narrative Psychology**

‘Human beings are storytellers by nature’ writes Dan McAdams. His book, my prime text for this section, argues for a narrative self, a construction of identity made from stories, the anecdotal or the epic. The stories told by individuals are projections that are strongly metaphorical and entwined with the stories of others and ‘culture’ – which, McAdams argues, individuals draw from folklores, books, films, soap operas, celebrities, as well as from national and/or ethnic history and religion. An individual’s story is not a finished work but can be more like a collection of memories and identifiers, perhaps like a shoebox of photos, tickets, letters and ephemera. All these may be considered as part of identity and inform our sense of self. When we talk about ourselves to others, we use story to draw from these individual or epic experiences and beliefs. We pick out from the stories of others the echoes of our own. We watch a film or drama and find empathy with a character ‘just like me’. Our own stories become bigger, more significant through sharing and projection into the stories that precede us and surround us. A key part of many forms of counselling is the rewriting of an individual’s story, the taking control of narrative to find value and significance and hope. Faith and religion offer powerful connections with epic and eternal stories. We have the ability to see ourselves as ‘other’ (as fully argued by Paul Ricoeur and James Geary) and this otherness can transcend the physical existence of human life. It is this aspect of

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50 Regarding the cognitive construct of ‘self’, Peter Abbs argues that until about 500BC the concept of self was essentially epic and tribal, with very little focussed on individuality. He writes that the philosopher Heraclitus (540-480BC), later followed by Plato, Socrates and the Stoics, searched for the meaning of self. The Stoics particularly used the reflective practice of writing personal journals. This search for self was deepened by the passionate Christian quest for salvation with its inward intensity. Abbs accepts St. Augustine’s Confessions as the first great subjective autobiography and links the cultural and spiritual which fostered the development of inner self through the act of writing. Reference: Peter Abbs, ‘The Creative Word and Created Life’ in *The Self on the Page* ed. by Celia Hunt (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1998), pp. 117-128.


transcendence that is most compelling in writing poetry in the hospice; I can aim to achieve a representation of the significant self of a patient.

In considering the way we construct out personal stories, my research has led me to another area in psychology, that of attribution theory. Attribution is a psychological process by which individuals seek to explain the causes of behaviours and events; certain attributions can be made to protect the sense of self or to cope with the stress of uncertainties. Examples could be the ‘obstinate’ machine that refuses to work for us, or the ‘cunning’ fish that leaves our nets empty. The human mind creates another, non-rational, world that sustains a search for meaning and significance. I have discovered, through my activities as a hospice poet, that within the detail of a personal mythology, a creative attribution has powerful potential. In my poem ‘Knutehytta’, in the Creative Work, I write,

We gaze to the southwest horizons, to Skrim and Telemark, sanctioned by the wilds of tree and snow. Those far granite hands fix and crack the sky, cradle the cloud and the mist.

By presenting ‘We gaze’ as ‘sanctioned’ the poem uses an attribution of significance and acceptance to a particular moment; this is then sustained further by the purpose of ‘Those far granite hands’. This is a similar effect to the first line of George Herbert’s poem ‘Life’, ‘I made a posie, while the day ran by’. The use of the word ‘ran’ is an attribution that personifies and gives an intention to ‘The day’. It achieves both a significance and a separation that would have been lost in the inert alternative of ‘the day passed by’.

Poets and literary critics are accustomed to mythologies. The ‘use’ of literary reference to, or parody of, Greek (or other epic) myths may be profound or conceited, or indeed the quest for meaning of all that is poetic. However, the idea of personal myth may be seen as new, in application to poetry. Judith Kroll argues that Sylvia Plath’s poetry forms a mythic biography with an overriding concern for


54 see Thesis page 59.


rebirth and transcendence. Her analysis of Plath’s poem ‘Ariel’ is fascinating. Kroll concluded that it is a paradox of sacrifice and preservation, an ultimate reconciliation.

Ariel

Stasis in darkness.
Then the substanceless blue
Pour of tor and distances.
God’s lioness,
How one we grow,
Pivot of heels and knees!—The furrow
Splits and passes, sister to
The brown arc
Of the neck I cannot catch,
Nigger-eye
Berries cast dark
Hooks——Black sweet blood mouthfuls,
Shadows.
Something else
Hauls me through air——Thighs, hair;
Flakes from my heels.
White
Godiva, I unpeel——Dead hands, dead stringencies.
And now I
Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.
The child’s cry
Melts in the wall.
And I
Am the arrow,
The dew that flies,
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red
Eye, the cauldron of morning.

Sylvia Plath
Many readers will see this as an enormously skilled and technically daring poem. It uses attributions to elevate the significance of the ride and the rider, for example, in ‘Pour of tor’, ‘Berries cast dark / Hooks’ and ‘Something else / Hauls me’. The poem achieves a great tension between the personal and the mythical. It may be that not every writer can walk this tightrope, but such an extreme example as this emphasises the idea that personal myth is inherently a creative work. Kroll concludes in her book:

Had Plath survived, it seems likely, given her concerns at the end of her life, that she would have further developed and further explored the overtly religious themes of some of the last poems, coming more and more to realize her power of what Ted Hughes calls her ‘free and controlled access to depths formerly reserved to the primitive ecstatic priests, shamans and holy men,…’; and, as in the case of her mythology, evolving a sensibility shaped by several traditions, with a voice unmistakably her own. The unflinchingness of her gaze, her refusal to compromise the truth, her precision, her intelligence, and her passion – all of these would have qualified her uniquely, in her discovery of her wholeness, to convince us that the achievement is possible.  

The creative expression of personal mythology is linked by Kroll with a discovery of ‘wholeness’. Perhaps Plath’s ‘Ariel’ is not a poem foretelling her death. It could be seen as signifying a preparedness for death, itself a numinous achievement borne from her own creative story. I have, at times, myself been amazed at those patients in the hospice who reveal, in conversation, a great sense of wholeness in the face of death and it is a privilege for a poet to portray some part of this, in telling their story. One example in my hospice creative work is the poem ‘I’d Do It All Over Again’.  

McAdams writes ‘Each of us creates a personal myth that in all its details is like no other story in the world’. He explores the ideas of narrative tone (optimistic or pessimistic) and related forms as in general literary styles of comedy, romance, tragedy and irony. Why is this of interest to a poet? The tone and style of individual personal myth, as well as the detailed content, will influence the response to the text of a story or poem. When we talk about a poem’s accessibility then tone and

60 Kroll, Chapters in a Mythology: pp. 220-221.
61 This can be found in this thesis on page 7.
62 McAdams, The Stories We Live By, p. 47.
63 Ibid., p. 50.
style must be considered part of the content to be accessed. I am intrigued by the potential, through a deeper understanding of the nature of personal myth, to somehow record and celebrate a patient’s life in a significant way. In my hospice work this approach to personal mythology has shown me that I can take license to offer creative representations, particularly through metaphor and allegory. The value of mystery is all the more interesting when considering the work of Dominic McLoughlin from the discipline of psychodynamic counselling. He argues that both the hospice and the poetic form may be defined in terms of a transitional space and the poem may become a ‘transformational object’. He writes: ‘Presenting poetry in a hospice as a transformative experience of this kind allows the patient to choose which poem will or will not mean something to him/her’. McLoughlin, furthermore, finds special value in poetry’s ability to represent mystery. His research, running a writing group with hospice patients, ‘shows how the act of reading and writing poetry places a value for patients on not knowing at a time when the plain hard facts of terminal illness loom large’.

An interesting question, and a challenge, strikes me. Suppose that Sylvia Plath were not a poet but a patient in a hospice and in conversation with me she speaks of her love for her horse, called Ariel. I hear of the immense freedom she feels from the world when out riding in the mornings. Could I have written such a powerful and mysterious poem as that on the page 96? How would Sylvia Plath, as a patient, have received it? I am convinced that my understanding of narrative psychology (and in particular how creative attributions may elevate the perceived significance of a text) helps me to write a better poem for a hospice patient.

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64 From the field of psychoanalysis where object-relations theorists view an ‘object’ as anything in the external world that can be related to by a person, and that can be internalized into one’s inner psychic world. Experiences, people and things are all ‘objects’. Object-relations theorist, Christopher Bollas says: ‘the objects of our world are potential forms of transformation’. C. Bollas, Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience, New York: Routledge, 1992, p.4.


Conclusion to Chapter 2

My novel approach is to utilise the aspects of cognitive sciences in this chapter, not in *reading* a text, but in applied *writing practice*. I would hope to be the very best poet, true to all that is found excellent in the art and yet also be able to amaze each patient, capture just something through which they are able to be drawn into the landscape of the numinous value in their own life story. I will write later in this thesis of my very best attempts to meet this challenge. It is my conclusion that skill in use of conceptual metaphors and cognitive poetics enhances my control of image and drama, in the creation of text-worlds. The cognitive sciences in this chapter have proved very valuable in my work; they point to how numinous poetry may be achieved and support its particular worth to patients approaching the end of life.
Chapter 3. Inform and Influence

This chapter develops my arguments for a numinous poetics by showing how bringing cognitive, aesthetic and literary components together in thinking and creative practice has been a revelatory force to influence my own writing, and to point to particular values in the context of writing in the hospice.

A Numinous Poetics

Literary criticism may be considered as the understanding and interpretation of texts.\(^\text{67}\) Because of this, in my writing practice before the current work, I would have had such questions in mind as ‘What am I saying? or ‘What is my poem communicating? I now view this approach as quite disabling to the hospice poet since such questions interfere with the aim to touch upon ‘achievements of wonder and mystery’ for a patient. The result of my research is that my writing practice, in particular the development and editing of a poem, is now radically different from my earlier approach.

The components of the poetics are indicated below, and incorporate a series of questions.

A Framework for Numinous Poetics

1. Cognitive Poetics has tools that enable us to identify scripts and how a poem shocks, disturbs or fascinates a reader. How does the poem achieve such shocks and disturbances? How do these work within the poem?
2. Conceptual Metaphors operate as the mental models and interpretations of the world we live in. Does the poem use a Conceptual Metaphor as a strong element? Are there contradictions? Does it enrich or challenge a view of the world, offer insight or reframing?
3. Deixis: how can Deictic Shift and Text World Theory identify language that draws a reader into the landscape of the poem? Does the poem achieve this to bring the reader a ‘new reality’? Are there unsettling deictic shifts and text-world overlays?

\(^{67}\) For the basis of such a claim I have studied Lois Tyson, *Using Critical Theory*, 2nd Ed. (Oxon: Routledge, 2011).
4. Narrative Psychology looks to enhancing the sense of self and life significance through words and personal narrative. Does the poem offer a narrative that is open to the reader for the reader to respond to or identify with? To what extent is the narrative unusual or accessible?

5. Paradox: where are these within the text and what part to they play in the dramatic or essential nature of the poem? How challenging to belief is the non-rational and how does paradox support the working of the poem?

6. Awe: is there a sense of vastness and need for cognitive accommodation? What is challenging or obscure and are these producing a sense of wonder, fear or reverence? Does a sense of awe point to an alternative reality?

7. Epiphany: does the poem reveal some previously hidden quality of a specific component? How does this view challenge or enhance existing qualities? In Joyce’s terms can the change in ‘whatness’ be expressed and in what reality can it exist?

8. Aesthetic Value: what is the image of the poem and sense of otherness? What is responded to? How do the other components work together to achieve a sense of completeness, of intrinsic or eternal value?

My approach, when reading a poem or editing my own work, is not to work through the above questions in any routine, or exhaustive, manner. I use them only as a guide. As an example (and rather than choosing one of my own poems) I have selected Sylvia Plath's 'Morning Song' for study. Plath has been of enormous influence on my writing and her work has often left me with a sense of awe, wonder and the mysterious. In looking at this poem I seek to draw out new views of her achievements and to make a particular point about the writing of poetry in the hospice.

Morning Song

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry
Took its place among the elements.

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.
In a draughty museum, your nakedness
Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.

I'm no more your mother
Than the cloud that distils a mirror to reflect its own slow
Effacement at the wind's hand.
All night your moth-breath
Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:
A far sea moves in my ear.

One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral
In my Victorian nightgown.
Your mouth opens clean as a cat's. The window square

Whitens and swallows its dull stars. And now you try
Your handful of notes;
The clear vowels rise like balloons.

Sylvia Plath

My opinion of Sylvia Plath’s ‘Morning Song’ is that the key to its numinous quality is in the incredible tension. This exists between the details of tenderness and significant joy of a new baby, and the rejection, fear and sinister threat that the event seems to bring with it. There is a great sense in the poem of ‘something else is going on’. I will now discuss, in my understanding of the numinous poetics, how this is achieved.

The first trick of the poem is in the paradox of its title. ‘Morning Song’ is an apparent phrase of joy and celebration and yet, immediately, the first two stanzas are harsh and detached. Cognitive poetics study indicates that terms such as ‘bald cry’, ‘elements’, ‘statue’, ‘draughty museum’ and ‘blankly as walls’ are disturbingly outside the scripts we expect for a joyful morning or the birth of a child. The third stanza introduces the shock of rejection and the sinister phrase ‘slow / effacement’. This further contrasts with the fourth and fifth stanzas where the tone is so intimate. The reader is drawn in, to experience this tension, by the present tense speech (of all but the first stanza). We seem to be witnesses to vivid, detailed and revealing images with such strength to engage the reader as voyeur. The deixis is ‘now’. We are overhearing a mother speaking to her new child. We hear the inner voice of a mother making a deeply personal commentary on her feelings (there are ten second person and seven first person pronouns in ‘Morning Song’).

The story of the poem is strange and the details point to another reality. Cognitive Poetics gives us the notion of ‘text world’. Using this idea I can see the discourse is dominated by air and air movement (as in ‘cry’, ‘voices echo’, ‘draught’, ‘breath’, ‘cloud’, ‘wind’s hand’, ‘moth-breath’, ‘ear’, and ‘vowels rise’) which present an

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attitudinal sub-world. The cognitively blended world of the poem is fascinating and compelling and increases the believable quality of the final line; we can almost see the balloons rising in the air. A further attitudinal subworld is that in which personified objects have agencies, as in the ‘cloud that distils’, ‘Effacement at the wind’s hand’ and ‘A far sea moves in my ear’. In the same way the ‘window square’ is not passive, but has an existence, as in ‘The window square / Whitens and swallows’. By creating such subworlds, Plath sets up the phrase of the final line ‘The clear vowels rise’; the voice of the child has its own agency as it moves away from the mother. We expect an emotional intimacy between mother and child, yet the poem seems to be about separation, which is difficult for the reader to cognitively accommodate; a sense of awe stems from this unreconciled conflict. To me, the final lines of the poem are both a picturesque representation of a baby’s babbling and also a statement of the profound significance of voice.

The paradox of intimacy and separation is also strengthened by a number of conceptual metaphors. AFFECTION IS WARMTH/DISLIKE IS COLD is apparent in the ‘draughty museum’, ‘cloud that distills’ and ‘far sea moves’. The only slight warmth in the whole poem is shown in ‘moth-breath / Flickers’, in lines 10 and 11. CHANGE IS MOVEMENT supports the ideas of the entering of motherhood and of the cloud and sea movements in the poem. EXTERNAL CONDITIONS ARE A CLIMATE supports the sense of inevitability and loss of control in the third stanza (‘slow / Effacement at the wind’s hand’). EMOTIONAL INTIMACY IS PHYSICAL CLOSENESS is a source of disturbance since the text presents physical separations.

Plath’s skill is in unsettling the reader with paradox and with the unexpected, blending a new world for the poem and setting up a mysterious significance in the separation of the voice. This separate presence of the voice is moving away to outlive its creator. Is ‘Morning Song’ about a new baby, or is it about a new poem? There are the twin parallels of giving birth to a child and giving birth to a poem, of the child’s voice and the poet’s voice, which cannot escape me. The poem has ‘presence’ in the terms of George Steiner’s arguments (which I mentioned in my introduction, on page 80), as the poem stands apart from its creator. Is the numinous also in the severing, from the creator, of the poem’s umbilical cord? There is a powerful duality in the idea that a poet, or artist, may declare ‘I have made something and it is now not part of me’. In my work, writing poems in the
hospice, I have returned to ‘Morning Song’ as a reminder of something I view as profound. This is that, once written, the poem is no longer possessed; such a poem confirms the sense of a poem’s ‘presence’. It is no longer my poem, or even the patient’s, to whom it may have been ‘given’. It is, in a sense, a voice to outlive us both.
Perspectives on the Numinous - Examples of my own Poetry

As my research has progressed I have continually developed my writing through my understanding of a numinous poetics. This chapter demonstrates the development of technique and skill through a selection of poems written prior to the hospice work; many were produced in the writing groups which I led in other healthcare settings, with the opportunity to begin to use aspects of the numinous in a deliberate way. It may seem a particular privilege to be the writer of a poem and also the one who presents its analysis. However, the examples are not to claim any level of value, other than demonstrating how each one utilises a numinous poetics in its construction and achievement. There is not, of course, a dichotomy of the numinous and non-numinous; the poems are the result of technical applications that will reveal a scale of strengths. The effect on any reader will always be in context; for example the poem ‘Contents’, when presented, say, to a grieving son, may produce a much greater response. (In contrast, the same use of economy in ‘Master Upholsterer’, (page 12) achieves, and reflects, a sense of peace with that which cannot be fixed.)

Cave.

In the previous chapter I referred to Lakoff and Johnson’s examples of conceptual metaphors\(^69\) which included LOVE IS WAR; in usage typical terms and phrases would be ‘advances’, ‘conquest’ and ‘fend them off’.\(^70\) The poem, ‘Cave’, develops a sinister use of LOVE IS WAR by drawing a parallel with the sea's conquest of the land.

\[\text{Cave}\]

Cave, created by a sea’s incessant mauling. A pit of weakness in folded soft strata, sucked and cracked returning back a million times.

This obsessive craving to taste the stone’s surrender; insatiable tongues exploring split and fissure to rattle pick and flick, spitting victims in

\(^{70}\) Ibid., p. 49.
the foam’s celebration, drinking
each vein’s red defeat.

Creation is this emptiness, a hollow,
a space for a raping sea’s thrust.
The cave-space cannons guttural thumps
a protest to each tide’s lust.

Waves offer sealing lips, swallow
the deep screams, transforming protest into
pretty sprays; a peacock shaking feathers.
Tourists stand to watch, click-capture the charm.

A blow-bugle sea proclaims marriage to the land
to lie back in half sleep satisfaction.
Children flow to fill the cave with shrieks.
Laughter echoes from walls that weep.

The sea is an active agent upon a passive land. This could symbolise centuries
(implied by ‘a million times’, line 4) of a society male-dominated for the purpose of
progeny. This unequal marriage can pretend to be respectable, as in the epiphanic
‘a peacock shaking feathers’ (line 17) and in the reference to taking a photograph
(line 18). The womb-cave is empty in old age and the poem ends in a sense of
sinister sadness. The conceptual metaphor frames the poem to signify the defeat
that comes with conquest.

The poem introduces cognitive disturbances with a personified sea ‘mauling’ (line
2) and this gives the sea a sinister character to initially unsettle the reader. In this
first stanza the use of ‘incessant’ and ‘returning’ immediately begins the sense of
the deictic now to achieve a shift of the reader into the poem. This is continued as
the second stanza begins with ‘This’. The present tense description helps the
reader to be as though an observer to the scene. Waves against a cliff are more
usually attractive holiday memories, so there is cognitive shock in the sea’s
personified lust for the land, implied by ‘Waves offer sealing lips, swallow / the deep
screams,’ (lines 15 and 16). Beauty and terror, love and rape, work as key
paradoxes to strengthen the poem. The story of the poem may find echoes in a
reader’s relationship experiences, but the final stanza achieves a place for the
poem in personal narrative. The reader is a voyeur, watching the scene, being
charmed by it but now with an unsettling guilt. How many times do we pretend not
to see what is really going on, use laughter to cover our own quiet weeping? The combined effect is unsettling and awesome due to the irreconcilable images.

It is interesting that the writing of this poem began as an exploration of the land and sea relationship using personification (this was upon observing the pretty sprays and hearing the audible thumps, of waves against the caves and cliffs outside Boscastle harbour). Could it be that, in the creative process in my own mind, the battling nature, distinctive of the sea, is directed by the LOVE IS WAR metaphor? Is it the influence that developed the sense of the land's submission, its weakness and yet its beauty? It is a potentially troubling idea that what is usually accepted as 'natural' may be in tension with such deep issues of power and submission, even intimating a sexual dimension. The fascination is to let this tension be the numinous heart of the poem without any cues to point to an explanation within the poem.

Swallowing a Poem.

Swallowing a Poem

A glass of water.
The pharmacy of words.
Anticipation; here goes.

A grimace, well-practised, precedes
ingesting compressed chalk, the tongue’s
delicate flick-lit towards the depths.

Lips sip solvent chasers.
Swallow. Epiglottal efficiency.
Done.

Oesophageal memory. Word-pack
scraped against the lining.
Shudder.

Peristaltic ecstasy; the poem pill,
pulsed against the stomach sphincter,
oozes through line by line.

Acid’s understanding; ripping
splitting, dissolving phrase, metaphor
noun, consonant, vowel; full stop.

Poem digested, built into strong bones, stored as vitamins for health, for the blood-ink of my pen. Except the day you scripted your bitter carcinogens. Word after word deep into me; sinister shadows to grow their darkness.

This poem uses an analogy by presenting a poem as though the words are a pill or some kind of medical intervention. This works with the conceptual metaphor IDEAS ARE FOOD (with examples such as ‘half-baked ideas’, ‘food for thought’ and ‘spoon-feed our students’). The poem has fun with this idea but presents a shock by following the opening familiar phrase, ‘A glass of water’, immediately with ‘The pharmacy of words’. There is much word-play as the analogy explores the swallowing and digestion processes. It is possible to identify the cognitive shocks in the ideas of words having a physical oozing presence, and that of stomach acids that dissolve words to build a body.

The poem’s particular strength is the surprise at the end that departs from the fun of the main analogy and utilises the idea of harmful words as ‘your bitter carcinogens’ (in line 22). Readers may have been drawn in by the deictic now of swallowing (achieved by ‘here goes’ in line 3) and detailed present tense description. At the end of the poem the reader is asked to imagine some painful insult or condemnation, not digested but remaining to fester and harm. The narrative is able to leave the reader with awe, a sense of the unresolved, in the poem’s landscape There may be connections to personal experiences of conversations that have been hard to take. Words become part of the self and words have the power to be carcinogenic to the self. These ideas become an epiphanic component of the poem, a fresh view of the numinous physicality of words. The topics of foods and digestion provide a fascinating opportunity for the poet because of the cognitive process of ‘embodiment’. Emotions are very strongly conceptualised in terms of our bodies. Examples of this in my own experience are ‘swallowing your pride’ and ‘a taste of your own medicine’ as

71 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live, p. 46-47.
specifically related to the gut. These can also be seen in relation to the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS A HEATED FLUID IN A CONTAINER\textsuperscript{73}. Embodiment is a valuable idea for a poet to grasp (to use a term of embodiment) since it reveals how we are able to understand abstracts and concepts, such as emotions, by references to bodily experiences.

**Body of Understanding**

My poem 'Body of Understanding' utilises body metaphors exhaustively!

*Body of Understanding*

Not a leg to stand on, muscling in,  
have the upper hand, take it on the chin.  
Suffer a backlash, bone of contention,  
much too hard-headed, knee-jerk reaction.

Soft touch, easy touch, just the bare bones,  
give your right arm, stand on your own.  
Nose to the grindstone, so tight fisted,  
treading on toes, not a finger lifted.

Pick someone’s brains, tip of the tongue,  
foot in mouth, put a foot wrong.  
Taken to heart, venting the spleen.  
Get under the skin. Be what you mean.

In this poem I hope I also demonstrate how voice and drama play a part in deictic shift. The phrases used here are very common in conversation (though, of course, normally never so close together) and the use of embodied metaphors enables personal association with the emotional references that are so conveyed. The pace of reading is guided, to an extent, by the rhyme scheme. This works together with the dramatic use of the imperatives to deictically shift the reader to the position of addressee, such that the final imperative is so much more strongly directed to the reader. The rhyme scheme and word-play help the surprise of the final epiphany, of the body to ‘Be’ meaning. There is a numinous question that arises from this string of the emotional references. Are emotions in any way conceptually possible without a body?

\textsuperscript{73} James Geary, *I is an Other*, p.94.
Foodie.
The poem ‘Foodie’ allows me to explore further the ways in which conceptual metaphors are embodied. It begins from IDEAS ARE FOOD and is accessible to the reader as it draws associations between particular moods and common food types. It is written in the style of a list and could be read as though looking into a fridge or a store cupboard. The cognitive shocks are achieved by novel visualisations of mood states as food presentations.

Foodie

Failed soufflé sadness
Depression, the oven-black flapjack
Apologetic stew; contrite en croûte
A forgiving cream cake, offered fresh

Melancholy salad-drawer slime
Fidgeting cappuccino froth
Manic popcorn on too high a heat
Smiling jam in a donut

Marzipan sorrows old and unrolled
Complacent tea with lemon
The succulent passions of grapes
Jelly fun in wobbly colours

Chocolate happiness, moulded into
Any shape you like. You’re the cook.

There are narrative associations that are available to the reader, for example lines 3 and 4, where eating together and offering food can signify acceptance within many cultures. The tone of the poem becomes more positive from line 11. The trick of the poem is to build from IDEAS ARE FOOD into mood and food associations and seek to reframe the reader’s view in the last two lines. You can choose the foods you like. Can you mould or choose the moods you like? By drawing the reader in, with the style of the observed list, the reader is much more able to feel addressed by the ‘you’ of the last line, such that the poem gains a stronger response. It may be a revelation to see the control that a cook takes over food operating as the mind taking charge of emotions. Can we recognise, and control, emotional addictions in the same way as food addictions?
Contents.
This poem demonstrates deictic shift and personal narrative but is without conceptual metaphors as an intended feature.

Contents

Six ill-defined pills, an expired credit card, a few coins. Protect and Perfect Cream.

A mug with no handle, a handle, a ski pass, two takeaway menus with scribbles.

A collection of barcodes removed from packaging; pen with lifetime guarantee.

Things my mother said. Things she didn’t say.

The technique of listing objects in the text, viewed as though in a drawer or box, places the reader in the deictic now of the poem, as though present themselves as the observer. The aesthetic fascination of the reflective, and even sad, items will help to capture the reader's interest. There is a sadness and futility, a sense of what has gone before, in the first four lines. The word-play on 'ill-defined', in line 1, links with the identity that is signified by 'barcodes' of line 5. The connection to words is set up by the 'pen' on line 6. The cognitive shock, and fascination in the poem, is to reveal the mother's words as an object. Using a cognitive poetics analysis, the title and all the preceding lines form a script of objects in a drawer which places 'Things my mother said. Things she didn't say', in the final line, also as contents in the drawer. The personal narrative flows from the common experience of having a drawer of collected oddments and the possibilities such oddments offer for personal memories.

‘Contents’ achieves a sense of awe through an unresolved portrayal of loss and longing. It does so very economically without the use of any main verbs. It is because of the deictic shift into the world of the poem that the 'my', of the final line, becomes much more personal to the reader. My use of the phrase 'pen with lifetime guarantee' (line 6), is an allusion to personal myth and creativity being vital to the sense of self. To continue to write, as implied by the ‘pen’, contrasts with the preceding impersonal, yet identifying, ‘barcodes’. The accumulation of these aspects of the poem’s construction achieves a numinous effect.
It has been through writing the poem ‘Contents’ that I began to see the potential for such highly economical writing styles with hospice patients. The collection of very small details of a life can be assembled to represent the mysterious and the wonderful. Details of life, that may seem quite disparate, can be connected by the numinous. My discovery of this has been applied quite intentionally in many of the hospice collection poems including, for example, ‘Things That Move’, Tiffin With Ballard’ and ‘Boxes’.\(^7^4\)

**Canvas.**

The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY (demonstrated in common usage as, for example, ‘dead end job’, ‘making progress’, and ‘marriage on the rocks’) is apparently challenged by the poem ‘Canvas’ which seems to present life as a ‘picture’.

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Canvas

Underneath there is still a canvas
Woven strong enough to bear another picture
Still the resonance to the thinking end
Of the artist’s brush. Tap, tap, tap.

Life placed on an easel. Paint mixed for
The love of colour. Shapes that form
Themselves from freedoms.
Some areas may be thin and watery; for now.

The picture will grow. I won’t rush its pace
Chase its shapes into unfitting corners
Filled, for now, with failure’s gesso.
The picture underneath was done by numbers.

Restrained contained colours of conformity
Love expressed by completion’s frame
Except it just wasn’t me.

The canvas waits with unwearied desire
Waits for the intimate hand
That cherishes the colours.

Tap, tap, tap.
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\(^{74}\) see Thesis pages 11, 129 and 64.
The first stanza implies a canvas to be repainted and an artist in active contemplation. The second stanza begins, 'Life placed on an easel' (line 5). This poem utilises its own picture analogy to parallel the idea of starting again in life as starting a new picture. There is the potential epiphany of seeing ‘gesso’ as a cure for failure, beginning again in control of the task, even saying that the enjoyment of the painting process is more important than a finished painting. The poem attempts to deictically shift the reader into the now of the poem (line 8), makes use of the present tense and the onomatopoeic ‘Tap, tap, tap’ in line 4 and in the last line.

That this poem demonstrates how the deictic now of a poem is assisted by detailed description. From the 'now' at the end of line eight, the poem speaks with the inner voice of the artist, 'I won't rush its pace', evoking the details of the painting process and rejecting any previous sense of completion. The deictic shift helps the reader be a voyeur to the intimacy that is taking place before them. The painting continues in the text, 'Tap, tap, tap' and it is this continuation, waiting for the touch of the intimate hand, which invokes a sense of awe with the paradox of being content in the uncertainty. Does this poem have a problem in its apparent challenging of an established conceptual metaphor? LIFE IS A JOURNEY can still be identified in this poem, with movement implied in 'pace' and 'Chase' in the third stanza. Even though the poem seems an attempt to establish LIFE IS A PICTURE, there is a sense of progression, of a mysterious journey through the layers of the painting. I have learnt that conceptual metaphors are not constraints but opportunities, for the poet to create new views and cognitive blendings within a poem’s landscape.

**Kettle**

Deictic shift can be achieved by repetition of the familiar as shown in this poem. The noun 'kettle' appears in all but the last line and reads almost as a stream of word-associations, and, as such, seems to offers an intimacy with the author's thoughts. A kettle is a very familiar object in our culture and is easily associated in most personal narratives with relationships. The familiar is offered as ‘other’ in the way of an epiphany.
Kettle

A kettle
Burnt out kettle
Kettle boiled, waiting, waiting
A brown and scaly kettle.
An empty kettle, an empty kettle
Kettles heaped up, white goods wasted
Kettles settling arguments
Kettling friendships.
An abused kettle full of yoghurt.
Switch.

The poem may also be seen as flash-cards, in the sense of visualised thoughts. The repetition of 'empty' in line 5 sets up a move to broader issues of 'wasted' in line 6 and to relationships ('arguments', in line 7 and 'friendships', in line 8). Being drawn close to the familiar narrative of friends drinking together helps the shocking and sinister to be stronger. In line 9 we are presented with an unsettling image of 'An abused kettle full of yoghurt.' Is this to be burnt, spoilt, and made unfit for further use? Similar to the poem 'Body of Understanding' (which is referred to on page 109) voice and drama are important. The deictic shift into the poem confronts the reader with an unpleasant and uncanny cognitive blend, that of a ruined relationship and a ruined kettle. This helps the imperative 'Switch' of the final line to leave the reader with a more compelling sense of urgency and uncertainty. Is the kettle presently on or off?

Ideas of containers feature significantly in conceptual metaphors. EMOTIONS ARE A FLUID IN A CONTAINER has examples in common use such as 'overflowing with love', 'boiling with anger', 'patience running out' and sadness as expressed as 'feeling empty'. Friendships and people can be conceptualised as containers; 'deep friendships', 'put a lot of work into this relationship', 'he is full of himself'. The poem 'Kettle' works well because of this accessible analogy between containers and an individual's emotional and relational sense of self.
Creation

Narrative psychology suggests that personal mythologies develop and sustain the individual's sense of self. Similarly, community identities make use of shared mythologies. There is a human tendency to make attributions to surroundings; creative exaggerations demonstrate our power and control over our world and defend the sense of self. 'Creation' is a purposeful celebration of the ability of the human mind to make attributions and personifications.

Creation

I will give you a heart.

Nettle nasty growths suck the why out of small pains. In darkness I give names to the demons I cannot see; make eyes in the trees that leer at my fears.

I will dig and wrench the stubborn, the disobedient adornments of my life; I make a home amongst the trusted trinkets of existence.

I can crown the hills, make gods of moons and mountains, turn my insignificance to worship and humility.

Love is soothing oil. Hatred a rusty spike.

I can turn you into a dog or a stone wall, your spitefulness a trample-mat as I enter. These mirrors all around, tempered protection, controlled reflection,

a place to dance, dance, dance, to see myself.

I look good

In a writing group some years ago one member demonstrated the personal potential of creative attributions. This person, who had been the subject of a serious sexual attack, found that, in writing a very powerful poem about foxhunting (from the point of view of the fox) she was able to form a creative expression of her
own experience. Whilst previous attempts to express the ordeal had proved too
difficult and too limiting, her poem, about the attack on a fox, brought her a sense of
control.

My poem 'Creation' uses personifications under the control of the voice in the
poem. The opening is an assertive statement of action, ‘I will give you a heart’. This
is challenging and intriguing, a god-like address that shocks by claiming the power
to give a heart. The effect of the poem is supported by the dramatic assonances,
for example with the ‘e’ sound in ‘demon’ ('see', 'eyes', ‘trees leer’ and ‘fears’). The
poem takes ordinary experiences and common responses (for example, blaming
the nettle when we are stung, expressing fear when walking down a dark lane) and
develops them with full control. The direct speech of the poem adds to the sense of
'now', to achieve a deictic shift that places the reader as audience, or even as an
adversary to whom the poem is addressed. The attributions are exaggerated to
enable the reader to witness a kind of madness. The purposeful intensity and
control, of the personifications and attributions, helps to achieve the shock and
deictic shift. This enables an unsettling sense of awe. It also gives insight into the
numinous quality where the real and unreal coexist, where the paradox of
combined truth and madness seems such an achievement.

Stain

‘Stain' has a clearly religious sense, but it does also demonstrate, again, the use of
embodiment and gives some insight as to how potent this is.

Stain

A stain on my character, a blot on my name,
my tarnished reputation never the same.
Red-handed guilt, cracks begin to show,
their view of me coloured by what they know.

I go darkening doorsteps, casting long shadows,
they dish the dirt to anyone who follows.
My lips are unclean, head shamed with ash,
life bears the scars of sin's scourging lash.
Bathed in Glory; steeped in the Word,
healing that some might consider absurd!
The power of the river to wash a man clean;
baptized in forgiveness, no stain will be seen.

Embodiment is important in terms of deictic shift and the creation of a text-world. Presenting any emotion as an abstract (sadness, peace, joy) is devoid of any direct image. However, if we wish to draw readers into a landscape there needs to be an image, a place for them to see and to be. Whilst 'Stain' is a poem that may seem to be an excess of clichés, they are rapidly overlaid and given pace by the rhyme. The first person voice in the poem is enticingly confessional and the accumulated scars and stains are washed away in the final stanza. Because the person of the poem and the person of the reader share the experience of a body (and, likely, the desire to be clean), there is a narrative identification, an empathy created, that gives the poem its power. Water and cleansing have a role in all major religions. I find it very interesting that, whilst there are a lot of individually clichéd metaphors, the effect of putting them all together, in 'Stain', does work. The clichés are refreshed by their intensity and the cognitive shock is achieved by a combination of this and the confessional voice of the poem.

**Biopsy**

This poem utilises my understanding, through conceptual metaphors, that emotions are readily embodied, personified and objectified. For example, anger can be 'buried', love can ‘touch’ and emotional hurt is felt ‘deep inside’.

**Biopsy**

Take the oh out of love
take the I out of pain
the need out of money
the greed out of gain.

Take the roar out of anger
take the you out of trust
the seek out of secrets
the dreams out of dust.
Take the one out of lonely
take the hold out of hand
the new out of knowing
the time out of sand.

Use the knife or the needle
use the nib of the pen
words have a history
they may grow again.

'Biopsy' possibly has an overt cleverness in its approach, but it uses the cognitive embodiment of emotion to strong effect. In the first three stanzas, the last word of each line is a personified ‘thing’ to perform a biopsy upon. The reader is addressed with the imperative ‘take’ throughout the poem, enabling a deictic shift to the position of the surgeon, in charge and in control. I hope that the medical analogy, running through, produces a fascination for the reader. Can you extract one part, out of an emotion, to diagnose a bigger experience? This idea is emphasised further, in the final stanza, alluding to the ‘medical history’ of an emotion and the mystery of its prognosis.

The possibility of defeat has a basis in the conceptual metaphor EMOTIONS ARE PHYSICAL FORCES. My examples of this from everyday speech are ‘he was seized by (emotion)’, ‘he was struggling with his (emotions)’, ‘I was gripped by (emotion)’ and ‘she was overcome by (emotion)’. From this perspective the poem 'Biopsy' is tackling an opponent (emotion) in a very careful and clinical way. Yet the voice of the poem is still failing, perhaps, to have the final say. Line 12 (‘the time out of sand’) is emotional, since our inability to control time causes much anxiety. The conceptual metaphor TIME IS MOTION is also relevant; perhaps we may have control of time if we can control sand. The imperative ‘use’ in two lines of the final stanza seeks to refresh the deictic shift to the reader. Is their control of words and emotions retained? Or does the use of ‘may grow again’ suggest the possibility of defeat?

EMOTION IS AN OPPONENT is very relevant in 'Biopsy' and also in another poem which I completed when leading a mental illness recovery group; 'Faces in the

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75 Other examples quoted in discussing such conceptual metaphors can be found in the metaphor index on the Berkeley University web resource page; see reference link footnote 89 on page 125.
Wardrobe’ used cognitive embodiment to explore the idea of ‘wearing’ emotions, selected from clothes hangers, and asserting a control and choice on a daily basis.

**Concluding Comments, Chapter 3**

I have discussed, in this chapter, only a small number of poems from my development work in order to demonstrate components of the numinous poetics. As a writer, I am able to use these components as intentional, even obvious, techniques. Nonetheless, after years of studying the numinous, I find that I readily (and almost unconsciously) use detailed observations, avoid main verbs and write in the present and imperative tenses, utilising a number of techniques in the poetics to best effect. Are all equally valuable? If asked to single out one aspect, I would choose deictic shift. Poems that unsettle the reader and have a sense of an alternative reality make their greatest achievement through a shift into the poem’s landscape. To offer a different perception of reality as though from a different place, or even as a different person, is a noteworthy achievement for a poem. Moreover, I have discovered that deictic shift can connect in a particularly valuable way with a personal narrative. Elements of personal story, attributions and a sense of presence in a poem’s landscape, can combine to a powerful effect. This important discovery is only due to the fact that this research has been centred upon the practical activity of writing. I now feel that this activity has informed my research as much as all the text books and papers in the thesis bibliography.

My becoming a ‘hospice poet’ was almost accidental. During my early studies I led poetry writing workshops in three different health settings; a brain injury rehabilitation centre, a community ‘arts and well-being’ project and a hospital secure unit. Such work may have progressed, in collaboration with clinical psychologists, were it not for potential difficulties in ethical clearance and the availability of psychology support services in the NHS at the time. However, it was through my interest in health care that I responded to an invitation to experience work as a poet in Bolton Hospice. I recognised there, almost immediately, the potential role of numinous poetry and it became the sole focus of my writing. There seemed to be a clear question. Could the landscape and presence of a poem connect with a patient’s own story and sense of significance?
In the next chapter, ‘Writing with a Purpose’, I go on to explore this and other questions relating to the practical business of being a hospice poet, managing the context and the creative framework, and producing poetry. The subsequent two chapters move to conclude this thesis, developing my underlying philosophy and arguing for the work of the poet in end of life care to be regarded as a highly valuable activity.
Chapter 4. Writing with a Purpose

This chapter deals with my experience in an applied writing context and the key learning points achieved. Since September 2010 I have volunteered almost every week at a local hospice. My primary purpose there is to capture and record some personal significance for patients and to celebrate their lives through poetry. It is not to campaign or to raise any issues relating to end of life care; it is not therapy (as discussed, later, in Chapter 6). I write for the sake of a patient, and his or her family, and for art. I have no hidden agenda. Whilst I am a poet in end of life care, there is no intentional inclusion of topics of death or dying or disease except, for example, where a poem may be commissioned for staff training. Such issues may appear as incidentals or may add a certain poignancy. Any reader who has personal knowledge of such a writing environment may receive my poems with particular associations, yet each one needs to stand as a 'good poem' without relying upon any assumption of such knowledge.

Are there any established approaches to writing in a hospice? There are many poems written for patients by relatives, before or after death; such poems may be to say ‘thank you’ or may help to express grief. The writer Lynne Alexander edited a collection of poems and stories by patients and relatives which came from grief, illness and the everyday of family relationships. A University of Bolton research student, Shiela Rowe, volunteered for a short time at Bolton Hospice a year prior to my own work beginning there. Shiela focussed on autobiographical/legacy writing, that is to say, on stories or letters that patients wished to leave behind for family members. The writer Char March has shared with me some examples of her work with patients at the end of life. Her poems tried ‘very, very hard to stick entirely to their own words and not to add any of my own - that seemed the most respectful way of working with them’. In my view, these are examples of good writing but they do bring a question to mind: whose poem is it? It is possible to decide to write on

76 My poems have been used, for example, in staff induction programmes and bereavement courses; examples in the Creative Work are ‘I Wonder Where?’ (a requested revision of ‘You’ve Spent So Much Time) and two poems, ‘Boxes’ and ‘More Boxes’, which have been used for a Bereavement Counselling courses to support the use of ‘memory boxes’.
78 Shiela Rowe, <shielaroe765@btinternet.com> (Research Student). Hospice Poetry. 20 September 2010. Email to <philisherwood@talktalk.net>.
79 Char March, <charlottemarch@btinternet.com> (Lecturer in Creative Writing. MMU). Research. NHS poetry NW Contribution of Creativity in Hospices. 11 February 2013. Email to <philisherwood@o2.co.uk>. 
behalf of the patient, to help them to say something that they hold important. Alternatively, it is possible to decide to be a poet who finds people to be sources of stories and ideas. I chose the latter – to write my poems and be grateful for the lives and conversations that inspire them. I take an idea from Steiner’s view, that a creative work should not be the subject of critical analysis but be responded to only by another creative work. In this way, since I view each personal mythology as a creative work, I can respond with my poem. I am not aware of any other hospice poet who has chosen my approach. My question ‘who’s poem is it?’ is best answered in terms of the ‘found poem’ which are discussed later in this chapter (on pages 141 to 144) as outcomes from my applied writing. I will take Steiner’s views further in a wider discussion of creative work in the hospice in chapter 5.

My working methods have developed throughout my years of applied writing in the hospice; it is not that I saw what needed to be done and set out with any specific process in mind. From my first days talking to patients, where I engaged in conversations and took directions from each situation, I will freely admit to feeling somewhat ‘lost’. As my research has progressed I have become mindful of my own skills and the variety of opportunities to develop and apply a numinous poetics. However, I have learned to be careful that my own competence does not, in itself, become an ‘agenda’. There may be a danger that the desire for ‘wonder’ interferes with attentive listening and capturing the significance within a patient’s story or craft activity. I must admit to the tension that exists; the poet is looking for ‘otherness’, the new view or connection that is creativity. A discipline I give myself, when spending time in the hospice, is to be prepared for nothing more than a good conversation. There are a minority of occasions when there seems no material for a poem and I have to accept it. My writing practice in the hospice has been one of continual development of my writing poetics. The eight numinous perspectives, presented on pages 100 and 101, have been steadily refined to become my working guide, after spending time with patients, to draft and edit my own poetry.

80 I am a member of LAPIDUS (Literary Arts in Personal Development) whose membership I have contacted. In addition I have researched the Dying Matters and Help the Hospice groups and the NW regional meetings of Hospice Creative Therapists.
In presenting the necessary details 81 of my applied writing in this chapter I aim to illustrate, firstly, some aspects of numinous poetics within my poems and, secondly (and more importantly), a number of key learning points that have been achieved through the unique and privileged opportunities. The examples are organised in two main parts: poems from exchanges with individual patients and those from group activities and conversations. There is then a single example poem from those I have written relating to the wider activities of the hospice (such as volunteers, staff training and service development). There are also three further poems towards the end of this chapter, used within a discussion of additional learning points from this practical work.

81 There are further details of the practical approach which has evolved in Appendix A, which presents guidelines and advice for poets considering hospice work.
Individual Patient Poems

Penny Drop

‘Penny Drop’ was written in my first year in the hospice. I had a conversation with a patient (a retired head teacher) in which I asked the question ‘What did you like best about teaching?’ The reply came, after a few pensive seconds, ‘When the penny drops’.

Penny Drop

Machine or muscle?

Churn out the ideas,
the information,
into a jittering rebellion,
into obstinate cogs and
jammed wheels.
A feral vandalism of mind.

There is a gaze, a coin to play.
Three cherries to feed upon. Yes!

The start of grasping and holding on,
the flex and stretch, to become
the strong and supple of achievement.
A body to defend any brittle wit.

A child hands me a book, to bless me.
To win is a coin in the palm.

The patient’s use of the title phrase was illustrated in conversation by references to difficult times in the classroom. There were similar recurrences of situations, when a (jokingly referred to) ‘feral-minded’ child looked hard into the teacher’s eyes and finally seemed to ‘get it’ - a turning point, after which significant improvements in that child’s progress occurred. I found it most interesting that the patient's answer of 'When the penny drops' was a metaphor. Such a turning point would seem to have been an almost numinous moment for the teacher and the pupil, in sharing the moment of inexplicable non-verbal communication. This clichéd metaphor could, I realised, make a good starting point for a poem. I used a clearly intentional process, beginning with the phrase origin and studying the underlying conceptual metaphors, before proceeding to write a single line of the poem. The origin of ‘the penny drops’ is unclear. The Oxford English Dictionary documents use of the
phrase in 1939 relating to coin operated machines but it is possible to anticipate much earlier use. Coin-operated public telephones (the black, button A and B types) were increasingly in use in the UK from 1925 and vending machines date back to the 1880s. (Curiously a Greek mathematician and engineer, Hero of Alexandria, (c. 10-70 AD) documented the first vending machine, for holy water, whereupon insertion of a penny tilted a lever and then dropped off, dispensing a set amount of fluid. However, there is no widespread use or development to support the metaphorical use of 'the penny drops' at that time).

The conceptual metaphor MENTAL ACCOUNTING (examples include, 'it all adds up', 'to sum up') supports understanding of 'the penny drops', as does THE MIND IS A MACHINE ('mental breakdown', 'churn it over', 'cogs are turning'). The orientational metaphor KNOWN IS DOWN ('solid facts', 'well founded', 'digging for facts') further explains the ready impact of the metaphor. There also is the broader PEOPLE ARE MACHINES ('run down', 'just ticking over', 'smooth operator'). In contrast, there is also THE MIND IS A BODY ('supple mind', 'mental gymnastics', 'getting a grip on an issue'). Given the teacher's passion for a pupil's progress and the 'penny drop' turning point, this look at conceptual metaphors made the fulcrum of my poem to be the change from 'machine' to 'body'. In my view, this metaphor shift celebrated the 'humanising' of the pupil, one who was progressing towards being a supple, mental athlete. The final two lines of the poem flow, in part, from the sense of reward and also from MENTAL CONTROL IS PHYSICAL CONTROL ('putty in my hands', 'handle the situation'), a subset of THE MIND IS A BODY. The metaphorical 'penny dropping' also carries ideas of reward and recognition and this is used in the final line of the poem; the penny may represent a numinous 'token' exchanged between teacher and pupil.

Writing this poem achieved a specific realisation for me. The 'penny drop' moment between teacher and pupil marked a numinous point in creating a 'new mind' and a

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82 http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140204?redirectedFrom=penny%20#eid31088664
84 For this work I referred to the George Lakoff metaphor index on the Berkeley University web resource page. The original Berkley site has been suspended but a version of it remains accessible at http://www.lang.osaka-u.ac.jp/~sugimoto/MasterMetaphorList/MetaphorHome.html [Accessed 22/12/13]
85 Examples can be found on the metaphor database referenced #89 as above.
86 Ibid.
87 For examples see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, pp 20-21.
88 Examples can be found on the metaphor database referenced #89 as above.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
new teaching relationship. Yet, in the same way, my conversation with the patient had led to the numinous point in the creation of the poem. I have found that this sense of ‘we made something new’ is present with almost every patient at the time of handing over a completed poem to them. A further learning outcome is the distinctive way in which this poem was formed. I had set out to apply a particular component (conceptual metaphors) as a method of writing the poem yet, now reflecting on the body of my work, this has proved to be most unusual. In the very great majority of my poems my application of the aspects of the numinous are ‘background’; my years of studying have produced a particular skill-set supporting how I write for patients. I use my knowledge to guide in later editing and not as any primary method. In commenting on later poems I will draw attention to certain components but without, necessarily, being able claim their fully intentional use.

**Precision**

This poem developed from a conversation with a man who was able to talk freely and at length. He had plenty of detailed memories of his engineering work over several decades. It became an easy poem to write with this wealth of information but the particular ‘poemness’ came from a couple of sentences. ‘There was one workshop I was in, for years, where it always puzzled me as a lad. We clocked in to work every morning - but we never clocked out.’ The poem is mainly in the present tense and uses details of engineering life in four stanzas, which all end with the line ‘we clocked in, but we never clocked out’.

**Precision**

An engineering apprenticeship,
scrolling, cutting, learning a sense of humour in the grime. Another hard hat melts on the slag bucket; strange,
we clocked in, but we never clocked out.

Workmates mimic the managers, swap tales of shift-trips and bayonets,
drink from chipped enamel mugs
sat on scrap-timber dinner stools.
We clocked in, but we never clocked out.
Coat-on-peg mornings, a high hauled lunch.
Calibrated micrometers, spot-on corners,
switchgear sheds, turning and milling.
Mistakes and memories mixed in the swarf.
We clocked in, but we never clocked out.

Vickers, AEC, Westinghouse, Chloride.
Precision engineer; precision furnaceman.
Word-boxing career; with hard-men, stevedores,
mates. We melted lead to float a submarine.
We clocked in, but we never clocked out.

‘The numinous is in the nitty-gritty’ is an aphorism by James Geary\(^91\) which is a good way to express how the use of detail can work in poetry, providing an engaging fascination. This patient readily supplied many fine details in his stories, only some of which are used throughout the poem.

My knowledge of deictic shift leads me to use the present tense and detailed description, to bring the reader into the image of the poem. Using the word ‘another’ in line 3 emphasises narrative drama, an ‘on-going’ supported by the repeated phrase, ‘we never clocked out’, at the end of each stanza. There are also many technical words of interest, for example ‘scrolling’, ‘calibrated micrometers’, ‘engineering’, ‘milling’ and ‘switchgear’. These are mixed with more mundane terms, such as ‘grime’, ‘slag bucket’, ‘enamel mugs’ and ‘swarf’. Cognitive poetics analysis identifies these terms as scripts, items the narrative would comfortably anticipate as present. However, these items are referenced to the abstract, as in ‘humour in the grime’ and ‘memories mixed in the swarf’. These techniques do produce a significant reality that has a fascinating sense of continuation.

This poem is very different to ‘Penny Drop,’ above, in that it avoids metaphor in favour of narrative allegory. The details of the technical working life (e.g. ‘Calibrated micrometers, spot-on corners’ and ‘precision engineer; precision furnaceman’) are presented in phrasing that is clipped and precise. The poem’s title is ‘Precision’. Yet it introduces imprecision with ‘humour’, ‘tales’, ‘memories’ and ‘word-boxing’. The massive imprecision is in the repeated ‘we clocked in, but we never clocked out’. In the context of my conversation with a hospice patient this phrase may have a metaphorical link with birth and (avoiding) death. Yet the phrase, as I received it, seemed to capture the significance of working relationships being far more

important than work. Born in the generation when men worked and women stayed at home, a man took pride in his work and job role (in this case in precision engineering). What came over in my conversation with the patient was that what continued, when work stopped, was to do with the imprecise and the relational. ‘Precision’ offers its own landscape with detailed images and the fascination of the unexplained. It achieves a celebration of the relational nature of the patient in his work. The numinous quality of the phrase 'we clocked in, but we never clocked out' is a product of the narrative detail, that draws the reader in, and the cognitive dissonance between the precise and the imprecise in the poem.

**Bowling**

A hospice patient in her early eighties spoke of her lifelong passion for crown green bowls. It had been shared by her husband (who had passed away some years before) and had brought her a community of friends and many stories connected with them. She had no children. I was particularly struck by the brightness in her eyes (many years below her age) and by her gratitude for the existence of the game when she spoke of it. There was, now, a simple acceptance of life, even in her inability to play bowls due to her cancer. By coincidence, the weekend after my conversation, I was, myself, to play only my second game of crown green bowls in the last ten years; this provided further inspiration.

**Bowling**

A serious side of summer.
Birdsong, swaying bough,
children, clatter, willow-crack.
Crown green, concentration.

The eye is not spherical, not perfectly. It will not roll straight.
That is the game. The world is not spherical, not perfectly.

It will not roll straight. It will turn according to imbalance,
according to swing and rise and fall. Finger, thumb.

An anchored gaze, and all is done when you let go.

‘Bowling’ sets an atmosphere to the game in the first stanza and then, surprisingly, speaks of the eye. It makes mysterious links between spheres; the eye
(representing the self), the bowl (game-life) and the world (cosmos-sphere). Crown green bowls is almost an art, a game full of mysteries of light and earth and seasons. The poem takes this one lady’s life passion and extends it, through poetry, to its wider connections. It uses the intimacy of eye and hand to set up the power of the final line of wonder. This poem has value to the patient because of its sense of the numinous. It celebrates a mystery, a personal mythology, of the echo between the art of a game and the art of life. Particular deictic shifts are achieved in the poem utilizing the *near and far* and the *present and future*. The resulting dualities of meaning would have seemed especially strong in the context of its reading at the lady’s funeral.

*Tiffen with Ballard*

My poem ‘Tiffen with Ballard’ uses a connection between a patient’s childhood spent in wartime China (in the early 1940s) and the famous author, J. G. Ballard, who was also born in the Shanghai internment camps. The patient had said to me ‘I knew him, though we never met’.

*Tiffen with Ballard*

Light lunch, unbaked cake,
the kindness of women.

1946, home on the SS Arrawa,
leaving behind internment,
the casual brutality of the camp.

Psychoanalysis, surrealism,
pains wrapped in pastiche.
A ship lies in wait for the wind.

I was told off for speaking posh.
Boundaries from a distant life,
I knew him, though we never met.

A life relived through fictions,
bizarre re-enactments of childhood.
Atrocity, car crash, miracles.

Conversations with My Physician.
Unfinished, crumbs on the plate.

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92 My conversation with the same patient had inspired ‘Auction Box’ which also utilized specific childhood memories. The poem is in the accompanying Creative Work, page 34.
In ‘Tiffin with Ballard’ the patient’s voice only appears in the three lines of the fourth stanza. The rest of the poem is all about the life of J. G. Ballard. Yet the resonances of disturbances, from childhood in internment camps, were recognised by the patient in Ballard’s books and films. These resonances support a shared sense of ‘knowing’ throughout the whole poem and also help to set up the ambiguities of the final two lines – relating to the life of Ballard, illness and cancer treatment, or even in the writing of a story through a poet. The numinous combination is achieved in the unfinished search for meaning in life (evident in Ballard’s work), the use of paradox (lines five and fourteen) and the uncannily deep connection to someone never met. There is an awesome sense of waiting in lines eight and sixteen.

**Finding again and Watercolour Apprentice**

These next two poems were both inspired by one patient because of his renewed passion for nature and his enjoyment of poetry and creativity.

*Finding Again*

Finding again the sweet
uneventful countryside.
The poet who wraps words
around my mind's musings,
manages to breathe with me,
feel the sun and rain, the
scorch and splatter on my skin.

He walks, I walk.
A companion's voice,
the one able to share
silences. The one who's
only desire is my discovery
of raindrops on this broad leaf.
They kiss and die and run.

‘Finding Again’ began as an idea because the patient quoted a line from John Betjeman’s poem, ‘Essex’, whilst relating details of a recent walk in the country. We had also had a number of discussions on the role of the poet in society generally. It was a most fulfilling experience, for me, to be able to put some of the patient’s enthusiasm for the details, of life and of art, onto paper. His response to ‘Finding Again’ was very appreciative, as it was to the next poem, ‘Watercolour Apprentice’. This uses analogy, to point to similarities between poetry writing and the painting of
Guided by the hospice Creative Therapist, the patient was undertaking his very first watercolour painting.

**Watercolour Apprentice**

The intimidating off-white virgin paper. Clean water, colour mix, rich, subtle shades. Shadows that steal.

The brush touches, sweeps the oozing canopy. Texture, layer, tone. Take in. Pot rinse, dip, dip, washing a mood. Like a poem

one line suggests the next or makes a space, a question. Femininity, grace and poise. Mystery, elegant silence.

A lake discovers a sky, a white-whispered request for perspective. The apprentice eye glances through blue-grey-beige. Terracotta, a blood-sapphire mix of earth and prayer, an unintended substance, falls. Becomes a place to stand, to listen. To hear the eulogy of the tutor's frame.

My argument, about the way in which fine detail assists the numinous quality, is evident in both the above poems. Using the present tense, the text achieves deictic shifting of the voice of the poem and the position of the reader. The fine detail also helps to bring into frame individual objects, to produce the sense of epiphany in raindrops as relationships and paint made of prayer.

**Elated**

The patient who inspired ‘Finding Again’ and ‘Watercolour Apprentice’ had a developed sense of detail since his diagnosis of cancer. I recalled my discussions with that patient upon learning of the songwriter Wilko Johnson’s response of
‘elation’ upon receiving his own terminal cancer diagnosis. Johnson also spoke of rediscovering beauty in the smallest details of life and he attributed this, specifically, to being told he had less than ten months life expectancy.

Elated

Ten months. An opportunity
to live, a window you look through
whilst it’s open. No room for
clichés when you count in days.

Curious child, pulling petals from
flowers. The rain comes, paints words,
an offer of a thousand lenses.
The coffee dances to the jazz of a bus
pulling away. No one was waiting today.

Calm. I imagine deafness, all the sounds
as memories. Blindness would need the
mind’s galleries to be lit. I imagine
breathing, like I haven’t been
doing it for sixty three years.

My experiences with specific patients, and the reports of Johnson’s reaction, lead me to a question. If a diagnosis of death causes us to focus upon and appreciate the fine detail of the ordinary, then does a numinous savouring of such details of life through poetry, help us to feel more alive? One particular achievement of ‘Elated’ is that the poem isn’t about death, so much as an invitation to life. The ‘Ten months’ diagnosis appears to be a liberation, as much as it may be a sentence.

Two Dragons

The final poem in this section is from close observation of an individual patient who was working, with the encouragement of the hospice Creative Therapist, on two paintings.

Two Dragons

Movements in still life, the
greyscale dragon enjoys its
sense of space. There is scenery,
ocean, summit; a cry can be heard.

93 Listening to Wilko Johnson (of the band Dr Feelgood) on BBC Radio 4 Front Row, January 2013.
94 The poem ‘Elated’ was awarded second prize in the Manchester Cathedral Poet of the Year Competition, 2013.
95 See discussion of creativity, and Mihaly Csikszentmihaly’s ideas of ‘Flow’, in Ch. 6.
The other has fire-breath flames, threatening and familiar, multi-chrome but somehow incomplete. Looking for pens we find a

practised ‘Hugs and Kisses’ in gold. They never made it into a heart. The flame dragon begins to be rescued.

Reluctance is slowly lost within the hands that hold the silver and the gold. They now define the living as the picture grows an acceptable resemblance.

The last attentions are the kicks delivered to a mountain side. Done. A song is fading in the next room, ‘He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother’.

Standing back, watching. Everything is getting to the point of becoming.

The writing of this poem was a key point that crystallised, for me, the sense of the ‘found poem’ in the hospice (which is discussed further on page 141). It uses elements of the pictures, the practicalities of handling materials and the incidentals and music of the moment. The use of the present tense and a detailed narrative draw the reader into the poem. The final two lines combine the artist, therapist, poet and reader in a numinous significance of discovery, the ‘point of becoming’.
**Group Activity Poems**

**A Roll of Film**

One event at the hospice involved a visit from the local museum staff. They brought with them some of their collection of ephemera from 1940 to 1970. The various household and community objects and pictures, especially those from early post-war Britain, produced a stream of comments and recollections amongst the hospice patients present. The following poem, ‘A Roll of Film’, uses only a small portion of the items and responses.

*A Roll of Film*

A roll of film lies deep in a drawer exposed but unprocessed.  
It is a discovery of questions.  
How long, how many, who?  
What could possibly still exist?  
We forget more than we remember.

A leather school strap for discipline.  
Approaching the headmaster’s door collecting lines, losing points, detentions dealt for misdemeanours.  
There’s still fun in larking about.  
We forget more than we remember.

Victory Vs, Horlicks Tablets and Tics in little tins.  
Spangles, pear drops, flying saucers. Arrowroot, coltsfoot rock, liquorice sticks.  
The winner at hopscotch gets a sherbet dip.  
We forget more than we remember.

We’d warm the bed with oven shelves, use dolly blue and darning mushrooms, smarten sills with donkey stones.  
The only soap was Sunlight.  
A warm face from the bonfire in the street.  
We forget more than we remember.

The Box Brownie camera collected Whit Walks and weddings. Places where you posed and kept still.  
Jim in uniform, when he went off to war.  
Dad, in a chair, the day he came back.  
We forget more than we remember.
One of the items on the day was a Box Brownie camera and the idea occurred to me that film provides an interesting analogy for memory. Pictures around the 1950s were rare and treasured, not easily copied. In many homes they would be kept in a box at the top of the wardrobe. The hospice can be a valuable time for remembering and the poem poses a problem, in lines 5 and 6, ‘What could possibly still exist? / We forget more than we remember’. There then follows rich examples of remembering, all produced from the apparently insignificant objects. The museum staff had brought small items which provided keys to the stories carried in the patients’ minds. What is forgotten is not necessarily lost.

_Silk and Salt and Silk and Salt, Two_

These next two poems came from observing hospice patients in group craft activity.

_Silk and Salt_

Yellow pebble perimeters,  
green interspaces. And blue.  
Painstaking scrutiny. Yet  
such flamboyant brushstrokes  
make their flicks and frizzles,  
blend rich narcotic colours.  
It’s hard to stop.

Then the salt, the sea roasted grit  
sprinkled onto silk. Look how it  
soaks and snatches pigments  
through fine fibres, writhes  
against the spaces and brush lines.  
It entwines itself into a modest art  
that calls itself an accessory.

The poem ‘Silk and Salt’ was formed on a day of quiet conversation with only a couple of patients engaged in the art of making silk scarves. I had previously come to understand the process involved, the way the salt reacts with the dye and water when applied to the silk material. I was singularly struck, when observing, by the intense concentration in the application of the silk dye. This meant that the room was almost silent for a time and seemed to focus the creativity onto the materials and away from each artist. The poem makes no direct mention of any artist and gives agency to the brushstrokes and to the personified salt and silk. It is the writhing material that ‘entwines itself into a modest art / that calls itself an accessory’. The numinous quality is to make this mystery of creation work within the poem. This begins with three lines which require careful and paced reading due
to the intense assonance, including the 'ee' sound and the contrasting 'oo' of 'blue' - this is then echoed in the 'oo' of 'scrutiny' in line 3. The tone expresses the 'painstaking' of lines 1-3. The next three lines are a lighter tone, reflecting the 'flamboyant' of line 4. Maintaining the control of tone within the poem helps this mystery of creativity, one that is detached from human hands. The poem is in the present tense to achieve the 'now' of observation and uses the imperative 'look' in line 9 to confirm the deictic shift. We are watching a fascinating event as a silk scarf forms itself into art that will be entwined around a neck.

The companion poem 'Silk and Salt, Two' was written the following week as a development of similar ideas.

_Silk and Salt, Two_

Thin plain-white silk.

The rain mist-makes a landscape, contours of lakes and hills. Sometimes the steps run together. Just blue today, just blue.

The pogo-stick technique, the spongee-jump impression. Then the hovering over the incomplete. Just blue today, just blue.

Salt now shakes its mysteries, coarse grains work the best, rattling out with random hesitations. Just blue today, just blue.

The result.

An accident of trust, where crystals surf the crests of colour, sipping tips to white in a sacrifice of purity. Just blue today, just blue.

It is finished. So soon it will be gone to find the grace of innocent hands. It leaves the room to carry on. Just blue today, just blue.

In this poem the fifth line, 'Just blue today, just blue', points to a despondency of mood. However, as it is repeated through the poem, amongst a commentary on a creative process, the line transitions to a tone of peace and acceptance. The
present tense and observational detail is used to draw the reader into the poem; the deictic shift is confirmed with the 'now' of line 10. The created scarf has its own 'being'. It looks for a new relationship away from the hands that created it. A numinous response is facilitated by the different ways of reading the penultimate line. 'It leaves the room to carry on' may be understood as the created silk scarf having a new life to go to, or, alternatively, wishing to get away from the 'blue' of its creation. There is also the 'room', as a place of creativity, now able to continue in new creations. The question may also remain in a reader's mind 'what happened to being blue?'

**Background and Another Sky at the Hospice**

*Background*

Dibble the tottering towers  
mop a spodge from tramlines  
muddy puddle frames to the famous.

A stipple at Hall i'th Wood  
careful swirls to the Infirmary  
Daubhill blobbed a bit.

Girls at work.  
A giggle, a grumble,  
giving a tint to the town.

‘Background’ is another observational poem, based on the ladies’ craft group putting a neutral background colour to a montage of illustrations of local landmarks. (It helps to know that the village of 'Daubhill' is pronounced 'Dobble' locally.) The title and the terms used in the poem make it easy to realise that the poem involves a painting. The enjoyable physical description, the use of imperatives and the present tense, helps the reader to visualise this activity. The particular interest is through the cognitive tensions created by the slightness of actions (dibble, splodge, swirl) compared to the relative enormity of their application (towers, tramlines, Infirmary). The light-hearted atmosphere, of the craft group that day, is reflected in the sense of fun with the words, the use of enjoyable assonance and alliteration, which supports the community purpose in the last three lines. The painters may not be young or active enough to paint the town red, but they can achieve a good tint together. This sense of shared narrative is important in understanding in how the
poem works. The cliché ‘painting the town red’ is popular because of its power to exaggerate the sense of human significance as a personal mythology. The numinous quality of the poem is to refresh this cliché in celebrating the shared creative activity.

Another Sky at the Hospice

Another Sky at the Hospice

A careful tint to a comet, or a Sputnik pushed to the edge. Dancing dabs of happiness against an ingenious grey.

A corner for Lucifer's stripes. Quips about painting with pills, running from the thunder, running out of blue.

The whites bite into the grey, embellish the gloom, make room for the pink chinking through, for the yellow fun-slash of laughter.

Finished. The colour-syrups knit together, soak into the canvas, soon to dry, taut like a drum for voices. As the frame is raised, the sun appears to orchestrate each layer with light.

‘Another Sky at the Hospice’ is also inspired by watching the painting activity of a group of patients. It relies, particularly, upon the overheard conversations of the moment, as a neutral sky is formed by several brushes. The poem uses the present tense to achieve the deictic now. The final stanza is the poet's consideration of what has been created and what lives on. As with "Background", above, this helps to develop the numinous quality of the poem. The idea is portrayed that the picture, and the poem, will continue to speak, continue to represent the orchestra of its creators.
**Conversation Haiku**

This is an example of a poem written as a bystander to a group conversation.

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Conversation Haiku

looking for stories
you walk into a garden
see a face. Listen

find, and love, someone
to learn within their music
songs that never end

dragon under silk
focus through borrowed rhinestones
flames that trace a smile

Gestetner memories
the honeymoon in Nefyn
letters will arrive

each one is a gift
the scarf that has no label
recognises friends

hands to launch the boat
preparation’s everything
tidy, detailed, honed

whilst making a card
we talk about gardening
ways to kill a slug.
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Combining stories from the six participants in a group, the poem moves amongst the craft or art in hand and the conversations; it records the ordinary of the past and the present and achieves a continuation after the activity is complete. It is excellent when a work of art is able to capture the special value of a particular moment.\(^{96}\) In the hospice a poem such as this is ‘owned’, in a mysterious way, by the poet and the by six people present. The poem has, perhaps, the quality of a cenotaph stone for those who fought together. In another, paradoxical, sense it has the quality of driftwood, found and assembled. Above all, it is a continuing presence of art.

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\(^{96}\) I will elaborate on ideas of the captured moment on page 145.
Volunteer Poem

A number of my poems, included in the thesis creative work, obtain their inspiration from the general work of the hospice. This poem is based upon a group discussion on volunteering, which I attended.

The Room

The Room.

There is a picture on the wall, the one that has been there for just a few weeks now. Valuable. We couldn't see it at first, in those days when our tears put a mist in the room.

It was still being painted, of course, developing as it was from conversations, from all those nostalgic brush strokes. We painted with laughter, splatterings from journeys; we placed in the sky all our plans that would fall as a landscape. As we talked the picture rippled with tall new grass or put some unseen star in place. In silence, together, we watched the butterflies looking for nectar amongst the flowers.

But now you are gone.
The picture is here. I wrap it up in my mind as I collect what you no longer possess. They have to clean the room now, to make room for someone else. The room needs a new picture.

I had asked the question of the group, ‘what do you like most or least about being a volunteer in a hospice?’ I noted down, amongst several responses, ‘seeing a patient's face when they are painting a picture’ and ‘having to clear a room so quickly when someone has died’. A few weeks later I realised the significance, of these two responses, whilst considering the value of creativity to the sense of self (discussed further in Chapter 6). ‘The Room’ uses the idea of the conversations, of a patient with a close relative or friend, being like an act of painting. It points to the numinous essence, the mystery of how a painting forms, and to the unfulfilled plans being ‘placed in the sky’. The picture does not die. The ‘work’ of the room is to be a place of art, one where beautiful pictures are created.
**Discussion – Further Learning Points**

There are three further, interrelated, learning points that I would like to develop: The Found Poem, The Numinous of Creation and The Privilege of the Poet.

**The Found Poem**

In discussing ‘Two Dragons’ earlier I introduced the idea that much of my hospice work may be considered as the writing of the ‘found poem’. Such poetry makes use of specific phrases, observed activities or objects in a story told; sources contemporary to the moment, such as a piece of music playing or even a fire alarm being tested are included. This ‘found’ poetry may be thought of as having similarities to the style of beachcomber art or the driftwood sculpture. There is the element of ‘what can I make with this?’ In the practicalities of many conversations, there are very many occasions when the patient is surprised at the extent of my interest in the details they tell me. What they considered ‘ordinary’ or ‘everyday’ is rediscovered and reawakened by another’s view. Some of my work makes use of patients’ memory boxes\(^97\) – collections of personal photographs, cards, letters, scrapbook items and small objects. Such items are already ‘found’ as the basis for a conversation upon which to form a poem; the following is an example.

**Organised**

Why can’t you organise memories?
A bag of sweets to take on holidays,
a favourite selection, but there are surprises. The Christmas tree and the sips of sherry. I hear the chatter of voices. A full home, young friends of the mischief sisters, egg hunts, baking and baking, sitting for an hour on the top step of the stairs. Talking.

You can never have too many knickers.
I made frilly ones for your nappies.
My pleated skirt, at school, was worn to serve the teachers at dinner. First prize for my cake – Mrs Cockcroft’s was red and white and I told them about Ken, courting with my gentle man. I danced.

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\(^97\) These memory boxes are suggested to patients by hospice staff as helpful in assembling significant items to pass on to loved ones. They may include various keepsakes and possibly letters written, for example, for such future occasions as weddings and special birthdays.
in borrowed clothes, not organised.
Auntie Anne’s stern advice. Be positive.

Nice grandma Mort sent me for a
Blackpool roll and a bunch of bananas.
I remember the smell of hot peanuts.
You’ll perhaps remember Nana’s Cinema
Afternoons. I organised the snacks and
I always planned for you to be happy.

Presenting a poem to a patient, when based upon a collection of cherished memories can, in my experience, have a quite surprising, even startling, effect; joyful tears and tremendous gratitude for the discovery of ‘memorial art’.\(^98\) This point of discovery is itself numinous and is part of the privileged poet/hospice patient relationship. What I also argue is that the ennoblement of someone’s story, as memorial art, gives a potentially stronger sense of connection with those for whom memory legacies are intended. There is also the connection with the poet in the shared discovery (and ownership) and with the ‘presence’ of art.\(^99\) The following poem was written as a reflection on these ideas.

*Something for Inclusion*

Something for inclusion
from the trivia of morning ritual.
Watch the daybreak preening,
the preparation. See the edifice
of a spiral consciousness.
Hear the singing in celestial space.
What piece of art is missing?

The poet scrapes a curious living in
other people’s lives. Borrowed passions.
Constructions from the mislaid,
from the lost and the discarded.
The prescription of art for the soul.
It is a good poem when someone
has used your toothbrush
and you don’t mind it at all.

Some six months before writing ‘Something for Inclusion’, I had written a poem ‘Plagiarism’, which uses the idea of ‘borrowing words’ from a hospice patient. In reading my notes I linked this idea with another I had recorded (after reading Sylvia

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\(^{98}\) Please refer to Chapter 6, page 165, for reference to Wolterstorff’s ideas in ‘Art in Action’.

\(^{99}\) Please refer to Chapter 5, page 153-4, for my discussion of this aspect of Steiner’s ideas in ‘Real Presences’. This point also informs my views in seeking an answer to the question, at the beginning of this chapter, ‘whose poem is it?’. 
Plath's interview with Peter Orr¹⁰⁰ to include a toothbrush in a poem. It appeared to me that the intimacy of ‘borrowing words’ has a numinous quality in a similar way to the borrowing of a toothbrush. Both acts are transformed to significance through the nature of the relationship. In ‘Something for Inclusion’ the morning represents an awakening, a coming into being and a time to search for art. The ‘found poem’ which I aim to develop for a hospice patient stands within the intertwining spaces, the mutual borrowings, using the poet’s skill and the individual’s stories. It addresses the question ‘What piece of art is missing?’ as well as that of the ownership of a poem.

**The Numinous of Creation**

For hospice patients the activity of creating a picture or some piece of craftwork can be very positive. I have further learned that to produce a poem alongside a piece of art is something that can be shared by artist(s) and poet and achieves ekphrasis. The poem illuminates not just the artwork but the also the moment of its making. Even a patient’s story, their own narrative identity, can be considered as a work of art. Hilary Corke believes the inspiration of a poem is ‘seeing a gap’ and a compelling sense of ‘something should be written about that.’¹⁰¹ In this sense, the creative writing of each poem offers an opportunity for the transcendent and numinous.

In one of my first visits to the hospice I was in conversation with a patient who had been a master upholsterer. I listened to him describe how he often considered some chairs to be beyond repair; ‘you can give them a couple of years but if you rip it apart to rebuild, then it isn't the same chair’. Without speaking of it we seem to realise, together, the analogy to his decision to decline major surgery. I think to myself ‘there’s a poem in that’ and write a few words down. A numinous moment. Something now exists that had not existed before. We are in its presence and a poem will seek to honour it, to rejoice in its creation¹⁰². Such instances are repeated many times when 'the germ of a poem'¹⁰³ is 'there' before you in a

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¹⁰⁰ ‘[...] but I can't put toothbrushes into a poem, I really can't.' quoted from the interview with Sylvia Plath, in *The Poet Speaks* ed. by Peter Orr (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p.171.


¹⁰² See the poem 'Master Upholsterer' in the accompanying Creative Work.

¹⁰³ The poet Christopher Middleton speaks of inspiration that can begin with a single phrase, which becomes the ‘germ of a poem’. Please refer to the interview with Christopher Middleton in *The Poet Speaks* ed. by Peter Orr, p.144.
conversation with a patient or in a group activity. There are other poems where the numinous may go unrealised in conversation, as was the case with 'The Room', above, where the link, between painting a picture and cleaning a room when a patient had gone, was only appreciated later. In other conversations there can seem to be a stream of moments, the numinous presence of detailed memories, spoken by the still mischievous voice, of an eighty five year old patient.\footnote{104} I readily identify with Edmund Blunden when he speaks of poetic inspiration as a sort of 'precipitation', where there is 'something accidental that disturbs something inside'.\footnote{105} This is the numinous of creation; it reinforces the value of what is 'found' within a patient's life. Yet it also provides an opportunity to look outside of a life. The words of the philosopher Josiah Royce especially poignant: ‘We cannot see the inner light. Let us try the outer one.’\footnote{106} Where a creative work achieves a sense of otherness and transcendence then it is able to point to an existence outside of a patient's situation. The poem can ‘become’ something of the patient, yet outside of him or her. I will return to these ideas in the next chapter.

\textbf{The Privilege of the Poet}

My experience of writing in the hospice has taught me that it is a place of tremendous privilege for the poet. In this chapter I have been exploring 'how do I go about writing?' and find no clear formula or process with which to answer the question. However, what I have become aware of is, firstly, the 'space' and great opportunity for the poet to be 'disturbed' in places of transition and, secondly, the motivation to write that is generated by a search for significance and celebration in the lives of others.

Ralph Hawkins comments that his writing is stifled by repetition, by 'being in the same place and repeating the same views and emotions in a poem'.\footnote{107} It may seem surprising, especially to anyone outside a hospice, that there is not a repeated theme of loss or pain and that I am not aware of 'being in the same place' as a poet. The hospice is a place that does not stay the same; there is constant physical, emotional and spiritual transition.\footnote{108} The inception of a hospice poem

\footnotesize{104} See the poem 'Memories for Maureen' in the accompanying Creative Work.
\footnotesize{105} Interview with Edmund Blunden in \textit{The Poet Speaks ed.} by Peter Orr, p.34.
\footnotesize{106} Josiah Royce, \textit{The Philosophy of Loyalty} (New York: Macmillan, 1908), p.36.
\footnotesize{108} I do wonder if there is something very significant regarding travelling and transition. It seems to me that the poet is more open, to ‘precipitations’ or ‘seeing the gaps’ for a poem, in such circumstances. I
may carry a sense of ‘a certain time’ within a transition. The best word I can use to describe this sense is the Greek *kairos*, meaning right or opportune moment, a supreme moment or ordained time. The other Greek word for time is *chronos*, chronological or sequential time. By combining this sense of kairos with the Japanese Haiku value, of recording the ordinary, the imperfect and everyday (Wabi-Sabi\(^{109}\)), I am especially aware of the numinous potential. I have learnt that, when accepted as ‘part of the hospice furniture’, it is possible for me to sit to one side of a group conversation or creative activity and set a poem down, as found from the ordinary of the moment.

I can personally advocate the value of hospice work to any other poet who may consider it, since the source of subject material can be so immense and surprising. The following poem was written as a meditation on the personal value I gain from this work.

**A Short Meditation on Poetry**

Poetry, from poietes, meaning 'to make'.
Not repair, not shore up or copy. Make.
Make new, make where there was nothing made before.

There is a space
for something to be said.
A view that will not exist if
no one describes it. A sound where
poetry provides the air to carry it.

Poetry possesses because of its claims
to have made. Anurca\(^{110}\), breath.
Existence has to be expressed.
I make, therefore I am.

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\(^{110}\) ‘Anurca’ is the Inuit word stated to have the dual meaning of ‘breath’ and ‘poetry’, referenced in ‘Working Processes of a Woman Poet’ by Carlyle Reedy in *Poets on Writing* ed. by Denise Riley (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 260.
Concluding Discussion – Writing with a Purpose

In this chapter I have tried to explain my hospice work using practical examples. Although I have used the title ‘Writing with a Purpose’ I may, however, argue that my work is far from ‘purposeful’. What I have learnt, in this regard, is best explained in terms of the purpose of a walk. I can set out on a walk with the intention to arrive somewhere; on the other hand I can set out simply to walk. Hospice poetry is best thought of as ‘walking with patients’ – whilst carrying a pen and notebook – and the purpose is no more than the walk. This seems to most appropriately express the ideas of transition and travelling, both for the hospice poet and the patient companion. The poet is moving through a patient’s story, a mythology of character, passions and events. The patient is in a particular place of movement – both practical, to do with managing a cancer diagnosis, and emotional and spiritual in a walk towards death. At this point I imagine myself as a patient, as a lover of London, walking upon Westminster Bridge with Wordsworth beside me. How would I have felt to have had such a poem written? Would I have felt ownership at inspiring it? These thoughts emphasise the other most significant learning outcome of this practical work - the potential for the numinous in the kairos of a poem’s inception and in its finished presence. I would say that I have come to understand all this most clearly through the ‘beachcomber analogy’, which I introduced earlier. This combines the numinous presence of art with the idea of a walk with a patient along a conversational or creative beach area. A work of art, a ‘found’ poem, can be assembled from whatever we come across together. The value of the walk and the quality of the art are both equally important and the two are, in fact, inseparable. As I discover and create the poem I am simultaneously helping the patient to (re)discover something amazing about themselves and, potentially, about the presence and the legacy of art.

The focus of the following final two chapters will be to explore, in more detail, these philosophical and spiritual approaches and will fully argue the case to be made for poetry in end of life care.

Chapter 5. Poetry, Philosophy, Spirituality and Wonder - Creative Work in the Hospice

Why is poetry, and specifically numinous poetry, of value in end of life care? My rather simple answer is that, since death represents the greatest uncertainty that any of us can face, numinous poetry moves us to celebrate uncertainty. Mary Oliver’s poem, ‘When Death Comes’, denies the value of rational detail, declaring;

When it's over, I want to say: all my life I was a bride married to amazement. I was a bridegroom, taking the world into my arms. ¹¹²

In this chapter I will discuss the role of numinous poetry in end of life care, beginning in three sections: firstly, Steiner’s view of art as presence, secondly Virginia Woolf’s assertion of life as a ‘luminous halo’ and Keats’s statement on Negative Capability. Thirdly, I will place these philosophical and literary views in the context of their psychological value to hospice patients, with principal reference to Dan McAdams’s book Personal Myths and the Making of the Self.¹¹³

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I have made previous brief references, in Chapter 1, to George Steiner’s views in Real Presences and I have taken his ideas as a major influence in my numinous poetics. I will now begin to explore these further. He argues that

... any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs, [...] any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God’s presence. I will put forward the argument that the experience of aesthetic meaning in particular, that of literature, of the arts, of musical form, infers the necessary possibility of this ‘real presence’. The seeming paradox of a ‘necessary possibility’ is, very precisely, that which the poem, the painting, the musical composition are at liberty to explore and to enact.¹¹⁴

He continues later in the same chapter:

¹¹³ Dan P. McAdams, The Stories We Live By; Personal Myths and the Making of the Self. (the prime text for my arguments on Narrative Psychology introduced in Chapter 2)
¹¹⁴ Steiner, Real Presences, pp. 3-4.
All serious art, music and literature is a critical act. It is so, firstly, in the sense of Matthew Arnold’s phrase; ‘a criticism of life’. Be it realistic, fantastic, Utopian or satiric, the construct of the artist is a counter-statement to the world. Aesthetic means embody concentrated, selective interactions between the constraints of the observed and the boundless possibilities of the imagined.  

Steiner’s arguments imply that being human is essentially to possess the ability to conceive the impossible. Whilst a common use of the term numinous is in a religious context (as in the presence of a deity), the numinous in art relies on the potential reality of the created; it requires of us an acceptance of the non-rational. Steiner argues that there is a creator; ‘there is aesthetic creation because there is creation’. He fears for the abandonment of such belief:

What I affirm is the intuition that where God’s presence is no longer a tenable supposition and where His absence is no longer a felt, and indeed overwhelming weight, certain dimensions of thought and creativity are no longer attainable.

Steiner is suspicious of attempts to do without God and refers to Wallace Stevens’s proposal that ‘after one has abandoned belief in God, poetry is the essence which takes its place as life’s redemption’. Stevens seems to think transcendence possible through a commitment to believe in created fictions. Considering these four separate statements in ‘Adagia’:

Poetry must be irrational.  
[...] 
As the reason destroys, the poet must create.  
[...] 
The poem is a nature created by the poet.  
[...] 
The poet is a God...  

Stevens seems to express a wish to abandon God but he moves toward a replacement ‘Supreme Fiction’, as he finds reality unsatisfying. The closing

Steiner, Real Presences, p. 11.
Ibid. p. 201.
Ibid. p. 229.
Ibid. p. 228.
argument in *Real Presences* is for ‘the question of the existence or non-existence of God to have lost all actuality …that we shall inhabit a scientific-secular world’.

Raymond Tallis reviewed *Real Presences* and praised (though not fully agreeing with) Steiner’s rich arguments for the necessity of the Otherness of God. He paraphrases, ‘This is Steiner’s wager: that there is something in what we say; that the transcendent is still there, if we will hearken to it through the mediation of art.’

Tallis doubts the need for ‘God’ but his alternative suspicion is ‘… that true wonder without the postulate of transcendence may serve as well’.

Whatever labels may be acceptable (God, True Wonder or Supreme Fiction) my arguments for numinous poetry include the requirement to be in the presence of mystery, to be compelled by the non-rational, and to find particular value in the transcendent. I choose to let Steiner’s view of ‘art as presence’ guide my writing for patients because of the framework it provides for the transcendent. One of the founding principles of the hospice movement is ‘being with’. Art and poetry, viewed as ‘presence’, may provide support for those in the ‘waiting space’ before death - the companionship of art with the creative self. Waiting may be blended with ideas of ‘becoming’.

Perhaps creativity helps to make acceptable, and to even value, the mystery of what we are to ‘become’ on death?

The view of all art as presence, as relating to a ‘supreme other’, underpins the value of art in end of life care, and this view would seem to strengthen the relationship between creativity and personal significance. I view the ‘self’ as a work of art by its nature as a created personal mythology. To write a numinous poem inspired by the life of an individual may achieve two particular things: to see a life represented as a creative presence of art and to see significance and value in the mysteries of such art. I will now proceed to further explain these arguments.

I am acutely aware of the meeting of the rational medical-science process with the individual patient’s aesthetic view of their own life. To support those individuals and their families within a hospice, poetry, and other creative activity, offers the potential to celebrate the self. Creative views of important memories, personal hobbies and passions, individual experiences or membership of some shared

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121 Steiner, *Real Presences*, p. 230.
123 Ibid. p. 25.
124 The idea of ‘waiting’ being closely linked to ‘becoming’ was made in an exploration of *Waiting* by Raymond Tallis, (London: BBC Radio 4 Broadcast, 21 October 2014).
125 Please see my discussion of McAdams’s views on personal mythology, Chapter 2, pp. 94-98.
community, can all be brought into the numinous. Such celebration is able to signify a life as ‘other’, a presence in time and space not restricted to a medical history or a curriculum vitae. Keith Douglas’s view of poetry is relevant. He wrote: ‘[Poetry] is anything expressed in words, which appeals to the emotions, either in presenting an image or picture to move them; or by the music of words affecting them through the senses; or in stating some truth whose eternal quality exacts the same reverence as eternity itself.’

Do we consider that Douglas’s war poems carry more of such truth than, say, Antony Beevor’s book *The Second World War*? My opinion, in concluding my research, is that poetry is able to hold truth of ‘eternal quality’ by virtue of the numinous; it is able touch upon the significance of life in a way that no historical narrative or autobiography could achieve. Ted Hughes writes that it is possible for poetry to capture ‘the vital signature of a human being…’ This idea and that of the ‘created presence’ of a poem are very valuable as I apply them in my hospice work. To explain further I will review my approaches from literary criticism and, following that, from psychology before returning to Steiner’s arguments in *Real Presences*.

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Virginia Woolf wrote ‘Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.’ Her literary argument is that the ‘good story’ requires the details, the wonder and the ‘flickerings of that innermost flame’. Woolf further recognizes Joyce’s ability to record ‘sudden lightning flashes of significance’ in his writing. Poetry is able to capture those ‘flashes of significance’ for a hospice patient; the examples in the Creative Work are rarely to do with what the headlamps of a journey may illuminate. They are in the light of the ‘luminous halo’ of a life; a smile from a stranger, a hat above a hedge, a leaf, a match sparking on Montmartre’s flagstone pavements.

130 Ibid., p. 150.
131 Ibid., p. 151.
Woolf’s views relate to Joyce’s use of epiphany and also to Wordsworth’s ‘spots of time’ when he writes of the value found in wonder and not in ‘contentions thought’. The use of the fantastical was supported by Coleridge (in his Suspension of Disbelief) and Wallace Stevens said ‘Reality is a cliché we escape by metaphor’. When a poet uses metaphor he or she offers a new way of seeing to the reader. A view may be of fine detail, paradoxical or witty. The poet has a range of methods in constructing a way of looking at the world. Where the skill is greatest the numinous may be achieved by the poet in a new landscape – a numinous reality of the poem where the reader is enthralled and unsettled by wonder. Keats wrote of the Negative Capability, meaning ‘when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’. This aspect of being at peace with uncertainties affirms a further reason why numinous poetry has such a value in end of life care.

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Narrative Psychology was introduced as one of four cognitive aspects related to poetry in Chapter 2 of this Thesis. Dan P. McAdams says that ‘in the modern world in which we all live, identity is a life story.’ He explains the basis for a personal mythology, a narrative identity of constant revision and development. McAdams acknowledges the value of purposeful ownership of a personal myth-story – ‘the good life story is one of the most important gifts we can ever offer each other’. Such a story is not (necessarily) a written autobiography but activities such as diary/journal keeping, personal storytelling and reminiscence are found to be very valuable in personal identity and significance. A ‘good life story’ is not to be considered as a list of achievements. We naturally use the details we remember, paint verbal pictures (with some embellishment); we concentrate on the curious, not on the catalogue of life activities. McAdams suggests ‘exploring your myth’ as a

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132 as discussed in Chapter 1, of this thesis.
135 Wallace Stevens, in Strong Words, pp. 59-64.
137 McAdams, The Stories We Live By; Personal Myths and the Making of the Self, p. 5.
138 Ibid., p. 7.
139 Ibid., Chapter 10, ‘Exploring Your Myth’.
specific beneficial activity in purposeful conversation.\textsuperscript{140} He advocates emphasis on peak and nadir experiences, turning points, nuclear episodes and the most significant memories and themes, by which to beneficially affirm the self. The self is aesthetic rather than factual and certain events are dramatized or minimised in projection or protection of self. McAdams discusses the way humans understand the world and he chooses to use the terms ‘paradigmatic mode’ and ‘narrative mode’.\textsuperscript{141} The former is a restriction to fact and a catalogue of the measurable and material; the latter is the mythological and metaphorical. In writing poetry in the hospice the personal ‘narrative mode’ is most appropriate; gathering details and views of a patient’s own journey together with mystery and uncertainty.

Robert Neimeyer also discusses the importance of personal narrative in the formation of individual identity:

\textit{… storytelling may involve various ways of ‘positioning’ oneself within a story (for example, as clown, hero, victim, or supporting actor), whilst at the same time assigning complementary roles to other characters (Winslade and Monk, 2001). Viewed from this perspective, all three levels of narrative activity – intrapersonal, cultural and interpersonal – can be viewed as concerned with the construction and co-construction of identity. That is, all three entail processes contributing to or challenging the development of a self-narrative, defined a ‘an over-arching cognitive-affective-behavioural structure that organizes the ‘micro-narratives’ of everyday life into a ‘macro-narrative’ that consolidates our self-understanding, establishes our characteristic range of emotions and goals, and guides our performance on the stage of the social world’.}\textsuperscript{142}

My view, as I understand what Neimeyer argues, is that creating a poem inspired by a hospice patient’s narrative (expressed in conversation or in their own art) has the potential to help to consolidate their self-understanding. This is not with any intention to be therapeutic but simply recording, in some way, aspects of a patient’s micro or macro narrative; this can be seen in the poems in the Creative Work and those explored in detail in the preceding chapter. Where a poem achieves the numinous, my view is that the ‘real presence’ of the poem supports the significance of an individual life. A poem may capture something of an individual’s inner voice,

\textsuperscript{140} McAdams, The Stories We Live By; Personal Myths and the Making of the Self, pp. 251-275.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., p. 29.
pick up on one or more of their storytelling characters (a child of mischief perhaps) or affirm their cultural and historical position (such as wartime or the closing of the cotton mills). Little, if any, of a patient’s narrative may ever have been put onto paper before. Now it is present in a poem with the potential to register life as art. The words of Maya Angelou are especially poignant when considering those approaching death: ‘There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you’.¹⁴³ My poems may, even in some small way, begin to tell someone’s story.

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To apply the above two sections of argument further regarding my own hospice poetry, I will now return to passages from Real Presences.

I can only put it this way (and every true poem, piece of music or painting says it better): there is aesthetic creation because there is creation. There is formal construction because we have been made form.¹⁴⁴ [...] The core of our human identity is nothing more or less than the fitful apprehension of the radically inexplicable presence, facticity and perceptible substantiality of the created. It is; we are. This is the rudimentary grammar of the unfathomable. I take the aesthetic act, the conceiving and bringing into being of that which, very precisely, could not have been conceived or brought into being, to be an imitatio, a replication on its own scale, of the inaccessible first fiat (the ‘Big Bang’...).¹⁴⁵ [...] This essay argues a wager on transcendence. It argues that there is in the art-act and its reception, that there is in the experience of meaningful form, a presumption of presence.¹⁴⁶

Steiner’s emphasis on creation frames my view that both patient and poem each have a creative presence and as such the poem can affirm human identity and the wonder of existence; the poem offers the transcendent and the ‘numinous other’. The process of developing a poem with a hospice patient can access the sense of

¹⁴⁴ Steiner, Real Presences, p. 201.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 201.
¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 214.
awe in their life. If a poem can have literary value as ‘life’ revealed, can spring from an individual personal narrative, and can offer a ‘radically inexplicable presence’ of numinous quality, it is a great achievement. I have already referred, on page 142, to instances where the sharing of a poem with a patient has resulted in a very strong appreciative response. This has continued to be my experience on many occasions.

My poetry is not intentional therapy, yet celebrating mystery may help to achieve a peace from ‘irritable fact and reason’. The sense of the unknown or unknowable, which Keats speaks about, is touched upon in modern poetry with Jeffrey Wainwright’s philosophical poetry collection, The Reasoner. In poem ‘92’ he declares, ‘There are, I’m convinced again, surrounding worlds’. Creative activity, with art and craft and poetry, can be actively used by art therapists to prepare patients and families for the unknown, the paradoxical and irreconcilable nature of death. Connections within the minute particulars of an individual patient’s life can offer a numinous sense of wholeness; to use (in Steiner’s terms) ‘the capacity of poetry to give to reality the greater permanence of the imagined’. Patrick Clary, a hospice physician and poet, writes: ‘In palliative medicine, we learn that not everything can or even should be resolved. As our patients and their families go through this passage together, they may feel both loss and relief; resolution is not required if we have the capacity to embrace both at once.’ In addition, to quote Clary, ‘writing in a hospice gives [a poet] access to stories not even a genius could make up’. A number of examples follow, to demonstrate how I strive towards the goal of numinous poetry in the hospice.

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147 Please see Chapter 1 and my discussion of awe, referring to the work of Keltner and Haidt (on page 81) and Rudd, Vohs and Aaker (on page 84). Their reference to awe available in the ‘walk down memory lane’ can be linked to my approach to my own view of the ‘found poem’.
148 Please see my references to the psychodynamic work of McLoughlin on poetry as transitional object on page 98 of this thesis.
149 Jeffrey Wainwright, ‘92’ in The Reasoner, p. 102. (This also resonates with the book cover notes which refer to ‘a ‘hidden order’ – that is both a hope and a fear.’)
150 I am using this term in the spiritual Hebrew sense of ‘shalom’.
153 Clary, p. 797.
Watermark

‘Watermark’ was inspired by a man with a very long (and successful) career in papermaking. He spoke in detail of his fascination with watermarks and this is given a much wider, mysterious context in the poem.

Watermark

Fine and dandy.
A disturbance in the fibres,
a marker for the maker.

Esparto grass in the potcher,
water, pulp, alum, resin.
Choose a colour. Dye.

Cigarette coupons, security.
Cartridge paper, word shot.
Crackle free, the BBC.

Laid wires, chain wires,
disturbance in the fibres lasts
a lifetime. White linen, final


The poem uses paradox and dissonance in the first three lines and shifts the reader into the poem with the detail and imperative of the next three lines. Types of paper and the use they are put to are listed, before the poem returns to the mysterious disturbance and the sense of ending. Watermarks are beautiful things; the wire device that creates a watermark in paper is called a Dandy Roller (a dandy being someone ‘excessively concerned with appearance’). ‘Watermark’ presents its subject as a flash of significance to a life; the text may reveal to the reader representations of beauty, disturbance and ordained lifetime. Such a poem supports a personal mythology for an individual and family to mark significance and mystery with a numinous quality.


**Opal**

Child poet. ‘Autumn’.
Children’s Hour, aged nine.
Prize. Remembering,
 savouring the rhyme.

Purpose in a poem.
 Document. Discuss.
 Idiosyncratic view.
What a poet does.

Scruffy books, pristine books.
Filtering a world of words
finding ones I like.

Two words fly and chase,
giving birth to one.
Opal. Light, stone of earth,
kiss of moon and sun.

‘Opal’ resulted from a discussion with a patient whose love of (and success with)
poetry began in childhood. I had perceived a deep passion for the poetic craft and
for the discovery of new views – including through technology. This poem
celebrates the story told to me, which included a favourite gemstone and poem,
and the patient’s love of words and of rhyme. It achieves a particularly valuable
sense of mystery.

**Fancy Cakes**
The potential of poetry to combine, in very few words, aspects of personal narrative
myth and ‘flashes of significance’ is demonstrated the poem ‘Fancy Cakes’.
Fancy Cakes

Fancy cakes at love's kick-off.

Percival's, 1955. Crumbs, community.
A journey with icing, icicles,
decorations, distractions.
Caravanning. Wanderers.
Crowds, cheering.

Rediscovered words.
Surrounded by singing.
Pack up your troubles.
If you were the only girl.

Fancy cakes, Lancashire Lass.

This poem uses juxtaposition and word-play between a widower's two life passions: his wife and his football. The poem continually overlaps these two passions with references to wedding, holidays and football (Bolton Wanderers). Song titles are used from a 1958 cup final programme (a match in which Bolton beat Manchester United 2-0 at Wembley). These ‘Rediscovered words./ Surrounded by singing,’ bring together marriage vows and hymns and football liturgy and songs, with the sense of celebration. It is the detail 'flickerings’ that produce a sense of the numinous in the poem. These illuminate the place of ceremonial victories in a personal mythology.

There are other poems in the thesis and in the Creative Work that I also consider the clearest examples of the ability to capture significant moments; these are ‘Bowling’, ‘Precision’, ‘Penny Drop’, ‘Commercials’, ‘Carborundum’, ‘Mill Girl’ and ‘On a Walk’. The poem ‘I’d Do It All Over Again’ uses the patient’s nuclear experience as a Land Girl and also the narrative (and epiphany) in the leaves collected. There are the psychosocial benefits of shared life stories, with ‘fellow citizens of the world’, as in ‘Tiffin with Ballard’. Such poetry has the ability to extend a patient's awareness of their own personal narrative to connect with the vastness of the world or with nature (other particular examples in my poems are ‘Bowling’ and ‘Finding Again’). In writing poems inspired by conversations or creative work, I am always careful to acknowledge the value I place on the patients’ contributions. Their stories also become part of my own personal mythology; I carry a very great sense of poetry being a ‘joint enterprise’ in my work. The significance of

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\(^{154}\) Please see pages 128 and 130
\(^{155}\) Please see Appendix A, ‘Guidance Framework for Poets in End of Life Care’.
making a poem with a patient is often, for me, a profound and numinous experience (and I will return to this aspect in Chapter 7). However, it is important to remember that the act of writing in the hospice is primarily a purpose of creating a poem; I am inspired by the ‘impulse to preserve’ expressed by Philip Larkin.

I write poems to preserve things I have seen / thought / felt (if I may so indicate a composite and complex experience) both for myself and for others, though I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself, which I am trying to keep from oblivion for its own sake. Why I should do this I have no idea, but I think the impulse to preserve lies at the bottom of all art.156

The key skill, in conversation with hospice patients, is listening and, in the practice of doing so, to develop the ‘writer’s spiritual ear’ for what may be ‘preserved’. Virginia Woolf honours James Joyce as ‘spiritual. For Woolf is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame’ and places him among writers who attempt to ‘come closer to life’.157 Inspired by Joyce’s skill in capturing day-to-day significance, I used the technique of listening with the BBC Ulysses broadcasts (on the occasion of the book’s 90th anniversary).158 By noting phrases that struck me (as spoken by the character Bloom) and any personal responses and ideas, I produced seven poems in an experimental ‘Listening to Bloom’ series, one of which follows as an example:

158 James Joyce, Ulysses, BBC Radio 4 Broadcast series, June 2012.
I enjoy the way in which James Joyce, in *Ulysses*, takes a creative view of the everyday. As I listen to the stories and views of life as told by hospice patients, there is an equally rich and fully authentic source of ideas in their lives. The role of the poet is in capturing a thought, an observation on life and placing it down ‘as it happens’. It is possible, by using the full range of poetic skills, to set a ‘thing’ as a numinous presence (in the terms I have discussed earlier) to mark the walk that someone makes through life. I acknowledge (and plagiarise) Joyce’s phrases such as ‘barrel-tone voice’, ‘grateful jug’ and ‘bilious clock’. Yet, in my hospice poems, many phrases are directly from the lips of patients. In the Creative Work, at the beginning of this thesis, there are very many examples to be found, including, ‘dressed for delicacies’, ‘painting with pills’, ‘sock conjurer’, ‘ingenious grey’ and ‘impastoed face’.

The Japanese-American poet Yasuda introduced a theory of the ‘haiku moment’\(^\text{159}\). I have made use of the haiku form of poetry many times in the hospice; the form lends itself well to capturing moments and to assembling collections of inspirational phrases used in conversations. A number of poems in my collection demonstrate

this, including ‘Garden Haiku’ and ‘Bolton Haiku’, ‘Teacher’, ‘Terry’s Haiku’ and ‘Conversation Haiku’. These examples, as part of individual personal mythologies, fit in clearly with the ideas of ‘spots of time’, ‘flashes of significance’ and ‘negative capability’ discussed earlier. Also, in Douglas’s terms, moments so recreated in a poem have their own presence, to represent a truth of eternal quality.  

I have brought James Joyce’s definition of Epiphany into the numinous poetics (as discussed in Chapter 1). Joyce was noted for his support of imagism and haiku, with its concentration upon small details. It is especially interesting that, in the Japanese culture, there exists the belief that real beauty is modest, transient and humble. The haiku is considered to have been shaped by such aesthetic values.

**Concluding Comments**

Steiner’s argument is for art as ‘real presence’ and I have referred to this sense of a poem’s presence having a parallel to the creative presence of the patient (about whom a poem is written). This idea is supported from cognitive viewpoints in text-worlds and by my points in earlier chapters. A numinous poetics can, in my view, help to identify how a number of components may combine to create a powerful ‘being’ or ‘otherness’ of the poem. A good poem can utilize mysterious associations between art and life and death. Such art in the hospice offers the opportunity for spiritual transcendence; in the face of death to dwell amongst the ‘mysterious flickerings’ and to value an aesthetic existence that is independent of time. From conversations and creative activity with hospice patients, it is possible to find the finer, ‘imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete’ details of a personal mythology, and make the connections in a tightly crafted poem. To celebrate a patient’s own creativity and to capture the flickering details of a life is to find beauty and significance. I would like to think that Joyce and Woolf would approve. Perhaps Walt Whitman certainly would: his questioning of life’s meaning in ‘O Me! O Life!’ led to his answer, ‘That you are here – That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.’

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160 As referred to on page 81 from Keith Douglas ‘Poetry is Like a Man’ in Strong Words.
163 Ibid., p. 7.
I will conclude this chapter on poetry, philosophy, spirituality and wonder with a quotation from Mark Cobb: 165

Death concludes life and the possibility of human creation. This journey towards an ending therefore invites, if not demands, a creative response of lament, celebration and hope addressed to the silence and absence of death. This impulse may be without logic but it affirms the fragile nature of existence and strives to reflect the intimations of a larger reality to which we are sensitive. The writer Ben Okri considers that ‘art is but a sign and a prayer to the greater glory and sublimity of our secret estate. It is a celebration of our terrestrial intelligence, our spiritual yearning, and the irrepressibility of our mischief and joy.’ 166 George Steiner goes further and argues that, ‘Without the arts, the human psyche would stand naked in the face of personal extinction. Wherein would lie the logic of madness and despair’. 167

Mark Cobb is a hospital chaplain but I do not believe his comments are restricted to those who may hold religious beliefs. Michael Symmons Roberts, in discussing poetry in a post-secular age, points to new opportunities for poets to meet the human yearning for the metaphysical 168 and he argued for an alternative label to ‘religious poetry’ - he dismissed the term ‘spiritual’ as devalued. Numinous poetics enables poets to meet such yearnings for hospice patients and helps them to stand, even in the face of death, as the ‘bride married to amazement’. 169

169 Mary Oliver, ‘When Death Comes’ in New and Selected Poems.
Chapter 6. Creativity, Personal Significance and the Numinous - The Place of Poetry in End of life Care.

How does my approach to poetry establish a workable framework, or a template, for others to write poetry with patients near the end of life? My work in the hospice will continue after my research and it is my intention to encourage others to find similar roles in writing within hospices and other end of life care services (including how poetry may be developed in the community). To this end, this chapter seeks a practical outcome to the research. I will discuss two key issues and make recommendations for end of life service providers to consider. The first issue is that of clarifying the distinction between support and therapy. The second is the question of identifying the type of person-poet suited to a role in the hospice. (Appendix A contains my guidance notes which have been prepared for circulation to any poets who may be considering hospice work.)

The hospice in which I volunteer has a declared mission (in common with the similar statements of many others) to ‘provide specialist palliative and end of life care that focuses on symptom control whilst also supporting people and their families to live well through the course of their illness and to cope with end of life’. Such support encompasses the spiritual and psychosocial needs of the patients. There is a tension between the advance of medical science, that pursues its ability to fix and treat, and an acceptance of the natural order of death and how that may be experienced. Atul Gawande, a surgeon and health researcher, has only recently reignited this debate with his new book (and also in presenting the 2014 Reith Lectures on BBC Radio). He writes, ‘As people become aware of the finitude of their life, they do not ask for much. They do not seek more riches. They do not seek more power. They only ask to be permitted, insofar as possible, to keep shaping the story of their life in the world – to make choices and sustain connections to others according to their own priorities.’ He puts forward strong arguments for medicine, and society, to review its approach to end of life care.

Erna Haraldsdottir reviewed the principle of ‘being with’ in hospice care, (a principle attributed to the founder of the modern hospice movement, Cicely Saunders). Haraldsdottir explains ‘being with’ as ‘an interaction that requires deep involvement while accompanying someone in their spiritual journey towards death’. This approach is held in tension with the natural nursing focus on physical care, and Haraldsdottir’s research points to the need for a renewed focus on ‘being with’. Similarly, Helen Scott’s article, on communication with the terminally ill, identifies patients’ desires for ‘presence, interest and acknowledgement’.

My work, in both conversation with patients and in the completion of poetry, supports the individual’s ‘story’ and performs a function of ‘being with’, to accompany a patient’s spiritual journey towards death. There are many occasions where patients respond very positively in appreciation of the time spent talking to them and the completed poems. Even months later, some patients will make mention of a poem, sometimes in the context of having shared it with family or friends, framed it on a wall or placed it into a ‘memory box’.

As I argue for poetry to be an integral part of hospice care, the first key issue to arise is a question. Despite my earlier assertions to the contrary, is my approach likely to be considered as a form of therapy? I have already referred, in Chapter 2, to the work of Dominic McLoughlin, a psychotherapist who guided patients in a poetry group in a hospice. He found that ‘literary arts can provide a transformational object, and a point of inspiration, that may help patients to negotiate changes brought about by their illness’. I must also accept, from my study of McAdams, that the retelling and affirmation of personal narratives is of great benefit to an individual, through the reinforcement of the self. McAdams refers to the work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, whose writings are also part of David Gauntlet’s book. His ideas, on the formation of the self, refer to ‘reconfiguration’ of identity at

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174 In the sense of my physical ‘being with’ as a poet alongside a patient as well as the idea of the poem ‘being with’ the patient in their journey towards death.
175 This area was considered in my own R1 ethical review for commencing my work and is also referred to in Chapter 3, p. 122.
177 McAdams, studied in Chapter 2 and also referred to in Chapter 5.
the ‘intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader or hearer’. This would seem to imply that a text given to a patient could be some form of intervention. But then would not any creative work of film, drama or novel have the possibility of ‘reconfiguration’? There would seem no easy line to draw; any novel, dramatic film or poem can seek to be an intervention, if it is, for example, driven by some agenda to change social attitudes.

My approach in the hospice is that the poet must go no further than his or her art; he or she is not there to fix anything or change or challenge anything. We turn what we see into art, but we need to be aware of all potential problems and to follow the available guidelines. Hospice volunteers are made aware of policies on interactions with patients, and on such issues as confidentiality and respect, for good reasons. Volunteers have well-established roles as support workers in hospice services; most will have day to day contact with patients. Good conversation, reminiscence, just the presence of a listening ear, is classed as therapeutic. Hospital environments are often designed to be therapeutic in the passive use of, for example, colour, light and sound. It seems that the key issue in seeking to define therapy is its intention to effect change of a clinical issue – that is therapeutic action as distinct from therapeutic support. There are many support activities that are analogous to this, for example to take a recovering heart patient for a gentle walk or encouraging someone with depression to eat properly. I conclude that supporting the self-story of a patient, whether in reminiscence or writing, can be simply viewed as a good activity, and it is not clinical therapy.

Another way, of questioning the role of poetry in the hospice, is to consider creativity as a basic psychological need. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, from his lifelong psychological research on creativity and flow, argues:

Creativity is a central source of meaning in our lives for several reasons. Here I want to mention only the two main ones. First, most of the things that are interesting, important, and human are the results of creativity. We share 98 percent of our genetic makeup with chimpanzees. What makes us different - our language, values, artistic expression, scientific understanding, and technology - is the result of individual ingenuity that was recognized, rewarded, and transmitted through learning. Without creativity, it would be difficult indeed to distinguish humans from apes.

The second reason creativity is so fascinating is that when we are involved in it, we feel we are living more fully than during the rest of life. The excitement of the artist at the easel or the scientist in the lab comes close to the ideal fulfillment we all wish to get from life, and so rarely do. Perhaps only sex, sports, music, and religious ecstasy – even when these experiences remain fleeting and leave no trace – provide as profound a sense of being part of an entity greater than ourselves. But creativity also leaves an outcome that adds to the richness and complexity of the future.\textsuperscript{179}

My poetry helps patients to see their own creative existence, from their stories or from their own artwork and craft. To Csikszentmihalyi’s views I can add those of the philosopher Nicolas Wolterstorff,\textsuperscript{180} who identifies the basic human desire to live and act artistically. He uses the examples of how work-song ennobles and elevates everyday activities and how memorial art is far more befitting, than historical fact, for remembrance. Wolterstorff’s view is that art has an intrinsic worth, a greater adequacy, and, as such, is in my consideration close to Steiner’s idea of art as ‘real presence’.

These views from psychology and philosophy support my argument; creative connections recognise and signify a patient’s life, character, passion and person in ways that are not ‘documentary’ but art. It is possible to offer new creative views that are able to elevate and ennoble. In this way it is possible to celebrate the self and personal significance of a patient in a way that may help them to transcend their illness and prognosis. This is not clinical therapy, but I believe it should be a key component of the hospice declared mission to ‘live well’ as death approaches.

Although I argue that my work is support, and not therapy, I am aware of potential problems. My recommendations are that the support role of any hospice poet must be made clear at the induction stage. There needs to be a designated line manager to monitor the work produced and to mentor the poet regarding patient issues. Where there are any psychological or emotional treatments in place for a patient (for example by a psychotherapist or counsellor) then close guidance needs to be offered. The guidelines for poets, in Appendix A, include reference to this.

\textsuperscript{179} Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity: flow and the psychology of discovery and invention, pp. 1-2.
\textsuperscript{180} Nicolas Wolterstorff, Art in Action (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980).
There are some sources of general guidance available which a hospice may find valuable for their own policies and procedures and for volunteer induction. One of the principal texts for my research is *Dying, Bereavement and the Healing Arts* edited by Gillie Bolton. The book is an introduction to the role of the arts for those working in palliative care (which aims to ensure that patients facing death experience physical, spiritual and emotional ease). Gillie Bolton writes in the introduction:

Being in genuine contact with others, and with the complexities of oneself, is to be fully alive, and to create is to be fully human. Dying, bereavement and pain are, along with birth, the only certainties of life. So art has always focused on them – helping us to understand and live them to the full, rather than merely to endure. Art helps in our struggling attempts to understand ourselves and our role in the world. We see through a glass darkly: the arts bring illumination.\(^{181}\)

In this book many valuable observations and case studies present a wide context for the role of the arts in dying and bereavement. Three approaches are identified by Bolton:

1. a sharing of arts with no overt therapeutic aim
2. directly therapeutic, to enable insight or healing in people
3. to support practitioners professionally as a form of reflective practice.\(^{182}\)

Without therapeutic qualification or training, any poet must work within ‘1’, above, and yet Bolton acknowledges that ‘arts practice takes us beyond our habitual boundaries and enables us to come face to face with our own deep existential questions. It can break our normal everyday rules for being’.\(^{183}\) A trained arts therapist may use poetry within a planned therapeutic process relating to, for example, grief over job loss or reduced physical abilities. However, any poet who, without therapeutic intent, produces poetry to celebrate creatively a patient’s life, or writes poetry which itself is a response to someone’s own creative work, will have an effect. A poem with numinous quality will push boundaries and address existential questions. John Graham-Pole writes of the value of imagination in cancer care and his arguments use the thesis of a theologian, Matthew Fox. He writes,

\(^{182}\) Ibid., p. 14.
\(^{183}\) Ibid., p. 18.
His thesis is that the highest communion with the original source of our being is reached by simple expressions of creativity. Philosophers, psychologists and poets also see the urge to create as the core of being human; in the act of creating we give birth to ourselves.\textsuperscript{184}

In my view the poet must have no clinical therapeutic aim, but work to be creative alongside each patient and to celebrate their own creativity. Any outcome for the patient must be able to be viewed as ‘self-affirming’ rather than ‘self-changing’. I made a decision, in my research, not to set out with any intention to guide patients in the writing of their own poetry. This was because, in any particular emotional context, I recognised a role that could possibly develop into one of therapist. If such a situation were to arise, I would only work under the active supervision of a suitably qualified staff member.

There are guidelines for arts in palliative care already in existence.\textsuperscript{185} These guidelines refer to ‘forms of writing’ within their scope but are without specific reference to poetry. In the context of therapy only art, music, drama and dance are defined. However, the following is very helpful:

Guidance on improving supportive and palliative care from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)\textsuperscript{186} outlines for skill levels essential to the provision of effective, supportive, palliative care. Levels one and two provide effective listening and support skills which are within the professional remit of all staff and volunteers following a basic induction programme. Level three is a more advanced response to complex problems, requiring in-depth knowledge of palliative and psychosocial care and the skills to make a full assessment of patient and family needs. Level four is related to the more severe psychological distress associated with the crises of diagnosis and relapse.\textsuperscript{187}

There is a great deal of scope for the poet to work within levels one and two as specified above. The National Council for Palliative Care provides a working definition of end of life care as care.


\textsuperscript{185} Guidelines for Arts Therapies and the Arts in Palliative Care Settings. The Creative Response. 2\textsuperscript{nd} Edition (Help the Hospices, 2007).

\textsuperscript{186} Guidance on Cancer Services Improving Supportive and Palliative Care for Adults with Cancer. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (London: N.I.C.E., 200).

\textsuperscript{187} Guidelines for Arts Therapies and the Arts in Palliative Care Settings. op. cit., p.11.
End of Life Care is that which helps all those with advanced, progressive and incurable illness to live as well as possible until they die. It enables the supportive and palliative care needs of both patient and family to be identified and met throughout the last phase of life and into bereavement. It includes management of pain and other symptoms and the provision of psychological, social, spiritual and practical support.  

The individual support work of the poet has, in my experience, been clearly achievable at levels one and two and such work falls broadly within the psychological, social and spiritual role of the hospice.  

The poet's support role may also extend to a patient's family and to bereavement work; a number of my poems have been beneficially shared with families by the Hospice Chaplain (who is also a bereavement counsellor) and many have been used within funeral services. My poems are included within eulogies, sometimes at the specific request of a patient (as expressed in their own funeral wishes). One way that the hospice supports patients approaching death is through 'memory boxes'; my poems have been placed within these and, on occasions, I have been asked to base a poem on the contents of a memory box.  

More broadly, there is potential for individual and group poems to be used in publications and at events organized by the hospice. This promotes the contribution of creative work, in the care of patients, and engenders a positive and helpful view for patients and their families. Poems may also help in general community support for funding and volunteer recruitment. In my thesis Creative Work there are some examples of poems that focus on the role of hospice volunteers or are pertinent to hospice staff training and induction; poems have been selected and used by service managers for volunteer and staff development.  

Regarding my second key issue, of identifying the type of person-poet suited to a role in the hospice, there is much that follows on from the above discussion on therapy. Good listening skills and a natural interest in, and respect for, other people and their views and values are vital. Any listener in the hospice needs that complex combination of sensitive empathy and emotional strength, to meet with people who are most likely to be physically and emotionally very vulnerable. The cheerful and positive outlook is useful to celebrate the self-story of a patient, but it must never be
glib or shallow. I would recommend that volunteer induction includes some aspects of bereavement training (as I had undertaken in my preparation for church ministry). There are listening skills courses available which will also be of value. I have myself attended the Bolton Hospice ‘Lost for Words’ course, in order to improve my skills in coping with difficult conversations with patients.

In assessing the suitability of someone, as a hospice poet, I would look for two things in particular. A desire to be inspired by others (and to be grateful for it) and a sense of being called (as opposed to driven) to take up the role. This last point is to underline the dangers of writing with any sense of an agenda. I first raised this issue in describing my own approach in hospice work in Chapter 4. When I consider what my own experience has taught me, I must affirm this as advice to a hospice; to look for a poet with a mindset of ‘interest and support’ and not ‘fixing’ or ‘making happier’. I recommend using art to honour everything you are given; I would also recommend the ‘beachcomber’ analogy, which I introduced in Chapter 4, as useful in advising poets to ‘make art with what you find’. It is also important to enquire of personal motivations for the work and to discern any sense of a volunteer bringing their own unresolved problems to the role. Any recent personal bereavement, or long-term emotional issues, may interfere with successful work. Working with patients can involve a great deal of emotional stress and there may be occasions when an individual raises distressing issues or memories. Poets must have access to, and use, qualified advice and support on any matters that arise. It is good practice, wherever possible, to make time for a short ‘debriefing’ conversation with a staff member at the end of each working session.

To summarize the key practical issues from the above discussion:

a) Guidelines for poets, and their volunteer induction, must be clear on their support role and also clear on issues of therapeutic intervention which are the sole responsibility of appropriately qualified hospice staff.
b) Care needs to be taken in deciding if particular individuals have the empathy, skill and motivation that is appropriate.
c) Volunteer poets should have access to supervision and mentoring for any issues that may arise from working with patients.
Research Conclusion – Poetry, End of Life Care and the Numinous

In concluding this thesis chapter, I will repeat my plea for the role of poetry in end of life care to be given more national attention. I have recognised that (within the wider hospice movement) art and other creative activities for those with a terminal diagnosis can tend to be classed, by some, as ‘diversional therapy’ (that is, designed to distract and occupy). From my time of research, and with the insight I have gained in a forward-thinking hospice, I am convinced that creative work with patients which helps to affirm the significance of self is much more than a diversion from a patient’s circumstances. Creative celebration of personal mythology needs to be seen as a key component of psychological, social, spiritual and practical support in end of life care. Such work is integral to ‘being with’, as one of Cicely Saunders’s founding principles of hospice care. The term ‘good death’ is in common usage by end of life care services and campaigner. Age UK have identified the following as the principles of a ‘good death’:

1. To know when death is coming, and to understand what can be expected.
2. To be able to retain control of what happens.
3. To be afforded dignity and privacy.
4. To have control over pain relief and other symptom control.
5. To have choice and control over where death occurs (at home or elsewhere).
6. To have access to information and expertise of whatever kind is necessary.
7. To have access to any spiritual or emotional support required.
8. To have access to hospice care in any location, not only in hospital.
9. To have control over who is present at the end.
10. To be able to issue Advance Decisions which ensure wishes are respected.
11. To have time to say goodbye, and control over other aspects of timing.
12. To be able to leave when it is time to go, and not to have life prolonged pointlessly.

In the above list the strong emphasis of the good death concept is clearly upon the medical and the practical (and this is the view argued by Gawande). Yet the feedback which I have received from patients and their families and those involved in pastoral care, convinces me that creative celebration of life is much more than

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191 For example, see Eve Richardson’s article, ‘People deserve to have their end of life care wishes met (make good death a priority)’. *The Guardian*, Wednesday 18 January 2012.
I have demonstrated an approach to ‘writing with a purpose’ in the hospice in Chapter 4 and in the 93 poems of Thesis Creative Work, the majority of which represent the application of a numinous poetics to personal narratives. Each poem is crafted using the perspectives developed. Chapter 5 of the Thesis fully expounds the philosophy behind this view – drawing support from Woolf, Keats, Hughes and Coleridge, as well as from cognitive science and narrative psychology. In being able to find ‘peace in uncertainty’ it can offer a sense of value that is surreal. Perhaps death is surreal or else it is terrifying. So I ask that we do yet more, in hospice care, to help each patient and their family. We can honour life with art. I urge service providers to find ways of exploring how this might be done through numinous poetry and I have made a submission in this regard to a Help the Hospices consultation led by the Leadership Alliance for the Care of Dying Persons, as well as to the National Council for Palliative Care consultation on ‘the Narrative for people near the end of life’. 194

How can I summarise my research achievements? The starting point is my poems, which have served so many patients over a number of years, bringing significance and value to their view of themselves. I have helped them to be amazed. Families have been supported in the death of their loved ones, through a better hospice experience of a ‘good death’ and through a legacy of ‘memorial art’. My poems are of value for funerals, for grieving and an ongoing gratitude for each life lived. Since I have shown how the poet can find inspiration in the creativity and conversation of the hospice patient, my achievement extends to the development of a numinous poetics for others to study and apply in other hospices and end of life care services. I have, further, produced appendices to encourage poets and hospices to consider in the development of similar roles (see pages 175 -183). I encourage other poets to be of service to those at the end of life; yet I also encourage such poets to be prepared for change and challenge, as I will explain in my final chapter.

194 See Thesis Appendix B. The ‘Good Death’ and the ‘Creative Life’.
Chapter 7.  Afterword -

The Poet and the Numinous Horizon.

This research has changed me. I conclude this creative thesis with a short chapter to explain how the progress and achievement of the research has profoundly affected me personally, as well as my writing and my approach to poetry. To discuss the change in me, I need to consider my starting points.

My academic and working background lies within science and technology, in the health service and in business. I completed a first degree in Ergonomics and then continued in ergonomics and disability research for a number of years. I was later employed in NHS health management and finally in a dental materials and sundries supplies company. An interest in poetry only began in my forties, principally through the spirituality of a new-found Christian faith. I would say that both my faith and my poetry were focused, at that time, on understanding and declaration. My creativity had developed, within church worship ministries, yet poetry seemed to be functional - to encourage, to heal, or to express empathy with some emotion. Various poetry studies became possible for me upon early retirement from business life, eventually leading to an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Bolton. The main focus of my master’s degree was ‘Fractured States’ and the therapeutic potential of writing (and poetry specifically). From this position, this doctoral research first explored the use of poetry in cognitive behaviour therapy, in supporting the work of qualified psychologists. The ethical and practical frustrations of such ideas halted progress but my benefit was an understanding of new areas, including cognitive linguistics, personal mythology, deictic shift and text-world theories. I moved from working in mental health recovery groups when I was invited into a local hospice, to undertake poetry with their patients. It has been my time in the hospice that has provided such a focus of practical writing within my research; this has led me to personal discoveries.

The first key personal discovery, through my hospice poetry work, is the value of creative achievement and expression, quite apart from any consideration of what a poem ‘says’ or is ‘about’. This value is both to me, as the poet, and to the patient whose own story, character or art inspires a piece of writing. Whilst I have spent a few years now, building a new set of skills to produce poetry, these skills now rest
upon me most importantly as a way of being creative. The idea of approaching a patient’s story, or their art activity, as a ‘beachcomber’ poet has been personally profound. Each individual or situation is a potential ‘found poem’ and I may ask myself ‘what art can I now make?’ with whatever is before me. In writing a poem I will, now, freely allow words to be - as opposed to mean - what they are. I write to somehow ‘represent’, not to say or communicate with intention. What may seem unconnected by meaning may simply work as contrast or mystery, in the same way that elements of a picture can use compelling effects in colour choices and shadows or shapes. Combining details of the surreal and the real, of the impossible and the possible, creates a dwelling place for the unknown self, the numinous presence of being. My experience of writing in the hospice has helped me to be at peace with uncertainty, even to push creative boundaries because of it. Perhaps it has taken all my years in this research to realize what Keats truly meant by ‘negative capability’! I now argue that this is important to my poetry and also to the hospice patients, whom I serve. I have discovered a view of the hospice principle of ‘being with’; it is, perhaps, essential to be at peace with uncertainty when alongside those facing death.

The second key discovery is to do with my own personal narrative. I am aware of the value a poem can hold for a patient in the way it can connect their story, even some small flickering of it, with generations, with history, with communities or nature. This has revealed to me that my own profound sense of being, of significance, which has grown over many years since becoming a Christian, is because of the connection of my story with biblical faith. The story of Jesus, of creation, of all the biblical narrative is of epic proportion - and I am part of it. My past, present and future is a connected story.

These discoveries mean that, in practical terms, I am in a place of extreme fulfillment as a writer. I work in a hospice knowing it is the best place for me to work, a wonderful place of inspiration and ongoing achievement. I have found the techniques and the freedom to produce good poems. This is, I am sure, what Ken Robinson means in his book The Element – How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything. His arguments, on achieving personal fulfillment through creativity, have links with those of Csikszentmihalyi and of Wolterstorff, discussed in the

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previous chapters. My own creativity is affirming to my self, as it is to the significant life of each patient for whom I write. My story connects with theirs.

In writing the introduction to this thesis I referred to myself as ‘church minister, as well as a poet’. I remain a minister, a leader of a local church and I retain a bible-based faith. Yet I no longer yearn to ‘prove’ and understand God. This is not to say that I ‘believe less’ in God, but rather that I am ‘amazed more’ by Him! The place of the creative has come to the forefront in my faith and I am convinced that when the bible speaks of ‘mankind made in the image of God’ this is primarily to do with the God-given ability to exhibit and be transformed by creativity – the very thing that makes us human and makes our story one of connection with the Creator. I say that my role as a poet in the hospice is fulfilling for me. Helping a patient to see their own creative identity and story is a kind of priestly ministry, one that may reveal the ‘image of God’ in an individual – even if ‘God’ is never mentioned! I have never initiated any conversation about God with a hospice patient and only engage in religious discussion with someone who voices their personal belief. Yet, I so regularly see the affirmation that patients seem to achieve through creativity, and I see this affirmation resting, in no small part, upon Steiner’s arguments that require God; ‘We create because there is creation’. My own spirituality is also relevant; I feel personally closer to God in creative expression. When I look upon the numinous horizon and lift my eyes skyward, it is not to some mythical place of a bearded deity. It is simply to dwell in the creative source of the unknown, the majestic mysteries of God. If my poetry has presence there for me, for a hospice patient, or for someone who reads a single poem, it is an achievement that can address the human yearning for the metaphysical.

THE END

I began to understand and to use.
I studied, I learned and acquired.
Now I am lost, and fulfilled,
in the mysteries of creation.

197 I refer discussion of Steiner’s arguments in Chapter 5, pages 147-161, of this thesis
Appendix A.
Guidance Framework for Poets in End of Life Care

The following sections present an initial framework for a poet in end of life care setting. They are based on my own approach and experience in a hospice but are aimed at helping others to get started and develop their own role according to the situation. If you decide to work as a poet in an end of life care setting then these notes may guide you in your own approach and the terms of reference for your work. (As an example my own terms of reference are included at the end of these notes).

1 Before You Begin. Be confident in your own skill and strength as a poet. If your need is for affirmation and success it will detract from your service to patients and the hospice. You will need to work under supervision of a staff member and there will be an interview to ascertain your suitability, as with all volunteers. It may be a useful step just to visit the hospice for a few times to mix with staff and patients, get a feel for the setting and be sure you are ready before any writing. You will be required to go through induction briefing and almost certainly a Disclosure and Barring Service (previously CRB) check. There will be arrangements for both day-to-day supervision and mentoring, and for you to understand and to use the support available to you as an individual. You have time to listen to patients’ stories and you will make friends with patients and patients will die (though some you may get to know over years). You may be closer to a patient than staff with other duties, as they have less time to engage in conversation. Please remember that confidentiality and respect for a patient and their family are utmost.

2 Poetry with Patients- approach. I view poetry in end of life care as most valuable to celebrate the self and personal significance of the patient in a way that transcends their illness and prognosis. This can be achieved using aspects and experiences of a patient's life, their stories, attitudes and character, as a basis for writing poetry. A poem may take a single phrase or idea or a topic discussed. It may be a longer linear narrative of a life, or a particular experience in work or war or a childhood tale. A poem may form a series of snapshots or an abstract reflection of a story. It may contain no direct personal reference and yet capture an individual's lifelong passion for place or hobby. You may write as to accompany a patient’s own art, a picture or
piece of craft work. A simple guide is to allow yourself, through conversation, to be inspired by the patient. Explain this to the patient the first time you meet them and why you have a pad and pen and will scribble notes as they speak. Every day in the hospice I learn many things new – a word, a story, a piece of history, a way of seeing something – and I thank the patient every time. Such things are inspiration, occurrences which themselves declare ‘something needs to be written about this’. The poem is not an evaluation or a narrative or biography. It is not a eulogy. It is art.

3 Poetry with Patients- practical. It is important for conversations with patients to be open and natural. The poet needs to have no agenda other than to be interested in the life and person of the patient. Sensitivity is needed and empathy to perceive when certain topics may bring painful recollections, such as the loss of a loved one. However, pain and loss are inspirations too and do not have to be excluded; they may form a suitable component within a poem. Patients may be at various stages of treatment and, for some, conversation may be difficult or tiring. Always be prepared to have stages of conversations, over a few weeks if needed. Patients may be interrupted for nursing and medical requirements, hair appointments and therapy activities. Even if you are half-way through a good story, the patient’s needs come first!

4 Poetry with Patients- use of poem. Show any finished or draft poem to the supervising staff before the patient and you may need to be briefed about any changes in the patient. It may help to read your poem to the patient or they may wish to take it away to read themselves later. Most will receive a poem happily with a positive response. I ask if the patient is happy for the poem to be ‘added to the hospice’s collection’ (for use in displays and publicity, or even a book) and no one has objected but you need to ask out of courtesy and in thanks for their inspiration. Where any poem’s contents make it possible to identify the patient (e.g. use of specific names, places and dates) then permission to use the poem would need to be obtained in writing. Copyright to the poem remains with the poet and you will need to follow the policy of your workplace on any acknowledgments. A file copy of poems should be kept by supervising staff and this file should be available to Chaplains and family bereavement counsellors if required. Permission to use a patient’s name alongside any poem should be obtained from the patient or their family.
5 **Group Creative Work.** In a hospice day support centre, group craft and art sessions provide therapeutic activity for patients. As a poet I have found these sessions to be an invaluable source of inspiration, both for poetry that accompanies a piece of patient art and in responding to the activities and conversations that take place. I will join the group as an observer and ensure that my purpose is understood (a man hovering with pen and clipboard may be intimidating!). I ask questions about colours, names of techniques and materials as well as the focus or intention of the artist. A poem about, for example, someone’s first watercolour or soft toy creation has the potential to magnify and celebrate a patient’s achievement. A group art task, such as a mural, is similarly enhanced by a poem that marks its completion. Pride and significance in self are helped by pride and significance in created artwork. Group work may also extend to seasonal events, such as Christmas, Easter and Remembrance Day, which provide themes for group work. On occasions specialists (such as cake decoration, pottery or local history) may bring novel activities or opportunities for discussion and reminiscence. All these provide ideas for poetry.

6 **Other Opportunities.** In a hospice, or other end of life care setting, the appropriate use of poetry is not restricted to patients but includes staff, volunteers and the wider community. Conversations with workers may inspire poetry and poems may be commissioned for specific use – for example for use in training or to mark the opening of a new facility. As the role of a hospice poet develops it forms part of a culture that can help present the hospice, on behalf of patients, volunteers and staff, as a place of life and creativity and significance. This is a very positive achievement. Society, in general terms, finds it difficult to talk about death. There are campaign groups (such as Dying Matters - see below) who try to weaken the taboos about death as a way to an enriched view of life. Hospice poetry can be part of that wider conversation with society.

7 **Publication and Use of Poetry.** In addition to the personal use of poems (patient, family and chaplaincy) the opportunities for publication and reading of poems extend to wall displays (alongside artwork), booklets, newsletters, local radio, events and exhibitions. Digital media (websites, blogs, You-Tube, social media etc.) offer potential for all creative work of patients and poetry to be communicated to a wider audience. It will be necessary to work within appropriate publication policies, procedures and proper controls for the use of creative work and copyrights.
REFERENCES – A shortlist of resources for the hospice poet


Dan P McAdams The Stories We Live By; Personal Myths and the Making of the Self. Guildford Press 1993

George Steiner; Real Presences 1989 Faber and Faber


Mark Cobb. The Dying Soul. Spiritual Care at the End of Life. OUP, 2001


USEFUL WEBSITES

Dying Matters http://www.dyingmatters.org/

LAPIDUS; http://www.lapidus.org.uk/

Example terms of reference at Bolton Hospice

Phil Isherwood is a poet who volunteers at Bolton Hospice. He is writing poetry to promote the work of the hospice and to creatively encourage patients, their families and the Hospice staff. His poetry finds inspiration from conversations with Hospice patients and from the craft activities in the day centre. He writes to celebrate the 'nitty gritty' details of life and will reflect the humour, joy and sadness of life. The majority of Phil's poems bring ideas together from an individual or group conversation and from his own and local ideas or research (about Bolton for example). Poems that flow in part from a particular conversation are given in acknowledgement and as encouragement to individual patients (and this is done under supervision from the Staff Creative Therapist, Mary Stubbs). For the most part it is not possible to specifically identify, from a poem itself, any individual patient by name. Many poem references could apply to any of a number of people with similar backgrounds (for example in work or in wartime experiences). For this reason we believe that for most poems it is not necessary to ask for specific permission to publish or use in any way that serves the work of the Hospice. However, where it is, by name or through a particularly specific individual reference, possible to identify a patient, then written permission for the use the poem will be requested from the patient (and/or the patient's family if appropriate).
Appendix B.
The ‘Good Death’ and the ‘Creative Life’.
Discussion Notes;

Submission to Leadership Alliance for the Care of Dying People (LACDP) consultation on the future of hospice care, Autumn 2013.

Also submitted to National Voices and the National Council for Palliative Care consultation on ‘the Narrative for people near the end of life’, March 2014

I have been a volunteer poet in the hospice for the last three years and I have completed over 120 poems based upon conversations with, and the creative activities of, patients and staff. As a research student, at the University of Bolton, I have been developing a particular ‘numinous’ approach to poetry and looking at the philosophies that support it. The strength of my work is, I believe, to celebrate the mysterious views and connections of someone’s life and character. This is especially valuable to those approaching death. Creativity is able to celebrate mysteries when meaning and understanding prove inadequate; it is also the essence of the sense of self.

From a psychologists point of view the work of Douglas P Adams argues that the self is a personal mythology, a creative narrative of an individual. Personal story telling, reminiscence and the sharing of varied experiences are self-affirming. Such stories are mythological in their creative treatment such as to have personal meaning and significance. The self is aesthetic rather than factual. Philosophers, such as Robert Neimeyer, believe that individuals use story to position themselves within family, cultural and spiritual narratives.

So why is creativity so important? I have studied many artists, writers and philosophers and find, within different perspectives, a common claim that creative views of life are at the centre of our greater being. From the point of view of literary criticism, Virginia Woolf wrote ‘Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.’ Her literary argument is that the ‘good story’ requires the details, the wonder and the ‘flickerings’. James Joyce saw life

elevated by epiphanies, seeing the profound in the everyday. Keats wrote of ‘negative capability’, meaning ‘when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’. This aspect, of being at peace with uncertainties, underpins why numinous poetry has such a value in end of life care. Mark Cobb writes:

Death concludes life and the possibility of human creation. This journey towards an ending therefore invites, if not demands, a creative response of lament, celebration and hope addressed to the silence and absence of death. This impulse may be without logic but it affirms the fragile nature of existence and strives to reflect the intimations of a larger reality to which we are sensitive. The writer Ben Okri considers that ‘art is but a sign and a prayer to the greater glory and sublimity of our secret estate. It is a celebration of our terrestrial intelligence, our spiritual yearning, and the irrepressibility of our mischief and joy.’

George Steiner goes further and argues that, ‘Without the arts, the human psyche would stand naked in the face of personal extinction. Wherein would lie the logic of madness and despair.’

The value of mystery is all the more interesting when considering the work of Dominic McLoughlin from the discipline of psychodynamic counselling. He argues that both the hospice and the poetic form may be defined in terms of a transitional space and the poem may become a ‘transformational object’.

He writes: ‘Presenting poetry in a hospice as a transformative experience of this kind allows the patient to choose which poem will or will not mean something to him/her’. McLoughlin, furthermore, finds particular value in poetry’s ability to represent mystery. His research, running a writing group with hospice patients, ‘shows how the act of reading and writing poetry places a value for patients on not knowing at a time when the plain hard facts of terminal illness loom large’.

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204 From the field of psychoanalysis where object-relations theorists view an ‘object’ as anything in the external world that can be related to by a person, and that can be internalized into one’s inner psychic world. Experiences, people and things are all ‘objects’. Object-relations theorist, Christopher Bollas says: ‘the objects of our world are potential forms of transformation’. C. Bollas, Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience, New York: Routledge, 1992, p.4.
206 Ibid., p.215.
I have developed an approach to poetry in the hospice, in particular bringing together ideas from literary studies and narrative psychology. The literary critic and philosopher George Steiner puts forward a particular view in his book *Real Presences*:

I can only put it this way (and every true poem, piece of music or painting says it better): there is aesthetic creation because there is *creation*. There is formal construction because we have been made form.\(^{207}\)

[...]

The core of our human identity is nothing more or less than the fitful apprehension of the radically inexplicable presence, facticity and perceptible substantiality of the created. It is; we are. This is the rudimentary grammar of the unfathomable.

I take the aesthetic act, the conceiving and bringing into being of that which, very precisely, could not have been conceived or brought into being, to be an *imitatio*, a replication on its own scale, of the inaccessible first fiat (the ‘Big Bang’...).\(^{208}\)

[...]

This essay argues a wager on transcendence. It argues that there is in the art-act and its reception, that there is in the experience of meaningful form, a presumption of presence.\(^{209}\)

Steiner’s emphasis on creation frames my view that both patient and poem each have a creative presence and as such the poem can affirm human identity and the wonder of existence; the poem offers the transcendent and the ‘numinous other’. The process of developing a poem with a hospice patient can access the sense of awe in their life.\(^{210}\) If a poem can have literary value as ‘life’ revealed, can spring from an individual personal narrative, and can offer a ‘radically inexplicable presence’ of numinous quality, then it is a great achievement.

The term ‘good death’ is in common usage within end of life care services and campaigners.\(^{211}\) Age UK have identified the following as the principles of a ‘good death’:\(^{212}\)

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\(^{207}\) Steiner, *Real Presences*, p. 201.

\(^{208}\) Steiner, p. 201.

\(^{209}\) Steiner, p. 214.

\(^{210}\) Please see Chapter 1 and my discussion of awe, referring to the work of Keltner and Haidt (on page 81) and Rudd, Vohs and Aaker (on page 84). Their reference to awe available in the ‘walk down memory lane’ can be linked to my approach to my own view of the ‘found poem’.

\(^{211}\) For example, see Eve Richardson’s article *People deserve to have their end of life care wishes met (make good death a priority)*. The Guardian, Wednesday 18 January 2012.
1. To know when death is coming, and to understand what can be expected.
2. To be able to retain control of what happens.
3. To be afforded dignity and privacy.
4. To have control over pain relief and other symptom control.
5. To have choice and control over where death occurs (at home or elsewhere).
6. To have access to information and expertise of whatever kind is necessary.
7. To have access to any spiritual or emotional support required.
8. To have access to hospice care in any location, not only in hospital.
9. To have control over who is present at the end.
10. To be able to issue Advance Decisions which ensure wishes are respected.
11. To have time to say goodbye, and control over other aspects of timing.
12. To be able to leave when it is time to go, and not to have life prolonged pointlessly.

The strong emphasis of the good death concept currently seems to be upon the medical and the practical and I am not saying in any way that these are not of great importance to patients and their families. Yet my research, and experience within the hospice, convinces me that creative celebration of life is much more than point 7 above - ‘access to any spiritual or emotional support required’. We can do more. I would like to help in any way to promote these ideas and to put ‘creative celebration of life’ as a more significant part of the above list, through the use of storytelling, reminiscence, poetry and creative arts.

Another way, of questioning the role of poetry in the hospice, is to consider creativity as a basic psychological need. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, from his lifelong psychological research on creativity and ‘flow’, argues:

Creativity is a central source of meaning in our lives for several reasons. Here I want to mention only the two main ones. First, most of the things that are interesting, important, and human are the results of creativity. We share 98 percent of our genetic makeup with chimpanzees. What makes us different - our language, values, artistic expression, scientific understanding, and technology - is the result of individual ingenuity that was recognized, rewarded, and transmitted through learning. Without creativity, it would be difficult indeed to distinguish humans from apes.

The second reason creativity is so fascinating is that when we are involved in it; we feel we are living more fully than during the rest of life. The excitement of the artist at the easel or the scientist in the lab comes close to the ideal fulfillment we all wish to get from life, and so rarely do. Perhaps only sex,
sports, music, and religious ecstasy – even when these experiences remain fleeting and leave no trace – provide as profound a sense of being part of an entity greater than ourselves. But creativity also leaves an outcome that adds to the richness and complexity of the future.\textsuperscript{213}

My poetry helps patients to see their own creative existence, from their stories or from their own artwork and craft. To Csikszentmihalyi's views I can add those of philosopher Nicolas Wolterstorff\textsuperscript{214} who identifies the basic human desire to live and act artistically. He uses the examples of how work-song ennobles and elevates everyday activities and how memorial art is far more befitting, than historical fact, for remembrance. Wolterstorff's view is that art has an intrinsic worth, a greater adequacy, and as such is close to Steiner's view on 'real presences'.

These views from psychology and philosophy support my thesis: creative connections recognise and signify a patient's life, character, passion and person in ways that are not 'documentary' but art, as life is art. My claim is that patients are best served by these creative views to elevate the mysteries of life details and be able to celebrate the self and personal significance in a way that transcends illness and prognosis. This approach is not clinical therapy but should be a key component of the hospice declared mission to 'live well' as death approaches.

\textsuperscript{214} Nicolas Wolterstorff, \textit{Art in Action} (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980).
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