Love, loss and rebirth

A qualitative study, which explores the potential of poetry to help women adjust to motherhood, by opening a conversation between their pre- and post-motherhood selves.

Student: Sarah Botterill

Research advisor: Jane Reece

A dissertation submitted to Metanoia Institute in accordance with the requirements of the MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes, a programme validated by Middlesex University, School of Health and Education.

June 2015

Synopsis

This study is a poetic inquiry into how motherhood may disrupt a woman's narrative of self (Elfersy & Katzman, 2011; Barg, 2001), engender a sense of loss for her pre-maternal identity (Kelly, 2014; Figes, 2008; Cusk, 2001), and the impact these factors have on women's wellbeing.

My focus is on autobiography as an inroad to a fuller understanding of our selves (Freeman, 2007; Hunt, 1998). I take the post-structuralist view that while autobiography may be a quest for the truth it isn't an accurate representation of our past (Hunt, 1998; Phillips, 1995) it can, however, open conversations between multiple selves (Hunt, 1998; Phillips, 1995), which may help to reconcile tension between our pre- and post-motherhood identities.

I chose to explore dialogues between pre- and post-maternal selves through the refracted lens of autobiographical poetry, because poetry enables us to 'say what can't be said' (Bolton, 2008) and so could enable us to break societal taboos, and express our true feelings and emotions towards motherhood. I am also interested the therapeutic potential of writing autobiographical poetry about motherhood.

Primarily, the subject(s) of this study are my pre- and post-maternal selves. Some nine years ago, after having my daughter, I suffered postnatal depression. Through the fog of that depression I wrote the fictional autobiography, *A Magpie's Tale* (Kidner[1], 2005).

I have revisited this autobiography, creating found poetry (Glesne, 2010) from it in an effort to explore the experience of my past self. I have also explored the works of other women who have

[1] Note Kidner is my maiden name, which I use professionally and also for writing

written about motherhood (Kelly, 2014; Elfersy & Katzman, 2011; Figes, 2008; Barg, 2001; Cusk, 2001; Chodorow & Contratto, 1989). I have created found poetry from their accounts, as well as writing in response to them. The result is a poetry cluster (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009) that I hope may reveal fresh insight into my experience of mothering.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for veggie curry and rice,

Cheese sandwiches with mango chutney,

A yellow sunflower,

A hug before bedtime,

And an early night.

I wrote this poem on the MSc course the day after staying at my sister's house. She has been kind enough to act as a 'second home' for me while I travel from Brighton to Bristol. I'd broken down and told her about a minor car incident, which was having a big impact on me. On the week-ends I stayed with she always gave me food, an [early] bed for the night, and on this particular night a hug before bedtime. My niece provided the picture of the yellow sunflower. I am grateful to them, and also to my brother-in-law and nephew, for allowing me to interrupt their routine, welcoming me into their home and even for impromptu magic shows.

Being away from home wasn't easy. I missed my husband and my daughter. I am grateful to both of them for the love and support they have given me throughout this dissertation, for allowing me the freedom to do it, and for the enthusiastic welcomes I received when I returned home.

While away, I was welcomed into join a band of Curious Pirates. I am grateful to have been a small part of their stories and for them to have played such a major role in mine. Attempting to keep order over this curious band were the course tutors from the Metanoia Institute. I am grateful to them all, past and present, to Claire Williamson for keeping the ship, ship-shape to Fiona Sampson for inspiring me to revisit *A Magpie's Tale*, to Graham Hartill for rekindling my lost love for poetry,

and for being an inspirational personal tutor, to Rose Flint for her session on rehabilitation, and to Nigel Gibbons for the felt-sense exercise, which was a key turning point.

I am also extremely grateful to my dissertation supervisor Jane Reece for all of her support, guidance and advice through the course of writing this dissertation.

I am grateful to friends, especially those who are fellow mothers, for their support and advice, and for pearls of wisdom such as “it’s just a phase”, and to “begin each day like a new day”, to my postnatal group who never judged me because of the depression, and for the ‘chicken day’.

Above all I am grateful to my husband for years of love and support, for giving me my daughter and for my daughter who brings joy, laughter, surprises and fresh challenges every day.

Author's Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work and in the list of references.

Signed:

Date:

Contents

Synopsis 2
Acknowledgements 4
Author's Declaration 6
1. Introduction 8
2. A Literature Review 11
3. Writing my self: towards a methodology 19
4. Parliamentary sessions: reviewing *A Magpie's Tale* 26
5. Mother's milk: tales of birth, breastfeeding and beyond 35
6. Ode to the good mother: a work in progress 42
7. Lessons in love: what motherhood teaches us? 49
8. Clocking out: tentative conclusions, and next steps 59
Bibliography 69

1. Introduction

With my application for the MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes (CWTP), I submitted *A Magpie's Tale* (Kidner, 2005), the novella I wrote following the birth of my daughter. At the time, I considered it to be a work of 'fiction'. I've since come to recognise it as an expression of two key elements of my personal narrative - a lifelong relationship with writing - and my newer, but equally significant role as a mother.

Some of my earliest writing experiences were of writing poetry, a childhood passion, which has been rekindled by the experience of participating in the MSc CWTP course. While I have found writing poetry therapeutic it has resurfaced a niggling question about *A Magpie's Tale*, namely, "why, when I should have been looking after my newborn daughter was I compelled to write, and why so much?"

The course has provided some answers. I've discovered an overlap between psychotherapeutic theories, and those relating to the writing of autobiography (Tosi, 2010; Hunt, 1998; Phillips, 1995). These have helped me to appreciate why, as individuals, we feel compelled to keep telling, and retelling, our stories.

In exploring these theories I have been fascinated in particular by the notion of a 'multiplicity of selves', (Tosi, 2010; Phillips, 1995) and the related concept of autobiographical truth. These argue that what we remember about our past may not be representative of what actually happened. However, some also believe that through a closer examination of what we choose to remember, and the meaning we attach to those events, we can reach a better understanding of our present selves and use this to help inform a healthier future.

A review of the literature, which has helped to inform this study - and that includes other women's accounts of mothering – is presented in chapter two.

Early inspiration came from Rose Flint's recollections of working in the spinal unit at Salisbury Hospital (Flint, 2003). Rose talked about rehabilitation' and how it tends to focus forward. By comparison, her work as a CWTP practitioner looked to residents' pasts, and in doing so helped them to reconcile their pre-accident selves with their less abled, post-accident ones.

This resonated not only because my uncle spent some time in the unit, but I saw a parallel with my experience of postnatal depression. The Cognitive Behavioural Therapy course, to which I was referred to help with that PND, looked forward to help us establish coping mechanisms, but could an exploration of mothers' pre- and post- motherhood identities be as helpful.

Did other mothers struggle to reconcile these, as I had?

The question that resurfaced during a felt sense exercise guided by Nigel Gibbons, which prompted me to explore my relationship with my daughter specifically our similarities and difference, and the issues of dependence and independence.

Throughout the course I have been inspired by Graham Hartill's discussions of form, and poetic form, as a 'container' for our emotions.

These themes of identity and self – past and present – what it means to become a mother and the therapeutic potential of poetry in helping us to make this transition are the cornerstones of this study.

Particularly, I wanted to explore the potential of autobiographically inspired poetry to help mothers reconcile their pre- and post- motherhood selves. My specific methodology, as outlined in chapter three includes creating found poetry from, and writing in response to, other women's accounts of their experience of mothering.

In chapter four I revisit my novella *A Magpie's Tale* creating found poetry in a bid to discover the key themes which emerged through it. I have attempted to explore what the novella – and these found poems – reveal about my then self who was struggling with becoming a mother but also how she was, in a sense, grieving for the loss of her pre-maternal self.

The following chapters explore themes, which emerged from this review, and from reading other women's accounts of the experience of motherhood.

Chapter 5 explores how experiences of giving birth – as well as my own – impacts on women, including the nature of the birth, and the care we receive in hospital, and beyond.

In chapter 6, I explore some of the paradoxes and contradictions of motherhood; the fact we yearn to become mothers but resent a lack of freedom when we do, the tension this perceived lack of freedom causes between parents, the struggle between work and home, both for stay-at home and for the working mother. I also explore societal expectations of mothers and the pressure this may place on women who mother.

Chapter 7 explores lessons I – and others – have learned from the process of mothering.

In concluding, I have tried to address what answers, if any, I have discovered to my original questions and curiosities. Namely, can autobiographical poetry help to build a dialogue between

multiple selves? If so, is this therapeutic? Does motherhood affect women's sense of self, and if so, how? Do societal 'norms' affect our perceptions and experience(s) of mothering? Is there a role for autobiographical poetry in helping women reconcile their pre- and post- motherhood selves? How do my experiences sit within a broader landscape of motherhood experiences?

2. A Literature Review

The basis of narrative inquiry, which this study is in its broadest sense, is that stories cut across all aspects of our lives (Adler & Rungta, 2002). Stories help give meaning, build self-image, and create identity. Therefore, I appraise narrative inquiry both as a **social science methodology** and a **psychotherapeutic tool of inquiry**. I also explore the place of autobiography and autobiographical poetry as a therapeutic tool, and as a method of research.

The second part of this literature review addresses writing relating to my specific research question. Namely, this is the impact of motherhood on women's sense of identity and self.

Narrative inquiry as a social science methodology

The rise in popularity of narrative inquiry as a social science methodology is identified by Andrews et al (2013). The authors point to the fact that narrative inquiry doesn't prescribe a start or end point, tell us how to conduct research, or where to find data. It is, therefore, a flexible but potentially overwhelming methodology (Andrews et al, 2013). Andrews et al (2013) also explore the division between event- and experience-centred approaches to narrative inquiry, explaining that both aim to give individuals a voice about how they view phenomena. However while event-centred approaches argue perceptions of the past remain constant, experience-centred ones believe our perceptions of these change over time (Andrews et al, 2013).

Taking the experience-centred view, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) argue that all inquiry, including narrative inquiry, stems from *experience*, which they argue is a unique category and the result of a continuous interplay between our personal, social, and physical environments. So, like a butterfly collector, narrative inquirers cannot hope to capture the total of a person's experience in

our fleeting interactions, and as in the phenomenon of the butterfly *effect*, each experience informs the next, including the experience of being the subject of inquiry (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Therefore, narrative inquirers become part of a narrators' shifting landscape(s). How we separate our experiences from those of others therefore becomes an important question. Chase (2005), for example, argues people's stories change depending on when and where they tell it, and to whom. She identifies three types of researchers' voice, the *Authoritative voice*, where researchers and narrators voice are separate; the *Supportive voice,* which puts the narrator's voice in the limelight and the *Interactive voice* where the author is part of the community (Chase, 2005). Each can be criticised, for allowing the researcher's voice to dominate, romanticising narrators and being self-indulgent, respectively.

Another way of addressing the issue of voice is to adopt an autoethnographic stance, which is transparent about the researcher's position, beliefs and values (Trahar, 2009). Presenting stories as co-constructed in this way, we may believe them to be more truthful but, we must also be aware people that may still tell us the stories they want to tell, or that they think we want to hear (Trahar, 2009).

Josselson (2007) discusses ethical considerations beyond voice, including the contract between researcher and narrator. The *explicit* contract, she says, states the study's purpose, and an individuals' absolute right to withdraw, and so on. The *implicit* contract derives from the researcher's ethical attitude. Josselson advocates two consent forms at the start, and end of an interview, allowing people to clarify material or to ask for some of it to be removed.

She argues this is important because the person we interviewed may be different from the one who reads the transcript (Josselson, 2007) a view that seems to sit well with an experience-centred approach.

Psychotherapeutic Interpretations of Narrative

Psychoanalysts have also embraced narrative theories. McAdams' (2001) theory of Life Story, for instance, argues that in early adulthood, we become conscious of a range of different and possibly conflicting roles. Our need to integrate these conflicting selves into a single, unified whole drives us to create identity by constructing a life story that explains significant transitions.

Theories of life *script* look to how a dominant life story emerges in childhood. Many credit Eric Berne with originating theories of life script. Berne defined scripts as an unconscious life plan, which reflects patterns played out in childhood. It is here, he argued, we write the script that determines who we'll marry, how many children we'll have and more (in Erskine, 2010).

Karen Horney's work referenced by Tosi (2010) and Paris (1997) is also relevant. Horney's theory is that if family provides the right conditions for healthy psychological development children achieve their full potential. Where these conditions aren't present, we become anxious, and develop a series of defences, one of which dominates. From this dominant 'life solution' evolves an idealised image, which gives us a sense of identity but one that is conflicted; each aspect of it imposes its own demands or shoulds (Tosi, 2010).

The role of therapy is to identify and dismantle life scripts (or life solutions). The counsellor encourages the person to tell their story, which represents their dominant life story, often one of "frustration, despair and sadness," (Payne, 2006, p. 11). The counsellor listens knowing that this is

probably not the whole story and asks “clarifying” questions, (Payne, 2006) to help both therapist and the client gain a store of remembered material, to form the basis of the therapy.

Importantly, this remembered material is not necessarily true to events because of the nature of autobiographical memory. Phillips (1995) cites Freud’s theory of screen memory, arguing that we repress unacceptable memories or substitute them with ‘false’ ones (Phillips, 1995). The truth emerges through a dialogue between patient and analyst (Payne, 2006) whereby the person is encouraged to name the problem (stress at work, say), and together patient and analyst explore how the problem influences the individual’s life (Payne, 2006).

Payne (2006) argues putting experience into writing allows us to hone material in order to discover its true meaning, enables people to prioritise and sift events and to organise them into a sequence. The written description assumes its own reality, which allows the person writing – from a safe distance – to disassociate themselves from the memories. Rather than rewriting our past, we can redress our relationship with it, and in doing so challenge and change, or re-write the script.

Writing as Narrative and Therapeutic Inquiry

Autobiography is a useful tool in allowing us to explore the meaning we attach to past experience(s). As Freeman (2007) argues autobiography rather than being a factual account of a life is a way of exploring the psyche of the person telling it. Viewed this way, autobiographical understanding becomes a series of dialectical relationships that are “a product of the present and the interests, needs, and wishes that attend it,” (Freeman, 2007, p. 138). The present self is transformed by autobiography, so, a link exists between our past, present and future selves.

Hunt (1998) argues that the act of remembering involves actual past events, the self, which took part in them, events as we experienced them, the remembering and the remembered self

(paraphrased from Neisser, in Hunt 1998). She believes opening a dialogue between these selves through self-analytical autobiography, we may discover our true selves.

In looking to how we might do this, Hunt (1998) references Paris' work exploring the fictional characters of 19th Century novelists as if they were real. Assuming this is the case, the novelist must then decide whether to let their characters make decisions or suppress their characters' natural desire to stay true to a pre-determined plot. This leads to conflicts between character and plot, which reveal the novelist's dominant life story (Hunt, 1998).

Why use poetry as a form of narrative inquiry?

Eisner (1997), Richardson (2005) Adams St. Pierre and Sze (2010) explore the benefits and pitfalls of alternative methods of representing data. Eisner focuses on films; Richardson and Adams St. Pierre explore writing as a method of inquiry, while Sze focuses on poetry.

Eisner asks, what happens if we view filmmakers as qualitative researchers? Can we then view the makers of the film *The Dead Poet's Society*, for example, as researchers using imagery to symbolize class and tradition, and display certain cultural values? This type of representation can illuminate a message, engender empathy, be authentic, offer multiple perspectives, and new ways of seeing although the representation may be imprecise and ambiguous (Eisner, 2007).

Richardson (2005) explores creative analytical processes, or CAP, ethnography, a term she says applies to work where the author has moved outside of conventional social scientific writing, and which includes fiction and poetry.

Creative approaches enable the writing process and product to become "deeply intertwined", and sit well with the postmodernist view that our selves are always present. In recognising this, we

are free to tell, and retell our stories in a variety of ways without the pressure of 'getting it right' (Richardson, 2005). Using creative processes blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, which means that we can put ourselves within the text in a position of not knowing (Richardson, 2005).

Adams St. Pierre describes how for her writing is a way of working things out, saying, "…writing is thinking, writing is analysis…[it is] a seductive and tangled method of discovery," (Adams St. Pierre, 2005, p. 966). Gillian Sze explores poetry as a "style of thinking and exploration" (Sze, 2010, p. 229) that can teach us new ways of living in the world, allows us to pause and think and to confront "a strange inner landscape," (Sze, 2010, p. 231).

Prendergast et al (2009) explore the what, when and why of poetic inquiry. Broadly, the 'what' falls into three categories: *Vox Theoria* (in response to literature or theory), *Vox Autobiographia* (poetry in field notes and journals, and autobiographical poems) and *Vox Participare*, co-constructed from interview transcripts. Poetic inquiry is best used when we want to move people emotionally, or explore experiences that evoke a strong emotional response (Prendergast, 2009). Poetry, she says, is a search for meaning making and a form of 'private psychotherapy', which enables us to attend to the relationship between selves.

Glesne's (1997) focus is on transcription poems, which involves paring interview transcripts down to the 'only' words a process Glesne argues can enable us to discover a "third voice" that is neither that of narrator or researcher but combines both to reveal new meaning (Glesne, 1997). Poetic form can also reveal new meaning because meter and rhythm help us notice, and make sense of, speech patterns; while poetic form offers a new way of interpreting data; and image and metaphor enhance our ability to listen deeply (Cahmann-Taylor 2009).

Elsewhere, Lynn Butler-Kisber and Mary Stewart (2009) use poetry clusters, a collection of poems around a single theme, arguing that where each individual poem offers a unique perspective together a cluster highlights subtle nuances outside of those (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009).

Dobson (2010) explores how the poetics of self-study can "release the inner voice" (Dobson, 2010, p. 131) in ways more conventional forms of research may not, and help in the search for what she calls the last frontiers of knowledge, namely 'self' and 'truth' (Dobson, 2010). There are similarities here to what Bolton (2004) describes as reflective writing; a process of "consciously not thinking," (Bolton, 2004, p. 198). She gives the example of fellow practitioner Rose Flint who explores how writing this way enables her to retrieve *experiences*. This is possible because writing anchors us to a safe present while enabling us to explore a past event. This appears to resonate with earlier discussions pertaining to 'multiple selves', and the benefits of a dialogue between them.

Mum's The Word: Literature relating to experiences of motherhood

My study concerns women's experiences of motherhood, specifically on how it affects the narrative of women who become mothers, and their sense of identity and self. I am also interested in what impact motherhood has on the short- and longer- term wellbeing of mothers. This focus has informed the literature I have reviewed, as has my interest in poetic inquiry.

One of the first books I discovered, and which helped to inspire this study, was the wonderful *Purple Leaves, Red Cherries* (Elfersey & Katzman, 2011). The book consists of individual, 140-word accounts of motherhood, and the way it changes women in all kinds of ways.

Rachel Cusk's A Life's Work (2001) recounts the novelist's account of the pregnancy, and early months, of her second daughter. The book covers Cusk's experiences of pregnancy, going home, colic,

breastfeeding, sleepless nights and feelings of isolation. The search for identity runs through the book as Cusk speaks of a longing for her lost pre-maternal self.

Similar themes run through Kate Figes book *Life After Birth* (Figes, 2008), in which she argues that while babies give us a sense of purpose, we may also lose sight of ourselves (Figes, 2008).

Figes also discusses the notion of the 'good mother', specifically relating to work giving an historical overview of how the notion of the good mother has embedded culturally and in women's psyches. Rosanna Barg (2001) also explores the concept of the good mother in her study of motherwork[2] focussing on "the fantasy of the perfect mother" and, by association, bad mother. Interestingly, for my study, Barg presents her findings as poetic narrative, reflective poetry and short stories. She claims poetry has been a way of meaning making when she has struggled "as a woman and a mother," (Barg, 2001, p. 17) to make sense of her experiences.

In *Black Rainbow,* Rachael Kelly (2014) tells how reading other people's poetry aided her recovery from bouts of severe postnatal depression and how she appreciated the brevity poetry provides, and the depth with which it can portray emotions. Kelly (2014) also speaks of uncovering and labelling feelings, and how they became core beliefs.

The voices of these authors and their collective experiences inform my study; already it feels they have become a part of my narrative as both a mother, and a woman. My study continues my

[2] The concept of motherwork developed within feminist literature as a reclaiming of women's reproductive and mothering work as work of value (Barg, 2001).

dialogue with them, and with a multiplicity of [my] selves. In the next chapter, I will discuss the genesis of these conversations, and my specific methodology.

3. Writing my self: towards a methodology

There are so many of us,
in this room, at this desk,
there's the me who's writing,
about the me who was,
the me who was,
re-experienced, re-membered,
but how much is that memory
affected by the me now?

How does she, view me?
Through eyes that judge,
or will she remember me fondly,
will a script emerge, or be buried
and, if it's buried, am I brave enough
to dig for the truth of my self?

Are we separated by history these
selves, never to meet again?
Or can poetry and verse
reunite us, like a marriage of souls
for better, or for worse?

Narrative inquiry, as mentioned, doesn't tell us where to begin, or end. I begin with the "autobiographically-oriented narrative," (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, cited in Trahar, 2009, p. 3) associated with my particular research puzzle. I want to know why, when in the throes of new motherhood I felt compelled to write the 40,000-word novella *A Magpie's Tale* (Kidner, 2005). Was it an attempt (literally) to re-write my narrative as I adapted to motherhood?

The question is one of experience, the experience of making the transition to motherhood, of to what extent writing *A Magpie's Tale* was rooted in that experience, and reflective of it? Therefore, experience-centred theories of research shape my perspective. I take the view that experience is a continuum, that each experience changes us, and as it does, our perception of phenomena changes, too (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

My search then is not for the truth of events but the truth of my self, or *selves*. I aim to open a conversation between multiple selves, which as Neisser (in Hunt 1998) says involves past events, the self that took part in them, events as I experienced them, the remembering and the remembered self.

In an effort to open a conversation between these selves I have re-read *A Magpie's Tale* attempting to apply a Horneyan lens (Hunt, 2000; Paris, 1997) asking what the characters might reveal about the then author who was suffering postnatal depression. Were there conflicts between character and plot?. Would a script emerge? Would I discover a dominant self?

I used poetic inquiry as a tool and have created a series of found, or transcription poems (Glesne, 1997), as I worked so positioning my current self as interviewer of the (past) author. I hope these transcription poems create a third voice (Glesne, 1997) that may reunite past and present. After creating each poem, I wrote about them trying to to write reflexively (Bolton, 2004) in a bid to discover how my remembering self views the past one.

As well as creating transcription poems from my work, I have created found poetry from the writing of the women whose accounts of motherhood I've read (Kelly, 2014; Figes, 2008; Cusk, 2001) taking care not to change their words or the order in which they appeared. Would the process of transcription reveal new meaning? Would these poems resonate with my own experiences of motherhood? I've also written poetic responses to their narratives.

Combining all poetry − transcribed from my own work, the work of others, and in response to others' narratives − I hope to create a poetry cluster, which may reveal subtle nuances (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009) about motherhood and identity that I may otherwise have missed.

Poetic inquiry is my preferred form because my study seeks to discover the *meaning* I have attached to past experiences of motherhood or of writing about it. As Dobson (2010) says poetry "…seeks to retrieve the intuitive, an all-too-often ignored sensibility that many years of formal schooling and adult living may have dulled, or even dismissed altogether," (Dobson, 2010, p. 132).

I have a personal reason for choosing poetry as a method of inquiry. Poetry is part of my narrative. As a young child I used to write a lot of poetry. I'm not sure when it happened but at some point I became overly critical of my poetic work, stopped sharing it, and then stopped writing it. I hadn't written a poem for years until the first day of the MSc CWTP. Since then, I've written countless poems and have recognise their value in terms of research and as a therapeutic tool.

This journey is captured in the poem *The Little Duckling*, as follows:

Where it came from,
I don't remember,
It just appeared.

Small and yellow,
With fluffy downy feathers.
I heard it before I saw it.
A distant cheeping,
That called me to it.
It was lost,
Behind the garage,
Where I used to hide,
Sometimes.

Poor little motherless, chick.

I rushed inside.
We found a box,
filled it with newspaper.
Fed it chunks of bread,
Ripped from the loaf,
And dipped in milk,

To make it softer.

We put the box on the boiler,
To keep it warm,
To nurture it,
And bring it back to life.

It didn't make it through the night.
In the morning,
We cried,
And mourned,
And buried.

I wrote a story,
A tale of adventure,
Of woodland friends,
A meandering stream,
Dangers, excitement, survival,
A story of finding your way back.

I'd typed up the story.
Lost years ago.
But I will carry it with me, always.

The poem has a lot of meaning to me (perhaps in the context of this study I should say that my current self attaches various meanings to it?). It references a memorable writing experience from my childhood. As a young girl, I found a lost duckling on the bank outside our house. We took it in, fed it bread soaked it in water, wrapped it in a blanket and kept it warm. By morning it had died. I wrote a story about a duckling that with the help of a badger and a mole travelled the river; they had many adventures before the duckling found its mother.

The story didn't change anything, the duckling has still died, but the story helped me deal with it.

The Little Duckling poem (above) written some 32 years after the original story became a poem about dealing with critical feedback on my poetry and came in response to an exercise to

explore our early writing experience. It references my (perceived) response to how I reacted to that criticism; *I will carry it with me always*. This same line also refers to the more recent – positive – experience of rediscovering poetry through the course and how I feel about writing in that I will *carry it with me always…* as I have said it is a constant, and welcome, part of my life story.

This constant presence is evidenced by a "stepping stones" exercise modelled in class when asked to identify major writing experiences. The original Little Duckling story and subsequent poem feature, as does *A Magpie's Tale*:

1. Duckling
2. Spot (Sanctuary of the Bar)
3. A Magpie's Tale
4. Duckling poem
5. Touch Sensitive

This exercise is interesting in that it is a way of capturing events we *think* are significant because of the *meaning* we attach to them. The same is true of the lifeline technique, which Adler & Runtga (2002) discuss in their study on integrating new members into a group. The lifeline is a means of capturing the significant events, which our autobiographical memory has chosen to retain, and that we may use to construct identity.

Given that part of my study is a search for my self (both pre- and post- maternal), it seemed a good idea to create a lifeline. Therefore, I have reviewed the poetry written over the past two years, much of which is autobiographical using the significant experiences that I perceive to be at the heart of each poem to map a lifeline (see Appendix) founded on poetic inquiry.

Ethical considerations and approach

Examining this timeline reveals where my narrative overlaps with the narratives of significant others: family members, colleagues, and friends.

A consideration of how I will represent others' stories within, or alongside, my own is critical. Given the subject of my study, my daughter by implication becomes a part of the story (although my intention to explore *my experience of motherhood*, rather than our relationship). I have discussed this study with my husband, her father, who has consented on her behalf, and has agreed to read my finished study, and may ask that I remove sections of it.

While narrative inquiry doesn't prescribe a specific ethical approach it does, I believe, provide a framework that places the wellbeing of participants at the forefront of a study. The approach dictates that the relationship between researcher and narrator is genuine, empathic and respectful (Josselson, 2007) and that we are non-judgemental as we attend to participants' stories (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). It's an attitude that reflects Carl Rogers' core conditions that we are *genuine*, *empathic* and show *unconditional positive regard* (Rogers, 1992), to which I aspire.

While the published work of other women writing about motherhood is in the public domain, I am conscious that I am using their words to create found poems to form a part of this work. In doing so, my intention is to stay true to their original sentiment. However, I recognise that found poems represent a distilled representation of a longer body of work, which while it may have more emotional resonance with an audience, is not fully representative of the whole work.

Rather, it is my interpretation of their work. While I do not plan to seek permission from the authors of those works, my intention is to be transparent about where the found poems come from, to contextualise them within my own study and to own my responses to them.

My intention is to contribute to a wider understanding of the impact of motherhood on women's wellbeing, which may indirectly benefit my daughter should she become a mother herself,

and I hope may benefit other mothers who read it. Again, this sits well within the framework of narrative inquiry, which seeks to understand more about individuals and about social change to start new dialogues rather than to uncover new truths (Andrews, et al., 2013).

It's possible that the research may also bring about changes in me (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002). I am mindful that change is unsettling, and unpredictable, and of the exposing nature of writing and sharing our stories. These risks are captured in my poem *Miniscule Mollusc*, written when reflecting on being in a group, using a metaphor from nature.

Moving slowly towards a destination unknown
No traces of where the path will lead
Yet behind a silvery trail zigzags
like the beginnings of a fragile spider's web

Horns reach out like sensitive antennae
reaching this way and that but
reaching out for what?
Sensing danger, or preserving the sights,
sounds and smells…

What are you saying with your silvery script?
Is there a secret message hidden inside?
What connections are you making as you slither and glide?

A message to be read, but quickly
Before the rain washes it aside
Before you retreat into your shell
And hide.

And so it is with trepidation (and excitement), and with a promise to take self-care that I begin my research with a review of *A Magpie's Tale*. I hope to open a dialogue between my past and present selves, I aim to write reflectively about it, and by creating found poetry within the novella perhaps to discover meaning I hadn't previously recognised.

4. Parliamentary sessions: reviewing *A Magpie's Tale*

The novella *A Magpie's Tale* (Kidner, 2005) was written as a work of fiction. I've re-read it asking what drives the 'characters', and exploring possible conflicts between character and plot, asking what − if anything − do these reveal.

As the novella opens Sophia is reflecting on her journalistic career; she expresses her desire to 'give it all up' if only she could become a mother, revealing – perhaps – the tension between the journalist I 'was' and the mother I'd become. The novella is split between Sophia's story and that of her husband, Jake who works for the National Trust. Jake must embrace his shamanic calling in order to rescue Sophia's *lost soul.* He has a recurring dream in which he is flying, before a parliament of magpies engulfs him. Birds rain down from the sky, polka-dotting an unmarked grave.

Weightless
clear blue sky
wisps of cloud,
down on a newborn baby's head.

Dark, black mass,
rushing toward me.

The down of *a newborn baby's head* in the found poem describes the perfect sky Jake is in before his dream turns. Now, I wonder if it wasn't a metaphor for the idyllic image I had of motherhood before depression struck. Reflecting on the dream, Jake says,

Can't explain it
part of me
had died.

Was this an expression of the loss of identity I felt? Certainly, I missed writing but I wanted to be a good mother, which I interpreted as being a 'stay-at-home-mum' (something I couldn't be).

In the novella Sophia rants about her wasted day, the deluge of irrelevant emails, the pointlessness of her job, which reminded me of Rachel Kelly's (2014) description of depression as a slot machine illness occurring when various factors line up (Kelly, 2014). In response, I wrote the poem *Hitting the jackpot*.

Stick a coin in the penny slot,
wheels spin endlessly,
will they ever stop?

Sour lemon, a worthless job,
orange fruits like the flame of her hair,
if only I could win the jackpot,
then I'd always be there.

Lights are flashing,
a chance to nudge,
which button should I press
impossible to guess…

Hit the big one,
and I could become,
the thing I should be
a stay-at-home mum.

Feeling lucky,
but then again,
life would never
be the same.

Is it my destiny,
I'm not so sure,
As the saying goes,
beware what you
wish for.
I'm no good for her,
Would resent it, but then,
It's what I should want,
and the wheels are spinning
all over again.

The poem evokes the repetitive thought patterns symptomatic of my anxiety as I wrestled with what I felt I *should*, and what I *could* do but also what I really wanted. Yes, I was unhappy at work and I thought I could be a better mother if I wasn't working, but I also knew that I enjoyed writing and being a journalist and wasn't sure staying at home was the solution for me.

Later, Sophia slips into a depression then a coma and in her dreamlike state is reunited with her 'lost' children. They ask her where she's been and if she's going to leave again. She promises she won't. Reflecting on this, I wrote:

> This seems to reflects my desire not to abandon my child, for work.
>
> Yet, in a sense I had already had gone away; the postnatal depression meant that I wasn't as present as I'd have liked to have been, and the drive to write kept me away too.
>
> In the early stages of my daughter's life separation was a big issue for me. In the hospital, I was alone on the maternity ward while she was kept in the Special Care Unit two floors although the threat of a longer separation was the real worry.
>
> After the first week in Portsmouth, I was told I was no longer entitled to a hospital bed. There were only two rooms available to sleep in and if someone else's need was more urgent than mine, I'd be asked to move out.

This became the following found poem *Gone Away*:

The drive to write
kept me away.

Separation
alone

Someone else's need
more urgent.

Prior to going home, all I wanted was to be with my child and yet when we were reunited, I felt a pull to get away that made me feel like a bad mother. These feelings were all the more intense

because it had taken us a long time to conceive. When we finally did, I had a bleed at 28-weeks and soon after was admitted to hospital with pre-eclampsia. At first, I was monitored on the maternity ward – as is Sophia after she loses one of her children.

Reflecting on this, I wrote the poem, *The cruellest thing*:

Newborn babies
a sympathetic look.
hospital lights
down low.

Past the maternity bays,
averting my eyes,
crying alone
eyes are red.

Sophia expresses guilt that perhaps in working so hard, she is to blame for her miscarriages:

"Part of me wonders whether I wanted them enough… so focussed on my career… I'm too selfish…'be careful what you wish for.'"

"Did you ever wish you weren't pregnant?"

"No, never."

When my daughter and I were reunited, I couldn't cope. Sophia faces a similar challenge when reunited with her lost children in the spirit world. She doesn't know what they need. From one of her monologues when she's *looking after* them emerged the poem *Happy Families*:

Big happy family,
children's laughter.

Paralysed by fear,
Terrible mother.

Need to get out,

trapped,
walls closing in.

Ashamed.

This isn't me,
successful
magazine
editor.

I snap.

Darkening skies,
black cloud.

Jake is meanwhile struggling to embrace his calling as a shaman. Transformation is a central theme of his story but he has to believe he can do it, guided by his spirit family as in this poem.

Peel away layer after layer
I baptise you,
welcome to our family

Much of the time Jake doubts himself as in the found poem, *Lost*:

Full moon overhead.
clear sky
heavens sparkle.

I tremble.

An overgrown path.
Trees block out the moonlight.
Trip over roots and fallen twigs…,
Stumble blindly on.

Does the overgrown path reflect my unknown journey into motherhood? Are the trees blocking the light symbolic of the darkness of my depression? I stumbled blindly on as best I could

but depression and anxiety made me bad-tempered, an ill-temper that emerges in another found poem.

Sweet smell of the heath,
springtime dew,
glistening,
butterflies dancing,
heavenly song,
rich burgundy of
autumn leaves.

The cattle,
with their shaggy red coats,
floppy fringes,
lovely temperaments
but those horns
could do some
serious damage.

PND made me short-tempered. My horns could sting.

Another found poem *Distance* appears to recognise how I pushed people away. This comes from a later part of the book from one of Jake's internal monologues .

So distant,
refuses to talk.
She wraps her sadness
around her
like a warm blanket,
which I can't penetrate.

It's how I imagined my husband might have felt about the wall I'd put up between us. I never meant to push people away but depression does strange things to us. The feeling is hard to describe. Willow – one of Jake's spirit guides – likens it to soul loss. He says Sophia is partly dead (hence her

coma). As Jake prepares a shamanic journey to attempt to rescue her soul, Willow performs a reading with some brass coins.

The reading reveals:

> "…there are worries about health and home… If the querent, that's you Jake, is going on a trip, which you are, it means it will take longer than you expect."
> "Gendelig tailah tuvshin also tells us that an illness will be difficult to treat. I'm sorry Jake but it looks as if you are facing a tough journey ahead."

This became the found poem that I titled *PND*.

Worries,
health,
home.

Illness.

Tough,
journey,
ahead.

Jake must journey to the lower world to rescue his wife's soul. On route he passes through *Ela Guren,* home of some of the most vicious souls from history, a section from which the following found poem *Eye of the storm* emerged and that reflects what depression feels like.

Howls,
pain,
cry out.

Deep pools,
of sadness.

Pick over,
dead carcasses,
looking for a sign.

Sky black,
as night
flash of lightning,
booming crash of thunder.

Inside the eye,
of the storm.

Keep going.

Finally, Jake finds his wife trapped in the lower world. He must convince her to leave her children there and return to the body lying in the hospital; he also tells her she has to 'let go'. From this section, which is the climax of the story, emerged the poem *Trapped*:

Can't explain,
that black cloud,
hanging over my head…

Is my soul trapped?

Flesh and blood
My flesh and blood,
Want to feel loved,
have to let go.

Get better.

Reading this reminds me that I was trapped in a prison of my own making. There were plenty of people offering to help but I wouldn't allow myself time out. I felt it would be failing my daughter and an admission that, as I'd felt in hospital, she didn't need me. The feeling of not being there enough is something that, as working mother, I still struggle with.

When Sophia returns to her body, she feels more alive.

Feel alive,
more alive.

Could do anything.
Invincible.

This poem seems to reflect how I now feel about getting through those early years, and the postnatal depression. I survived. I learned from the experience. It taught me to ask for help, to let go and that while becoming a mother meant things would never be the same again, I hadn't lost myself. *A Magpie's Tale* ends with Sophia becoming pregnant again. Jake says he has been on a shamanic journey to ensure that this time, things will be different.

Sophia takes the afternoon off.

Sophia had her happy ending. My road to recovery took longer. Perhaps, this dissertation is part of that journey. What I do know is I want to explore the themes that have emerged from *A Magpies Tale*. Were the circumstances of my daughter's birth a contributing factor? Do others feel the pressure to be a good mother? Do they feel they're falling short? Can you work *and* be a good mum? How does motherhood change us, and what can it teach us? Have other mothers experienced loss of identity? Can writing help us with our transition to motherhood?

5. Mother's milk: tales of birth, breastfeeding and beyond…

In continuing my exploration of motherhood I go back to the beginning. Why? Because statistics show that in the year following birth, 20 per cent of women suffer postnatal depression although actual figures are probably higher (Figes, 1998). My midwives shared similar statistics with me. I found no comfort in them, I wanted to know *why me*?

At the time, blaming the circumstances of my daughter's birth seemed like a cop out. Now, I'm a little easier on myself and can appreciate that a difficult birth may contribute to a bumpy start. Cusk's (2001) description of her caesarean birth holds particular resonance. It became the following found poem:

Tugging,
and pushing
and wiggling.
Tough blanket
of anaesthetic.

Fear.

Left dismantled.

Talking head
on a table.
(from Cusk, 2001, p. 42)

In exploring my experience of birth and the weeks before and after I wrote 'Begin again':

Protein in your wee
Pre-eclampsia
Hospital admission
Blood pressure monitoring
24-hours,
Again, and again and again….

Always back to the beginning, again

Something I did,
or didn't do?
I worked too hard
carrying you.

Unable to stop
Couldn't slow down
My fault?
Did I let you down?

Back to the beginning, again

Hospital transfer
an ambulance ride
miles from home
frightened, alone
pressure rising
stomach tight
another check
in the dead of night

I go, back to the beginning, again

Pinprick
Numb
Green tent
An open door
I hoped,
for more.

Hear her say,
"It is a mess in there."
Then the quiet mewl
before they whisk
you away…

The poem references the fact that, prior to my own caesarean, I had told the consultant about my ovarian cyst and the ovary and fallopian tube I'd also had removed. Once she'd safely delivered

my daughter, she looked over the top of the *green tent* and said: “You’re right it’s a mess in there.” I barely glimpsed my daughter before they took her, and then me away.

For the next 24-hours, I was in a room on my own receiving regular blood pressure checks. My daughter was two floors up; her father – who stayed as long as was able – was at home an hour-and-a-half away. I was scared and alone in a strange place, which as Figes says, may have negatively impacted on my experience (Figes, 1998). It also came as a shock when one of the nursing staff appeared with a large metal contraption and asked me to express some milk.

Cusk (2001) − who says her experience of childbirth was more akin to an appendectomy than what she’d expected of labour −also recalls her surprise at being asked to feed her child.

> “I still inhabit that other world in which, after operations, people are pitied and looked after and left to recuperate," (Cusk, 2001, p. 94).

The ‘dairy room’ adjoining the SCBU is another lasting (if bizarre) memory of being in hospital. I became quite adept at pumping even mastering the *double pump* technique. The dairy room features, as do my experiences of birth and post-natal care, in the poem, *Mother’s Milk*:

They asked could I express,
some of my milk for you,
they needed it urgently
upstairs in SCBU.
Why hadn’t I asked them?
Why didn’t I think?
Selfishly sleeping,
had you nothing to drink?

A random act of kindness
In the middle of night
The one nurse who listened
to tales of my plight,
How eight hours had passed

and I'd lain all alone,
was it all a strange dream?
did I really give birth?
or was all not as it seemed.

She fetched me a wheelchair,
through dark corridors passed,
upstairs in SCBU,
reunited at last,
a fleeting glimpse,
as you lay in your cot,
encased in soft plastic,
the room grew too hot,
before I could hold you,
began to feel faint,
the nurse said enough,
and back downstairs we went.

I was doing much better,
well enough to go home,
but much as I longed to,
couldn't leave you alone.
it just wasn't natural,
it didn't seem right,
I wanted to see you,
in the depths of the night,
to dress you come morning,
and cuddle you tight.

Yet, your room was still stifling,
and next door was far worse,
they called it the dairy
it felt like a curse,
lined up like heifers,
breasts swollen and sore,
and as hard as we pumped,
they just asked for more.

I remember her sat there,
the cup to her breast,
barely a half centimetre,
she was doing her best,
as my milk poured forth,
a jet like a geyser,
spraying with force.

When I had finished,
she'd join me at the sink,
her brow furrowed and wrinkled,
barely a drop of milk to drink,
and that phrase she would say,
I remember the line,
"it's the washing up
that gets me,"

Every time.

As the poem says, I met another woman in the pumping room, who was unable to produce much milk but the only complaint she ever made was about the washing up. The poem's original inspiration was Barg's poem '*Forever Love, Forever Guilt'* (Barg, 2001, p. 131), which reminded me of a comment someone once made to me that "Guilt is like Mother's Milk". I think what they meant is that guilt like the milk we produce is part of motherhood.

I suspect the other woman in the dairy room felt guilty about not being able to express more but she couldn't admit to it hence her complaints about the washing up.

I, on the other hand, had almost too much milk. My breasts were huge – twice the size of my daughter's head – making it difficult for her to 'latch on'. I was drowning in milk, and guilt. I felt guilty about my daughter's early birth, guilty about wanting to go home and guilty about my inability to breastfeed.

Contrary to popular belief breastfeeding doesn't always come naturally. Recalling her experiences of breastfeeding, Cusk says, "I put her to the breast. The word natural appears in a sort of cartoon bubble in my head. I do not, it is true, feel entirely natural," (Cusk, 2001, p. 95).

She dislikes breastfeeding, and wants to stop, but perseveres only for the midwife to blame something in her milk for her baby's lack of growth.

> "'Your baby is failing to thrive', she informs me presently. 'You must feed her with formula milk' commands the health visitor. 'Your baby is failing to thrive' repeats the woman. 'You risk damaging her brain. Do you want to have a brain damaged baby?'" (Cusk, 2001, p. 68)

Following our eventual discharge from hospital I continued to struggle finding my daughter reluctant to feed, and that she became sick when she did. It was only when returning to the chidlren's hospital out-of-hours that we discovered she had reflux (common in prem babies). This meant I had to express milk to mix with Gaviscon in a bottle, and feed that to her before putting her to the breast. Surely, I told my midwife it would be easier if I gave up and switched to formula milk.

The look she gave me suggested that I was proposing a daily dose of arsenic, and rather than discussing it with me she fell back on what was a stock response to any grumbles about motherhood, "Bless you,". This inspired the poem, *bless you*:

The midwife asks
Rough night?

Is there
any other kind?

Bless you.

She asks
"how's the
breastfeeding."

Hard, which is
code for
I hate it.

Bless you.

And you,
how are you
coping?

Okay, I lie
through eyes
that sting.

Bless you.
I remember when
I had my twins
now that was
hard.

I think, don't say.

Fuck you.

Like the woman in *Mother's Milk* many mothers feel we cannot complain about the tribulations of motherhood. Figes, cites Christine MacArthur who says:

> "…many women feel guilty about even thinking about themselves. The health visitor tends to focus on the baby and I think mothers are often quite loath to say how they really are. They feel they should be talking about the baby and not about themselves. Tiredness must also affect a mother's motivation to go to a doctor and report backache or haemorrhoids," (in Figes, 1998, Loc.286).

While the other physical effects of motherhood pass relatively quickly, MacArthur touches on something, which I believe has a deeper impact, namely that when we become mothers we feel it is selfish to think about our own needs. We may also lose sight of who we used to be; we have "gained a new identity, yet ..there is a sense of loss of [our] former life," (Figes, 1998, loc. 456).

This loss of identity, I believe, has a profound effect on us when we become mothers but is harder to talk about than discussing embarrassing bodily functions. I desperately wanted a child and yet in having one I missed the journalist and writer I was. It's this loss of identity that I intend to explore in the next chapter; the tension between dependence and independence, work and home.

6. Ode to the good mother: a work in progress

Perhaps one of the hardest things to come to terms with is that we yearn to become mothers, and yet when we become them we can feel trapped (Kelly, 2014; Cusk, 2001; Figes 1998). Cusk, for example, speaks of being split in two, saying that the drama of parenthood is

> "….conducted in full view of the heaven of freedom; a heaven that is often passionately yearned for [of] which the parent has been cast out, usually of his or her own volition, (Cusk, 2001, p129).

Rachel Kelly says, "Having a child could mean a subconscious loss of independence and a previous way of life, however joyful that addition," (Kelly, 2014, loc.902) while Cusk (2001) says she missed the slack, 'lubricant empty hours'. I felt the same way. It wasn't the wild days of my youth that I missed but I wanted to lie in, watch TV all day, to drive a little too fast with the music up loud.

The perceived lack of freedom that comes with parenthood causes tension between couples as, "each feels it is unfair if the other goes out…," (Cusk, 2001, p.133). For women, there are additional psychological barriers to overcome before they can have a break from mothering:

> "It is not love that troubles me when I leave the baby... It is rather that when I leave her the world bears the taint of my leaving so that abandonment must now be subtracted from the sum of whatever I choose to do" (Cusk, 2001, p.87).

After being separated from my child in hospital I felt guilty for leaving her to have time out on my own. I resented my husband for the freedom his work provided just as Kelly (2014) speaks of missing her journalistic career. She admits to being jealous of other women's careers, of missing the office and her friends and felt she had become a "backdrop" to others' lives.

From this passage of the book emerged the found poem *Invisible*,

Cloak of invisibility,
No longer a person.
Somebody's mother.
Somebody's wife.
Invisible hands
Folded bath towels
Person vanished.
Found poem from Kelly, 2014, loc. 2494-2495

I missed work. I missed its easy routine compared to the unpredictability of childcare, I missed knowing what I was doing, but most of all I missed the creativity of it, the writing, which for me was about more than work: it was who I was. There is a direct link between this loss of identity and the depression women suffer following childbirth. Depression, is about anger, and anxiety and,

> "is the illness of identity...of those who do not know where they fit …[women] are probably more vulnerable to a crisis of identity when they become mothers than at any other life stage," (Lott, in Figes, 1998, loc. 685).

Figes speaks of the need to mourn this loss, which became the found poem *Extinguished*.

Billions of tiny lights
inside each of us,
the effort to produce each child
extinguishes a few of those lights

forever

We can live without them,
but that does not mean
that we do not need time
to mourn their loss.
(Created from Figes, 1998, Loc.393).

In *Purple Leaves, Red Cherries* Sarah, a mother of two, describes being irritated by people looking at her pushing her pram assuming she is "just" a mother. When she goes out pram-less she is upset when people don't pay her attention.

In seeing herself as *just* a mother, Sarah hints at the low status that society confers on motherhood. In becoming a mother, and leaving work, Kelly feels she has become "somebody with no status in a world that values what we do, not who we are," (Kelly, 2014, loc. 2494-2495). Cusk says becoming a mother "erodes your self-esteem," (Cusk, 2001, 7-8).

Another paradox of motherhood is that despite it's low-status, society places high expectations on women who mother. It's not enough to be a mother we must be a 'good mother'.

While women, if asked, might struggle to describe the 'good mother' her image looms large in our psyches as the mother *archetype*. Like all archetypes she has a bipolar, conflicted character, which encompasses the positive, and the cruel, wicked mother (Brun, 1993) reinforcing the idea that the 'good' and 'bad' mother are the only options (Barg, 2001).

Reflecting on this I wrote the following poem titled *Ode to the Good Mother*.

No such thing,
as a good mother
Except in myth and mirage
Yet, in psyches she
Looms large,
as the life
she bestowed upon us.
If don't believe me,
then you can ask Carl Jung.

The poem refers to Carl Jung as he was an influential voice in theories of archetypes, and their impact on our subconscious, a position that implies that the image of the good mother lives within us. However, there is also evidence that society has reinforced this myth.

Figes (1998) explores societies' role in perpetuating the good mother myth. She points to the end of the 18th Century when women assumed responsibility for their children's education; this meant they were responsible for their children's moral as well as biological wellbeing (Figes, 2008). Darwin's theories of evolution, coupled with increased knowledge of healthcare, meant society could blame women for high mortality rates; and so in the 1930s 'mothercraft' centres were created, and health visitors began inspecting working class homes (Figes, 2008).

The emergence of behaviourist theories in the 1920s, and the influence of Freud's work, meant that people came to believe that children could be programmed from birth. This, argues Figes, laid responsibility for psychological stability, or otherwise, firmly at the mother's door. These philosophies helped feed the myth of the perfect mother because they see women as all-powerful (or all-powerless) and so responsible for how their children turn out (Figes, 2008).

It's a heavy burden to bear and begs the question of 'where it leaves us' (Freely, in Figes, 1998, Loc.1068). Aspiring to be a perfect or even a good mother seems an unrealistic goal to which we are doomed to fail, and even if we do come close to it, the rewards can seem few and far between. "Much was given back to me in the form of my daughter [but] it was not payment in kind nor even in a different coin, was not in fact recompense of any sort," (Cusk, 2001, p.145).

Kelly recounts how a friend of hers likened the life of a stay-at-home mother to a prospector working on a stretch of river:

> *Much of the time,*
> *mud and stones*
> *sometimes*
> *nuggets of gold.*
> (found poem from Kelly, 2014, loc.2472-2473)

She describes how the ambition she'd once channelled into work, coupled with notions of the good mother saw her striving for perfection in her newly defined roles:

> "It wasn't enough for me to be a mother: I wanted to be a very good mother, not to mention wife, friend, daughter, hostess and homemaker. But I also craved the status and interest of a job, which none of these roles could confer on me," (Kelly, 2014, loc. 2484).

Kelly makes a number of attempts to return to work, with mixed success. Describing the tension between work and home, she says,

> "I worried about missing the children if I went back to work. I worried that in my present state I wouldn't be able to fulfil any role at all…Such worries had been present for a while but…in the middle of the night, they seemed to multiply, overwhelming me like creepers choking a ruined building," (Kelly, 2014, loc.117).

I vividly recall lying awake at night wrestling with the exact same dilemma. Part of me wanted to go back to work – at least I knew what I was doing there – and yet another part of me felt I was failing as a mother, and to go back to work would be an admission of that.

This wasn't helped by the fact that I knew being a stay-at-home mother was at its best a temporary arrangement. Our household situation meant that I needed to go back to work. I'd be a *working mother*, whatever that meant.

I thought it meant not being a good mother.

I lay awake fantasising about winning the lottery but then they wouldn't need me financially and – in my mind – not at all. Other times I fantasised about publishing A Magpie's Tale so I could combine working with being at home.

These feelings aren't uncommon. As Figes says,

> "In spite of all the additional work we do as mothers to bring up our children well, some of us still feel that if we could only give up work we would be even better mothers," (Figes, 1998, loc.1204).

Kelly also talks about being torn between home and work. Her doctor comments that she seems more animated when talking about her work, which she seems to enjoy and yet, she worried:

> "…that my ability to be a decent journalist would be compromised by worrying about the children….I worried about missing the children if I went back to work…I worried in my present state I wouldn't be able to fulfil any role at all " (Kelly, 2014, loc. 113).

This sense of feeling torn between two roles is expressed in the poem *Drop and run*:

Just a drop,
of motherly duties,
the once-weekly run
to the school gates.
Scoping for a friendly
face outside,
the kids oblivious
to the schoolyard
politics that lie
in store, and
even more unaware
that it will chase them
into adulthood.
And so I drop-kick
a smile in the hope
it will land, into touch,
somewhere in the unruly
scrum, and then, I run.

I wrote this in response to Rachael Kelly's anecdotes about the school run when her depression rendered her unable to work, and the less than positive comments she received from another mother at the school gates. It refers to the 'once-weekly run', because I work from home on a Tuesday, which is the day I am able to take my daughter to school.

While I enjoy the opportunity to do it, I find it stressful. I have a small group of other mothers whom I know from the postnatal days when I was able to be at home, but I feel I haven't connected with others, and don't feel as much a part of the community as I could because most of my time is spent working in London. Somehow being outside the school gates evokes memories of playground politics, of who is a friend with whom. At the same time I'm envious of the kids, who don't notice those tensions, the way my daughter's face lights up when she sees her friends.

The working mother is conspicuous by her absence in Barg's (2001) thesis, which reinforces the concept of mothering as work. Her focus is on motherwork *learning* and what our children and the process of mothering can teach us. I agree mothering *is* work – damned hard work – but that doesn't mean that the working mother can't also learn from her children.

Reflecting on it I wrote:

> Where is the working mother? In the beginning of her thesis, Barg hints that increasingly women are work as well as being mothers. Guilt is a theme that runs throughout her thesis, including the guilt that comes from being away from your child. Surely, the working mother knows this guilty feeling, too, if not more than mothers who don't work?

As a mother, despite being one who works *outside* of the home, I too have learned a lot from the *experience* of mothering, from other mothers and from my daughter. It is to these lessons that I turn my attention in the following chapter as I explore what motherhood teaches us.

7. Lessons in love: what motherhood teaches us?

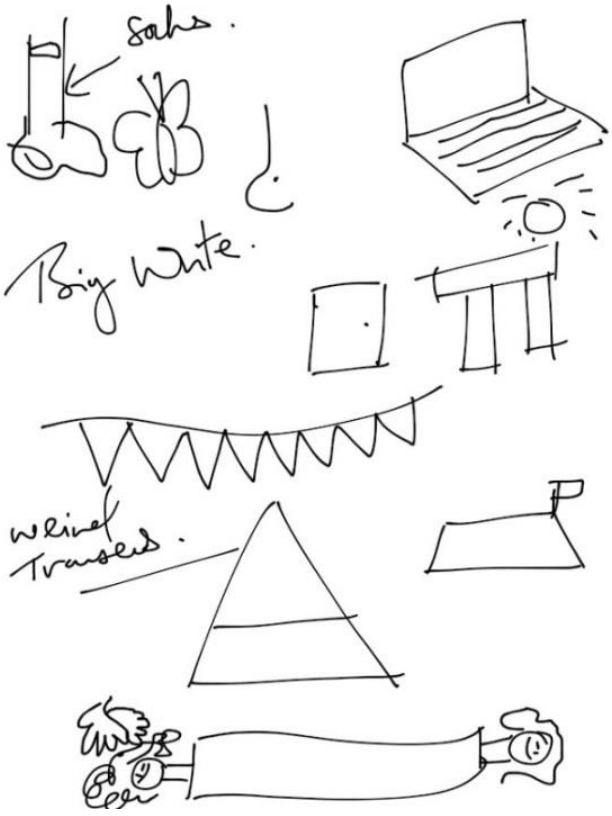
The experience of becoming a mother changes us in ways we could never have imagined (Figes, 2008). Barg says that the mothers she interviewed usually named childbearing or child rearing (Barg,

2001, p.200) among their most significant adult learning experiences. Many recounted moments of 'epiphany' or transformation.

So what have I learned from the experience of becoming a mother?

One key theme for me has been the tension between dependence and independence, a theme, which inspired me to pursue the experience of mothering as a topic for my dissertation. The idea emerged from a felt sense exercise one of our tutors led at the end of the second year.

I began doodling in the notebook of my iPad and drew this.



Reflecting on it my journal, I wrote:

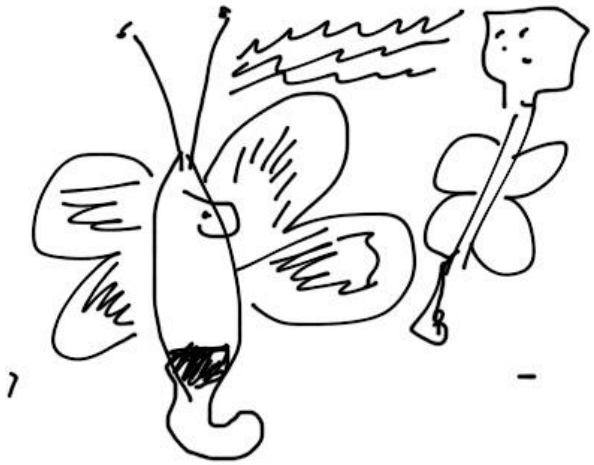
The pictures are of Amber's socks pulled up high…. My nose piercing, butterfly tattoo, the bunting I hung up at the weekend for our 'at home festival'. Weird trousers, the pyramid stage at Glastonbury, a tent, Amber and I lying top-to-toe in a sleeping bag on the sofa at home…

"I'm beginning to realise that what I am writing is about identity and the way that becoming a mum challenged my sense of self, of who I was – where did I end and my daughter begin?,"

(Botterill, 2014).

I wrote a few words inspired by the image 'Transition, Change, Butterfly…' and from this emerged a tentative title for my dissertation: 'Motherhood and poetry. Love. Loss and rebirth; a re-examining of my journey through motherhood through the refracted lens of poetic inquiry.'

Later in the exercise, I drew a picture of a butterfly playing a violin:



I was struck by the similarities in shape between the butterfly and the violin, although they're (obviously) entirely separate. That's how I feel about being a mother. I have a strong bond with my daughter, but a need to remain independent, and want her to be independent, too. As Barg (2001) says the purpose of mothering is to do ourselves out of a job.

> "…not in the sense of separateness or total independence, but within a cooperative spirit that exudes social interest, collaboration, interdependence, democracy and mutual respect," (Barg, 2001, p. 195).

Letting go isn't easy. Cusk (2001) recounts an incident, where her daughter fell and hit herself on a sharp stone. She picks her up to comfort her, but her daughter wants her father. Cusk says, "Even in the heat of her injury I felt my own more keenly…I needed to be her mother more than she needed my mothering," (Cusk, 2001, p. 205).

It's the same feeling I sometimes have when I drop my daughter at school, and expressed in the poem *Holding on and letting go…*

"Why d'you always have to go away", you said
Clinging to me as we lie in your bed,
I'll be here in the morning to drive you to school,
It is bed time now, time for your sleep.

In the middle of night you climbed into our bed
Legs akimbo, arms open spread
I woke in the night to find, arms round my neck
You didn't remember that.

Morning has broken and with eyes blurry eyed
You rush to the kitchen and stand by my side
Breakfast gobbled in front of the TV
"C'mon mummy, you shout, waiting for me."
School gates are buzzing, kids everywhere
We stand on the sidelines, you scouting who's there
Then you spy little [redacted] *and you're off at a run*
Not a care in the world, you've forgotten your mum

It's how it should be for you, and me, too
But, why d'you always have to go away?

Fleeting these moments, precious and rare…

So I linger and watch you as long as I dare

Being independent doesn't mean our children no longer need us, however. Cusk's anecdote about her daughter's fall reminds me of what I recall as a *transformational moment*. We were in my bedroom. Underneath the bed was a toy Tigger. I pressed its body down, which caused it to bounce and sing *"the wonderful thing about Tiggers…"* My daughter took one look at it and burst into tears, in a rare 'instinctive' moment I picked her up and cuddled her and she stopped crying. She *needed* me. This experience inspired the poem *the good enough mother*.

The Good Mother
is a unicorn,
a will o' the wisp,
for in reality,
she doesn't exist.

The Good Enough Mother,
will make many mistakes,
she'll make them,
again, and again, and again,
but she'll keep on trying,
whatever it takes.

The Good Enough Mother,
is one who tries to be there,
and yet, when she isn't,
you will know,
she still cares.

The Good Enough Mother,
is always busy with tasks,
but she'll stop,
and she'll listen
to you when you ask.

The Good Enough Mother,
knows mistakes you have made,
but rather than judge you,
she will come to your aid.

And over the years,
you will argue and fight,
tantrums, teenage rebellion,
the things you might say,
all in an effort to push her away,
some things you'll regret,
but whatever you do,
the Good Enough Mother
will always love you.

The poem evokes another memorable experience when I had started taking anti-anxiety medication to help with my postnatal depression. I was pushing our sleeping daughter in her buggy,

the sun was shining and I was listening to my iPod. Joss Stone's song 'Right to be wrong' began to play. I realised I didn't need to be perfect. It also made me think about the type of mother I wanted to be; that if, or when, my daughter makes mistakes I'll try not to judge but to be there for her.

As Figes says,

> "Accepting fallibility in mothering means accepting that all humans are fallible and that damage is done to children, sometimes irreparably. Our children have to grow up in the real world…where mistakes are made by grown-ups as well as by children. All mothers can do is attempt to limit the damage caused to children so that it is not too harmful in the long run," (Figes, 2008, loc. 1026).

This inspired me to write the poem *You're right*.

You're right,
to ask questions,
You're right,
to laugh at mummy's
weird clothes
You're right,
to choose your own path
You're right,
to pull your socks
up knee high,
You're right,
to make a chart
and eat healthily

but not compulsively

I have a right,
to ask questions
providing I take the time
to listen deeply to
how you respond
I'm right to scold
you sometimes
but I have a right
to cuddle you tight
afterwards and
make it all better again

I'm right to leave you
sometimes
and to let you go
knowing that however
far we stray
a piece of my heart
will forever belong
to you, even if you
will never belong
to me.

It's important for me to be there for my daughter but I have come to realise that isn't the same as being with our children *all of the time*. In Purple Leaves, Red Cherries, Aviva – a mother of two – describes how a lack of creativity in her life is impacting not only her, but her son.

> "My mental activity has been reduced to reading, internet and TV. I can't find the energy to do anything else. I feel like my son is growing up in a void – he's not being exposed to any of the former me…emptiness is eating me up and it's about to creep into him as well," (Elfersy & Katzman, 2011, Loc. 306)

In *The Midnight Disease* Alice Flaherty (Flaherty, 2005) talks about the compulsion she had to write following the birth of her child. She asks to what degree obsessive writing *hurts* parenthood from the her answer to that question this found poem emerged

Obsessive writing hurts?
So absorbed,
Least of my faults.

Take joy in something,
And share that joy
(Found poem created from Flaherty, 2005, p. 102).

My daughter is developing her own passions, too; violin, dancing, swimming. Increasingly, she does her thing while we do ours. Being apart means that I miss her, and I find she misses me too. In her conclusion Cusk talks about 'brief pauses' beginning to appear in her mothering. She tells how,

"When I return from an absence, she runs…down the passage and throws herself into my arms," (Cusk, 2001, p. 208). It puts me in mind of my poem *Homecoming* in response to Leggo's (2010) article on 'lifewriting' in which he talks about poetry as a celebration.

This
is the best
part of my day.

Key in lock
Hand on door handle.
Pushing. Not rushing.

Wait.
Outside the inner door.

For the thunder of footsteps.
The shriek of surprise.
Elation.
Rushing.
Running.
Squeezing.

As if
your life
Depended on it.

My life.
Depends on it.

The gap between the 'this' and the 'is' in the poem is quite deliberate and symbolises the breath I take as I step into the hallway when I get home from work. I pause and listen for my daughter who thunders out the greet me, sometimes pushing the dog aside and screaming '*my mummy*' and then rushing into my arms and hugging me tight. It reminds me that even though I'm a 'working mother' she loves me.

I couldn't have imagined feeling like that when I was in hospital with my daughter. Being separated from her it felt every second counted, that we were missing out by being apart, and that it made me a bad mother. It wasn't the start I had hoped for. In looking back on the birth of her twins Jo – a mother of three - recounts how it was the scariest experience of her life.

> The day I was discharged from hospital I left not with a bundle of babies, but a boxed electric breast pump. For years that memory made me choke.
> But now, eleven years later, I no longer see two tiny fragile girls, but two strong, charming, loving, intelligent individuals.
> Finally the way they came into this world is no longer relevant." (Elfersey & Katzman, 2011, p. 21).

This comes through in the last part of the poem *Begin Again* (Chapter 5), which concludes:

The tiny 3lb body
Snuggling against my chest
Encased in an oversized shirt
That smells of sweat,
and men's aftershave
mingle now with
newer smells of
wet dog,
cat breath
chocolate Gu
patchouli oil
our family

Finally, the way you came into this
world is no longer relevant

We have endless possibilities
a world of imagination
of purple camper vans
white daisies
Greek islands
Mamma Mia island…

New beginnings.

Mamma Mia island, is in reference to the fact that we visited Skiathos where the movie was filmed, last year. While on holiday I was reading for this dissertation by the pool, and wrote:

> My 'current' self is reading and reflecting on this in the balmy heat of a Skiathos morning by the pool. My now eight year old daughter has transformed into a beautiful young girl, and one of my favourite people to be with. She is playing in the pool with her Dad.
> Strapped to the side of my handbag is the watch I had made that depicts a much younger version of her self, wearing a small sun hat, sitting in her pram and sucking on her finger. The picture now seems to hold all the promise of what she has become.

This became the poem *Skiathos sunset*:

The balmy heat,
A Skiathos morning,
The sunset of a heavenly,
Holiday in a Greek Isle

In the pool my little mermaid,
Dips and dives,
In and out of her
contented, private world

Like a clam opening
and shutting Its
shell, she affords
Me rare glimpses inside,
Of precious pearls.

Beautiful, witty and wise,
Sharp and playful,
as a dolphin, while on
my wrist sits the reminder
Of times past, the promise
Of all she has become.

These are just some of the lessons I have learned through the experience of mothering. I continue to learn every day and this dissertation is another step along the way. Now, I turn my attention to what I believe I have learned from the process of researching and writing it.

8. Clocking out: tentative conclusions

Figes (2008) argues, we "…cross a one-way bridge..." when we become mothers (Figes, 2008, Loc. 175); we can look back, but never go back. She's right, we can't *go back*, but can we use writing to broker a conversation between multiple selves; the *person writing* about the *person who experienced events*, *the person who experienced those events*, and the *present* and *future* self (Hunt, 1998)? I have attempted to open this conversation through poetry, *but with what success*?

Certainly, through a reappraisal of *A Magpie's Tale* the theme of *soul loss* acquired greater significance to the self that reviewed it in the context of this study. In distilling other sections of A Magpie's Tale into poetic verses, I've seen metaphors I hadn't recognised before; the horns, which came to symbolise the ill-temper engendered by my postnatal depression, and the poem *Lost* in which I saw expressed the unknown path to motherhood.

The distance afforded by time has also enabled me to see the significance of the theme of 'transformation', which runs through Jake's story, as captured in the found poem *silhouettes*, taken from a paragraph where he accepts his shamanic calling:

Peel away layer after layer
I baptise you,
Welcome to our family

In reflecting on it, I wrote:

I realise that Jake's spirit family has the same make-up as my own, mother, father and a child.

It's also interesting to reflect that Maggie, the young girl, is the one who is teaching Jake just as I now realise I have learned so much from my daughter.

Alongside this, I made a note to "list all the things to thank my daughter for, and write a poem." I have tried to do this but can't improve on Annie Lennox's song *Precious* (1992). It begins:

> Precious little angel,
> Take a look at what you've done,
> Well I thought my time was over,
> But it's only just begun…
>
> **Chorus**
> I was lost until you came…

The lyrics seem to sum up what I've learned, through the experience of mothering, and of writing this dissertation. After my daughter's birth, I felt lost, *I thought* my time *was over…* Now I realise, as the song continues… *it's only just begun…* as becoming a mother has kick-started a new chapter in my life. In embracing it I have learned I don't need to relinquish my independence, or to give up my passions in life. These can sit alongside – even enhance my abilities as a mother.

I've realised the importance of letting my daughter have her independence as she grows, to give her the freedom to make mistakes, but also that I am committed to being there for her when she needs me, or as the final lines of Lennox's song reads:

> When this bad old world has crumbled,
> I'll be standing by your side.

In response to Lennox's lyrics, I wrote the poem *Lost*.

> *I was lost in a humdrum blanket*
> *the mundanity of life*
> *so caught up in the rat race*
> *in the sewers sinking deep*
> *I thought I was awakened*
> *but was walking in my sleep.*

For a while, I sank down deeper
drowning in the mire
I couldn't understand it
identity quagmire.

My soul it seemed was fleeing
creativity leaked out
I was lost,
and then you came.

You've taught me to be playful,
you have taught me to slow down,
you've taught me to be grateful,
to smile when I feel down,
I have learned to say 'I love you'
each and every day,
I have learned how much I miss you,
every time you go away,
the sweet joy of your returning,
and how it makes my day.

Once again the theme of 'soul loss' appears. This also features in the opening quote to *A Magpie's Tale*; "The only thing of value in a man is the soul. Our flesh and blood, our body is nothing but an envelope about our vital power," (Utkahikjaling Eskimo in Ingerman, 1991). Reflecting on her caesarean, Cusk says "I fear... that I have been forgotten... I fear that *my soul* is being uncaged and allowed to fly away," (Cusk, 2001, p. 42, my italics).

Does this recurring theme of soul take me back to a past self? Am I stuck in the past? Or has this process – as Hunt suggests it could – opened a dialogue with a future self?

When I began this process I started with a timeline created from poetry written throughout the course of the MSc CWTP. I thought I'd spend some time reflecting on these, or writing about the person 'I used to be'. Actually, the timeline features little, if at all in the dissertation. Instead, my

focus has been on writing about my experiences of mothering. By doing so I have connected with a future self who can be both 'me', and the mother I want to be.

Some of the poems written in response to stimulus seem to link past, present, and future. For instance *Skiathos sunset* written in the [present] moment of watching my daughter in the pool, reflects on a past photograph holding the *promise of all she has become*. When the picture was taken I couldn't see that promise through the depression yet now I see the potential of more to come as reflected in the line, she "*affords me rare glimpses inside, of precious pearls…*".

The same could be said of *Begin Again*, in which I write about the complications I experienced during pregnancy, while the latter part of the poem focuses forward to a world that includes 'purple camper vans'. This refers to the morning spent with my daughter at a craft fair trying to sell homemade fossil necklaces. There was a lot of sitting around and trade was slow. To keep her interest I said we'd spend whatever profits we made on buying Lottery tickets and with the winnings buy a camper van and paint it purple with white daisies.

The poem's next line refers to 'Mamma Mia island', which we have since visited but also reminds me of part of the film where Donna (Meryl Streep) sings about all the things she planned to do with her daughter "some we did but most we didn't." This resonates with the poem *Making time* (see below), written in response to Dobson's (2010) poems *Nowhere* and *Now here*

The subject of both poems is time as she explains:

> "Reading the two poems out loud, I can feel the difference between artificial man-made time, 'nowhere,' and natural time where past, present and future are fused, 'now here.'," (Dobson, 2010, p.138).

It reminded me of an excerpt from *Purple Leaves, Red Cherries* where Mallory, mother of one discusses Mother Time, which she says is "often quiet, sometimes boring and frequently seen as unproductive. Yet it is the most valuable gift I offer my child," (Elfersy & Katzman, 2011, p. 192).

My poem *Making time* is an expression of this sentiment; it references a list from the National Trust about things to do by the time you are 11¾, reminding me (as the song suggests in Mamma Mia) that you don't always need big adventures but it is important to take *time*, to appreciate small things (including daydreaming about purple camper vans).

The poem reads:

There is still time.

Finish that list
all the things
you should do
before
you're 11¾.

Blow a grass trumpet,
Let shapes cloud the sky
Grab a kite
Fly
Run until you can't breathe
Lie in the long grass
pick flowers on the hill

Be.
There is
Still Time.

The ending refers to what Mother Time gives me, in the line 'There is *Still Time*'. I spend so much of my time rushing but time with my daughter often makes me be still whether it is crafting

necklaces, colouring, painting and more. This recognition will certainly affect the 'future me' who has a greater appreciation of that *Still Time* rather than thinking about tasks I *should* be doing.

In short, I believe the poems I have written and this process have reunited past and present selves and influenced my future, but what about my study's wider influence? Beyond this, could it contribute to a broader discussion of mothering, and to the field of CWTP?

In evaluating her study of 'Motherwork learning', Barg highlights the changes that the women in her study experienced as a result of 'Motherwork Learning'. Many, she claims, "made conscious decisions to change from living within the boundaries of what they saw as societal expectations of women and mothers," (Barg, 2001, p. 226).

In the same way, I believe the elements of self-study in this thesis have helped me to reclaim a voice I felt I had lost. When I became a mother I knew what society expected, but not what *I* could expect; could I ask to be taken to see my newborn child, to be taken to a quieter area of the maternity ward when suffering complications, could I challenge the tyrannical midwife? My frustration, and anger found its voice in the poems *Begin Again*, *The cruellest thing* and *Bless you*.

Barg also reports how some of the mothers she studied became less "invisible, long-suffering and silent", and learned to take better care of themselves.

In recounting *her* journey, Kelly tells how she struggled with others' reactions to her depression, particularly those who 'didn't believe' in its existence. She surrounded herself with those who did, who were sympathetic or who had experience of depression themselves. Kelly says how she it enabled her to be more honest and authentic, from which passage of the book emerged the following found poem, which I titled *Barking, up the right tree*.

Bark off
vulnerable,
honest,

Expressing
my difference.

A new, and
better shape.

In *Life after Birth*, Figes, (2008) explores among other things the phenomenon of the 'working mother'. She argues that tension between work and home is a twentieth century construction whose architect is psychiatrist John Bowlby, by virtue of his 1951 report, which studied the mental health of orphans and children separated from their parents during the war.

From the report Bowlby derived his 'attachment theory', which argued children under three could become distressed if not physically close to their mothers. His theories, argues Figes (2008) gained traction because it encouraged women to vacate jobs they'd 'acquired' during the war.

Bowlby's theories were later discredited because he ignored children's other needs including "a happy mother rather… [than one] who is simply there," (Figes, 2008, loc.1092). Yet his legacy remains in that many women still feel they can't be good mothers if they work, as Figes says:

> "When it comes to work-life balance little has changed in ten years. While the fact that many mothers want and need to continue working may be more accepted and talked about, practical support for this principal is thin on the ground…
>
> …their [mothers] expectations are still shaped by stereotypical notions of how 'good' mothers ought to behave and they strive to be perfect in both roles, which in turn takes its toll on their sense of self and wellbeing," (Figes, 2008)

Society cannot be wholly to blame, however. Through counselling, Kelly comes to recognise she had a low self-esteem, which stemmed from her childhood, and which caused her to judge her achievements by others' standards. She says:

> "I was on an achievement treadmill and the speed setting was too high. I had been driven mad attempting perfection, skewered on my generation's desire to excel at doing it all."

I recognise this in myself, too. In the depths of my depression, I felt I had to do everything on my own, needed to be able to cope with my daughter on my own, that I should be able to be mother, write a novel, and to earn the household income. The experience has taught me, above anything, to rely on others, to ask for help if I need it and not to be so hard on myself.

While society cannot be held entirely responsible for the high standards that some women hold themselves accountable to as mothers, there is arguably a need to adjust our attitudes to mothering and women who mother. As importantly, there is work to be done in terms of opening a conversation about some of the challenges women experience in becoming mothers, particularly, when women such as Cusk still suffer a backlash for writing about those challenges, as she recounted in *The Guardian* newspaper (Cusk, 2008).

The first review of the book from a woman was scathing accusing Cusk of threatening to eradicate the human race and of "confining [my daughter] to the kitchen like an animal," (Cusk, 2008), says Cusk adding that she felt guilty, and ashamed. Another woman wrote "…If you had a baby, you did so because you wanted one. If you are suffering sleep deprivation so severe you're hallucinating, that was your choice," (in Cusk, 2008).

Cusk ackowledges – as do I – that there are plenty of women who find becoming a mother, and the experience of mothering, easier than she did. She goes on to explain how she came to reconcile what she had written, with others' reactions to it:

> "My great love for my children and step-child slowly liberated me from much of what I felt about the past. I freed myself - or them - by trying to be honest, by being willing to apologise," (Cusk, 2008).

However, she goes on to say that she remains "uneasy in the public places of motherhood - the school gate, the coffee circuit - where the skies can unexpectedly open and judgment rain down on one's head," (Cusk, 2008). This is testament to how strongly the myth of the perfect mother lingers in our psyche, and, perhaps as Barg argues how it "often pits women against each other within families (Chodorow & Contratto. 1992; Caplan 1989)," (in Barg, 2001, p. 94).

I have been fortunate in that I've had the love and support of immediate and extended family, and close friends; in particular, the support of my sister and of a postnatal group, which was honest enough to talk about the challenging – as well as the the rewarding – aspects of motherhood, without judging or of entering into one-upmanship.

But for the mothers who don't, or who feel the need to strive for perfection, or that they are somehow 'falling short' in their mothering I hope that this study and the poetry, which I have written adds to the previous, and brave, voices of those who have gone before Kelly (2014) Elfersy & Katzman (2011), Figes (2008); Barg (2001); Cusk, (2001), a hope I express in my poem *Dandelion*:

> *A head full of stories,*
> *a ticking clock,*
> *marking the passage of time,*
> *a puff of breath,*
> *releases them,*
> *they float on the warm air,*

and then settle,
but where?

On the clothes
of a passing stranger?
Or does the seed,
settle on the ground,
where it will grow,
creating a new clock tower,
becoming part of
another's story,
or will if float forever,
lost to the winds of time?

The poem expresses my desire to join with the voices, which have gone before me but also, perhaps, to in some small way reach out to other mothers. I hope also that this study is a beginning not an end and that, in the future, I might be able to use this as a foundation for working with other mothers to explore their experiences of mothering – through poetry, perhaps, to explore more how poetry as a medium touches something deeper in us than narrative inquiry, that speaks to our soul.

9. Next Steps - Implications for practice

As an outcome of this study, I have considered the valuable aspects of my narrative inquiry and incorporated some of these into a prototype workshop series, entitled Manual Labour, (see *PowerPoint, Manual Labour,* Appendix), which could be facilitated by myself or made available to other CWTP practitioners.

Ultimately, the aim of the workshops is to enable mothers to explore how motherhood has impacted on their identity. Based on my own narrative inquiry, I believe – as does McAdams (2001) – that life story and identity are closely related, and that *narratives of self* influence our psychological wellbeing. Motherhood demands that we adjust our life story. However, this need isn't always recognised by new mothers, some of whom find the psychological adjustment difficult.

Week one aims to establish ground rules and to begin forming a group by exploring shared experiences of mothering. In week two we will explore individuals' *experiences* of mothering. As I've already argued I have taken an experience-centred approach and believe that how we experience events affects our narrative of self. This session also aims to open a conversation that recognises that each person's experience of mothering is unique to them, and that's OK.

This will, I hope, act as a precursor to discussions in week three pertaining to mothering archetypes, which as Carl Jung argued are ingrained in our psyche. Like all archetypes the mothering archetype has a bipolar character being perceived as the archetypal 'good' or 'bad' mother. I have provided a sample workshop for week three, designed to explore how these archetypes and societies' attitudes to mothering affect our experiences of being a mother.

The workshop explores the nature of archetypes and aims to get participants to discuss

examples from popular culture including literature and films. I have also included a found poetry exercise, which encourages participants to create found poetry from parenting manuals. My hope is that found poetry will be accessible to a group, which may have differing experiences of writing. I've chosen to use parenting manuals as a basis for this writing as these often reflect others ideas of how they think we 'should' parent. My hope is through the found poems participants will discover their reactions to these texts, find their own voice, and explore their own attitudes to mothering.

I've created my own found poem from the sample text from Gina Ford, as follows:

Redecorating
…anxiety,
from day one.
The first few weeks
feel abandoned,
an unfamiliar, dark room.

Decoration
…not essential

the need to redecorate totally.

Reviewing this, I'm surprised to see familiar themes. The lines 'anxiety, from day one' reflect the uncertainty I felt being alone in the hospital after my daughter was born, and the sense of abandonment in being so far from home. The 'decoration, not essential' seems to reflect the lack of awareness I had of how motherhood would impact me, and the 'need to redecorate totally' how my now self sees that becoming a mother requires a significant adjustment to narratives of self.

Change can be unsettling, something I have tried to explore in week four. I've proposed a timeline to enable participants to consider key moments of change. I've also included poetry as prompts for people to write from. One of these is the poem Halfway Down by AA Milne. I've chosen this as one of the reasons change can seem unsettling is because it's an in-between state, which is

reflected in the poem but the tone of it seems comfortable with the position.

In response, I wrote the following poem titled *Growing up*:

I'm not at the bottom,

I'm not at the top;

It's no longer a beginning,

No longer an end;

It's a growing together,

My daughter, my friend;

Teaching each other,

Lessons old, and some new

But we'll have fun as we learn them;

Growing-up isn't easy but we'll

have fun as you do.

We'll make some mistakes,

Of that I am sure

But I promise I'll love you,

Now and ever more.

The poem seems reflective of my journey through motherhood, which I've explored through this dissertation. Initially, I felt I'd lost a part of myself especially when I found I didn't have the time to write, and missed it. Now I see it not as an end, nor a beginning but a journey my daughter and I

are travelling and growing together, and separately, as in my drawing of the violin and butterfly'.

The poem encompasses an element of my own narrative inquiry, which I have found particularly helpful in that it opens a dialogue between past, present and future selves (Hunt, 1998). My postnatal self felt a sense of ending, my current self reflecting on that *experience* now recognises that I was struggling to adjust my narrative of self; my current self having made that realisation understands why I felt as I did and is able to look forward to a future where being a mother doesn't mean relinquishing a sense of self, although recognises I have changed.

My aim is to help others to open this dialogue through an exercise devised for week five, looking at 'who I was, who I am, what I hope for'. The exercise is inspired by accounts in Purple Leaves, Red Cherries (Elfersy & Katzman, 2011) where mothers recount their experience(s) of mothering. Sarah's story of being seen as 'just a mother' – in a sub-section titled 'who I was, who I am' – touched me, and this story *Defining me* would act as a prompt for discussion.

Participants would then write from the prompts who I was, who I am. In doing so, I hope that they will recognise that motherhood changes us and to consider more specifically how that change has impacted them. It would also, I hope, encourage mothers to re-engage with their pre-mothering selves and to recognise that becoming a mother doesn't mean abandoning the passions and interests they had before they became one. These may be reflected in the third prompt 'what I hope for'. Ultimately, I would encourage people to share responses in a web of words.

The final workshop would explore what we have learned through mothering experiences through exploring the work of Rosanna Barg. This would, I hope also act as an opportunity for us to explore as a group what we have learned through the six-week workshop by means of an ending.

Bibliography

Adams St. Pierre, E., 2005. Writing as a method of nomadic inquiry. In: Y. S. Lincoln, ed. *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Sage Publications Ltd, pp. 959-978.

Adler, M. & Rungta, S., 2002. Integrating New Members into an Ongoing Therapy Group: The Life-Line Technique. *Group,* 26(4), pp. 283-296.

Andrews, M., Squire, C. & Tamboukou, M., 2013. Introduction: What is Narrative Research. In: M. Andrews, C. Squire & M. Tamboukou, eds. *Doing Narrative Research.* London: Sage Publications Ltd, pp. 1-26.

Barg, R. M., 2001. *Motherwork: subsistence learning.* Toronto: University of Toronto.

Bolton, G., 2004. Black and blue: writing for reflective practice. In: G. Bolton, S. Howlett, C. Lago & J. Wright, eds. *Writing Cures.* Sussex: Brunner-Routledge, pp. 196-211.

Bolton, G., 2008. ‘‘Writing is a way of saying things I can’t say’’— therapeutic creative writing: a qualitative study of its value to people with cancer cared for in cancer and palliative healthcare. *J Med Ethics; Medical Humanities,* Volume 34, pp. 40 - 46.

Bolton, G., Field, V. & Thompson, K., 2006. *Writing Works: A Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities.* London : Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Bond, T., 2004. *Ethical Guidelines for research counselling and psychotherapy.* s.l.:British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Botterill, S., 2013. *In response to your Creative portfolio, Learning journal, Practical and theoretical work covered in this module demonstrate your understanding of the field of Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes and the links between Creative writing, Personal refle.* Hassocks.

Botterill, S., 2014. *MsC CWTP Learning Journal, Module 6, Day 3.* Hassocks.

Botterill, S., 2014. *MsC CWTP Learning Journal, Module 6, Day 5.* Hassocks.

Botterill, S., 2014. *Powerful experience: Written, critical account of your facilitation of a Group Workshop.* Hassocks: Sarah Botterill.

Brun, B., 1993. Symbols of the Soul - Fairy Tales. In: B. Brun, E. Pedersen & Runberg M, eds. *Symbols of the Soul - Therapy and Guidance Through Fairy Tales.* London: Jessica Kingsley, pp. 6-16.

Butler-Kisber, L. & Stewart, M., 2009. The use of poetry clusters in poetic inquiry. In: M. Prendergast, C. Leggo & P. Sameshima, eds. *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences.* Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, pp. 4-12.

Cahmann-Taylor, M., 2009. The Craft, Practice and Possibility or Poetry in Educational Research. In: M. Prendergast, C. Leggo & P. Sameshima, eds. *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences.* Rotterdam: Sense Publishing, pp. 13-29.

Chase, S., 2005. Narrative inquiry, Multiple lenses, approaches, Voices. In: N. Denzin & Y. Licoln, eds. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Third ed, Sage.

Chodorow, N. J. & Contratto, S., 1989. The fantasy of the Perfect Mother. In: N. J. Chodorow, ed. *Feminism and Psychoanalytic theory.* London: Polity Press, pp. 79-95.

Clandinin, D. J. & Huber, J., 2010. Narrative inquiry. In: B. McGaw, E. Baker, P. Baker & P. Peterson, eds. *International encyclopedia of education.* New York: Elsevier, pp. 1-26.

Clandinin, J. & Rosiek, J., 2007. Mapping a Landscape of Narrative Inquiry, Borderland spaces and tensions. In: J. a. R. J. Clandinin, ed. *Handbook of Narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology.* Ca: Thousand Oaks Sage, pp. 35-75.

Clough, P. & Nutbrown, C., 2002. Part 1, Research is Methodology. In: *A student's guide to methodology.* London: Sage Publications, pp. 3-20.

Cusk, R., 2001. *A Life's Work, on becoming a mother.* London: Fourth Estate.

Cusk, R., 2008. *The Guardian.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/mar/21/biography.women

Dobson, M. L., 2010. The Poetics of Self-Study: Getting to the Heart of the Matter. *Learning Landscapes, Poetry and Education: Possibilities and Practices,* 4(1), pp. 131-141.

Eisner, E. W., 1997. The Promise and Perils of Alternative Forms of Data Representation. *Educational Researcher,* 26(6), pp. 4-10.

Elfersy, T. & Katzman, A., 2011. *Purple Leaves, Red Cherries*: Flower Cap Press.

Erskine, R. G., 2010. Life scripts: unconscious relational patterns and psychotherapeutic involvement. In: R. G. Erskine, ed. *Life Scripts: A Transactional Analysis of Unconscious Relational Patterns.* London: Karnac Books.

Figes, K., 1998. *Life After Birth.* London: Hachette digital.

Flaherty, A. W., 2005. *The Midnight Disease.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Freeman, M., 2007. Autobiographical understanding and Narrative Inquiry. In: J. Clandinin, ed. *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology,* pp. 120-145.

Glesne, C., 1997. Transcription That Rare Feeling: Re-presenting Research Through Poetic. *Qualitative Inquiry,* Volume 3, pp. 202-221.

Glesne, C., 2010. Disappearing into Another's Words Through Poetry in Research and Education. *Learning Landscapes, Poetry and Education: Possibilities and Practices,* Autumn, 4(1), pp. 29-36.

Hartill, G., 2005. Introduction. In: *The Art of Memory: Poetry and the Elderly in Poetry, Therapy and Emotional Life. .* Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing.

Holman-Jones, S., 1994. Autoethnography: making the personal political'. In: N. Denzin & . Y. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* London: Sage, pp. 763-791.

Hunt, C., 1998. Autobiography and the Psychotherapeutic Process. In: C. Hunt & F. Sampson, eds. *The Self on the Page: Theory and Practice of Creative Writing in Personal Development.* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 181-197.

Hunt, C., 2000. Fictionalising Ourselves. In: *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing.* London: Jessica Kingsley, pp. 50-75.

Ingerman, S., 1991. Soul Retrieval, Mending the fragmented self. In: *Soul Retrieval, Mending the fragmented self.* New York: HarperSanFracisco.

Josselson, R., 2007. The Ethical Attitude in Narrative Research: Principles and Practicalities. In: D. Clandinin, ed. *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry.* California: Sage Publications, pp. 537-566.

Jung, C. G., 1981. In: R. Hull, ed. *The archetypes and the collective unconscious, Volume 9.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kelly, R., 2014. *Black Rainbow.* London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd.

Kidner, S., 2005. In: *A Magpie's Tale.* London: Lulu.

Leggo, C., 2010. Lifewriting: A Poet's Cautionary Tale. *Learning Landscapes, Poetry and Education: Possibilities and Practices,* 4(1), pp. 67-84.

McAdams, D. P., 2001. The Psychology of Life Stories. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(2), pp. 100 - 122.

Nicolson, P., 2011. Introduction. In: P. Nicolson, ed. *Postnatal Depression, Facing the Paradox of Loss, Happiness and Motherhood.* Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, pp. 2-7.

Olney, J., 1972. *Metaphors of self.* Princetown: Princetown University Press.

Paris, B. J., 1997. *From Imagined Human Beings: A Psychological Approach to Character and Conflict in Literature.* [Online]
Available at: http://plaza.ufl.edu/bjparis/books/imagined/chapter01.html
[Accessed 5 December 2013].

Payne, J., 2006. *The Language of the soul: healing with words of truth.* Scotland: Moray: Findhorn.

Phillips, A., 1995. The Telling of Selves. In: *On Flirtation.* London: Faber and Faber, pp. 65-75.

Prendergast, M., Leggo, C. & Sameshima, P., 2009. *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences.* Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Rapport, F. & Hartill, G., 2012. Crossing disciplines with ethnographic poetic representation. *Creative Approaches to Research,* 5(2), pp. 11-25.

Reason, P. & Hawkins, P., 1988. Storytelling as Inquiry. In: P. Reason, ed. *Human Inquiry in Action.* London: Sage, pp. 79-101.

Richardson, L., 2005. Part 2: Writing as Method of Inquiry. In: K. N. Denizon & S. Y. Lincoln, eds. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research: Third Edition.* London: Sage Publications Inc, pp. 967-973.

Richardson, L. & Adams St. Pierre, E., 2005. Writing: A Method of Inquiry. In: N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Third ed. London: Sage Publications Inc., pp. 959-978.

Rogers, C., 1992. The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology,* 60(6), pp. 827-832.

Sze, G., 2010. Sense & Nonsense: Thinking Poetry. *Learning Landscapes,* 4(1), pp. 229-236.

Tosi, M. T., 2010. The lived and narrated script: an ongoing narrative construction. In: R. G.Erskine, ed. *Life scripts: A transactional Analysis of Unconscious Relational Patterns.* London: Karnac Books Ltd, pp. 29-54.

Trahar, S., 2009. Beyond the Story Itself: Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnography in Intercultural Research in Higher Education. *Forum Qualitative Research,* 10(1).

Slide 1: MANUAL LABOUR

A six week CWTP workshop for new mothers, including

summary and detailed plan for a found poetry workshop

Slide 2: Target audience

- **First time mothers** of pre-school children (older than one year)
- Have experienced first year of motherhood
- But **may still be adjusting to mothering role**
- May have returned to work, changed occupation, or given up work to become full-time mothers

Slide 3: Aims and Objectives

To deliver a series of workshops, for first time mothers, which:

- Prompts them to explore their own experiences of mothering
- Enables sharing of mothering experiences in a 'safe' environment
- Prompts discussion of how perceptions of self have changed since becoming mothers
- Prompts them to think about society's attitudes to mothering, and how this has shaped their experience of mothering

Slide 4: Six-week schedule

The aim would be:

- To deliver a six-week CWTP course for new mothers
- Working in conjunction with a GP surgery, or pre-school nursery
- To enable exploration and sharing of mothering experiences
- To prompt mothers to think about how motherhood has impacted their sense of self

---

Slide 5: Week 1: shared experiences

- Introductions
- Group contract, the 'Good Mother' (see Appendix 1)
- Paired discussions/brainstorm on experiences we've shared (e.g. pregnancy, birth, weaning, first smile, first teeth etc.)
- Writing exercise: acrostic, all to write acrostic (see Appendix 2) around one of shared experiences e.g.

B
I
R
T
H

- Sharing in pairs
- Group reflections

Slide 6: Week 2: exploring differences

- While we share some events in reality how we experience pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding… and all aspects of mothering is unique to us.
- **Prompt for writing:**
  - The best thing about being a mum is….
  - Being a mum is hard because…
- **Group sharing**
  - Word cloud as a prompt (see Appendix, 3)
  - What words did we find?
  - Are there key themes/differences?

Slide 7: Week 3: Manual Labour

- Mothering archetypes, as a means of exploring societies' attitudes to mothering
- Pre-conceptions of 'good' and 'bad' mothering
- Exploring parenting manuals
- Creating found poetry from parenting manuals
- Reflecting on found poems
- **See sample workshop**

Slide 8: Week 4: Milestones, and baby steps

- Exploring change, which can be unsettling
- Exploring significant life events/key changes by using a timeline
- Sharing in pairs: discussion of key changes and why we've chosen the
- ones that we have (five minutes)
- Group discussion
- What are the changes?
- Are some big, and others small?
- How many are endings?
- Where we see endings, are there also new beginnings?

- What feelings do we associate with these milestones?
- Where does becoming a mother feature in the timeline?
- Starting to think about how this has changed us, prompt for session 5
- Poems 'Halfway down' AA Milne (see following slide) and Welcome change, Gina Whitacre (See Appendix, 5)
- Writing exercise (all) take a line from one of the poems and write from it for five minutes

Slide 9: Halfway down, AA Milne

Halfway down the stairs is
a stair where I sit.

There isn't any other stair
quite like it.

I'm not at the bottom, I'm
not at the top; so this is
the stair where I always
stop.

Halfway up the stairs

Isn't up

And it isn't down.

It isn't in the nursery,

It isn't in town.

And all sorts of funny
thoughts Run round my head.

It isn't really
Anywhere!

It's somewhere else
Instead!

Slide 10: Welcome change, Gina Whitacre

Change is inevitable,

But yet we fight it, just the same. Change is essential to our evolution.

Change is going to happen, In fact, it happens every day,

Maybe it is too small to see, or perhaps we would rather not see it.

We fight change, because we fight the unknown, We fight the unknown, because we are scared, Scared of change, scared of the unknown.

If we were to allow change to happen freely,

We might find solutions to the problems that exist around us,

But instead, we are hung - up on controlling everything around us.

Maybe this is the problem with the world today.

Everyone assumes control of everything and does not allow nature to run her course.

Maybe this is why, we have devastating fall out from Nature, Natural catastrophic

disasters, such as fire and flooding.

We fight change, therefore we are fighting nature and her natural being and her existence in the world that she has created by God's hand and has graciously allowed us to be a part of.

We should welcome change and allow nature to control our destiny. Change is uncontrollable,

Change is inevitable,

Change is the unknown.

Nature takes pride in being one of life's illusive wonders, the unknown.

Slide 11: Week 5: who I was, who I am?

- Checking in
- Re-cap of week 4, exploring change
- Beginning to think how motherhood has changed us
- Volunteer to read ‘Defining me’ from Purple leaves, Red Cherries (see following slide)
- All, to write for five minutes from the prompts:
  - Who I was…
  - Who I am…
  - What I hope for….
- Discussion in pairs
- All to pick one of each for sharing
- To read around the group in a web of words
- Reflections and check-out

Slide 12: Defining me, Sarah mother of 2

I was pushing my newborn in her pram, noticing the gazes of people walking past us in the street. How irritating, I thought, that they assumed I was “just a mother”.

I said to myself (and secretly to them), “In fact I am so much more than that. I shouldn’t be defined by this tiny child.”

Then I went out myself pram-less for the first time. No one glanced at me and I felt irrationally upset, I thought, “I’ve got a baby. I’m not just a person in the street. I’m a mother too!

And I realized [sic] this was it. I was forever both. I would forever feel that pull, the tension between the woman I am and the mother I had become.

Slide 13: Week 6: learning through mothering

- Reflecting on previous week’s work
  - Shared experiences
  - Differences
  - What has been our experience of this series of workshops?
  - What does society expect of us as mothers?
  - How does this compare to reality?
  - How has mothering changed us?
  - Has the writing workshop changed us?
- Rosanna Barg, Motherwork Learning
- Summary of her work, she believes that mothering teaches us about ourselves, we learn from our children
- Examples of what other mothers learned

Slide 14: Prompts for writing

Untitled 03, Friedrich Schiller

Thee would I choose as my teacher and friend. Thy living example Teaches me,--thy teaching word wakens my heart unto life.

The Swing, Robert Louis Stevenson How do you like to go up in a swing, Up in the air so blue?

Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing Ever a child can do!

Up in the air and over the wall, Till I can see so wide,

River and trees and cattle and all Over the countryside--

Till I look down on the garden green, Down on the roof so brown--

Up in the air I go flying again, Up in the air and down!

Slide 15: A sample workshop

Week three: Manual Labour

Slide 16: Agenda/summary

- Checking in
- What are archetypes (Sarah)
- Group discussion
- How do these reflect societies' attitudes to mothering?
- What are our conceptions of 'good' and 'bad' mothering
- What do parenting manuals tell us?
- Creating found poetry
- Reflecting on found poems

Slide 17: Archetypes explained

- Concept of archetypes proposed by Carl Jung (psyc
- He claimed that they were highly developed elements of the collective unconscious.
- As they come from our unconscious we can only derive them by examining behaviour, images, art, myths, religions, or dreams.
- Jungian archetypes refer to unclear underlying forms or the archetypes-as-such from which emerge images and motifs such as **the mother**, the child and the trickster
- Archetypes are perceived as all good, or all bad

Slide 18: Archetypes identified by Carl Jung

1. The Innocent
2. The Orphan
3. The Hero
4. The Caregiver
5. The Explorer
6. The Rebel
7. The Lover
8. The Creator
9. The Jester
10. The Sage
11. The Magician
12. The Ruler

Slide 19: The Mother archetype

- Like all archetypes she has a bipolar, conflicted character, which encompasses the positive, and the cruel, wicked mother (Brun, 1993) reinforcing the idea that the 'good' and 'bad' mother are the only options (Barg, 2001).
- In literature, the mother character's main function is to provide comfort, guidance, advice, and direction to the protagonist or hero of the story. The mother is female, of a matronly appearance, and does not often have a developed backstory of her own; she acts as a source of comfort and help for the hero, but not as much else.
-

-

Slide 20: Mother archetypes from culture

The Good Mother	The Bad Mother
Glinda: The Wizard of Oz	Wicked Stepmother (Snow White)
Fairy Godmother (Cinderella)	Wicked stepmother (Cinderella)

Slide 21: Discussion (in pairs)

- Do you recognise these archetypes?
- What other examples can you think of?
- What makes a 'good mother'?
- What makes a 'bad mother'?

Slide 22: Larger group discussion

- Sharing perceptions of good and bad mother
- Was it easier to talk about one than the other?
- Could you think of other examples from literature?
- How much of your answers were based on personal opinions, and how much came from society?
- Can you separate one from the other?

Slide 23: Parenting manuals

- Tell us what our experience of mothering 'should be'
- Reinforce ideas about 'good' and 'bad' approaches to mothering; over 75-pages listed on www.amazon.co.uk, for example:
  - Contented Baby (Gina Ford)
  - New Toddler Taming: A parent's guide to the first four years (Dr Christopher Green)
  - Secrets Of The Baby Whisperer: How to Calm, Connect and Communicate with your Baby (Melinda Blau)
  - The Parenting Book (Nicky Lee and Sila Lee)

Slide 24: Creating found poetry from manuals

- We will create ‘found poems’ using excerpts from parenting/baby manuals
- A found poem aims to take some of the words, using them in the order they appear, to create a new ‘poem’
- An example follows

Slide 25: The Parenting Book, Nick and Sila Lee

Talking in their hearing

Speaking about our children in front of them will affect how they think about themselves.

‘She’s a complete nightmare.’ ‘I am finding it so tedious being at home with him.’ ‘She’s so naughty!’ ‘He drives me up the wall! I’ll tell you what he did the other day…’

We have all heard parents talking disparagingly in their children’s hearing.

They forget that their children are absorbing every word.

A child may not react outwardly, especially when very young, but will take on board all that is said.

Conversely, when a parent tells a grandparent or a godparent in the child’s hearing a story about their child’s kindness or thought-fulness (avoid telling friends, as parents who show off are tiresome), it makes her feel valued.

We may hold back from praising our children for fear of spoiling them. But children are not spoilt through praise, but through a lack of discipline and through being allowed to do whatever they like.

Slide 26: Example found poem

In their hearing

‘She’s a complete nightmare.’

Absorbing every word.

A child’s kindness, valued.

Children are not spoilt through praise.

Slide 27: Excerpt 1 (Baby whisperer)

Caring for newborn, many of whom I brought into the world, I came to realize that I could comprehend their nonverbal language, too. So when I went to America from England, I specialized in infant care, being a newborn and postpartum caregiver, which Americans refer to as a baby nurse. I worked for couples in New York and Los Angeles, most of whom described me as a cross between Mary Poppins and the Daphne character on *Frasier* – apparently her accent, at least to American ears, sounds just like my Yorkshire burr. I showed these new mums and dads that they, too, could whisper to their babies: learn to hold back a bit and read their little ones and, once they knew what the problem was, calm them.

I shared with these mums and dads what I believe all parents should do for their babies: give them a sense of structure and help them become independent little beings. I also began to promote what I’ve come to call a whole-family approach – little ones need to become part of the family rather than the other way round. If the rest of the family – parents, siblings, even pets – is happy, then the baby will be content, too.

I feel very privileged when I’m invited into someone’s home, because I know this is the most treasured time in parent’s lives. It’s a time when, along with the inevitable insecurities and the sleepless nights, mothers and fathers experience the greatest joy of their lives. As I watch their drama unfold and am called upon for help, I feel that I add to that joy because I help them step out of the chaos and relish the experience.

Nowadays, I sometimes live in with families, but more often I work as a consultant, dropping by for an hour or two over the first few days or weeks after the baby arrives. I meet lots of mothers and fathers in their thirties and forties, who are used to being in control of their lives. When they become parents and are put in the uncomfortable position of being beginners they sometimes wonder “What have we done?” You see

whether a parent has a million pounds in the bank or two shillings in her purse, a newborn, especially a first baby is a great equalizer. I've been with mums and dads from all walks of life, from people who are household names to people whose names are only known in their own neighbourhood. And let me assure you, having a baby brings out the fear in the best of them.

Most times, in fact, my beeper goes off all day long) and sometimes in the middle of the night) with desperate calls such as these:

Slide 28: Excerpt 2 (Gina Ford)

…anxiety could have been avoided if the mother had got the baby used to his own room from day one. Instead, for the first few weeks, the baby dozes off and on during the early part of the evening in a car seat, then is taken to the parents' room for the last feed and the night. It is not surprising that these babies feel very abandoned when they are eventually put to sleep by themselves in an unfamiliar, dark room.

From the very beginning, you should use the nursery for nappy changing and naps. In the evening after the bath, feed and settle the baby there from 7pm to 10pm. The baby can still be transferred to your room after the last feed, to make middle-of-the-night feeding easier. But by getting your baby used to his room from the beginning, he will very quickly enjoy being there and see it as a peaceful haven, not a prison.

When my babies are very small, if they have become overtired or overstimulated, I find that they will calm down immediately when taken to their room. And by six weeks they are positively beaming when taken to their nursery for the bath and bedtime routine.

Decoration

It is not essential to spend a fortune on decorating and furnishing the baby's room. A room with walls, windows and bed linen covered in teddy bears soon becomes very boring. Plain walls can easily be brightened up with a colourful frieze, and perhaps a matching pelmet and tie-backs; this makes it easy to adapt the room as the baby grows, but avoids the need to redecorate totally.

- **See Appendix, 4 for a found poem I have created based on the above**

Slide 29: Group discussion

- Reflection on found poems (in pairs)
- Poetry sharing (optional)
- Group reflections
  - Does this resonate with earlier discussions around 'good' and 'bad' mother?
- Check-out and close

Slide appendices

Appendix 1: acrostic

- **B**eginnings, not as planned
- **I**n the SCBU, a long way from home
- **R**emembering insecurities, the threat of eviction
- **T**hen together at last,
- **H**omecoming, we three reunited; a family

Appendix 2: Rules for sharing

Give as much information as you feel comfortable sharing but

Observe others, and your own right to retreat, and

Offer space to those who do want to share

Don't judge; everyone's mothering experience is different

Make sure what is said among us remains among us

Own feedback saying what others' work touches in you, and

Take care when commenting on others' work, being sensitive

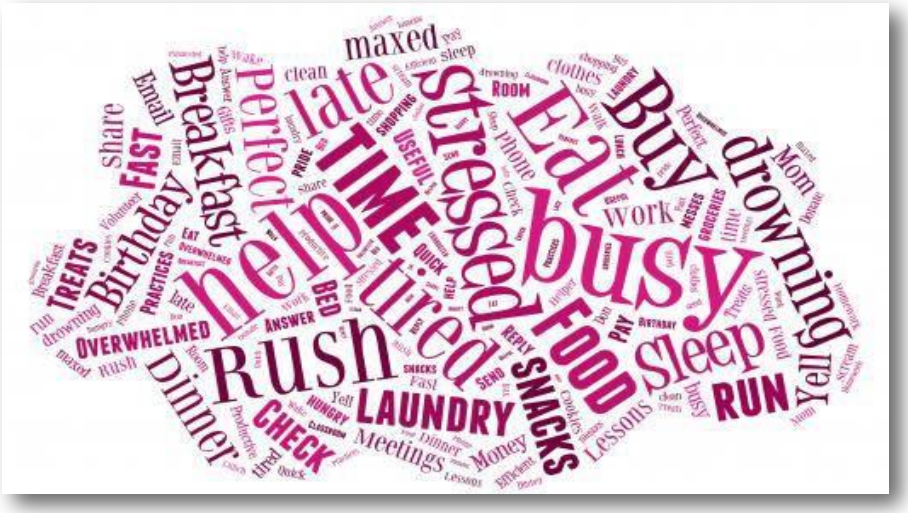
when giving feedback

Hear the feelings in other's poetry by listening deeply **E**veryone's voice has a right to be heard in whatever form **R**emember most of us are new to therapeutic poetry

Everyone's voice has a right to be heard in whatever form

Remember most of us are new to therapeutic poetry

Appendix 3: word cloud



Appendix 4: Found poem

Redecorating

…anxiety,

from day one.

The first few weeks

feel abandoned,

an unfamiliar, dark room.

Decoration

…not essential

the need to redecorate totally.

Appendix, 5: Growing Up

Growing up, a poem inspired by AA Milne

I'm not at the bottom, I'm not at the top;

It's no longer a beginning,

No longer an end;

It's a growing together, My daughter, my friend; Teaching each other,

Lessons old, and some new

But we'll have fun as we learn them;

Growing-up isn't easy but we'll

have fun as you do.

We'll make some mistakes,

Of that I am sure

But I promise I'll love you,

Now and ever more.