Wallflowers have eyes too - A critical engagement with women writing in prison and their narratives of lived experience

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April 2021
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Submitted to the University of Sussex for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Criminology)

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

Summary

The steep rise in the female prison population over the last three decades worldwide, as well as in the UK, has increased the urgency for a critical concern with the experiences of women in prison, and their representations thereof in life writing and prison narratives. These particular narratives of lived experience written by women in prison are underrepresented in the cultural, academic and social spheres in the UK.

From a participatory arts-based perspective, using narrative inquiry, the research aims to understand the lived experiences of incarcerated women in writing their own stories - what it means for them on a personal level, but also in the wider social context, how these stories can provide a counter-narrative to the master narratives and cultural constructions of punishment.

Creative writing workshops were used as research method to realise this contribution to knowledge in practice. The women's writing, produced in the 10-week period of workshops in two UK women's prisons, formed the research material for the critical engagement in the thesis and the creative compilation of *How Bleak is the Crow's Nest – An Anthology of Women's Prison Writing*. The interdisciplinary nature of the study is reflected in the analysis process, which expanded beyond the criminological boundary point into the spheres of literature and literary theory to engage in reflections and conversations with and about the women's writing.

The research found that a sustained writing practice developed into a transformative learning experience for the writers in prison to engage with the self as a process. Creative writing as research method also widened the parameters of knowledge contributed as it opened up possibilities for the writers in prison to explore and share unanticipated aspects of the self in the development of their life journey narratives. The publication of the anthology of creative writing by women in prison, comprising a composite narrative journey of individual lived experiences, creates the further possibility of wider public engagement in the social and cultural spheres with the hidden aspects of women's imprisonment.

Acknowledgements

I somehow never thought that this moment would arrive, the completion of my research thesis. As I look back now over the course of my doctoral studies, my sense of gratitude is immense and I thank:

~ my supervisors Dr Lizzie Seal and Dr Bethan Stevens – for taking on my PhD research project; for their thoughtful discipline-specific feedback expanding the inter-disciplinary boundary lines during the research journey; Dr Seal at the end of my research for her support, understanding and assistance; and also Dr James Hardie-Bick;

~ the research participants – the 18 writers in prison, for their generosity and courage in the face of writing the difficult things I had asked of them; who had come together, and grown into a community of writers in kindness and support of one another;

~ Professor John Pryor who impressed on me the urgency of gaining access to prison for my fieldwork early on in my research journey; Dr Liz McDonnell for pointing me in the right direction with the ethical approval process;

~ Mr Robin Eldridge, the Governor of HMP Downview and HMP East Sutton Park at the time, who granted access to both prisons for the creative writing workshops;

~ once there, Kathryn Walter, Anne Simmons, Victoria Barnett, for displaying the workshop posters and postcards for me in the prison libraries to publicise it initially, and thereafter for welcoming me into their libraries and showing me their workplace; also Steve Harris and Adrian Northeast;

~ the Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts South-East England (CHASE) for funding my research, training, fieldwork, including the materials used for the workshops, and the placement at Muscaliet Press in order to publish and print the anthology; and Dr Steven Colburn, Amanda Britt and Shelley Jenkins;

~ Dr Simon Everett and Dr Moyra Tourlamain of Muscaliet Press for producing the anthology and many thoughtful conversations;

~ Marguerite Moon, my sister, for painting the illustrations of the writers as their pseudonyms for the anthology;

~ Sort of Books for donating copies of *The Summer Book* by Tove Jansson and Headline Review for donating a copy of *The Snow Child* by Eowyn Ivey for each research participant;

~ Claire Durrant, my fellow traveller on the research road; Nicole Hartley for Wednesday mornings after fieldwork Tuesdays; Mum, OJ, Judith Amanthis and Nicky Cooper for their support, kindness and friendship;

~ my three roots, David who knows, and has been there since the start, all those many years ago in Cape Town – thank you more than you will ever know, it is done;

Josephine and Bede for your love, curiosity, understanding, conversations and imaginations, and all our walks, the long ones and the short ones.

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> [...] in my cowardice I became at once a man and did what all we grown men do when face to face with suffering and injustice: I preferred not to see them; (Proust, 2002 (revised translation Volume 1 of *In Search of Lost Time)*, p. 12)

At intervals through the day, the crunch of the key turning in the lock, followed by the heavy metallic thud of the entrance gate opening and closing, would pierce through the exterior layer of silence enveloping the closed category prison for women hidden away in a rural location on the outskirts of London in South East England. It is early June 2018. I have checked in and am waiting for the prison's librarian to escort me to the education wing of HMP Downview where I am facilitating creative writing workshops with incarcerated women. From where I sit, on one of the two couches in the small waiting room, I can see the whiteboard in the office behind the glass partition of the reception desk. It shows the prison roll for the day, handwritten in black ink - *329 with 326 out, 1 in bed and 2 POTC*. Next to the glass partition, a purple poster of a kitten adorns the back of a white door, painted shut, and above my head, the television is on. Sky News is reporting about American immigration policies and the separation of families. Children's cries fill the room. A woman sits on the couch to my left. She holds on to a crocheted cushion, her fingers tracing the stitches in pastel shades of purple and yellow.

- It's inhumane, she repeats over and over again, holding my gaze, shaking her head.

Outside, summer clouds drift across the barbed wire fence lining the high brick walls. Inside, a queue is forming at the check-in desk and voices are rising. With my eyes now fixed on the blue carpet, I try not to stare, but cannot help overhearing. Three women are denied access to their appointment with an incarcerated woman. The documentation they have presented is missing a crucial letter. This official letter is of such importance that without it they cannot have access to their client. They make their case with increased urgency - there was no mention of this letter in the stipulated requirements. They repeatedly voice their concern over their client's mental health,

– She is expecting us. She is not well.

With great patience and determination, their request is refused. The women are advised where to find the nearest printing and faxing facilities in the town close by. Since they have travelled by public transport, by train and by bus, they deliberate whether the journey into the town and back would allow sufficient time for them to return and see their client later that same day. In the end, their worry for their client drives their final decision and they confirm an appointment for the afternoon. The

queue moves along and two members of the Brighton Table Tennis Club[1] sign in for their morning session with the women in prison. They are given visitor's badges and of the two, the young girl says,

- We've never had to wear these before. Why today?

Her voice, loud and defiant, fills the small waiting room and makes me look up. Behind the glass partition, another warden approaches. He swoops in and hovers, like a bird of prey. I do not hear his answer to the question, for the librarian arrives and we leave the waiting room together, stepping through another metal heavy door, as if into a safe, a heavily guarded vault. For a moment, I experience a strange sensation, a physical shift of energy, as I step over the threshold, leaving behind the world I know, into the unknown. We walk down a short white painted corridor, where I am asked to wait outside the entrance to the key room. Voices, greeting one another at the start of another workday, float amongst the rows and rows of black boxes, a mortuary of keys marked with rows of dotted lights flashing on and off as if at the edge of a runway at night. In the days following this 10-minute wait in the border post, between the unknown and the known, before stepping across the boundary line into the hidden world of a women's prison, it is the sound of the keys crunching and clinking together as they dangle from the chains attached to the black belts worn by the prison personnel that becomes the soundtrack to my reflections.

1.1 Introduction

> *Keys, those bloody keys, jangling. I'm sure they do it on purpose. Still, I lay asleep, earplugs in so that I can't hear them so much.*
>
> (Raven Hawthorn, 2018)

In this world, not even the wardens are free - lock, unlock, lock, unlock, lock, I write down in my fieldwork notebook at the end of my first day of teaching creative writing workshops in two women's prisons in the UK, contemplating the constraints of movement in the prison space. Almost a year later, in April 2019, reading *The Society of Captives* written by Sykes in 1958, I am struck by the dedication (unnumbered page) in his work:

> This book is dedicated to the man in prison –
> Both the prisoner and his guard.

[1] The *Brighton Table Tennis Club*, a registered charity, operates from the "belief that table tennis can be used as a powerful tool in engaging people of all ages and transforming lives". This includes people with learning disabilities, prisoners, young people from the Brighton Travellers site, Looked After Children, people with physical disabilities, people from the LGBT community and young asylum seekers - http://brightontabletennisclub.co.uk/about.

This reflective moment of coincidence holds the beginning of the writing of my thesis. It is of significance, because contemplating Sykes's dedication alongside my fieldwork observation, I realise that when engaging with the tradition of prison life studies and prison writing as a researcher, where the narrative gaze is trained from the outside in, no thought or observation is ever new. The external gaze affords us but a momentary glimpse of the day-to-day, whilst the timelines marking space and time in invisible layers of experience, the lifelines of existence spreading in concentric circles remain hidden within the trunk of the women's prison. The external gaze does not contain the personal experience of living the inside story. My response to this realisation is explored in writing this thesis as a narrative inquiry and the journey to tell the story of its process, the creative and critical engagement with women writing in prison. And as such, it aims to incorporate and embrace the duality expressed within Pinkola Estés's (2008, p. 13) conceptual vision of art, or in this instance writing, when she argues that:

> Art is not just for oneself, not just a marker of one's own understanding.
> It is also a map for those who follow after us.

In essence, this doctoral thesis is a study of stories, writing and experience. Of missing stories, those of lived experience written by women in prison, underrepresented in the canon of prison writing in the UK. Of writing together in prison, and making meaning of experience, of lives hidden within the criminal justice system. The title of my thesis - *Wallflowers have eyes too - A critical engagement with women writing in prison and their narratives of lived experience* – reflects this duality in the synthesis of the creative and the critical, in the voices of the women writing in prison combined with that of the researcher. *Wallflowers have eyes too*, as featured in the title, is a line from a poem by The White Cow (pseudonym), a research participant in the creative workshops in prison. This evocative metaphor encapsulates the critical engagement with the aesthetic expression of the internal gaze by women in prison through their writing. Incorporating it into the title is also an acknowledgement of this research as a collaborative project, as I will discuss later in detail.

With her wordplay on *Wallflowers have eyes too*, The White Cow captures the essence of the contribution to knowledge flowing from this study, where the narratives of lived experience, as written by women in prison, missing from the accepted narratives of prison and punishment in the social and culture spheres in the UK, are incorporated into the thesis and published in the accompanying anthology, *How Bleak is the Crow's Nest*. A companion metaphor featured from the writing and reflections of Raven Hawthorn (pseudonym), also. In *The Poetics of Space,* Bachelard (1958, p. 118)

writes that an image of a nest, just as any other image of rest and quiet, can immediately be associated then with the "image of a simple house". He continues that the simplest image is also one that is doubled – "it is itself and something else than itself" (Bachelard, 1958, p. 118). This something else, as opposed to a space of quiet and rest, is found in Raven Hawthorn's daily lived experience in prison, of the keys and how she interprets their noise. Through the image of the key situated within the metaphor of the nest, we gain a sensory perspective of the key as a symbol of power, *Keys, those bloody keys, jangling. I'm sure they do it on purpose,* and how Raven Hawthorn responds to this sound, *Still, I lay asleep, earplugs in so that I can't hear them so much,* within her living space in prison.

This focus on the choice of title for the thesis and the anthology, shows how in practice, approaching my thesis as a journey of narrative inquiry, I sought a writing style that included the multiple voices involved at different stages in the research process - the voices of the women in prison as research participants writing alongside the researcher writing during the fieldwork process, and later in the solitary reflection of writing the critical thesis. As I contemplated this process, I remembered that the artist Boetti (Watson, 2009, p. 297) whose work straddled the worlds of art and cartography, renowned for his series of world maps embroidered by craftswomen known as *Mappa* or *Mappa del Mondo* each framed by a border of text, argued that there is more than one way to read a map. Weaving through the stitches of the border of text, stepping across the boundary line of prison, the writing of this thesis then implies travelling through and in narratives that move and weave between abstract concepts and concrete voices, commencing from a bird's eye view with the first step into the mortuary of keys to communicate the hidden world of women's imprisonment.

To facilitate this process of writing as weaving, I draw on Ricoeur's three-stage process of mimesis, which views narrative as the basic structure of experience and time, from which creativity and narrative identity then springs (Rankin, 2002, p. 2). In this three-stage process, Mimesis 1 refers to the understanding, the perception of the world and of human action in a pre-narrative form; Mimesis 2 encapsulates the point where the pre-narrative form is configured into a narrative form through emplotment, i.e. the transformation of action into text such as the women in prison writing their own lived experiences; and in Mimesis 3 the narrative transfigures ideas to the world, i.e. the interpretation, analysis or transformation of the data|creative writing research material as text into the thesis and anthology for an audience (Rankin, 2002, p. 4). Following from this framework, the key to my thesis, as a multi-layered writing structure, is divided into three mimetic parts, namely:

i. locating the missing stories within the field of women's prison and punishment in Chapters 1 and 2 with a focus on the research rationale and review of literature,
ii. moving towards writing and reading together with women in prison in Chapters 3 and 4 with the focus on the theoretical framework, methodology and method, and
iii. critically engaging with the women's writing in the analysis Chapters 5, 6 and 7, crossing disciplinary boundaries, moving between criminology, narrative theory, literature and literary theory.

Chapters 1 to 4 start with an introductory section of my fieldwork notes and reflections written as creative non-fiction. Chapters 5 to 7 start with an extract of the women's writing serving as an introductory foundation to the creative work discussed in the analysis. Throughout the thesis, the words of the women's prison writing are italicised to afford them their own stylistic space within the thesis.

In this chapter I will now proceed with an overview of the landscape of women's imprisonment in the UK, considering how the hiddenness of the prison estate becomes a blank canvas for the implementation of punishment and the narratives thereof. This contextual introduction paves the way for the research aim, questions and thesis structure as a response.

1.2 Confined in the shadows of history repeating itself

The words - keys, guard, safe and vault - conjure the concept of safekeeping, guarding that which is of significance or valuable to a particular society. In stepping over the threshold into the hidden world of imprisonment, of punishment and its execution, my observations of waiting in the liminal holding space of Downview Prison's reception area gives a brief insight into the application of policy in practice and the resulting implications of its delay in the day-to-day operation of a women's prison. Paradoxically, what we find in the context of this heavily guarded, contained space of prison, is the association with that which is considered of significance or valuable to society does not apply. Instead we find the sentenced, the women in prison - a richly textured microcosm comprised of distinct individuals - hidden from view, forgotten and unwanted. Wyner (2004, pp. 21 - 22) articulates this phenomenon when she writes of her imprisonment in Holloway prison:

> It was as if you ceased to be a person when you got to prison, were not of any import at all. We were just part of the institution's bureaucracy, which in itself was utterly confusing.

Of significance in this extract from Wyner's experience is the link drawn between the personal situated within the institutional context, where personhood disappears, so to speak, within bureaucratic confusion. McLeod (2015, p. 1211) writes that, "when we are forced to confront what prisons do, we are compelled to consider the ideological work prison performs". To understand the ideological work prison performs, Western (2007, p. xxiii) writes of the *Society of Captives* and its significance today as a study of life in prison, that it is "also an account of society in which repression is the official strategy for maintaining social order". The terms ideology, repression and the use of prison as a strategy to maintain social order assert a particular view, the master narrative of the exercise of power in society to maintain the status quo.

Worldwide this strategy of maintaining social order through imprisonment now features women as the fastest growing segment of the prison population (Pate, 2013, p. 197; Jacobsen, Heard and Fair, 2017, p. 30). The women, the citizens of this increasing prison population, are particularly vulnerable because many of them find themselves at the nexus, the focal point of multiple intersections of discrimination, where marginalisation and gender converge and overlap in poverty, economic hardship and poor health, escapes from violence in their home countries and/or domestic, emotional and physical abuse, sexual orientation, race, religion, inadequate education and disabling mental health (Pate, 2013, p. 198; Carlen, 2010, p. 5; Player, 2014, p. 287). It is argued that women are increasingly being criminalised for policies being put in place where prison becomes the "default option" for those most impacted on by the razing of social safety nets in our societies, be it healthcare, social and economic welfare, education and immigration (Pate, 2013, p. 198). In England, this is reflected in current statistics:

- 60% of female offenders have suffered domestic abuse (Ministry of Justice, 2018, p. 3)
- 77% of women sentenced to custody in 2017 were given sentences of under 12 months (Ministry of Justice, 2018, p. 17)
- In 2017, almost half (47%) of women sentenced to a short custodial sentence had committed shop theft (Ministry of Justice, 2018, p. 17)
- The majority (94%) of women in custody serving a short sentence of under 12 months are a low or medium public protection risk (Ministry of Justice, 2018, p. 17)
- Homelessness is a significant problem for the female prisoner population: from April to December 2017, 39% of women allocated to Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the National Probation Service were released into unsettled accommodation, with 18% released homeless (Ministry of Justice, 2018, p. 19)

- 22% of women supervised under a court order have a mental health issue, 29% an alcohol misuse issue and 32% a substance misuse issue (Ministry of Justice, 2018, p. 22)
- In 2019, 74% of those convicted for TV licence evasion were female. This offence accounted for 30% of all female convictions, compared to 4% of male convictions. (Ministry of Justice, 2020, p. 6)

Yet, despite these statistics reflecting non-violent, low-level risk offences, the social is not confronted with the ideological work prison performs in punishing women, particularly the very vulnerable. Which leads to the question, what makes it possible for this ideology, the story of women's repression through imprisonment in response to poverty, domestic abuse, homelessness, addiction and mental health pressures, to maintain its continued existence?

Historically, women's imprisonment has been hidden in the shadows of the much larger male penal estate, which as a consequence has rendered the analysis of issues specific to the punishment of women more difficult because female offending has always been viewed "through the distorting mirror of male criminality" (Carlen, 2010, p. 4). Coupled with the rigidity of official stances and the susceptibility of popular concern, conceptions of women's crime and punishment have led to contradictory assessments and critiques of the treatment of women in penal system (Carlen, 2010, p. 4). Thus, prison reform scholars and practitioners internationally labour under an acknowledged collective weariness – a weariness born out of repetition, where many have seen their current calls for gender-responsive prison reforms repeat and feature in similar calls spanning a period of 30 years with little lasting effect (Malloch and McIvor, 2013, p. 208; Corston, 2007, p. 79).

Morris (1987, pp. 104 - 105) in charting the development of women's prisons in England, points out that the policy towards both male and female offenders was one of uniformity under the rubric that a "prisoner was a prisoner and nothing else" and as such that "until the nineteenth century women were imprisoned in the same institutions as men". She notes with specific reference to prison conditions, that John Howard argued in 1780, as part of his overall proposals for prison reform, for separate facilities for women and that Elizabeth Fry advanced the idea that "the needs of female prisoners were different from those of male prisoners", suggesting amongst others "separate buildings and female officers for female prisoners" (Morris, 1987, p. 105). However, despite giving evidence to a variety of investigative committees, scant attention was paid to her suggestions and Morris wryly, perhaps even wearily, refers to Fox (1952, p. 29 quoted in 1987, p. 105) who sums up the advancement of Fry's reforms as follows:

> everything she asked of Parliament for her women in 1818 was granted by Parliament – in 1948.

This historical context is important because the trajectory of procrastination repeats itself. The most recent example in this cycle of delay in the UK refers to the long-awaited Female Offender Strategy which was finally published in 2018 stating the strategic aims of reducing the number of women in the criminal justice system and the improvement of prison conditions (Ministry of Justice, 2018). This strategy comes 11 years after the Corston Report, published in 2007, which called for a radical approach to female incarceration, "to address issues connected with women's offending before imprisonment becomes a serious option" (Corston, 2007, p. i). The Corston Report emphasised the "need for a distinct, radically different, visibly-led, strategic, proportionate, holistic, woman-centred integrated approach" (Corston, 2007, p. 79) and pointed out that it based the recommendations on academic research conducted over the past thirty years. In other words, Corston confirmed that many of the recommendations made in her report were not new at the time of writing 14 years ago.

Following on from the Corston Report, a proliferation of policy documents and research was published in the UK and in December 2010 the country signed up to the Bangkok Rules, i.e. the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders, hailed for its recognition of the gender-specific needs of incarcerated women and the promotion of standards to be applied in their treatment. The UK then has a wealth of policy to inform its future strategies for the treatment of women in prison, yet commenting on the 2018 Female Offender Strategy, Booth, et al (2018, pp. 433 - 434) highlight the vagueness of the proposals to implement change and in May 2018 plans set out in the 2018 Strategy to set up five community prisons for women were shelved due to budget cuts (Syal, 2018). In January 2021, the Ministry of Justice (Press Release, 2021) announced 500 new prison places for women, despite expressing a commitment to divert more women from custody. This announcement reinforces Hine's (2019, p. 11) observation that whilst the Strategy is ambitious in its aims there is a distinct dissonance between the reality and the implementation of its rhetoric in practice. The 500 new places, we are informed, come in response to the 20,000 new police officers to be employed and will allow for children to spend time overnight with their mothers in prison (Ministry of Justice, 2021).

What makes the introduction of children to the prison environment a further worrying development, is that following the deaths of 109 women in prison since 2007, Coles (2018, p. 4) writes in 2018 that "the situation has never felt so desperate".

INQUEST - the charity that works alongside bereaved families with the focus on investigating deaths in women's prisons – informs us that there has been "almost no progress on the necessary systemic and structural change needed" (Coles, 2018, p. 4). *Still Dying on the Inside – Examining deaths in women's prisons,* the charity's latest report published in 2018, lays bare the enduring harms inflicted on women in the prison system (Coles, Roberts and Cavcav, 2018). Harms that have grown into a body of evidence "revealed at inquests exposing the lived experiences of imprisonment for women, the regimes and conditions operating and the systemic and practice problems contributing to deaths" (Coles, 2013, p. 37). Yet, as Coles (2013, pp. 37 – 39) points out, what emerges from the inquests as "the harrowing picture of distress, vulnerability and damage done to women in prison" is not revealed in statistics barely scratching the surface of "how the criminal justice system treats some of the most vulnerable citizens in society" in institutions ill-resourced and ill-equipped to work with women's complex needs.

> Oh, and these women are quite unknown – nobody knows or cares about them except their own friends. They go to prison again and again to be treated like this, until it kills them! (Lytton, 1914, p. 235)

What is striking here in this quote, linked to the observations from *Still Dying Inside,* is that Lytton's lament written in 1914 is still a fitting description of the state of women's imprisonment today. Player (2014, pp. 276 - 277) argues that this paralysis, "the triumph of inertia", stems from the fact that operationally, the routine functioning of the criminal justice system is focused on "the management of risk" and "the distribution of just deserts". An agenda that opposes the implementation of reforms and policies based on the principles of social justice and social equality - principles that take into account the gender-specific needs and disadvantages of incarcerated women from a rehabilitative perspective utilising a reparative approach to address social harm (Player, 2014, pp. 276 - 277). Thus the resilience in resisting change points to a political process where, in the competition to implement different policies, "the outcome of the contest is already weighted in favour of certain ideas, values and beliefs rather than others" (Player, 2014, p. 281). Bearing this resistance to change in mind, Pate (2013, p. 200) urges:

> that we need to examine our fundamental beliefs and notions of whose interests and biases are privileged and at whose expense?

1.3 Where prison as the power to punish becomes a blank canvas

Proust's observation, quoted at the start of this chapter, about the preference, or rather, the decision not to see when confronted with suffering and injustice, together with the

title of his seven-volume novel, *In Search of Lost Time,* resonates in the study of state punishment. It encapsulates the nature of state punishment and the trajectory of its reform in the context of women's imprisonment. Of lost time diverges into multiple tributaries of loss, the loss of time for women in the personal sphere and the loss of time over time to address the plight of the women imprisoned, hidden from sight within a criminal justice system – an area of the social sphere, as Player (2014, p. 276) points out, "so exhaustively researched to such little practical effect".

Foucault (1977, p. 130), in *Discipline and Punish,* observes that:

> The emergence of the prison marks the institutionalization of the power to punish [...] investing itself in a coercive institution, in the enclosed space of the reformatory.

Here, the emergence of the enclosed space of prison marks the reform of punishment - the gradual transformation of the "gloomy festival" of the public spectacle of execution into one of institutional punishment where it survived as an administrative or legal practice, becoming in the process "the most hidden part of the penal process" (Foucault, 1977, pp. 8 - 9). As a consequence, it fades from the everyday world of perception into the domain of abstract concepts where the actual becomes mythical, a narrative constructed from and on the outside where "justice no longer takes public responsibility for the violence that is bound up with its practice" (Foucault (1977, p. 9).

Jewkes, Slee and Moran's (2017, p. 293; p. 303) comments are apposite in this regard when they point out that the impassive prison walls, the outer border on the perimeter of the prison estate, is often described as a blank canvas onto which those on the outside project their fascinations and fears, apathy or ignorance. They argue, that although the building itself mediates the relationship between those confined within it and the public, "sanitizing the pains of imprisonment", it is the state that defines the meanings ascribed to prison and its architecture, and as such legitimises its own authority and functions, which also shapes society's attitudes and responses to the incarcerated (Jewkes, Slee and Moran, 2017, p. 293; p. 303).

Explaining the meanings ascribed to prison, Foucault (1977, p. 101) argues that within this shift from public spectacle to the visual retreat of prison, "one finds all the rules that authorize... a calculated economy of the power to punish". This economy of power binds legislative enactment in the criminal justice process in sentencing (McLeod, 2015, p. 1211). McLeod (2015, pp. 1211 – 1212) explains that if we come to interpret law "as part of the normative universe", we come to realise that the "law and narrative are inseparably related". Elliott (2005, p. 15) points to the ubiquity of narratives within society as a popular form of communication, and how particular narratives are "usually told in a specific social context for a particular purpose".

Therefore, the normative stances of those interpreting the law "determine what law means and what law shall be" (McLeod, 2015, p. 1212). It moves beyond "a system of rules to be observed", to the "world in which we live" (McLeod, 2015, p. 1212). A world in which the interpretive and normative adherence of officials, informed by competing normative claims, narratives and values, determines what the law shall be and what it means (McLeod, 2015, p. 1212). However, for the person convicted of a crime, the moment of "sentencing and the enforcement of the imposed punishment" is in reality one and the same, because without enforcement/punishment, the judgement would become unimportant (Greve and Snare, 2009, p. 308).

To illustrate these points of the entwinement of law and normative narratives, I include a piece of writing by Andromeda Marsh (pseudonym), a research participant in the creative writing workshops. It responds to the narrative of sentencing in the context of judgement being passed in court from the perspective of lived experience:

Sophisticated, cunning and devious…

The three words the Judge had used when handing down my sentence of five years. Save for those three hurtful words, I was somewhat strangely relieved to finally receive the sentence, which could have been longer. The Judge had, in fact, been incredibly fair when passing sentence. I had pleaded guilty, so could not really fault him. Except for those three words, which continued to nag at the back of my mind. So was I really a woman who was sophisticated, cunning and devious or was I the daughter, wife, mother who was so desperate to look after her family that she committed the ultimate act of theft/fraud for which she was now serving the sentence?!

How had it come to this? What would now become of the lovely family that I had long continued to shield and care for? Seven years of struggling, seven years, seven years of anti-depressants.

To the outside world a successful, professional businesswoman. Inside the home a miserable, depressed creature, sick with worry and constantly juggling things. Looking after my husband who had heart disease, caring for my children who were still at school, caring for my father who was bedridden and in a home – yet another expense.

For each day of my sentence that passes is one day nearer me going home. I have missed an awful lot of family events. The birth of a precious granddaughter (my first grandchild) and my youngest daughter going through a major operation. I have not been able to be there for her. It hits hard! The photos arrive which are lovely but painful – a daughter's 21st birthday, a son's 18th birthday, my daughter's graduation,

my son's A Level results and seeing him awarded the prize on leaving school before starting university.

My granddaughter is three today. I love the very bones of her and am missing her grow up. However, I am lucky in that I have been re-categorised and moved to an open prison, which is nearer to my home and family. But to go back to the beginning, am I really sophisticated, cunning and devious? NO, I think just plain stupid. Therefore until you walk in the shoes of another, it is best not to judge, even if you are The Judge!

I have long wanted to write about the three words used to describe me in court.

(Andromeda Marsh, 2018)

In this retelling of her final day in court, Andromeda Marsh reflects on the language of the law, because she cannot find herself and her experiences in the judge's sentencing narrative. She expresses the need to engage with this portrayal and description of her in court, to write down the words - *I have long wanted to write about the three words used to describe me in court - sophisticated, cunning and devious*. She wrestles with the story they tell which she does not recognise as hers.

In stark contrast, she writes of herself as *just plain stupid - a miserable, depressed creature sick with worry,* emphasizing the time period of how long this state persisted for, *Seven years of struggling, seven years, seven years of anti-depressants*. In writing to determine her own story, her own identity, in her introduction she accepts her sentence as fair because she had pleaded guilty, however in the conclusion, she responds to the *three hurtful words* that did not reflect or respond to her lived experience. Andromeda Marsh illustrates how within these constructed narratives of the law in sentencing, the value of the individual's experience, the woman in prison, grows dimmer, because:

> the Enlightenment has always sympathized with the social impulse. The unity of the manipulated collective consists in the negation of each individual: for individuality makes a mockery of the kind of society which would turn individuals to the one collectivity (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944 (2016), p. 13).

Shaped within the composition of this narrative landscape, the collective social impulse would more likely unite to condone the sentencing of a cunning sophisticated deviant rather than sympathise with, relate to or question the sentencing of an individual woman, "a depressed miserable creature" in her own words – the mother, wife, daughter struggling to meet the caring needs of the different generations within her family.

Foucault (1977, p. 101) argued that the shift to the hiddenness of prison and punishment produced "a shift in the application of this power" as it moved to "a play of representations and signs circulating discreetly but necessarily and evidently in the minds of all" in the depiction of the criminal and crime, for instance as *sophisticated, cunning and devious*. Flowing from this interpretive stance, crime and the criminal become constructed and contested concepts. These concepts are root-bound within the narratives of law and punishment, which in turn morphs into the story of ideology and how it maintains the status quo of repression through punishment.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1944 (2016), p. 22) argued in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* - their critique on the Enlightenment and how it mutated into an "affirmation of the status quo and its dominant positivist and pragmatist philosophies" – that the conditions for domination were to be found in language and the universality of its assertions as the means for discourse in a bourgeois society. Therefore, if we turn to the current time period and apply this concept to the question of what makes it possible for the ideology, the story of women's repression through imprisonment to maintain its continued existence? We find, cast against the blank canvas of the distant prison wall, "in the impartiality of scientific language" normatively interpreted in the language of the law; the language of the state and its prison speak; and the language of quantitative research with its focus on numbers and statistics that:

> that which is powerless has wholly lost any means of expression, and only the given finds it neutral sign (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944 (2016), p23).

Therefore, lost within this linguistic void of appropriated impartiality languish the voices and stories of women in prison, buried in time beneath the multi-layered and politicised narratives of crime and justice, the criminal and prison as punishment, and the portrayal of these narratives in the media and popular culture. Narratives that divert attention from criticisms about the state's "abject failure" (Coles, 2013, p. 43) in how it responds to women in conflict with the law and their lived experiences often marked by inequality and injustice. Carlen and Tchaikovsky (1996, p. 211) argued that in order to keep the "endemic secrecy" of the carceral machine in check, its inner workings should be opened up to the public gaze, in particular to monitor its tendencies to revert from progressive to regressive practices. Consequentially, because of this hiddenness of the execution of punishment, justice, the state and society are absolved from confronting the preference not to see when face to face with the suffering produced by imprisonment.

Carlen addressed this hiddenness of the lived experiences of imprisoned prison in her work *Criminal Women – Autobiographical Accounts*. Published in 1985, it is a

seminal text of early narrative criminology inviting four women to tell their stories in their own words. Highlighting the absence of women's voices in detailing their own experiences, Carlen (1985, p. 1) in the introduction to the publication cited under the heading of – *Criminal Women: Myths, Metaphors and Misogyny* – sets out her critique of mainstream criminological theory of female criminality and punishment as contextual background. Interspersed within each story and autobiographical descriptions of the women's lived experiences, including their crimes and punishment, the reader further encounters Carlen's analysis and observations of the multiple forms of marginalisation and oppression the women experienced. At the same time she also situates and foregrounds their resistances to the structural, systemic and societal status quo. It is a harrowing read and speaks to Henry's (1952, p. 17) earlier commentary about women's imprisonment when she noted:

> It was dark, and we did not speak as we drove through the gloom. Now and then, as we drew up at the lights, occupants of other cars looked at us curiously. They were free. To them we were like animals in the zoo. To be pitied, perhaps, but as remote from the everyday world as life is from death.

Henry's observation that the life of a woman in prison is as remote from the everyday world as life is from death, encapsulates the story of the lived experience of each woman in prison as she disappears into the mortuary of keys. Dominance grows in the distance between power and that which it dominates, and increases through the further "alienation" from those over which power is exercised (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944 (2016), p. 9; p. 22). Thus it becomes a lopsided story, firmly embedded in the cultural and social psyche, disproportionate in the exposure afforded to the dominant voices in the media and public sphere. Juxtaposed, on the other hand, it is in the voices of the dead, their stories finally heard at inquests, that the lived experiences of women in prison expose the "institutional failure of the prison system to exercise its own duty of care" (Coles, 2013, p. 43). When a fellow inmate burned to death in her cell, Chris Tchaikovsky, one of the four contributors to Carlen's *Criminal Women*, decided on the necessity to publicise the conditions in women's prisons and formed the campaigning group, Women in Prison (Carlen, Hicks, O'Dwyer, Christina, Tchaikovsky, 1985, p. 185). It was her hope to work with other ex-prisoners and Carlen to stimulate debate and highlight "the brutalizing and/or debilitating effects that can result from imprisonment" (Carlen, Hicks, O'Dwyer, Christina, Tchaikovsky, 1985, p. 186). Writing about their campaign manifesto in 1985, the campaign aim for *Criminal Women: Autobiographical Accounts* contain the refrain of lost time linked to women's imprisonment when they observe that:

> [...] after years of being ignored by penal reformers, after years of being invisible to the general public, the state of the women's prisons is now, at last, being forced into the arena of penal politics and public debate. (Carlen, Hicks, O'Dwyer, Christina, Tchaikovsky, 1985, p. 186)

It is against this background that the continued delay to the reform of women's imprisonment becomes a reflection of the state's failure of vision about the kind of society it wants to, and does develop, and how it governs every member/citizen living within it.

> There is an ancient saying in the village that my mother used to tell me. They say it is not who you are that makes the world respect you, but what power it is that stands behind you. It is not you that the world sees, but that power. (Okri, 2007, p. 3)

With this description of power in relation to punishment, it is worth consulting history briefly. In the Netherlands between 1947 and 1974, a strategy of humane conditions and decarceration led to the consistent decrease in the use of imprisonment as punishment (Jacobsen, Heard and Fair, 2017, p. 21). The dominant, master narrative of this time period was described as the combination of maximum investment in rehabilitation and welfare; minimal recourse to punishment and coercion; and the absence of the emergent politics of "law and order" found in the USA and elsewhere, "aided by socio-political factors such as the media deferring to expert opinion on criminal and penal policy" (Jacobsen, Heard and Fair, 2017, p. 21). Nationally, this approach led to scepticism about the efficacy of repressive measures (Jacobsen, Heard and Fair, 2017, p. 21). In the second instance, we focus on Denmark, where during the same time period, 1946, the enforcement of prison sentences was founded on the basis that "punishment solely consists in the deprivation of liberty" and that prisoners therefore kept the same duties and rights as citizens living within the society (Greve and Snare, 2009, p. 311). The significance of these two comparative examples from history is apparent in that they illustrate that alternative narratives of prison and punishment can exist from those currently dominant in England.

1.4 A shift in gaze - writing imprisonment as counter-narrative

In the foreword to her book, *Women in Prison,* written in 1952 following her lived experience of serving a prison sentence, first in Holloway and later Askham Grange prisons, Henry dedicates her writing to any person who has ever sat in a court of law and heard a friend or dear one sentenced to imprisonment, who had wanted to go with them "into that strange, sad world which is a prison for women" (Henry, 1952). With this dedication, she makes it explicit that she is writing for those readers "who are

interested in human beings" (Henry, 1952). It is a subtle, nuanced intention that steers clear of the entrenched binary narratives of criminal/wrongdoer and law-abiding citizen with the aim to penetrate the remoteness of life in prison, to "tell the story of any woman, innocent or guilty, who has the misfortune to go to prison" (Henry, 1952) - an intention that I, as researcher, align to and seek to extend through my research, particularly in the writing of the thesis.

With my research - a participatory arts-based[2] narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of women in prison, written in their own words – the aim is to shift the external gaze and move beyond the boundary lines of a prison's visual retreat, ring-fenced by the normative language of statistics and strategies, to encounter "what they actually represent" (Jewkes, Slee, Moran, 2017, p. 293). It is a journey into and through the multiple narratives that entwine the lives of women in prison. Proust influenced my thinking on how to approach the textual expression of this aim with his sentences meandering through the time-loops of a life, as he weaves the "arabesques" of lived experience (Matz, 2008, p. 360), using the themes of memory, time, love, loss and art to tell the story of the search for lost time. His narrator recounts a life-journey, moving from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, folding into this monologue is a portrait of French society at the time, using linguistic experiments to travel in time (Bowie, 2002). It is this weaving as writing or writing as weaving lived experience that

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[2] Participatory Action Research (PAR) denotes the "umbrella term" used to cover the "variety of participatory approaches to action-oriented research" where advocates have sought to move away from, and challenge, the more traditional "hierarchical relationships between research and action, between researchers and 'researched'", with the aim to transform academic knowledge production into a "more flexible and socially owned process" (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007, p. 1). As such PAR constitutes "a counterhegemonic approach to knowledge production" (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007, p. 9).

With the origins to the varied strands of participatory and action research approaches traced back to the mid-1940s, worldwide there now exists networks of individuals, and organisations, engaged in "the theoretical and methodological subtleties of affecting constructive change through research, learning and action" (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007, p. 9). Within these various strands, the most notable influence on my research approach has been the work of Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) where he charts the development of "community-based research processes to support people's participation in knowledge production and social transformation" (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007, p. 10).

Developments in the field of participatory and action research point to scholars who distinguish participatory research from action research by arguing that participatory research "is more focused on learning as a vehicle for increasing citizen voice and power in a wide range of contexts, while action research is more focused on social action, policy reform or other types of social or systemic change" (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007, p. 11). However, this has led to the situation where many advocates, such as McTaggart (1997), deemed it "less necessary to add the word action to participatory research because emancipation and transformation have always been at its heart", and as such Fals-Borda (2006), for instance, refers to the acronym as P(A)R (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007, p. 11). Hence, the reference to my research as the participatory arts-based narrative inquiry which signifies the collaborative and reflective approach where action is denoted in the arts-based writing and creative writing workshops as the participatory strand of the research methodology based on the cyclical principles of action research as discussed in Chapter 4.

resonates in the context of women in prison presenting a physical sensation of the search for lost time, both for the women in their personal capacities, but also extending to the social.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. xxiii) establish the "study of experience" as the starting point in the plotline of social science research due to its occupation with "humans and their relations with themselves and their environment". The stories, the narratives of lived experience by women in prison, "carry personal and cultural meaning" whilst "their telling has social consequences" (Narayan, 2012, p. 8) within the folds of the wider social context. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 2) argue that although people need to be understood as individuals, they cannot only be understood as individuals, because they "are always in relation, always in a social context". Thus, time made concrete within prison tells a story, many stories – the story of prison and the lives lived within it. This multiplicity leads to the narrative inquiry becoming a multi-dimensional and rhizomatic journey, traversing the story landscapes of time, place and the personal within the social, of the women living in prison and the researcher as reflective writer and recorder of the process. Therefore, whereas Proust's story was written as a monologue, this thesis recognises that to move beyond the silence of the external gaze, the observation of prison from the outside, requires writing and the telling of women's stories to be a collaborative project between the voices of the women in prison as the research participants and the researcher as writer of the thesis. Together, these words, braided and blended, combine to give a sensory experience of the carceral world, moving from the outside in towards the inside out.

From this follows the questions influencing the research focus, namely:

* How might creative writing workshops, with the theme of reconceptualising the self as a process, contribute to the self-affirmation of female prisoners in re-establishing their own identities, confidence and therewith agency for life post-incarceration?
* How can the narrative inquiry into women's prison writing contribute to a re-imagining of the narratives of justice and its outcomes for social transformation, by contributing a counter-narrative to the master narratives about prison, punishment and life in prison?
* How might the publication of this prison writing in an anthology demonstrate the value of the creative process and output by providing encounters for understanding the lived experiences of female incarceration, thereby informing cultural perceptions of the wider community, to recognise human dignity across the lines that divide and differentiate socially?

Through the research questions, this thesis becomes a conversation with the master narratives of prison and punishment to confront suffering and not to turn away from it. Instead it seeks to diverge from the master narrative with a new tributary in the contribution to knowledge through encounters with the lived experiences of women in prison as written in their own words. This counter-narrative does not constitute a redemption narrative as found in the focus of narrative identity theory where stories, or narratives, about crime chart the offender's transformation from deviance to desistance (Stone, 2016, pp. 956 - 957). Furthermore, it also departs from the discipline of criminology's focus on crime or deviance as the first point of departure, by not seeking out or examining the offences of the research participants but rather concentrating on their lived experiences and the process of writing together in prison. It is also to note that the distinction between this study and those that fall within the remit of narrative criminology lies in narrative criminology's focus on offending through the "complex narrative work undertaken by offenders" (Fleetwood, 2016, p. 174). Narrative criminology is therefore defined as the examination of how narratives sustain and motivate offending (Fleetwood, 2016, p. 173). This study does not fall within the remit of this definition.

Rather, the act of deviance is thus found in the academic thesis written as a critical reflection and counter-narrative to wider criminological approaches to make meaning of the experiences of women living in prisons and for them to write into the silence enforced by the dominant power narrative as co-producers of knowledge.

With the focus on lived experience in the production of the counter-narrative, thinking back to the observations of the *Still Dying Inside* Report by INQUEST, I am drawn to Narayan's (2012, p. x1) reflections on the necessity of writing, when she points out that the process of writing "offers the chance to cultivate an attentiveness to life itself" in that it provides dual ways for people to "remain alive through their writings" from the perspective of the internal experience, and "alive too in the closely observed writings about them" from the perspective of external understanding through the communication of insights and images to circles of unseen readers. The compilation of the anthology of writing produced by the women as research participants both as individuals and as a group with a shared experience of a particular space and time in this project, then further aims to extend this exploration of lived experience back into the social. This ties in with Bamberg's (2004, p. 361) argument that once the master narratives have been identified, the counter-narrative takes form and grows when "we build '*doing* being critical', countering and even being subversive more directly into the fabric of our daily interactions", not through conflict, but instead through exploring different possibilities.

In conclusion, I concur and have adopted this exhortation as intellectual lodestar, to build doing being critical and countering into the fabric of writing my thesis as a reflexive narrative text. Because, as a researcher weaving back to Proust's quote at the beginning of this chapter of not turning away from suffering, I found that once you step over the boundary line behind the blank wall into a prison for women:

> It is impossible to walk along the landings and endless passages to work, to exercise, to go to church without being aware of the misery, the tears, the despair which those drab stone walls have witnessed. This atmosphere of suffering was to me almost like a living thing [...]. (Henry, 1952, p. 43)

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Chapter 2 The empty shelves of time

> And of course there is nothing I can do, except pass on my thoughts and experiences in the hope that they may be of some help to somebody. (Henry, 1952, p. 91)

One Tuesday morning at Downview, after the writing workshop had finished I found myself on my own, locked in the prison library waiting for the librarian to finish a phone meeting. From where I was sitting in the middle of a row of chairs, I could see her speaking on the phone, standing behind her desk, a tiny figure framed by the glass-panelled office walls, managing both libraries for Downview and Highdown prisons. She waved and then started pacing up and down, her back turned to me. On the chair next to me, she had left out a small pile of prison writing anthologies compiled by various church and charitable organisations in the UK through the years. I paged through the uniform anthologies, filled with poems mainly of remorse and regret, written by a combination of mostly male and some female prisoners. Afterwards, I remembered being struck by the forewords written by Ministers and how the anthologies themselves seemed institutionalised, visually and textually. Pale and thin, is how I tried to describe it. After that, an image, the representation of prison writing as state-approved art, took hold in my mind and I somehow could not recall the actual words written within the anthologies. What stayed with me instead, whilst waiting in the dusky light of the quiet, well-kept library, was the lingering presence of the women who had visited it earlier that morning – sitting at the tables, paging through magazines, returning books, talking to the librarian and borrowing popular American crime TV series DVDs. After a while, the librarian finished her call and tidied the anthologies away on a separate shelf near the checkout desk.

It was on leaving the library, my eyes roaming over the rows of book titles in different genres, that a conceptual moment from my research proposal became concrete, in that the words, the stories of the lived experience of women in prison were nowhere to be found amongst the other books on the shelves, as if their punishment reached further than the physical social exclusion of imprisonment, extending into the cultural, everyday sphere of stories and reading. They were still separated and somehow, in that moment, it seemed as if they did not exist at all, except for in the cultural reference point of the popular American crime TV series DVDs to which they were drawn. I wondered about the women in the research writing group and how they were doing, now subsumed within their cells, concealed within a deeper layer of their prison existence. Even though I found myself on the same premises of the prison estate in the Education wing, their lives in prison remained a space barely glimpsed in its entirety, spread beyond the warren of fences, gates and different cell blocks - the extent

of which still only revealed through their writing as a lens, an aperture letting in light into this world hidden in the shadows. Before the end of the workshop session on this day, the peaceful mood of writing together had suddenly changed abruptly. The women became agitated and hurriedly started packing up to be on time for change over. In the last remaining minutes of the session, waiting for their writing to be photocopied, Raven Hawthorn (pseudonym) turned to me and said:

> *RH: I'm surprised they've allowed you in here to do this.*
> RW: Do what?
> *RH: Let us write and talk about our feelings. In here no one ever talks about feelings.*
>
> (Raven Hawthorn, July 2018)

2.1 Introduction

> Stories often grow in groves, with some stunted by the shadows of others. (Narayan, 2012, p. 14)

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p. 35) write that "human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk", because talking about these lived stories, "are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities". As a narrative researcher in the field of criminology, I am struck by this focus on the extension of stories into meaning-making of experience, which flows and feeds into the building of communities and lives as processes that entail the collaborative growth and development of the social sphere. Revealed in stark contrast to this notion of building lives and communities mediated through stories, is the focus of this literature review chapter on women's prison writing and women writing in prison, which finds expression in the vivid metaphor contained in the quote above, of stories growing in groves with the growth of some stunted by the long shadows cast by other stories in the narrative of women's imprisonment.

This reference to the stunted growth of some stories encapsulates the study of the entwinement of voice, representation and power in this narrative inquiry. This entwinement is mirrored in my field notes, observing the empty library shelves as a reflection of the narrative neglect of women's prison writing, further augmented by Raven Hawthorn's comment voicing her surprise about being allowed to write and talk about her feelings in the creative writing workshops. Baker (1999, p. 365) writes that voice, representation and identity are considered cognate and related terms bearing a "relationship to the construction of knowledge and the circulation of power".

Thus, this chapter on the review of literature pertaining to women's prison writing and women writing in prison as the study of experience understood narratively (Clandinin and Huber, 2010, p. 436), necessitates a brief introduction to why I employ narrative as lens for the exploration of the ways in which stories are constructed, their production, the means thereof and by whom, and how they work, how they are later consumed, accepted, contested or silenced, and what effects, "if any" this may have (Andrews, Squire, Tamboukou, 2013, p. 2). And again I am drawn to Ricoeur for whom, through his three levels of mimesis as outlined in Chapter 1, there is a relation between life and art, because of the "dynamic circularity" between narrative and life. Art/*poiesis,* then holds the dual possibility of revealing, as well as transforming life (Wood, 1991, p. 17).

Of the historical trajectory of narrative, Rankin (2001, p. 1) writes that after years of philosophical denigration, "dismissed as realm of mere fiction or entertainment", the re-emergence of narrative "as a process primordial to human affairs", is due to the struggle for recognition in cultural and personal narratives, which led to the understanding and conception of actions, agency, intentionality and perceptions. As such, narrative inquiry as sociological methodology, which as an old practice may at times also seem new, is distinctive in that it "embraces narrative as both the study and phenomena of study" (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007, p. 5). This in turn captures the interconnected and rhyzomatic nature of narrative inquiry where Pinnegar and Daynes (2007, p. 9) explain that the reflexive journey of the narrative inquirer moves along the following four narrative channels with the acknowledgement that:

* the researcher and research participants "are in relationship with each other and that both parties will learn and change in the encounter";
* there is a move away from using numbers as data towards using words as research material;
* the focus shifts from the universal and the general towards the particular and local; and
* the "acceptance of a wider range of ways of knowing and the blurring of epistemologies in research" as will be discussed and explored in detail in the chapters pertaining to the methodology, methods and analysis.

These four channels then absorb the literature review and dictates the exploration of power and representation in the neglect of narrative inquiry into women's prison writing as object of study, but also looks at how the process of writing can be exclusionary and dismissive of women in prison based on socio-economic disadvantage and literacy levels. Reflecting on the metaphor of trees as life stories,

growing in groves alongside, and in the shadows of one another, as the poetic frame of the literature review, it seems as if, in an unanticipated foreshadowing, the tree of life or river of life writing exercise in week one of the creative writing workshops had spread its roots into the writing of the thesis and the literature review. Therefore, as we enter into the grove of women's prison writing and women writing in prison, Raven Hawthorn writes of her particular tree:

> *I can see the core of the tree – the trunk – as sad and very dark. My daughter has been a shining light. I chose a tree, because I feel more rooted in the earth, as river I would be dry and not know where to go. Felt like I had to climb the tree to where I am today.*
>
> (Raven Hawthorn, 2018)

This descriptive narrative of Raven Hawthorn's tree is of significance, precisely because as Rankin (2002, p. 2) explains the ultimate purpose of narrative and language is to communicate. To illustrate this purpose, Rankin (2002, p. 2) breaks narrative down into three approaches:

> * the first of which considers narrative as a cultural artefact, "a work or text or product" with the purpose of telling or unfolding a story (Rankin, 2002, p. 2) - women's prison writing for the purposes of my study in this literature review;
> * the second approach sees narrative as fundamental to the "mode of human consciousness and self-consciousness" (Rankin, 2002, p. 2) – women writing in prison for the purposes of my study;
> * this culminates in the third approach, which considers both in relation to one another between the approaches of narrative as product and narrative as mode of consciousness.

Within this characterisation, each approach – women writing in prison as expression and women's prison writing as text thereof – is dependent on the other and without each other they cannot exist. This illustrates the cyclical temporal nature of narrative as an ongoing process paving the way for other processes such as dialogue and "consciousness of the world" stretching existence further in time into conceptions of lived experience and personal identity (Rankin, 2002, p. 2) which becomes important as we move into the critical engagement with the text and the process of writing in the analysis chapters.

2.2 Of representation and women's prison writing as cultural artefact – narratives of neglect

> Narratives carry the traces of human lives that we want to understand. (Andrews et al, 2013, pp. 2 - 3)

Casting a wider net, moving beyond the academy and women's words from research interviews represented in journal articles, I set out to find women's prison writing and their narratives of lived experience from other sources. In search of these narratives, I found that in the UK, in addition to the institutional silence, there is also a cultural gap in terms of writing produced by women in prison. Mullen (1999, p. 144) points to the need for research on the female incarcerated population and their prison writing, in that these works are also generally not well represented in the educational literature of art and criminology. In the UK, Deary et al's (2011, p. 94) survey of "published prisoner life writings" found the majority of authors of these works to be middle-class white men. Whilst women in prison benefit from arts initiatives, such as music, drama and visual arts, platforms and avenues for the publication of women's prison writing exist primarily in submitting their words and stories to writing competitions and charity magazines. *Ready Steady Go!,* the magazine for women in prison produced by the charity, Women in Prison, features amongst others general interest articles, stories, poetry and artwork.

Therefore, when situating stories and the telling of lives within the context of prison writing, Scheffler in 1984 (p. 57) points out that:

> The tradition of men's prison writing is rich and established, while works by women prisoners remain scattered and largely unidentified as a body of literature with a tradition of its own.

Scheffler's work (1984, p. 58) aims to identify the characteristics of writing by women in prison to contribute to the understanding "of the unique genre that they compromise". She notes specifically the texture of the women's writing, how it differs from male prison writing in its concreteness with the aim to communicate as opposed to the stoic or romantic works of heroism and transcendence (Scheffler, 1984, p. 58). These works "are grounded in the reality of the prison environment and dull routine" where language provides an escape, a route away from prison's imposed isolation "to communicate some point about the unrelenting reality of her experience" (Scheffler, 1984, p. 58). Henry's writing (1952, p. 91), quoted at the start of this chapter, is of significance here, because it encapsulates Scheffler's observation when she acknowledges that there is nothing else she can do but "pass on my thoughts and experiences in the hope that they might be of help to somebody".

For Scheffler (1984, p. 65), through her research, it became clear that women's prison writing and narratives constitute a "rich storehouse of unexplored primary source material for researchers [...] engaged in the study of women and society" precisely because they are the empirical and practical records of attitudes, events, physical surroundings and persons which make an impression upon the writer – a "realistic rendering" of their prison experiences through various times and places. Yet, she laments the negligible attention paid to women's prison literature as a literary tradition because it almost always plays "a relatively minor role" within the general context of prison writing – marginal texts further lost within the "marginal literature of the prison" depicting facets of women's experience deemed too unpleasant warrant attention (Scheffler, 1984, p. 65; 2002, p. xv). This struck a chord with Waliaula (2014, pp. 71 - 72) who argues for the search of what is "*sui generis*", in other words unique about women's prison writing, particularly in terms of narrating their literal imprisonment alongside the virtual imprisonment of their marginalisation in society. To do this, Gelfand (1983, p. 23), following her study of women's writing in French prisons ranging from the 18th century to the 20th century, argues that in order to make visible a tradition of writing, "of motivation and realization, strong and identifiable in its own right" it becomes necessary to establish "the threads that connects women's writing through time".

Threads that for instance, through this narrative inquiry and women's prison writing, begin to connect Raven Hawthorn's observation about feelings, *In here no one ever talks about feelings,* with Ruth Wyner's (2004, p. 126) prison writing when she describes:

> Feelings seem to come up from nowhere in prison. One afternoon I am working away, weeding another bed on my own and quite enjoying the activity. Then, unexpectedly, I am flooded with emotion and an urge to weep. It is as if my body is dissolving, the deep sadness forcing its way up my throat. I am besieged with images of being at Wintercomfort; the bustle and chatter on the Bus; people working hard and getting things done; the commitment of the job and to our homeless clientele. I chip away at the earth with my hoe, chipping away at the pictures I am getting, trying to cut them out of my head.

Raven Hawthorn's observation is apposite in its grasp and reflection of the status quo in terms of incarcerated women and the neglect of narrative inquiry into their lived experiences. Her words resonate with Lorde's (1984, p. 39) observation that:

> For living within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive.

Crewe et al (2017, p. 1364), in their comparative study of the gendered pains of life imprisonment, which includes interviews with women in prison, echo Lorde's observation about dehumanization and death of feelings within institutional structures when they remark on the "extraordinary emotional burdens" that their research participants were carrying, and the "limited opportunities to process their feelings about their lives prior to imprisonment, their offences and the extremely long sentences that they were serving". These observations begin to reveal the enforced silencing of the women's lifeworld in prison, the repression of their feelings as an unexpressed and unprocessed perceptive aspect of imprisonment and their lived experience.

Therefore, in her book, *Wall Tappings – An International Anthology of Women's Prison Writings*, examining prison narratives by writers from Argentina, Chile, Egypt, England, France, Germany, Iran Malaysia, Malta, the Philippines, South Africa and the United States, Scheffler (2002, p. xvi) argues that to publish women's prison writing and literature is to remind society of the existence of women incarcerated and to raise awareness around women's imprisonment (Schwan, 2014, p. 198). And as such, all women's prison texts become political in speaking for women in prison, silenced and hidden away (Scheffler, 2002, p. xxii), because as Melossi (2001, p. 407) points out, "punishment is deeply embedded in the national/cultural specificity of the environment that produces it".

From this perspective, Schwan (2014, p. 6) in her historical examination of women's prison voices in the 19th century England, argues that culture in this context becomes a "contested space" due to the duality at play where texts relating to convict voices often constrained and celebrated these voices simultaneously, depending on the generic and social conventions. If publishing women's prison literature is political, then it is necessary to consider that on the one hand the relative scarcity of prison narrative texts written by women can be explained by taking into account that women prisoners have historically constituted a smaller tranche of the prison population internationally and in the UK (Scheffler, 2002, p. xxv). On the other hand, Schwan (2014, p. 4) points out that the number of factors impeding the recording of women's prison experiences and knowledge in 19th century England generally sprang from their low cultural capital owing to their socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and the "cultural sanctioning of certain forms of knowledge over others". Women's limited literacy as a consequence of their socioeconomic disadvantage and poverty in most cases prevented written records left for posterity (Schwan, 2014, p. 5). In my research study, I contest the use of low literacy as an exclusionary denominator when working with women in prison to write their own stories of lived experience. I discuss my approach in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

For McAdams (2001, p. 114) "stories live in culture" and they therefore become the mirror of the culture within which they are forged. "Stories exist to be told in a social context", writes McAdams (2001, p. 114) precisely because in concept they are inherently social and in "all human cultures, people tell stories to other people". Thus, stories are therefore born, they multiply and grow (in groves), and in due course, completing their lifecycles, they die according to the prevailing traditions, existing norms and rules of a particular society, and its "implicit understandings of what counts as a tellable story, a tellable life" (McAdams, 2001, p. 114).

But what if stories emerge, are born and die prematurely before they can multiply? What does this reveal about the implicit epistemological understanding of what constitutes a tellable life with a tellable story, and who can write and tell it? McAdams (2001, p. 114) observes that in any given society stories compete for acceptance on the one hand and dominance on the other, because "life stories echo gender and class constructions in society", reflecting the prevailing hegemonic patterns in cultural, economic and political contexts. Different societies will approach the telling of lives in different ways and will hold different views on what represents the good story to tell (McAdams, 2001, p. 114). For Sprague (2016, p. 5) these questions focusing on the particular circumstances under which knowledge can be produced and "about who can know what" then situates epistemology as a theory about knowledge.

In the context of women's imprisonment, what constitutes a tellable life with a tellable story when the layers of submergence stretch so far and deep? In terms of progress since the 19th century, all of these factors mentioned – particularly the low cultural capital because of socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and the "cultural sanctioning of certain forms of knowledge over others" (Schwan, 2014, p. 4) - are still at play in the UK in the 21st century. They are encapsulated and reflected in the small, limited number of published works written by women who have spent time in prison. *Wall Tappings*, Scheffler's (2002) international anthology of women's prison writings from 200 – 2002 features two entries from the UK, the writing of Lady Constance Lytton (1869 – 1923) and that of Joan Henry (1914 - 2000).

2.2.1 Lytton 1914 – Prisons and Prisoners

In *Prisons and Prisoners*, her account of her time spent in prison, Lady Constance Lytton disguised as Jane Warton exposed the class injustices of imprisonment in the unequal treatment of poor women in prison (Scheffler, 2002, p. 228; 1984, p. 60). Because of her interest and work in prisons, Lytton/Warton came into contact with the suffragettes in 1908 and she began to draw on their work, gradually adopting their militant approach (Scheffler, 2002, p. 228).

In total, she was imprisoned four times. As Lady Lytton, she was not forcibly fed when a test of her heart revealed physical weakness - this preferential treatment stood in stark contrast to that of the other suffragette prisoners (Scheffler, 2002, p. 228). Rejecting her own privilege, disguised as the spinster Jane Warton upon her arrest in 1910 in Liverpool, imprisoned in Walton Jail, she was fed forcibly without an examination of her heart (Scheffler, 2002, p. 228). Lytton suffered a paralysing stroke in 1912 and in the two years that followed she documented her prison experiences and wrote *Prisons and Prisoners* (1914) with her left hand.

The following excerpt of her experience in prison gives a moving insight into why she chose the name Jane Warton to highlight the inequality of the prison system – a name that would bring comfort from distress:

> I determined that if it were necessary to go to prison under another name, I should take the name of Warburton. [...] Now nobody was to know of my disguise, but Warburton was too distinguished a name; that would at once attract attention. I must leave out the "bur" and make it "Warton". "Jane" was the name of Joan of Arc (for Jeanne is more often translated into "Jane" than "Joan") and would bring me comfort in distress. [...]
>
> Presently an officer came and led me out. The manner of nearly all the officers was severe; one or two were friends but most of them treated me like dirt. (Lytton, 1914, pp. 237- 238)

In addition to coming to understand how and why Lytton chose the name Jane Warton, this excerpt also alerts the reader to the treatment of prisoners by prison officers. Whilst Lytton/Warton points out how officials speak to prisoners mechanistically rather than humanely and in an individualised manner, hers is also a commentary on the prison system as a whole in noticing how the system "takes its toll on prisoners and staff alike" where the chaplain seems unwell and wondering whether the matron, who seemed fatigued, found any fulfilment in her work (Schwan, 2014, p. 168).

2.2.2 Henry 1952 – Women in Prison

Following in Jane Warton's footsteps and sharing a version of her first name, is the other Joan referenced in Scheffler's *Wall Tappings* (2002) – Joan Henry the author of *Women in Prison* (1952). Based on her experiences in prison, the first edition of her book was published in Britain with the title, *Who Lie in Gaol,* referencing a line from Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol,* and it "exposed the brutal treatment women received in English prison" (Scheffler, 2002, p. 92). A bestseller at the time, it was criticised by the prison services who called it sensationalist (Scheffler, 2002, p. 92). Schwan (2014, p. 2) points out that a discussion of Henry's book fell outside of the

remit of her work uncovering the voices of women within the 19th century penal sphere and she urges for further work on Henry's books, including *Yield to the Night* (1954), the fictionalised first-person account of a woman awaiting execution.

Who Lie in Gaol/Women in Prison charts Henry's imprisonment in Holloway (a closed prison) and Askham Grange (open prison) serving eight months of her 12-month sentence. In brief, the work is a portrayal of her adjustment to the world of prison - its jargon, inflexible routine, and learning to live with its other inhabitants (Scheffler, 2002, p. 92).

Searches on discussions of Henry's work yielded a dearth of results, except for Tilley's (1952) scathing rebuttal in defence of the criminal justice system and the regime in Holloway prison published in the *British Journal of Psychiatric Social Work*. In the 1950s version of 'prison speak' (Carlen, 2002, p. 224), Tilley (1952, p. 31; p. 33) casts aspersions on Henry's character, calling hers a confused mind in relation to her descriptions of the medical and disciplinary actions observed in Holloway, most possibly due to the fact that Henry is "both sensitive and educated" and as such "her distress is likely to be proportionally greater". Because of her differing circumstances – Henry was born into a "rather illustrious, but not wealthy family" (Scheffler, 2002, p. 92) – her temperament was thought to differ from the other first time offenders in Holloway, who "adapted themselves to the routine with a sense of relief, quite often expressed, that things are not worse" (Tilley, 1952, p. 32). This echoes the inequality of treatment and perceptions experienced and documented by Lytton/Warton in 1914.

Tilley (1952, p. 30) remarks that the book is "vivid and readable", but at the same time objects to this readability and perceived authenticity based on the fact that the public at large "who otherwise know little of life behind prison walls, are likely to gain an impression that will remain with them". The fear of this impression that will remain of the criminal justice system focuses on Holloway prison's inhumane and inefficient regime, leaving the reader with, in Tilley's (1952, p. 30) own words:

> a haunting picture of human misery and official indifference, of fear and loneliness, and of the monotony relieved only by corruption and emotional outbursts.

Tilley's (1952, p. 30) argument proves a convoluted one, veering on the one hand towards questioning the accuracy of Henry's descriptions and why her words have "generally been accepted as authentic", whilst on the other hand backtracking in trying to establish whether accuracy or inaccuracy matters in the end when public concern about prisons have been stimulated. Whilst admitting that Holloway prison as a "building [...] is functionally and aesthetically deplorable" (Tilley, 1952, p. 30) and acknowledging that "policy favours smaller units in more civilized surroundings", Tilley

asserts the "national need for economy" as justification for the continued use of Holloway as a prison for women. In the context of Tilley's response to the public reception of Henry's lived experiences in prison, King's (2003, pp. 9 - 10) observations resonate when he points out that although "stories are wondrous things", they are also dangerous because once told they cannot be recalled:

> But what you said just now – it isn't so funny. It doesn't sound so good. We are doing okay without it. We can get along without that kind of thing. Take it back. Call that story back.

Yet, in the face of this call to cultural sanctioning to maintain the status quo, it becomes imperative not to call Henry's story back because in order to engage with women's prison writing their stories need to be written and published for wider social and critical engagement to start conversations and with it the possibility for new ways of thinking about punishment and crime. Contrary to Tilley's critique and the protests proclaiming sensationalism, reading Henry's *Who Lie in Gaol/Women in Prison* is to be struck by its measured tone and humanity stretching across time to link words with and affirm the experiences of the research participants as writers at Downview and East Sutton Park prisons.

This instance of the timelessness of stories of and written by women in prison, showing their lives, is highlighted in the foreword to Watterson's revised edition of *Women in Prison* published in 1996 where Chesney-Lind (1996, p. xxvi) writes that "the lessons they teach us are timeless" and that in the silence surrounding the stories of women's punishment "we begin to deny our own humanity as well as the humanity of those we punish".

2.2.3 Wyner 2004 – From the Inside - Dispatches from a Women's Prison

In the US, a body of published critical, creative and autobiographical women's prison writing has steadily been growing (Davis, 2004, p. 262). However, the UK suffers on both accounts, with limited critical engagement and analyses of women's prison writing because a tradition of publishing did not grow or flourish after the publications of Lytton/Warton and Henry's books detailing their lived experiences in prison. Their books were published respectively in 1914 and 1952, 38 years apart.

Following the trajectory of this timeline, in a similar repeating pattern, Ruth Wyner's book, *From the Inside – Dispatches from a Women's Prison* was published in 2004. Whereas Henry's book did not discuss her conviction, Wyner's work is a tale of two stories - on the hand, it details her arrest and sentence together with her colleague and fellow charity worker, John Brock, under section 8 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

for making "insufficient attempts to prevent drug dealing on the premises of the hostel" according to the police – they "knowingly allowing heroin to be sold" at the charity they ran for the homeless population of Cambridge (Carlen, 2004, p. 289). A closer read reveals that they were punished, in effect, for their refusals "to violate their professional code of confidentiality" in naming the people whom they had banned from their project because of dealing or drug use (Carlen, 2004, p. 289).

Wyner's writing is also a visceral narrative account of the seven months she spent in prison following her conviction. In tone, it is less measured than Henry's work, written with an immediacy that Carlen (2004, p. 290) describes as a harrowing, deeply disturbing and moving account of the fear, desolation and extreme humiliations experienced by women in prison – the casual destruction it details dispels any notion of rehabilitation upheld in the "rhetoric of prison rehabilitation programmes" as justification for women's imprisonment.

Wyner shares with Henry and Lytton/Warton an educated background. For Carlen (2004, p. 290) this background as a "well-educated mother of two with a supportive and loving family, a non-smoker and in good health" becomes important when she compares this reality of Wyner's person before her imprisonment with the vision of what she has become on leaving prison, a "coughing smoker" with breast cancer troubled by sleeplessness and mixed emotions. Carlen (2004, p. 290) points out that following her release Wyner eventually recovered with "emotional props and material support" – support systems known not to be readily available to the majority of women in England leaving prison. This was a point continued and underscored in Lytton/Warton's writing in 1914, when she changed her name to highlight the inequality of women's treatment in the legal and penal systems based on class, gender and educational hierarchies within in society.

The act of replicating time spent in prison requires the writer to write how it, i.e. the experience of time, feels, because time then becomes concrete in the experience of imprisonment as a place and a state of being. Lost time in the macro level is tethered in the present moment of the life lived in prison, where time becomes a place, and this place exists through the women writing their experiences in prison and of imprisonment. Wyner (2004, p. 23) captures this experience of time as a state of being when she writes:

> Following the screw back from the canteen shop to the cell, I realized that I had already developed a prison persona: hands in pockets, a slow uncaring walk, shoulders hunched, scowling and grumpy, a woman of few words but always a curse at the ready. It happened in just two or three days.

Wyner's prison writing in this context signals the action of becoming present in observing time, "threading connections between perceptions and words" (Narayan, 2012, p. 27). This moment of observation, of becoming present in time by threading words and perceptions, in practice encapsulates Wood's (1991, p. 8) description of narrative as a temporal connectedness, creatively and linguistically mediated, where through nuanced approaches to narrative sequencing the "co-presence of futurity and the past" can be recognised in the present (Andrews, Squire, Tamboukou, 2013, p. 12) - a prevalent feature of the experience of time found in the research material as prison writing.

2.3 Of voice and women writing in prison - the narratives of power

> [...] power and knowledge directly imply one another; [...] there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (Foucault, 1977, p. 27)

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p. 54) observe that because of the "interdependent relationship" between power and knowledge it is implied that "oppression operates, in part, by artificially narrowing what counts as legitimate knowledge". Thus, flowing from the previous section on the neglect of women's prison writing as cultural artefacts, Carlen's (2004, p. 290) comment is of particular interest when she writes that Wyner's book should be listed on student reading lists and furthermore become "required reading for everyone working in the criminal justice or penal systems". She qualifies this recommendation by pointing out that although Wyner's prison narrative is not an academic one and does not add to knowledge about "global penality" or the "disciplinary thesis", it does provide clues as to "why, in the first six months of 2003, eight women committed suicide in the women's prisons of England and Wales" (Carlen, 2004, p. 290).

It is this review of Wyner's book that links it closely to the writing of Lytton/Warton and Henry which were described in similar terms in reference to the description of their narratives of the often harrowing lived experience of women in prison and the practical explanations it could possibly provide to understand, on the one hand women's prisoners taking their own lives whilst imprisoned. This links to Scheffler's argument (1984, p. 65), mentioned above, that women's prison writing and narratives are a rich storehouse of records, both empirical and practical, of the physical surroundings, attitudes, people and events that make an impression on the woman as writer in prison. Yet, this writing as a storehouse of lived experience with shared attributes over time and space, stands neglected and unexplored because it is not

viewed as a necessary element in theorising punishment and as such not contributing to knowledge on the grounds of either generally not being cerebral and/or theoretical (Scheffler, 1984, p. 65), or described as sensationalist, or of straddling all of these instances. In terms of the inclusion of prisoner lifewriting in readers or collections of penology aimed at students, I have only come across an extract from Wyner's *From the Inside Out,* in *Prison Readings –A critical introduction to prisons and imprisonment* edited by Jewkes and Johnston (2011).

Therefore, in considering the expansion of and critical engagement with prison writing within criminology as a cultural genre, I note that Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2013, p. 21) point out that narrative social research is playing catch up with developments in cultural and literary studies, and social theory. In this regard, they argue that the question of context cannot be separated or stripped away from understanding the narrative and the interpretive community involved and their decisions about what to include and what to leave out in theorising punishment. Here Narayan (2012, pp. 14 - 15) argues for stretching beyond "oneself to try and fathom what the world looks like from other perspectives" and to move beyond cultural generalisations to "potentially challenge prevailing theories" in that the purpose of the words written by women in prison, their stories in non-theoretical everyday language, is to contribute knowledge from the prisoner viewpoint in the expansion of the narratives of the punishment and prison beyond the dominant existing scripts thereof.

Expanding this observation of women's imprisonment and the discipline of criminology as a field of knowledge, Malloch and McIvor (2013, p. 208) have highlighted the "limitations of evidence-based research" in this context and called for "innovative ways of ensuring women's voices are represented". They argued that "greater status be accorded to qualitative studies that prioritise women's voices in capturing their experiences", emphasizing participation as a crucial element of a human rights-based approach (Malloch and McIvor, 2012, p. 208). Writing in 1914, during the time of the women's suffrage campaign which focused debates on class and gender inequalities together with the treatment of women in the legal and penal systems (Schwan, 2014, p. 149), Lytton (1914, pp. 6 - 7) observed and argued the same point,

> I gleaned two general precepts from my investigations. They were these: It is useless to try and help the lives of a community without consulting the individuals whom you hope to benefit, and that to benefit the life conditions of men does not necessarily benefit the life conditions of women, although their interests may be apparently identical as to social grade, locality, religious and other beliefs.

Lytton's words echo and reverberate into the present moment, into the silence we still encounter when we seek the words of women in prison, to read, understand and make meaning of their experiences. Schwan (2014, p. 4; p. 198) points towards an acceptance within criminology, "traditionally a subject dedicated to the production of scientific models *about* offenders", of the now well established understanding of the necessity to consider the prisoner viewpoint as an element for the theoretical development of thinking about punishment and crime, and that the reference to historical material is of significance because many of the issues addressed and scrutinised then still resonate today.

In the UK, studies of creative writing in prison have focused in the main on writing with male prisoners, whilst creative writing workshops and also journal writing courses with women do take place in prison they have not been documented as academic research projects to the same extent. In the US, Rowe's doctoral thesis *From The Inside Out: Women Writers Behind Wall*s (2004, p. 2) documents how she wanted, through teaching creative workshops with women in prison, add their voices to the "canon of prison writing" and find a way to study their prison experiences "to do something positive with a greater understanding of the problems they encountered".

In this context it is widely acknowledged that creative writing with prisoners can increase and help the cultivation of "inner resources", such as personal autonomy, increased self-confidence and well-being that serve to support desistance through its continued rehabilitative effects. However Seal and O'Neill (2019, p. 57) expand and extend this argument by showing through their creative writing research projects with male prisoners in HMP Durham and HMP Lewes, how the imaginative writing of prisoners presents:

> an important lens through which to view both the experience of imprisonment, the boundaries between the inside of prison and the outside of 'freedom', individual biography and emotional subjectivity.

For them, prison writing becomes a mechanism to "shed light on complexity" rather than viewed just a means to simply "reduce offending" (Seal and O'Neill, 2019, p. 58). Therefore, extending Seal and O'Neill's argument viewed through the lens of women's creative writing in prison, we can then begin to encounter a narrative, which departs from the master narrative about prison and punishment, moving towards critical engagement, and in doing so expanding beyond the notions of writing or arts-based initiatives in prison as purely rehabilitative in purpose.

2.3.1 Prison speak as gatekeeper

Politics serve as the catalyst for the conceptual approach of narrative research (Andrews, Squire, Tamboukou, 2013, p. 5). In the UK, the prison service, across both the female and male estates, is in crisis (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2017; Savage, 2021). Together with this crisis and the steep rise of female prison populations in Western countries over the past three decades has come the increased urgency for a critical concern with the experiences of women in prison and their representations thereof in prison narratives and life writings (Schwan, 2014, p. 2). However, as we have found in the UK, published prison writing and narratives of lived experience written by women in prison has been limited in scope.

To examine this state of affairs, we find that at the start of the 21st century the "official challenge" for decision makers is captured in the imperative to face down the legitimacy crisis "of disproportionally imprisoning poorer and ethnic minority women for relatively minor crimes" (Carlen, 2002, p. 224). To neutralise this threat, an in-house 'prison speak', appearing to mirror the discursive elements of the critical discourses against women's imprisonment, was adopted (Carlen, 2002, p. 224). And as such it neutralised the threat to punitive legitimacy and maintained its ideology, i.e. "the desirability to repress all knowledge of social inequalities between the punished and the punishers" (Carlen, 2002, p. 3).

This means that in response to the soaring prison populations and pressure from campaigning groups, in-house policies, programmes and strategies were developed to address women's needs. However, within this "burgeoning prison business", Carlen (2004, p. 258) argues that the women's prison system began "feeding off itself" due to the belief that these in-house prison reforms and programmes would be sufficient to prevent future lawbreaking, despite the high number of recidivists pointing to a different conclusion.

In doing so, prison speak resisted engagement with the analytic exercise of discursive power pursued and practised by other theoretical and/or political opponents (Carlen, 2002, p. 224). These other points of view held that "women suffer more from economic deficits than cognitive deficits" and advocated non-custodial programmes with the aims of showing women how to cope practically with their daily problems, together with the traditional prison-based programmes such as art and discussion groups, but in prison speak the outcomes of these programmes were considered anti-criminal justice and instead were "abandoned in favour of cognitive behavioural programmes parachuted in from Canada, originally designed for men" to enforce rehabilitative programming (Carlen, 2004, p. 259).

Prison speak as an ideological justification translates welfare need into psychological need, transferring attention from social integration to psychological readjustment (Carlen, 2004, p. 259). Carlen (2002, p. 236) refers to this use of a mirroring language as carceral-clawback and argues that it takes place in a specific society at a specific time, and that in the UK the substance and politics of women's imprisonment is linked to changing political ideologies about approaches to female oppression, particularly in the sphere of female poverty. Professionals in England instead hold the belief that the focus should be "on first resettling women in their own safe accommodation" and then on supporting them their struggles against abusive relationships and addictions (Carlen, 2004, pp. 258 - 259). For Carlen (2002b, p. 223) the main question centres on the persistence of the myth that the possibilities for a "benign prison" exist. Her argument zones in on the fact that the state's power to punish is a "politically dangerous symbol" and that as such "its legitimacy has to be constantly renewed" (Carlen, 2002b, p. 222).

In using the term carceral-clawback, Carlen (2002a, p. 116) highlights the fact the punitive function of prison, i.e. the "delivery of pain", particularly in the context of women's prisons, has been veiled by the multiple governmental and reforming claims that prisons could be used for "something other than punishment" such as general education, drugs rehabilitation, training in parenting or any other treatment to provide a legitimate rationale for "locking up women who commit very serious crimes [...] but also those who commit very minor ones, too" (Carlen, 2002b, p. 223).

Moore and Wahidin (2017, p. 11), in their study of the post-Corston women's penal crisis, point out that Corston in 2007 described:

> a system that was fundamentally unsafe and disrespectful, further undermined by inadequate services to meet a high level of need.

Moore and Wahidin (2017, p. 24) write that the Corston review was developed during an episode of crisis and that despite her twin-track recommendations for prison reform and decarceration, women's imprisonment had not been transformed. Chamberlen (2018, p.10) observes, that despite significant campaigns for these radical approaches to move away from the punishment of women in prisons as it currently stands, reform seems to continue its trajectory in the opposite direction – by now a familiar theme in the narrative of lost time.

Here it would be remiss not to mention the Female Offender Strategy again. Booth, et al (2018, pp. 433 - 434) found cause for concern in the language and tone used in the 2018 Strategy, particularly the concept of the productive citizen (Ministry of Justice, 2018, p. 334) which serves to reinforce negative images of women within the

penal system focusing on the "responsibilisation of the individual' which provides "a smoke screen to the wider social context". Alongside these critiques on the use of language as prison speak and the opaqueness of the Strategy, one is also confronted with the budget accompanying the new Strategy. In 2002, Ramsbotham (p. ix) in the foreword to Carlen's book *Women and Punishment – The Struggle for Justice* wrote:

> But somehow the notion that budgets matter more than people continue to prevail, and doing something about it seems to slip all too easily into the 'too difficult' basket.

This links with what we have seen in Chapter 1 where in May 2018, the Ministry of Justice announced budget cuts to the Female Offender Strategy and the shelving of plans to set up five community prisons for women (Syal, 2018). Following the narrative trajectory of the prison service in crisis, this can again also be linked to examples in the past. In Tilley's (p. 30) assertion in 1952 that the "national need for economy" takes precedence, despite the acknowledgement that "policy favours smaller units in more civilized surroundings" for women in prison, we find the narrative echo of another cycle in the endless repetition for incarcerated women living within the wasteland of postponement in the context of change to women's imprisonment. In this instance, Hine's critique of the Female Offender Strategy is insightful, particularly when she writes:

> at no point is consideration given to the role of the women themselves in the identification of their needs and how to address them. The system remains paternalistic at heart. (Hine, 2019, p. 14)

Thus, whilst the 2018 Female Offender Strategy states that offenders are part of society, the voices of imprisoned women are missing. This critique is of significance, because just as we have found in the dearth of women's prison writings and critical engagement therewith in the wider cultural sphere, we find the voices of imprisoned women absent from informing prison reform strategies for female offenders, despite Carlen and Tchaikovsky's hope, as expressed in Chapter 1, that the publication of *Criminal Women – Autobiographical Accounts* (1985) would stimulate public debate and lead to penal reform.

The multiple narratives that entwine the lives of women in prison are also found in the calls to move beyond the acceptance of prison as a mere technical implementation of law enforcement on the one hand. At the same time, it is also necessary to confront the use of official language, which in its resistance to engage with the results of deep theoretical reflection then becomes the mirror, a perfunctory echo, that distorts years of research and subdues campaigning voices. Prison speak becomes the gatekeeper that maintains the status quo, which in turns creates an ever-widening

vacuum between developments in theoretical penological research and the stasis in the general understanding and perception of punishment and prison within society. A vacuum filled by cultural and media representations of prison, which further skews debates and distorts the picture in how it represents an understanding of female imprisonment.

From this narrative configuration of the temporal elements of a prison system in crisis, and the language used in prison speak to communicate, emerges then a narrative identity of power, assured of its continued existence even though split in disposition comprising a dual character which presents on the outside an impression of authority, justice and order providing a sense of superiority and security through its symbolism, whilst on the inside, within its walls "it maintains this spectacle violence, inequality and prejudice" (Chamberlen, 2018, p. 9).

Therefore, language and stories of lived experience written by women in prison can afford us different patterns of engagement and give texture to the lives hidden behind the mirror of prison speak, as will become evident in the analysis of the women's prison writing in Chapter 5, 6 and 7.

2.3.2 Critiques against writing in prison as cultural production

Situated within this temporal, contextual backdrop of the continued postponement to reforms of women's punishment and contained within the silence of narrative neglect, exist the stories of women in prison, most of whom are non-violent and pose no threat to public safety. In defence of this silence, statistics, revealing the smaller female prison estate as opposed to that of the much larger male estate, have been used to deflect from non-engagement or lack of reform. Gelfand (1983, p. 39) argues that the use of statistical discourse in this context reflects another layer of social control as opposed to measuring actual transgression. Therefore, when engaging with the cultural production of women's narratives of their lived experiences in prison through the method of creative writing workshops as participatory arts-based action research, Goodson (2013, p. 5) urges for a "way of studying that embraces stories of action within theories of context" to move beyond the existing scripts, because if the collection of stories we work with only serve to elaborate mainstream stories it will "merely fortify patterns of domination". To move beyond the narrative neglect and silence into a space of language and communication, Henry (1952, p. 147) makes the case for:

> Any form of instruction that occupies the mind – art, English, literature, and the like – is a good thing. It takes the prisoner out of herself in a way that all the mailbag sewing and cutting of post-office pads cannot do. [...] It makes the woman aware that she is still a person with individual thoughts and ideas.

However, Rodriguez (2002, p. 407) raises the argument against the nomenclature of "prison writing" by questioning the conditions that make it possible for "carceral texts " to exist. Whilst Rodriguez (2002, p. 409) does not distinguish between female and male prison writing, he focuses on the cultural production of prison texts, because he argues that beyond its institutional and legal status, "*imprisonment* is essentially a practice of statecraft" which through prison writing "legitimizes and reproduces the discursive-material regime of imprisonment". As such, he argues, the existence of this writing as a genre benefits penal institutes by emphasizing their pedagogical capacities (Rodriguez, 2002, p. 409). Cultural production in this context is then viewed as "both enabled and coerced by state captivity" where therapy and rehabilitation programmes sometimes decree writing exercises as part of education in prison (Rodriguez, 2002, p. 410).

Turning specifically to the cultural production of women's writing in prison, Jacobi (2011, p. 40) argues from a pragmatic perspective that prison-based writing programmes can foster the development and production of counter-narratives to challenge media and social stereotypes of the women's prison identity. However, situating creative writing workshops within prison-literacy programmes, following the concerns raised by Rodriguez (2002) about the state co-opting the output from writing workshops, points to the complexities of designing and facilitating these programmes, particularly in the context of the competing sponsors for this work (Jacobi, 2011, p. 40).

In the UK, a practical example of these concerns can be found, where the Koestler Trust provides a platform for prisoner writing through the publication of its Koestler Voices Awards and poetry anthology to a wider cross-section of society. It does not distinguish between women's prison writing and men's prison writing. Funded amongst others by HM Prison and Probation Service, and as such viewed through Rodriguez's lens of prison writing benefitting penal institutes by emphasizing their provision of pedagogical opportunities and Jacobi's concerns about the competing sponsors of writing produced in prison, the Koestler approach with its focus on judging writing and rewarding achievement in showcasing talent amongst those in prison, becomes knotty and complicated despite providing a platform representing prison writing.

The charity was co-founded in 1962 by Arthur Koestler who "found writing an invaluable escape and source of solace during his own time in prison" (Koestler Voices – Koestler Arts, 2019). Yet, it could be argued that with the charity's focus on talent, competition|awards and judgement of writing, it selectively mimics and still maintains the social hierarchy by excluding ordinary stories of lived experience, at the same time not anchoring this writing within the wider social and historical context of prisons and

punishment. In focusing on "unlocking the talent inside", it inadvertently deflects "responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers" (Davis, 2003, p. 9).

One could further argue that its focus on "the use of creativity as a tool for self-expression; increasing wellbeing, engagement with education and personal development" becomes a form of prison speak. Acknowledging the potential and positive aspects of prison writing, whilst a positive point on the one hand, does not on the other hand engage with deeper critical analysis and reflection of the process of writing and the narratives produced within the wider societal context of imprisonment. Therefore, in seeking the narrative viewpoint of women in prison through their writing produced in creative writing workshops in prison to critically engage with their lived experiences is necessary. Wilson warns (2004, p. 193) when she unpacks the educentric view of prison education, that this education means different things to different people and as such it could be threatening to powerful institutions because:

> to suggest that others - traditionally perceived as non-educated or non-literate - might in fact have valid, useful and important skills would upset the balance of power as constructed by those who presently hold it.

By its very nature prison writing is state enabled because of the particular social context of imprisonment. My research is a contribution to knowledge situated within the central tenet of engagement with women's prison writing produced in creative writing workshops as a neglected area of narrative inquiry in the UK. Not to engage theoretically and critically with this writing and its production, would be to maintain the status quo and reproduce the hierarchical social order of repression where the stories of the lived experiences of women, written in their own words, continue to languish in neglect, phantoms receding further into the shadows of social and criminal justice. Prison speak would remain the dominant voice.

In conclusion, King (2003, p. 2) in exploring the nature of stories, how we interact with them and understand other people through them particularly through language, refers to the Okanagan storyteller Jeanette Armstrong who said:

> I am a listener to the language's stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in a different pattern.

Thus to find the narrative shape for the counter-narrative to the master narrative of prisons and punishment, I turn to Lorde's (1984, p. 39) observation when she writes:

> For there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt – examining what those ideas feel like being lived.

Mullen (1999, p. 145) asserts that the artistic process involves the choice of a medium, in this case creative writing, to give expression to internal images, feelings and ideas, unique to the individual writers in prison to "then to make connections between these personal narratives and the cultural forces" - in this case the time and space of lived experience in prison and how this impacts on the lives of female prisoners. Therefore, the act of writing their lives creatively then provides the opportunity for the research participants collaborating in my research to tell their individual stories, within the wider ripple of their collective story within prison, producing a narrative filled with the metaphors of their lives to counter the master narrative of punishment sustained by the reductive language of prison speak reliant on statistics and cultural representations thereof in the media, news, films and television. This chimes with Gelfand (1983, p. 26), who argues for women's prison writing, as an expression of their social reality, to be moved from the margins into the centre where engagement with and the reading of these texts affirms rather than distorts their experiences. In doing so, she argues that women's prison literature and writing then assume "their rightful places as vital creative traditions" precisely because it undoes, undermines or subverts the imposed literary and social paradigms where it begins to change the story perpetuated in the master narrative (Gelfand, 1983, p. 26).

In the chapters ahead we find that the writing produced in the creative writing workshops begins to form the sprouts that can allow for critical engagement and theorising the inner world of lived experience of the research participants as feeling time and space in prison through the use of imagination, metaphor and creative non-fiction. Where for the women in prison their lives no longer disappear within imprisonment's narrative of lost time, but instead where we can begin to listen and feel as we read their words, because:

> Time shrank to the beat, beat, beat of her heart. (Brahmachari, 2019, p. 330)

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Mimesis 2: Emplotment - Producing the research material within a theoretical framework

Chapter 3 The good guest

> It seems incredible to think that they will go on living like this, patiently waiting for nothing [...] Grim is a gentle word; it's heartbreaking and terrifying [...] (Gellhorn, [1936] 2012, p. 12)

The door closes and the librarian leaves us in the classroom at Downview to start the week's writing session. The women ask for the writing tablecloth. They unfold and spread it across the classroom tables arranged in a large rectangle. They pull at the purple cloth, stretching it out over the four corners. Crumbs from the biscuit break in previous week's evening session at East Sutton Park stick to the middle of the cloth. They wipe them away, tutting, hands moving across the painted elephants and birds, asking after the women in East Sutton Park, how their writing went. Some of the women long to make the move to East Sutton Park, an open prison, and ask me to describe it. Raven Hawthorn places a small bunch of lavender on the table, then decides to share and passes it around. Everybody takes a turn to smell and they tell me where the lavender bushes grow on the prison estate. At the end of the session they will ask me to take the lavender to the women in East Sutton Park that evening, where the women there will respond and tell me about the Carshalton Lavender fields near Downview, whilst Daisy Dove, squeezing the flowers between her fingertips, would wonder if they had been dipped in Spice, teasing and laughing into the silence of the rest of the group.

Back in the classroom, the group begins to shift into the space of the workshop, they pass around the pencil case of black ballpoint pens and spread the felt tip pens out on the tablecloth – on some days everyone wants the different shades of pink and purple and barter for their preference. For a brief moment, as I look around, at the table strewn with colourful pens and notebooks, I could be mistaken and believe that the writing is taking place in a community hall, yet I am brought back into the moment when the guard walks past and peers into the room through a window in the wall. The women go quiet and we do the register - Hearts will not come back, she is on parole and has left Downview; Baby Blue 79 is on ACCT watch (Assessment, Care in Custody, Teamwork – a document used when a prisoner is deemed at risk of self-harm or suicide) and tells me she wanted to attend because it calms and helps her to write down her thoughts and emotions; The Mallard is tearful and upset, she worries about her son – does he eat?, who cooks his dinner? After weeks of waiting she still does not know whether she will be moved to an open prison or not and because of this not-knowing she cannot concentrate on studying for her English language exam that afternoon. The group comforts her and the morning settles around us. The light inside the classroom is

dusky, subdued. Collectively the group does not want the fluorescent light switched on. Outside the sun is shining bright and hot, a tree sways in the breeze and a bird lands on the diamond-shaped security grill that stretches across the windows. The Mallard wonders whether it is the one-legged pigeon that she has been feeding from her bedroom window, leaving crumbs on the ledge. She becomes calmer and the group starts to write. The classroom clock ticks loudly into the silence, matching the rhythm of the pens as the women move their hands across the blank pages, filling it with their own words.

> In this moment of silence, I reflect and write down in my notebook,
> *Time is the clock ticking in this silent room whilst everyone writes; time is waiting for Sea-Coral to turn up; time is in the footsteps passing up and down in the landing outside the door; time is in the crumbs on the tablecloth; time is in this group reduced and shrunken to six women today; time is in The Mallard's tears.*

3.1 Introduction

> One cannot simply write. Thus, it is the ways in which the processes of textual production are hidden that allows texts to be constructed as realist accounts. This obscures and limits understanding of the nature and the power effects of texts as discourse. (Dunne, Pryor and Yates, 2005, p. 133)

Confronted with the silence of the empty shelves of time pertaining to women's prison writing as a cultural genre explored in Chapter 2, my research journey continues in this chapter with a focus on the methodology I employed in the design of my research working with women in prison to write their own life journeys in creative writing workshops. The methodology pivots on the reflections from why women's prison writing is so scarcely populated through time towards considering the possibilities of how to begin to fill these empty and neglected narrative and literary spaces in Chapters 3 and 4. I addressed these reflections in the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix) for the research participants and explained my approach as follows:

> My interest lies in storytelling and writing, and how this process can help us to understand ourselves and the world around us. I am particularly interested in exploring your lived experiences through writing stories together - how this creative process can benefit your wellbeing, and at the same time tell a different story to the world about your experiences and prison. (Participant Information Sheet, 2018)

Of pertinence to this examination of methodology is Sprague's (2016, p. 5) view that it functions as the crucial connecting element between epistemology, as the theory

about the development of knowledge, and method, as the techniques used for gathering and analysing this information. This view of methodology as a connecting element hinges on examining the choices made by the researcher in the implementation of the method and as such signifies "the terrain where philosophy and action" meets (Sprague, 2016, p. 5). This terrain in my research pertains to the reflexive participatory arts-based perspective employed within the narrative inquiry framework to understand the lived experiences of incarcerated women in writing their own stories in creative writing workshops as research method. Therefore, according to Sprague (2016, p. 5), "how we do what we do" becomes the necessary element of reflection on the methodology, because it uncovers choices and reveals possibilities, such as also asking questions about "how knowledge fits into the rest of social life". As such, reflecting on methodology in this way allows for technical details to enter social and political contexts in considering their consequences on people's lives (Sprague, 2016, p. 5).

Enveloped in these reflective pauses, my journey of narrative inquiry enters Mimesis 2 and the stage of emplotment in Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis framework. This entails the process of capturing the research methodology as the story of the action and the research method as the action. And again we find ourselves in this intermediate space of connection as Ricoeur described emplotment as the most important component in narrative (Muldoon, 2002, p. 66). It becomes the cog that mediates between Mimesis 1 as "our pre-understanding of the world of practical action and events" in coming to the contextual background of the research study and getting to know the field through its literature, and Mimesis 3, which entails "the reception of the plot by a reader" in the critical engagement with the women's writing as research material, both in the thesis and the accompanying anthology. Mimesis or imitation is viewed as the particular representation of human action and for Ricoeur it moved beyond the notion of merely copying reality, because he observed that there is "an active creative element in composing that goes beyond mere reproduction" (Muldoon, 2002, p. 66). As such he argued that emplotment, Mimesis 2, constitutes "a creative reconstruction" (Muldoon, 2002, p. 66) and not a straightforward reproduction.

Emplotment is the writing and drawing together of a "heterogenous set of incidents, events and characters" which transforms these "disparate entities into a story taken as a whole" (Muldoon, 2002, p. 67). It synthesizes "our actions and the story of our actions" through a combination of the temporal dimensions of both the episodic, which is chronological and often found in linear narrative representations, and the configurational, the non-chronological element which "transforms the succession of events in a meaningful whole" (Muldoon, 2002, p. 67). In my thesis, critical engagement and reflexivity become the configurational element which underpins the

synthesizing process of emplotment, which in turn shapes the whole the thesis, "allowing the story of [it] to be seen as a whole" (Muldoon, 2002, p. 67).

Therefore, the instance of the reflective pause far from being a mechanism for "information-processing" is instead viewed as a power "we choose to exercise in the analysis and transformations of the situations we find ourselves in" (Kemmis, 1994, p. 149). This is of particular relevance in writing this chapter on the methodology as a critical reflection on communicating the process of decision-making and action in the context of facilitating creative writing workshops with women in prison. This is a crucial point which leads us back to Dunne, Pryor and Yates (2005, p. 133) who argue that "one cannot simply write", precisely because if "the ways in which the processes of textual production are hidden… [it] allows texts to be constructed as realist accounts". This hiddenness serves to obscure and limit the understanding of the power and nature of texts as discourse.

Working with women in prison as co-producers of knowledge, I therefore follow Sprague (2016, p. 9), who points out that for critical and feminist scholars the goal of research also becomes one of understanding how oppression works in the production of knowledge and how the provision of this knowledge "will help fight against injustices". This goal is crucial in the specific social context of imprisoned women and the associated sets of "politically relevant interests" where:

> mainstream knowledge, more generally, tends to assume the position of privileged groups, helping to naturalize and sustain their privilege in the process (Sprague, 2016, p. 2)

How we write about our research design, choices and action shapes the contribution to knowledge within the philosophical framework. Working with the philosophical framework of narrative in the field of criminology, my contribution is that of qualitative narrative knowledge instead of scientific quantitative knowledge. Sprague (2016, p. 2) writes that in order to create knowledge that is less systemically biased, "we need to ground each view of the social world in the standpoint from which it is created", namely the lived experiences of the research participants. She frames this critical situated approach as one where the focus shifts from "what is wrong with the person who is experiencing the problem" rather towards an evaluation of "what it is about the current social order that makes the problem likely" (Sprague, 2016, p. 15). Thus, mindful of not replicating power hierarchies in my research, I apply this critical situated framing to my research design and writing with the reflexive focus on the four channels of narrative inquiry. These include the relationship between the researcher and the research participants; my ethical approach to the creation of knowledge flowing

from the realisation that the ethical process started in practice when the research fieldwork commenced; my positionality as researcher; the shift in focus onto writing as research material, and the role of ethics as epistemic justice.

3.2 The researcher and research participant relationship

> A river passing through the landscape catches the world and gives it back redoubled: a shifting, ~~glinting~~ world more mysterious than the one we customarily inhabit. (Laing, 2011, p. 6)

My reflexive approach follows Attia and Edge (2017, p. 33) who write of reflexivity as a process that involves an "ongoing mutual shaping between researcher and research" and to which I add the mutual shaping between researcher and research participants. As such, they argue for a move away from the "view of research methods as objectified procedures to be learnt by researchers" towards a more developmental approach – the development of researchers "who craft procedures integral to the environments in which they operate" (Attia and Edge, 2017, p. 33). For my study, this resonates as a narrative researcher working with women in prison situated within the wider field of criminology, which required flexibility and adaptability in my approach.

Development in this context is not treated as a side-effect of a reflexive research practice, but instead becomes central to the process, a "way of being, rather than a new way of doing" with the emphasis on the conscious "stepping back from the action" to theorise what is developing or occurring so that the researcher can "step up to be an active part of the contextualized action" (Attia and Edge, 2017, p. 33). An ongoing, continuous motion, now swimming in, then watching on from a distance, the waves breaking onto a shingle beach, moving backwards, pushing forwards, rolling stones when the tide comes in, changing the shape and physical features of the pebbly shore.

Stepping back from the action, I had days where I would sit staring at the sea after a workshop day, transitioning back into the outside world. A physical, personal liminal space of processing the intensity of the workshops in prison, thinking of the research participants and their lived experiences - how they had become co-producers of knowledge in this study and how there would be no research material without their words. I would contemplate the numbing, distancing effect of spending one day in the prison environment, how it changed my perspective and relational experience of the social, and I wondered about the effect on the incarcerated women who spent days, weeks, months and years within this environment. In this state of reflection the world outside of prison would sometimes seem to be spun from candyfloss. And I relate when

Chekhov ([1895] 2007 translation, p. 3), in documenting his journey to the penal colony on Sakhalin Island, observes:

> Amidst the silence, a familiar ~~melodious~~ sound rings out, you glance up and see high above your head a pair of cranes, and for some reason you are overcome by melancholy.

In the circuitous manner of weaving this research narrative, this moment of research melancholy is linked to Meretoja's (2018, p. ix) comment that narratives and people become what and who they are in "dialogue with other people and their stories".

3.2.1 Fieldwork as a dialogue of stories

This research dialogue with other people and their stories commenced when for a period of 10 weeks in the summer of 2018, I facilitated creative writing workshops on a Tuesday at two women's prisons – I spent the mornings at Downview, which is a closed prison and the evenings at East Sutton Park, an open prison. The writing group at Downview fluctuated between 11 and nine writers initially, and settled on seven writers that completed all 10 workshops. The writing group at East Sutton Park started with eight women, fluctuated between six and five, and ended with three women who completed the 10-week course. In both groups the writers ranged in age from twenties to sixties.

The group at Downview was more subdued and disciplined in their approach to the workshops whereas the spirited group at East Sutton Park at times felt disjointed and less focused on their writing. On reflection, I came to realise this comparative experience as an extension of the closed and open natures of the respective prison environments. The research participants at East Sutton Park were nearer the end of their sentences and were afforded greater freedom of movement, whilst the participants at Downview lived under much stricter confinement conditions. Whereas the workshops took place in the Education wings of both prisons, in Downview we spent the writing time in a classroom with a closed door and a guard patrolling outside. Every so often he would peer in at the window to observe our workshops and the librarian would check-in bringing us tea and coffee at the halfway mark – a mug for me and plastic cups for the research participants, which made me feel uncomfortable, even though everyone else accepted it as the way things were done. The same level of surveillance was not present at East Sutton Park where the workshops took place in a classroom across a corridor from the library. The door was left open and the research participants could move about freely, going for smoke or bathroom breaks or using the computers in the classroom. It was an atmosphere at times filled with chaos and

disruption. I had to work much harder to retain control and focus on the writing, and also, on my own patience and understanding of the situation.

Following the completion of my fieldwork, in August 2018, it was in the silence of reviewing how the method and methodology moved from concept to practice, that a pensive melancholy took hold of me, prompted by the now familiar reactions to my study and research participants when people, not within the academic sphere, would ask:

- How was it?
- What is prison like?
- Were they scary?
- When is society's patience going to run out with these people?
- You're not doing this because you were in prison? Were you? I hope not.
- But what about justice?

These questions held the perceptions, the story of prison and prisoners, as reflected in dialogue with the outside world, with other people and their stories. My pensiveness revealed a transformative moment in the research process when I noticed that I had become protective of my research participants, of their stories and their words that they shared with me in their writing, the difficult and uncomfortable thing I had asked of them - to dig deep, and excavate themselves and their experiences in their own words.

Through this dialogue and the conversations that followed in the wake of the reactions of the social community outside of prison, I found that I did not want to engage in anecdotes or what felt like gossip about the 18 women I had met – *Yellow-horned Poppy ~ Oriental Redwood ~ Andromeda Marsh ~ Daisy Dove ~ Hearts ~ The Mallard ~ Baby Blue 79 ~ Sea-Coral ~ Purple Rose ~ Yellowhammer ~ Rainbow Rose ~ Raven Hawthorn ~ The White Cow ~ Foxglove ~ Snapdragon ~ Wood Lily ~ Periwinkle ~ Tall Melilot*. The funny, apprehensive, curious, helpful, nervous, exasperating and challenging research participants, hereafter referred to as the writers, who had shared their tears, laughter, anger, frustration, desperation and sadness with me. The writers who had pored over the books of birds, flowers and trees that I had brought along to the creative writing workshops for them to choose their pseudonyms - a writing name of their own to open up their own reflective spaces sheathed in anonymity. I did not want to intrude into these reflective writing spaces and therefore did not elicit any information about the writers' convictions or collect demographic details. What is known about the writers and their life journeys flow from what they explored and revealed in their writing. And as such I would deflect from the questions mentioned above and instead focus on the grimness, the day-to-day realities of

women's imprisonment. This deflection was at times met with irritation or annoyance because it did not reflect the accepted narratives of women in prison, and as such challenged the social perceptions thereof. As the writer of this research process, I became aware of being reshaped, a researcher re-storied in the moment of stepping inside prison and spending time with the research participants writing the stories of their lived experiences - a pebble, tossed and turned by the waves of the lived experience of doing research.

This pensive moment relates to Liebling's (1999, p. 152) observations about the nature of prison research and the features thereof that draw in the researcher, "the institutions that we create" and the dialogue that follows with the human spirit living within the confines of prison, and the choices we make about how we communicate this dialogue. In time, through writing, I noticed that a boundary had blurred within myself, that I viewed this protective measure both from an ethical point of view as a reflexive researcher, but also as a human being, an outsider who had been given access to the hidden world of prison, who had come to see punishment and its effects in action. For me, it signalled a profound shift in acknowledging that the researcher does not only proceed from the plane of the intellect, but as a whole person also "engaging their feelings, and values, and needs in the research process" (Barnett, 2005, in Attia and Edge, 2017, p. 34). Hunt (2013, p. 15) describes this moment of transformation as opening up to the inner space that involves learning "through bodily-felt and emotional experience rather than just through conscious reason" because it necessitates feeling in the reflection on the writing process.

This particular focus point calls for the empathic ability to relate to psychological and social realities that is other than the researcher's own - a mode of being which further requires a humility that acknowledges the researcher's particular standpoint, but at the same time embraces an openness to risking the possibility that this standpoint might or might not change in the research process (Attia and Edge, 2017, p. 34). For Medlicott (2000) this openness becomes imperative and she describes this process as the adoption of a "strategy of disciplined empathy", because this capacity to empathize as a researcher with other minds and beings becomes an indispensable and distinctive capacity of the researcher, particularly when the research takes place in "difficult environments". This commitment forms the heart of my study in coming to know and write about another human being; the research participants in this thesis are situated producers of knowledge through their writing. And it led to an understanding of the dissonance I experienced in the outside world when revealing this empathy in the face of derogatory pre-existing narratives.

3.3 Procedural ethics and access

> The way we know has powerful implications for the way we live… because every way of knowing tends to become a way of living. (Palmer, 1987, p. 22)

Van den Hoonaard (2017, p. 590), reflecting on the ethical tensions of narrative inquiry, identifies two points of departure for the narrative researcher – on the one hand he writes that the researcher should aim to be a "good guest, who values humility and faithfulness in working with the research participant", and on the other he sees the narrative researcher as one "who does not intrude on the freedom of the readers to judge the narrative on their own terms". The point he makes, centres on the argument that external ethical validation is not the sole signifier of whether the research project is ethical or not, but rather that the ethicality of the research project also resides in the "personal virtues" of the researcher and the established practices of the discipline (Van den Hoonaard, 2017, p. 590).

However, before continuing with this discussion, it must be noted in the context of conducting research in prison that external ethical validation of the research proposal assumes an important position, as there would be no access to the women in prison without this validation and approval. In reality, it is a difficult starting position for the critical researcher embarking on the research journey with the aim to move beyond the dense institutional layers of power and control to communicate with the situated voices of women in prison. Ethical approval entails the further layer of communication with the Prison Governor and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS).

Because of the qualitative nature of my research project and with gaining access to prison known to be a notoriously difficult process, I started the process in July 2017 and approached the Prison Governor for Downview and East Sutton Park because of his contribution to the ONE SMALL THING project, which explained the approach of using a trauma-informed lens both in understanding women in prison, but also towards the prison staff. I decided on Downview and East Sutton Park respectively, because Downview is a closed prison and East Sutton Park an open prison, and with narrative inquiry as the study of experience as story (Clandinin, 2006, p. 43), I was interested in capturing narratives of both experiences. Particularly, as Chamberlen (2018, p. 15) points out, that in terms of closed prisons for women in the UK, the accommodation is restricted because there is no difference in category or security levels.

Following the email correspondence with the Prison Governor, 12 months prior to the commencement of the creative writing workshops, he granted provisional access

to both prisons, provided that HMPPS approved the research and that I would be willing to work around the prison times provided so as not to disrupt and interfere with the day-to-day prison regime. Thereafter, my research project underwent detailed scrutiny and rigorous external validation by both the University of Sussex Research Governance Sponsorship Sub-Committee and by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS) (previously known as NOMS – National Offender Management Service) - a protracted process, which started in September 2017.

Before granting access to the two women's prisons, HMPPS questioned the research framework and approach. The queries in the main focused on what would be the primary benefits of the research for HMPPS; the selection criteria of the research participants and the inclusion/exclusion of women with low literacy levels, dyslexia, aggression and mental health concerns such as self-harming or who were actively suicidal; whether the research sample would likely be representative and how the researcher would eliminate sampling bias; confidentiality and security risks, both to the research participants and the prison. Within the structure of my research framework as set out so far, I then considered and linked these questions by HMPPS to the assertion by Hill Collins (2002, p. vii) that:

> Oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group.

Upon reflection, these queries are interesting, because they mimetically reflect as Gelfand (1983, p.26) observes the hegemonic approaches and androcentric lens through which women's experiences of imprisonment have historically been viewed, where the focus remains on the institution and the research is addressed in neutral and often scientific terms, as opposed to a focus on social change that starts with addressing human needs in a particular context. This became clear, precisely because for HMPPS the focus of their questions start from the point of view of what would be of benefit to HMPPS, i.e. the macro, the status quo as opposed to the benefits of the research to the research participants, the women who participate in the research - a question that was incidentally never asked.

In response to these queries, I referred to PS4800 and the General Equality Duty (GED), which places a statutory general duty on all public authorities to promote equality of opportunity between women and men, particularly in this context of female prisoners. I further pointed out that representative samples and sampling bias were not applicable measurement yardsticks for the purposes of this creative research project which aimed to treat each research participant as an individual, inclusive and

accommodating of their literacy levels and dyslexia, in order to write and express their own story of lived experience, rather than examining the writing group as a whole, predetermined dataset to analyse. Instead, the 18 research participants selected themselves, voluntarily, to take part in the creative writing workshops, in answer to postcards and posters (see Appendix) the prison librarians displayed on my behalf in the prison libraries at East Sutton Park and Downview. The librarians at both prisons kept a list for me of the women who had wanted to participate and emailed the complete lists before the start of the first workshop. I set a cap on 12 participants in each group, to keep the groups small, so that each writer could receive individual attention. However, despite my intentions and instructions, and although I am grateful to the librarians for their assistance, I had to relinquish control in practice at the stage of the self-selection process and do not know whether anyone was turned away or not. The Heads of Education at both prisons did intimate that they would look at participants who self-selected to join as there were prisoner relationships unknown to me which could lead to volatile situations in the writing workshops.

In the first writing session with the writers, I explained that the creative writing workshops would be undertaken separately from other prison activities and that there would be no advantage or disadvantage attached to them as participating research participants. To protect the privacy of the writers, research participants each chose their own pseudonyms. All the writing produced in the course of the research would be treated as fiction (Schneider, 2003, p. 187) and confidentiality within the legal limit, except in the case should I become aware of potential harm to a research participant or third party. In discussing the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Forms (see Appendix), I explained the research project to the writers – my focus on storytelling and writing and how the process can help us to understand ourselves and the world around us. I communicated my particular interest in exploring their lived experiences through writing stories together to find out how this creative process could benefit their wellbeing, and at the same time tell a different story to the world about their experiences and prison.

We spent a good while discussing the project and reading through the Consent Form. The women asked questions about the Participant Information Sheet and signed the Consent Forms for their writing to be to be analysed and reproduced in the thesis, and anthology. Throughout the weeks that followed I also circulated a copy of my research proposal within the group. The women took turns to read it and made notes on pages that stood out for them, or underlined sentences, which we discussed in the course of the workshops. For example, Sea-Coral was struck by the statistics of women

who have died in prison and Daisy Dove underlined "in their own words" wherever it appeared in the text.

The ethical concern not to cause harm to the research participants during the course of the creative writing workshops was the foremost consideration and starting premise of the research project. HMPPS expressed concern about women experiencing distress or vulnerability during and after the process of writing. Scheffler (2002, p. xxxv) writes that for imprisoned women lifewriting serves as a means of bearing witness to their experience and working through the trauma of their imprisonment – to write through and into "the grief caused by her confinement and isolation from family". Baby Blue 79, who was deemed at risk of self-harm or suicide, insisted on joining the group every week because in her writing she could explore her thoughts and feelings. In week two of the creative writing workshops, she wrote the following small story about a place that had an impact on her writing character:

> *Heaven is a safe place. There is no pain and suffering. One day, when I have done all my jobs down here, I will join all the people that I had lost on my journey, my grandparents, my daughter and my brother and the family I had never met in my life.*
>
> (Baby Blue 79, 2018)

Baby Blue 79 attended all 10 creative writing sessions.

The question of the focus on the beneficiaries flips the consideration of where the benefits of the research project lie. If it starts from the standpoint of women in prison as research participants and is of benefit to them most importantly, this would consequentially benefit HMPPS. What is of individual benefit in the exploration of feelings and the expression thereof in writing becomes transformative in the collective response to the shared experience of incarceration and how the women related to and communicated with one another. The White Cow expressed what writing together as a group meant and how it benefitted the group of writers at Downview at the end of the project:

To Miss, You

> *Thank you for all the time that you've taken.*
> *Giving us due care and attention.*
> *Letting us know there is no need to shout.*
> *Quietly helping to point things out.*
>
> *The way you slowly bring us together.*
> *No matter the mood at the time.*

We walk together in sunshine and happiness
Due to your calming ways.

There is a fight deep within that's raging,
Yearning to escape.
With the careful nurture of our creative skills,
We've harnessed the power and found ourselves.

There is no longer a need to always bee shelved,
Like tiny walls of honey.
Thanks to days like these
And fun, vibrant classes,
We'll understand distinction and,
Claim our passes.

A toast to spreading and sharing
The skills released from within.
From Us

3.4 Relational ethics and positionality

> Much of my formal academic training has been designed to show me that I must alienate myself from my communities, my family, and even my own self in order to produce credible intellectual work. (Hill Collins, 2002, p. viii)

With this statement, Hill Collins captures my academic training in the years prior to commencing this PhD research study. It is this lens that Hill Collins uses to capture the perception of the need for alienation and detachment from one's self and life outside of academia in order to produce credible intellectual work, that slowly started to crack and shatter under the scrutiny of reflexive writing and the transformation that ensued in grappling with the questions of who am the I, the narrator of this research project? These questions spiralled. Where does my epistemological supposition stem from and how did this social construction of my subjectivities lead to the conception of this research project and the framework within which to undertake its actions? And furthermore, in answering these questions, how do I navigate the narrative power of writing the research narrative whilst being mindful of the research participants and their voices? I also heed Seal's (2012, p. 690) observation about the potentially problematic and troubling nature of the moment "the researcher writes herself into the project", precisely because this could indicate that she privileges herself above everything else.

Hua (2016, p. 18) asks of the researcher to consider the concept of "your voice in your research"– whether it is one that remains extrinsic to the research material and does not "interfere" or whether it is an integral part of the research in the collection of research material, its analysis and interpretation? Writing, creatively and academically, forms the nucleus of this research project as the co-construction of knowledge, and as such absorbs the voices of the research participants consequently together with that of the researcher. Sprague (2016, p. 3) writes that the researcher, the I, the narrator, occupies "a specific social location… informed by a specific biography". These two dimensions then work together and shapes how the researcher aims to build on the knowledge about society.

In terms of my social location, when I re-entered academia as a mother of young twins at the tail-end of an intense few years following their premature birth, I was a mature student - tired, an ancient old tree not sure if my frazzled mind still worked and whether it could bud again academically. I felt an outsider to the academic world of work and studying, and also to criminology, my field of interest, and found myself in a strange, unsure, liminal space of not quite fitting. Sprague (2016, p. 4), in tracing the trajectory of her development as a reflexive researcher, found that in studying the sociology of knowledge she moved from exploring "the content of the knowledge we and others produce about social phenomena" towards studying "the production of sociology itself… the social organization of my own working conditions". This phrase, the social organization of my own working conditions, alongside the words of Hill Collins (2002, p. vii) who felt it "was important to examine the complexity of ideas that exist in both scholarly and everyday life", and how this everyday reality reflects theory, both resonated deeply and proved a pivotal transformative moment in coming to understand my positionality as not a fully typical PhD student.

Acceptance of this aspect of my positionality however arrived later. One day, when working next to the pool during my children's swimming lessons, listening to the conversations of lived reality around me, I read how Hill Collins (2002, p. viii) described the enrichment of her writing process whilst "fully immersed in ordinary activities… caring for my daughter, mentoring Black women undergraduates, assisting a Brownie troop, and engaging in other 'unscholarly' activities", reflecting in particular on how these activities had reshaped her thinking about her relationships and community with a wide range of other women:

> Theory allowed me to see all of these associations with fresh eyes, while concrete experiences challenged the worldviews offered by theory. (Hill Collins, 2002, p. vii)

This revelation proved a turning point in my thinking about my academic work. Up to that point, the denial of my everyday working conditions filled with childcare responsibilities - the immersion in an 'un-scholarly' life not on campus and the associations, experiences and awareness it brought, alongside the pockets of carefully negotiated time on campus - impoverished my writing and my growth as an academic with a voice to speak and write about the symbiotic relationship between the realities of the everyday lived experience, and my conceptual and theoretical awareness. Sitting there, next to the enclosed swimming pool with its thick humid air, observing daily life and listening to the challenges expressed by others around me, I heard echoes of the stories of the women writers in prison – lived experience as a vast web of interconnected stories within the wider narratives of a culture and society at a specific time.

Therefore, in reflecting about the inclusion of my own biography and how much of it was appropriate to disclose, particularly in the first creative writing workshop, and later also in the thesis, I experienced a moment of ethical hesitancy. Because, through my reflections on voice, biography and narrative power I seemed to drift ever further away from my perceived idea of writing as a conduit which allows for others "to speak through us" (Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p. 47). Instead this disclosure of the personal seemed to steer me into the opposite direction of:

> The ideal: less and less of me and more and more of you... to make room, to become not the hero of the scene, but the scene itself: the site, the occasion of the other. (Cixous, 1989, p. 9 cited in Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p. 47)

It was during the fieldwork, in the creative writing workshops, that I had to confront and work through these "uncomfortable, unclear and uncertain aspects of researcher subjectification" (Kofoed and Staunæs, 2015, p. 24). Kofoed and Staunæs (2015, p. 24) make the case for "hesitancy as ethics" as a strategy for research fieldwork that takes place in "zones of high intensity". Their strategy posits that uncertainty is assumed as part of the researcher's approach and position, and that within this strategy it becomes an ethical obligation to "not be too certain", particularly when faced with "affectively distressed, concerned, upset, action-orientated participants" (Kofoed and Staunæs, 2015, p. 24). The emphasis here on the researcher to "not be too certain" allows for the "analyses to emerge from uncertainty, rather than from previously established certainty about the requirements of a given field" (Kofoed and Staunæs, 2015, p. 37).

For Kofoed and Staunæs (2015, pp. 25 - 26), a particular feature of research in high intensity zones is that the researcher is confronted with conflict, which is mostly

explicit and articulated and often inspires the "urge to take action" and "contribute to the resolution of problems that characterise their field". However, in the instance of employing ethical hesitancy as a research strategy in these situations, they argue that the researcher should be "guided by a different compass than unproblematized intervention" and instead that the focus should shift to the research contribution and how this can be informed by different ways of thinking about the conflict and its resolution (Kofoed and Staunæs, 2015, p. 26).

In the initial stages of the creative writing workshops conflict between research participants simmered covertly and was not explicitly articulated. In the first creative writing session at Downview the air was thick with tension, the writing group split into cliques with a moment of accusation flaring up between particular research participants when one writer, on coming came back from the bathroom, looked around the table and agitatedly asked who had taken her purple pen. At East Sutton Park, the conflict contained a subversive dynamic exercised by a couple of research participants, who, in trying to establish dominance and superiority in the group, would continuously laugh at the contributions and thoughts of an older research participant and ignore the contributions of another more hesitant research participant. In both writing groups, the writing space was not yet established as one bound by kindness and trust. Therefore, in returning to reflexivity in the research process, Kofoed and Staunæs (2015, p. 37) observe that:

> research reflexivity, or embodied thoughtfulness, as we prefer to call it, is not only a matter of gaze or cognition, but also of affectivity; i.e., the intensity and weight of the atmosphere, the moods, the feelings, senses and intuitions through which the researcher experiences and interacts/intra-acts with the object of study.

This initial discordance became the "unpredictable challenges presented by concrete encounters during fieldwork" and as such required me to step back, to pause in hesitancy and to reflect (Kofoed and Staunæs, 2015, p. 37). Although I was told beforehand that there might be conflict and that I just needed to ask for help "in sorting them out", I did not want the prison world and its expressions of authority to enter the writing space during the time of its fledgling formation. Ethical hesitancy in this context involves "the momentary suspension of action" which results in the interruption of "one's own incentives to respond and enact embedded normativities and judgements" (Kofoed and Staunæs, 2015, p. 25). Precisely because in this moment of fieldwork the consideration of ethics shifts from the procedural towards "the grey zones, the unpredictable, yet utterly important moments and issues" which leads to a third dimension of ethics, namely the relational (Kofoed and Staunæs, 2015, p. 26).

Relational ethics is described as the instance of valuing and recognizing mutual dignity and respect, and connectedness between the researched and the researcher, and the communities within which they work (Kofoed and Staunæs, 2015, p. 26).

From this relational ethics point of view, I realised that I had asked difficult things of the writers in their first writing exercise (discussed in detail in the section on creative writing pedagogy in Chapter 4) and that I needed to respond in kind. This moment resonates with Coogan's (2013, p. 73) reflection on the dynamic relationship between research participants and researcher in the collaborative act of writing as research:

> But the gravity with which the men took up my invitation to shape their life stories for publication amazed me. They not only rose to the challenge of going beyond their first drafts, but they challenged me to write the same way that I taught: to tell my story of teaching them to write their stories.

Therefore, traversing beyond the procedural Information Sheets and Consent Forms which we discussed in the first workshop, I decided relationally to reciprocate and share the journey of how this specific research project was conceived, over a period of time that stretched nearly 20 years, across my student and working life. I also read out loud my writing in response to the first writing exercises that the group had just completed. In that moment of sharing, of showing my own vulnerability in contributing my story and writing, the energy in both groups snapped. It switched and became still. Both groups took a step back from their covert conflicts. Conflict of which I was aware, but deflected by consciously rerouting and shifting the focus back onto our writing together.

In telling my research story an unexpected and unanticipated space for dialogue opened, a shared humanity, where the emotions of the writers in the workshops detangled as they started to question me about the idea for the research project (research objective) and where I was from and why my focus was on writing (research method). The Consent Forms and the Participant Information Sheets, though they said they were interesting, remained abstract concepts, the skeleton framework. The following two components, discussed below, of my shared biography in coming to the research objective of understanding lived experience and writing as the method became a grounding moment and provided the flesh of why I chose to pursue this research project. Within the groups, on the day, this somehow led to the simmering animosities to cool down whilst the workshops were in progress as the mantra of kindness and respect towards one another's words and writing was repeated.

Here then follows the flesh.

3.4.1 Coming to the research objective

The inspiration for this research germinated in my first contact with the real world of work, an education beyond the university environment and my legal studies. This education took place in an in-between space – a time when for three months, in the mid-1990s, in the year wedged between my undergraduate and honours law degrees, I worked as a substitute State Prosecutor in a Magistrate's Court in a very small rural town surrounded by farmlands and red dust in the Free State Province of South Africa. Three definitive moments of this are relevant.

The first moment signals my introduction to the inner workings of the court and the back office tasks that did not appear before the Magistrate. This first task was administrative and involved fine-combing the accidental death files, to check that the police investigations had been completed and the paperwork submitted, and eventually to sign off on the end of a life. My education started at the moment I opened those files and faced the post-mortem photographs where the images of the dead, swollen and maimed, became my tutors. As a white child who grew up with every benefit bestowed by the Apartheid state - education, running water, electricity, to name but a few of the basic welfare rights - I did not know that so many toddlers drowned in buckets of water because their township homes had no taps or running water. I did not know that so many people, men and women, lost their lives crossing the main road between the township and the small town on their journeys to and from work because there were no fly-over bridges or subways. In this in-between time of three months, I came face to face with my extreme privilege of growing up as a white South African in a country segregated along racial lines.

The second moment occurred, following on from the accidental death files, when I was moved into court to witness and record the outcomes of domestic abuse cases. More often than not in the domestic abuse tribunals, I was horrified to find that the prosecution's questioning placed the victim's version of events under greater scrutiny and examination than that of the accused/perpetrator, some of whom were represented by professionals - lawyers who played and toyed with the technicalities of the law. This display of power and its effects silenced those, often from poor rural or township communities, who stood in its path, unversed in its subtleties, knowing only their own stories in their own words, which could not compete.

> You all know, don't you, that if people are frightened very often, they sometimes become invisible. (Jansson, 2017, p. 14)

The third and decisive moment occurred when I eventually found myself after qualifying in the prosecutor's stand, a wooden box to the right of the Magistrate,

diametrically opposite the accused's stand on the Magistrate's left. The first case I tried involved a pensioner whose shack was ransacked in a township (formerly a suburb officially designated for Black occupation by Apartheid legislation) raid during which the police confiscated a matchbox of cannabis just over the legal limit of possession.

Armed with my checklist of questions, to cover all aspects of the law, robed in black, I faced the accused, an old lady, shrunken and bent over with age, her head wrapped in a beautiful African cloth printed with vivid colours and patterns. The accused had used the cannabis to make tea as a relief for her arthritis. At the end the day, she would leave the court for prison, convicted of the possession of an illegal substance and I would be congratulated on my first successful conviction.

What followed from this turn of events was a crisis, of career, of being. As a human being, not a lawyer, I felt awful, because I had understood her version of events having previously written a paper on the decriminalisation of cannabis following the Dutch model, yet my successful technical, tick-box list did not reflect my own point of view. She was so very old, and I but a child. A privileged child, who because of my education, had the power to change the course of her life. Driving home that day, in my battered blue Beetle, with the red farmlands flicking by, I would glance at my first pay cheque lying on the seat next to me and the realisation dawning, a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach, that this was not how I wanted to earn a living - a cog in the machine perpetuating the cycle of inequality, enforcing the prevailing systems of injustice and class.

Unpicking this day, I have come to understand the profound, visceral effect it had on me and how it has subconsciously informed my research project. Understanding the necessity of the law and criminal justice institutions, I began to question its implementation and how it treated those who came into contact with it and also those who work within it. It forced me to understand that this particular day was a moment in real life, not a hypothetical exam or essay question - a realisation which led to a complicated relationship with my legal and academic studies afterwards. At the time it implied to me, as Cotterell (2002, p. 633) so succinctly put it, that:

> thinking like a lawyer meant... being condemned to a professional state of intellectual tunnel vision and moral and political impotence.

This notion was seemingly incongruent with the responsibility I felt to understand the wider social impact of my studies and subsequent actions in practice on the lived experiences of those who come into contact with the criminal justice system. It was a deliberate choice not to pursue a legal career. Yet, this existential crisis made for slow progress in the field of criminology that lodged itself in my academic explorations

thereafter, because my voice was not wholly my own, rather it echoed those who had gone before me - their theory and practice. However, the seed of the focus on lived experience germinated, despite lying dormant for many years.

3.4.2 Coming to the research method

The choice of the research method, namely the creative process of writing, is entwined with the birth of my twins at 29 weeks. As much as I had initially wanted to avoid referring to this personal experience in my academic work, it is this time, the months of October 2010 to January 2011, spent living in the neo-natal intensive care units of three different hospitals that became integral to my understanding of writing as the research method because of its connection to a lived experience in a strictly regulated institutional environment which strips one of one's identity through the removal of self-autonomy. This time also entails a reflection on humanity, what it is to acknowledge the human being in someone else, when one is shown a moment's empathy, the fine lifeline between despair and hope.

During this time, writing as a process and daily practised habit kept me centred in this regulated and institutional hospital environment. I wrote to complete a novel of tired-sorts to finish the thesis component of an MA in Creative Writing (Novels), which I had started the year before. However, two things happened during this continued practice of writing. I came to understand writing as a process with a deeper internal psychological and emotional depth than the external value and emphasis placed on it by the writing course with its focus on getting published and getting it 'right'. And at the same time, I began to question the exclusivity of writing as art – the contradictory duality contained in the monetary value and prestige attached to the telling of stories in one sphere of the social, and the use of writing stories and other art forms as a rehabilitative measure in prisons.

Writing as research method for the research study with women in prison to tell their own stories in their own words sparked into my thoughts deep in the middle of the night, during a conversation with another new, dazed mother - professionally known as the curator of the permanent art collection at a local gallery. In the dusky light of the tiny parents' kitchen in the hospital, boiling endless kettles of hot water to defrost the small containers of frozen pumped breast milk for our babies' next tube feed at 3am, we talked about access to art. A moment that underpins my motivation and belief that art belongs to everyone, that it is "not just the province of the privileged" (Schneider, 2003, p. xx). Art allows us to explore what it is to be human when everything else in life is stripped away.

In reflection, I realised that a part of my hesitancy in telling and sharing my biography also stemmed from a two-pronged fear, that in letting go of these personal stories, which I had held so close and tight for such a long time, the research participants would judge me for working in court as a lawyer and as such would not want to take part in the workshops to write with me. And, equally, on the other hand, that it would academically be frowned upon as not acceptable, despite my biography laying the foundations of my socially constructed subjectivity and epistemological approach. However, I came to understand this transformative process of finding my researcher voice through my positionality in the context of Gelfand's (1983, p. 26) observation that "most women have kept their stories within them" because they have seemed too small and too personal when viewed through the androcentric lenses of traditional discourses and history.

To my surprise the research participants did not judge me. Instead, sharing my biography and how it informed the objective of my research design had the opposite effect. It sparked a flame and stirred them to share their experiences, particularly the court perspective for the writers in East Sutton Park and the hospital aspect for the writers in Downview. On the one hand, for the research participants it opened up a space, emotional, cathartic and intense, for discussions, dialogue and writing about their experiences of appearing in court and being sentenced. And on the other hand, this reflexive process of examining my own positionality and considering the moments of hesitancy contained therein, "when one is pushed outside of one's comfort zone, temporality and qualified thinking and feeling" (Kofoed and Staunæs, 2015, p. 37), came to be revealed as a relational and ethical position rather than a detached one in the creation of knowledge. This moment of understanding finally led me to:

> the clearing of a space where the voice of the self and the voices of others can be heard; not the 'destruction of every voice' but a 'proliferation of the possibilities of hearing (Walker, 1990, p. 568 cited in Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p. 47).

Berry (2014, p. 138) writes that it is often in this space that the narratives "instructors ask students to write" begins to connect with "the teachers' own stories about literacy and possibility". The possibility of writing a counter-narrative emerges.

3.5 Lived experience, imagination and emotion - moving from data to words

In weaving the writing space as a space separate from the prison world, I thought about writing in this institutionalised environment and decided on the idea of the tablecloth. It needed to be a thing of beauty, of colours and patterns, to stimulate and inspire the

writing and reading workshops, to lift the spirit in order to create. Entering this workshop space once the tablecloth was laid out, mutual dignity and respect centred on writing and how we, as researcher and research participants, treated one another as writers and as a consequence how we treated one another's words. As such, as will be seen in Chapter 4, the ritual of the tablecloth became significant as it held the physical shift of space, symbolising the embodiment of the writing room as a creative and ethically relational space, which differed from the hostile prison environment from which the women were drawn.

Based on the Amherst Writers and Artists (AWA) method, the women were all writers in a writing space with its own rules of conduct, ritual and support based on the notions of kindness, respect and listening (Schneider, 2003, p. 187). The AWA method for writing groups, workshops and classes, had its origin in 1979 and was developed in a community of writers including workshop leaders, teachers and "several thousand workshop participants" who have been working towards reform in the teaching of writing since the 1930s - most notably, and fully, articulated by Professor Peter Elbow (Schneider, 2003, p. 185). This method focuses on minimising hierarchies in supportive groups, particularly to keep all the writers safe to find confidence in their own voices (Schneider, 2003, p. 187). Schneider (2003, p. 191) cautions the workshop leader to remember that a writer's voice is:

> an incredibly delicate instrument made up of all the places he or she has been, all the persons loved and lived with, all the cultural nuances of original neighbourhood, workplace, home, country, continent, historical period, and personal story.

The housekeeping rules for both writing groups were set out as follows and reiterated throughout the workshops, weaving it into feedback and also into reflection on self-criticism:

- Everyone in the group is a writer and writers write - writing is a very personal experience.
- There is no right or wrong way to write.
- All the writing is to be treated as fiction, with kindness and respect.
- Feedback is always to focus on the writing not the person, which sets the tone for how we interact as a group.
- Freewriting/sloppy copies will only to be shared if the writer feels comfortable doing so – feedback only on an image or sentence that has stayed with the listener.
- Manuscripts are shared when the writer has spent some time editing and rewriting a piece - when giving feedback, always start with something positive,

> what you liked and why, before going into the detail of the piece of writing/paragraph/sentence/word that did not work for you.

These housekeeping rules became an important anchor in the prison environment. Liebling (1999, p. 152) writes that prisons are distinctive, "raw, sometimes desperate places", which "can also precipitate remarkable honesty". Within this raw desperate place we encounter lived experience. Conaghan (2000, pp. 373; 385) observes that women's disadvantage in the context of imprisonment is to be understood as multiple, complex and intersecting, and she urges for a women-centred approach paying "close attention to the material lives of an oppressed" or dominated group, because it becomes a necessary task to the "intellectual goal of furthering knowledge and understanding the world we live in". This call, to situate the view of the social world and pay close attention to the material lives of incarcerated women in contributing to knowledge, further shaped the research design as an inter-disciplinary qualitative research study where the women in prison as research participants and writers, became the co-producers of knowledge through their writing produced in the creative workshops, alongside the researcher as writer of the thesis within the particular discipline of criminology extending into the arts and humanities. Sprague (2016, p. 22) writes that this framework, with the focus on research participants as agents developing knowledge through their own subjectivities counteracts the objectification of research "subjects", where people are turned into data:

> particularly those at the bottom of social hierarchies – women, the poor, oppressed racial/ethnic groups, people from postcolonial nations, and people with disabilities.

The lived experiences of women in prison intersect at numerous points within these social hierarchies, and for Sprague (2016, p. 22) the danger in the practices of objectification lies in the fact that it comprises a "distancing effect", which can lead to justifying the continued existence of harmful institutional practices. From a narrative perspective, in coming to examine these raw, penal places through the experiences of women living within it, Andrews et al (2013, p. 13) observe that the Latin etymology of narrative "lies in knowing, not telling". Proceeding from this vantage point, "without over-extending its remit, or treating personal narratives as universal theories", they write that the process of researching narratives as "ordered representations" holds the possibility of "mapping forms of local knowledge or 'theory'" (Andrews, Squire, Tamboukou, 2013, p. 13). And as such, because of the local situated knowledge produced, narrative research of storied lives, as a way of studying and understanding experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, pp. 19 - 20), both the personal and the institutional, holds the possibility of a micro-political and micro-social convergence.

Different knowledges can engage in dialogue with one another to create and produce a larger, yet still situated, narrative knowledge (Andrews, Squire, Tamboukou, 2013, p. 13).

However, it is with this reference to the narrative perspective in not treating personal narratives as universal theories that I found my research design diverge from some criminological studies of arts-based programmes in prison, where these programmes are in the main evaluated for the contributions they make towards the "process of desistance from crime" (Cheliotis and Jordanoska, 2016, p. 26). The focus on this evaluative measure places arts-based research within the sphere of scientific research designs of abstraction with a specialized language (Sprague, 2016, p.25). Where research findings are measured against the methodological requirements of for example, "the composition of research samples" and lack of establishing the programme effects, they are described as making it difficult to "assess both the validity of causal inferences and the generalizability of findings" (Cheliotis and Jordanoska, 2016, p. 26). Within this framework of assessment, Cheliotis and Jordanaska (2016, p. 29) highlight further limitations of arts-based research to be found in selection bias, i.e. self-selection or screening by prison staff and the "overly small samples of participants" that "weakens causal inferences" and "precludes the generalisation of findings to broader populations".

Deciding on the design for my research, it was this criticism of arts-based prison research and the insistence on the neutral language of causal inferences and generalizability of findings, sample sizes and attrition that made me uncomfortable. Precisely because these requirements do not capture or reveal the depth, nuance and complexity of the lived experiences of prisoners. At the same time this approach would require to maintain the barrier, i.e. the separation between my selves, that of researcher in the field of criminology and that of human being who witnessed the deep emotional intensity experienced by the research participants as women and writers in prison writing down their stories in their own words. Liebling (1999, p. 148) describes this moment as an internal struggle, which becomes a further dialogue between "our criminological lives and our human lives" where this dialogical overlap reveals two states of being often kept separate from one another in writing and reading about prison. Wakeman (2014, p. 719) continues this argument and points out that criminologists are "diverse human beings with a vast array of life experiences and complex histories" before they are scholars, researchers or academics. The "self", as he points out, becomes an "embodiment of how we research, how we theorize and how we come to know and tell about our subjects" (Wakeman, 2014, p. 719). Therefore, when Liebling (1999, p. 163) astutely observes that research in prison takes place in "an

intense, risk-laden, emotionally fraught environment", it is precisely because of the complexity of human nature, both that of the researched and the researcher. It is this acknowledgement of emotion and human nature, both of the research participants and the researcher that steers my research study away from neutral language into the sphere of reflexive writing to capture the intensity of prison research and prison writing.

Sprague (2016, p. 27) points out that according to convention:

> scientific writing should express rationality without emotion or humor, speaking plainly so that the unvarnished facts and truths will be obvious.

However, she argues that this "emotional flatness" proceeds to hide the researcher in the text, which at the same time impacts on the reader – "the audience [who] is supposed to think and not to feel" (Sprague, 2016, p. 27). Thus, Sprague (2016, p. 27) finds that this scholarly norm of discrediting speakers who reveal feelings such as "caring, anger or outrage within the context of scholarly communication" at the same time serves to distance the reader, audience, "from caring about the situation under discussion", which in turn leaves the reader, audience, feeling much "less compelled to do something about it".

Research writing is drawn to the fore here with the requirement that the representation of the research, in bridging the gap between thinking and feeling, focuses on the language, tone and voice used. This world - the research landscape of women and prison, and their lived experiences - caught and redoubled through the research writing process, touches on the concern voiced by Dunne, Pryor and Yates (2005, p. 129) "to move away from writing conceived merely as a technical support for research activity." What they propose instead is to view and "examine the idea that researchers are primarily writers", because it asks of the researcher to consider "the issue of representation, the matter of how what we write relates to the realities our research aims to portray" (Dunne, Pryor and Yates, 2005, p. 129).

In the particular field of criminological research, Wakeman (2014, p. 715) argues that when the researcher takes account of the "emotive self" it creates the possibility of presenting the research material in more "emotive and stylized" ways to enable readers to feel their way to an understanding in the process. Therefore, for Tierney (1995, p. 386) it becomes imperative that qualitative researchers engage with their ideas and what they attempt to do with these ideas through the act of writing by examining the use of words and the construction of sentences. Thus, he argues for a narrative scope as broad as that which exists in fiction, because the opposite would entail a scope as "narrow as what exists in the natural sciences" (Tierney, 1995, p. 386).

This links to Liebling (1999, p. 166) who argues against this separation of the self and views any methodological approach, which advocates for a disassociation between being a human being and criminologist, as "deeply flawed".

At this point, I turn to O'Neill and Seal (2019, p. 1) who, in making the case for imaginative criminology, argue that criminology should not be constrained by the conventional perspectives which primarily view it as the study of criminal justice and crime, defined by the social science methods of interviews and surveys. In reference to Young's *The Criminological Imagination* (2011), they point out that cultural criminology becomes an antidote to:

> criminology's lack of imagination, evidenced by an almost singular focus on positivism, 'quasi – scientific rhetoric' and administrative criminology that works in favour of or legitimates neoliberal politics. (O'Neill and Seal, 2019, p. 1)

For O'Neill and Seal (2019, p. 3) an imaginative criminological methodology pays attention to the "micrology of lived experience" and the ways and forms of telling with the focus on methods that expands the development of doing criminology imaginatively. This further links to Ricoeur's insistence on the "vital importance of the imagination" in the study of narrative and time, because of the "meaningful connection" it constitutes "between narrative function and the human experience of time" - lived experience in other words (Muldoon, 2002, pp. 63; 78).

Imagination here functions in a mediating role, "forever at work in lived reality" (Muldoon, 2002, p. 79). Yet, Ricoeur further argues that no social, lived, or human reality exists "which is not already represented in some sense" or other as a segment of the "social imagery" (Muldoon, 2002, p. 79). Social imagery is defined as the "ensemble of symbolic discourses" – the scientific, political and literary – mediating the human reality. And within this ensemble of social imagery we find the projected vision of the world, or our particular society and culture, mediated through narrative (Muldoon, 2002, p. 79). Muldoon (2002, p. 79) writes that this particular feature of narrative, the remaking or reshaping of reality, "has not been an idea lost on political propagandists of all sorts", particularly because the "configuration of the social agenda" holds the "potential to become an official doctrine" justifying the power of the dominant ruling party and/or class (Muldoon, 2002, p. 79).

This observation chimes with Ferrell's (2004, p. 297) arguments for criminological methodologies that reclaim the "criminological enterprise from a courthouse criminology of scientific rationalization and methodological objectification", which instead offers researchers deep involvement with their research participants through humility and vulnerability. For Ferrell (2004, p. 296) the energy

and vigour of criminological research comes from the engagement with the research participants and not essentially in the subject matter, precisely because the subject matter and research participants "could just as easily be reduced to tabulated abstractions [...] by any good abstract empiricist". He sees this, in part, as an intellectual resistance in the process of rehumanizing criminological inquiry and analysis, by confronting these cultural and social conditions that "pervade mainstream criminology" (Ferrell, 2004, pp. 296 - 297).

3.6 Ethics as epistemic justice

Lastly, the aim of this examination of the researcher's ethical epistemic standpoint is to proceed with an awareness of what constitutes epistemic injustice, both at the macro-level and to avoid replicating it on the micro-level of the research study. This in turn underpins the endeavour to work towards epistemic justice for the structurally situated knowledge held by women in prison about their lived experiences found in their own writing, both for themselves as research contributors and for expansion of the collective social understanding.

Fricker (2007) argues that for the ethical dimensions of our epistemic practices to be revealed, we must shift our focus onto the negative space of injustice, particularly epistemic injustice. With this adjustment of lens, she examines the entanglement of social power and reason to reveal two forms of epistemic injustice, which slots into the wider patterns of social injustice (Fricker, 2007, p. 3). This is done in order to convey the ethical aspects of two basic epistemic practices namely that of "conveying knowledge to others by telling them" on the one hand, and "making sense of our own social experiences" on the other hand (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). This is termed as testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice, and underpins the focus on epistemic injustice from the perspective of a wrong done to someone in their capacity as knower – the women as writer in prison (Fricker, 2007, p. 1).

According to Fricker (2007, p. 1) testimonial injustice transpires when a "deflated level of credibility is given to a speaker's word", whilst hermeneutical injustice takes place:

> when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their of their social experiences.

This encapsulates the neglect of women's prison writing as cultural resource. Both injustices centre on a capacity that is wronged - with testimonial injustice it is that of the "giver of knowledge" and with hermeneutical injustice it is as a "subject of social understanding" (Fricker, 2007, p. 7). For Fricker (2007, p. 3) this ethical consideration

forms the context of the "socially situated accounts of our epistemic practices", because all participants in the research are not conceived:

> in abstraction of relations of social power, but... as operating social types who stand in relations of power to one another.

Central to these socially situated conceptions and capacities are the question of identity and social power, with social power in its situated capacity viewed as the capacity to control others' actions (Fricker, 2007, pp. 1 - 4). From this flows a sub-species of power, which is referred to as identity power "of which gender power is one instance" (Fricker, 2007, p. 9) dependant on the:

> shared social-imaginative conceptions of the social identities of those implicated in the particular operation of power (Fricker, 2007, p. 4).

Therefore, testimonial injustice occurs when the speaker suffers prejudice on the hearer's part, i.e. if the research participant is given less credibility than would otherwise have been the case, because of the shared social-imaginative conceptions of the social identities of the particular group that the speaker, as a woman in prison in this instance, belongs to (Fricker, 2007, p. 4). The reach and scope of testimonial injustice is extended (Fricker, 2007, p. 27) if these testimonial injustices are connected to other injustice "via a common prejudice" to become systematic. Fricker (2007, p. 27) argues that systematic testimonial injustices are not the product simply of prejudice, but rather that they track the subject/research participant/woman in prison "through different dimensions of social activity", namely that of education, economical, professional, legal, political, sexual, gender and religion. In this instance, to be the subject of a "tracker prejudice" is to be rendered susceptible "not only to testimonial injustice" but also to a range of other injustices (Fricker, 2007, p. 27). Therefore, when a prejudice generates a testimonial injustice it becomes systematically connected to these other types of injustice too (Fricker, 2007, p. 27).

Fricker (2007, pp. 27 - 28) argues that the principal type of prejudice tracker is located in someone's social identity due to a particular feature thereof, in this instance a woman (gender) in prison (social signifier). This constitutes a negative identity prejudice in the hearer's ability to give credibility to the speaker's testimony, culminating in identity power. Identity power concludes with one party controlling the other, in other words where the speaker is prevented from conveying knowledge, because of a dependency on the "collective conceptions of the social identities" of both parties concerned (Fricker, 2007, p. 28).

The collective conceptions of social identities exercised through identity power pervade the contribution of knowledge in both the macro-level and micro-level. As such, the significance of testimonial injustice is revealed for the micro-level of the relationship between the researcher and the research participant. This relationship required an awareness of how the creative writing workshops were conceived and how they ran. It informed the Consent forms and Participant Information worksheets, together with the representation of the writing produced by the women in prison as co-producers of knowledge. It required reflection on the positionality of the researcher and continuous reflexivity throughout every step of the research process concluding in the research thesis and anthology of the women's prison writing. This is implemented to proceed towards the possibility of testimonial justice where the speaker as research participant does not suffer further prejudice on the part of the hearer in the person of the researcher.

Fricker (2007, p. 6) identifies hermeneutical injustice as arising from a gap in the collective hermeneutical resources. This gap is defined as one that impinges on the "shared tools of social interpretation" because the cognitive disadvantage that it creates affects different social groups unequally (Fricker, 2007, p. 6). For the groups unequally disadvantaged, in this case women in prison, hermeneutical marginalization then follows because of their unequal participation in the practices that generate social meanings (Fricker, 2007, p. 6). Fricker (2007, p. 6) argues that this form of marginalization renders our collective forms of understanding structurally prejudicial when taking into account the "content and/or style" thereof because:

> the social experiences of members of hermeneutically marginalized groups are left inadequately conceptualized and so ill understood, perhaps by the subjects themselves; and/or attempts at communication made by such groups, where they do have an adequate grip on the content they aim to convey, are not heard as rational owing to their expressive style being inadequately understood.

Therefore, drawing on feminism's long history of concern with the way that power relations constrain women's ability of understanding their own experiences in a "world structured by others for their purposes" and acceptance of the expressions thereof, Fricker (2007, p. 147) consequently expands hermeneutic inequality and marginalization in relation to the practice of social power, arguing that "our interpretive efforts are naturally geared to interests" and an understanding of "those things it serves us to understand". From this flows the observation that a particular group's – women in prison - unequal hermeneutical participation is revealed "in a localized manner in hermeneutical hotspots", where the powerful display "no interest in achieving a proper interpretation", and where instead, in some instances, it

culminates in the "positive interest" of maintaining the misinterpretation (Fricker, 2007, p. 152).

Fricker (2007, 154) argues that because of the wide-ranging hermeneutic marginalization, a significant area of a person's or group's social experiences is persistently obscured from the collective understanding. For the hermeneutic marginalization to culminate in hermeneutic injustice, Fricker (2007, p. 155) examines how marginalization causes a structural prejudice in the collective hermeneutic resource where prejudice resides against the members of a socially powerless group "by virtue of an aspect of their social identity". Women in prison and the neglect of their prison writing in the context of this thesis, based for example on low literacy levels, is one such exclusionary argument. For this identity prejudice to become systematic, just as in the case of testimonial injustice, it needs to track the subject/research participant/woman in prison through different and multiple spheres of social activity (Fricker, 2007, p. 155).

Thus, using Fricker's framework of epistemic injustice as yardstick, in Chapter 2 the review of literature about women's prison writing revealed the epistemic practices of testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustices in the context of women's prison writing. This occurs in the macro-level through time in the neglect and denial of their contribution to knowledge, based on the identity prejudice found in evaluating the preoccupations revealed in their writing as situated knowledge of their own experiences which differs from the preoccupations of the male prisoner as prison writer. It is further found in the connected systemic identity prejudice which then tracks them through their lives in multiple and different social inequalities. This is highlighted in the gap of their writing as resource and the lack of critical engagement with this writing as a means of expanding the social and collective understanding of the lived experiences of incarcerated women within the penal system.

Finally, Fricker (2007, p. 4; p. 8) argues that this awareness becomes imperative in examining how our epistemic practices and conduct might become more just, precisely because "in matters of epistemic injustice, the ethical is political", which becomes important for our own understanding of these phenomena in order to bring about social change. In the context of criminology, Fricker (2007, p. 13) focuses particularly on the social group of "delinquents" in Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment*, as the subjects of a disenfranchised group within the structural operations of power to maintain social order and control. She argues that with the term "'delinquent', a certain subject position is created as the subject matter for a certain professionalized theoretical discourse" and within the framework of the

disenfranchisement of that particular social group, their interests "become politically expendable" within the realms of the theoretical discourse (Fricker, 2007, p. 13).

Thus, to avoid this expendability of knowledge and expand the concept of justice, O'Neill and Seal (2019, p. 2), in their review of Carlen's (2010) book, *A Criminological Imagination,* which spans over 30 years of Carlen's work on prison, punishment and penal reform, point to her bidding her readers to:

> Imagine a better world, serving the interests of justice and where the ordering of things can always be otherwise.

This bidding underpins Carlen's, and by virtue O'Neill and Seal's, argument for the "practice of imaginative criminology" starting with the belief that everything in the social world could also be different from an ontological viewpoint and that as such with the task of social science and academic criminology it becomes "more important to account for social phenomena than to count them" (O'Neill and Seal, 2019, p. 2). It leads to the critical engagement with women writing in prison and their narratives of lived experience that I undertake in this thesis.

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Chapter 4 Wallflowers have eyes too

> I am writing this in my cell because Loveness has allowed me to take the notebooks and pens back with me. It has been three weeks since you gave me the notebooks and I started writing. (Gappah, 2015, pp. 6 - 7)

On fieldwork Tuesday, when I leave home, flanked by green fields, the road stretches out, grey and winding. It becomes a river and flows towards and between two new places of learning and writing, connecting the writing session at Downview in the morning with the writing session at East Sutton Park in the evening. Driving from one prison to the other, in the mid-day sun, brambles and thorn bushes turn to concrete and highways – moving away, from, to. Every now and then the wind, brushing through a gap in the window, sounds like waves in my ear and after a while the wheels on the tar become a steady hypnotic drone. In the drone, I reflect on the day's workshops and writing – the workshop completed in the morning and the workshop to commence in the evening. Already I begin to plan next Tuesday's session. The research moves at its own pace, onwards it flows in its own inimitable human and unpredictable way.

On fieldwork Tuesday, the day is long and I cannot tell the outcome of the writing workshops yet. Every week is different and I ignore the satnav telling me, "Make a U-turn now". Arrived at my destination, before the start of the session at East Sutton Park in the early evening, waiting in the car park at the end of a small country-lane adjacent to a farmer's field, the sheep graze in the late afternoon sun and I collect my thoughts, writing in my research journal:

Today the workshop at Downview was strained. Rainbow Rose did not write at all; Purple Rose was very pale and quiet; The White Cow was helpful and combative at the same time, and Raven Hawthorn kept correcting my pronunciation of her name, which is fine. Names are important.

At the end of the evening, after the workshop at East Sutton Park, before driving home in the darkening dusk of a long summer day, I note in my journal:

The session began with an awkward silence when Daisy Dove looked at me and said,

- You, you are just like Miss Honey.

- These two here, they are the two old crooks (she pointed to Andromeda Marsh and Yellow-horned Poppy sitting on either side of her). They can be the parents.

- And I, I am the little Matilda.

Andromeda Marsh did not speak for the rest of the workshop and Yellow-horned Poppy carried on as if nothing had happened.

The strange mood of this day, enveloping both the workshops at Downview and East Sutton Park, made it difficult to gauge whether the writing exercises had any impact or made any impression on the writers. It was hard to tell. So much remained hidden amongst the entanglements of being human in the moment, of writing and not writing. Yet, weeks later, at the end of our last workshop session, Sea-Coral presented me with poems written by the women in their own words, unsolicited, of how they experienced the workshops and what it had meant to them. In her poem she wrote:

Today is the day, Tuesday by name,
Something is different, not the same.
I won't be going to my favourite place,
It's ended, finished, there's no more space.
Purple book stays upon the shelf,
No more creative writing today, I tell myself.
I expect I will have to get used to this,
I will miss the girls, I quietly hiss.
No more Rosa, no more fun,
But I have enjoyed 10 weeks with everyone.
Thank you Rosa for all your ideas,
Sorry everyone for my weepy tears.
Thank you girls, your work was great,
I will miss your stories that you will create.
Carry on writing, it's not the end,
It's the start of something you can depend.
So pick up your pens, you can't go wrong,
Your writing will make you very strong.

(Sea-Coral, 2018)

4.1 Introduction

> Oftentimes what is known can limit the possibility of what is not and this requires a creative act to see things from a new view. (Sullivan, 2006, p. 20)

The pursuit of aesthetic responses to incarceration becomes a challenge in and of itself in the circumstance of the prison environment, which is as Lucas (2011, p. 193) observes, "seldom imagined as hotbeds of education, literacy, creativity, or the arts". The restrictive nature of incarceration, the noise and cramped conditions, "poses

significant challenges for those who wish to study, write, or make art" (Lucas, 2011, p. 193). The imprint of the prison environment on my research reflections is that of a brittle space filled with tension. Almost tangible, it held an invisible force field. Upon meeting the research participants and prison employees at the start of my research, I became aware that everyone was on their best behaviour. Yet behind the shield of their effort, the atmosphere remained heavy, sometimes chaotic, weighed down with sediment, the layer upon layer of that which remained hidden, unspoken. This atmosphere, at the same time, also seemed on edge, ever perched on the verge of an eruption of what simmered beneath the surface. It bristled and challenged my research aim of providing the opposite, a tranquil creative space in which to write and create as part of the writing workshops.

Prisons "by their very nature" hide and obscure the people who work and live inside them, with Lawston (2011, p. 1) further observing that it is perhaps this obfuscation, the "mystery that enshrouds the carceral that fuels the desire for outsiders to create representations of those inside prisons". This is apposite for imprisoned women, who continue to "perplex society" precisely because they do not fit the perceived mould of what a prisoner is supposed to be (Lawston, 2011, p. 2) – or as this comment, jotted down in my research fieldwork journal, demonstrates from another perspective, *Oh of course, I forget, women can be prisoners too*. As such, attempts to explain what "causes female criminality" have led to manufactured representations of incarcerated women whilst these representations:

> are not necessarily congruous with how imprisoned women may frame and understand themselves, their lives, and their experiences with incarceration. (Lawston, 2011, p. 2)

Contemporary portrayals of women in prison, therefore often fixate on the notion of incarcerated women as "hardened criminals" who need to be feared (Lawston, 2011, pp. 3 - 4). Their lives are depicted in a "flat and simplistic picture" which fails to contextualise the complexity of their lived experiences within social systems where economic, racial, gender and class discrimination are contributing factors to their disproportionate incarceration as marginalized, non-violent and often vulnerable women (Lawston, 2011, pp. 3 - 4). These socially constructed perspectives of women in prison permeate as knowledge, often manipulating social understanding to maintain the current status quo. The simplistic nature of these one-dimensional portrayals neglect to explore or tell very little about how women in prison:

> represent themselves, how they conceptualize and process imprisonment and the separation from their communities and families, and how they express dissent and fight for their voices to be heard by those on the outside of prison walls. (Lawston, 2011, p. 4)

With the concept of creative writing as research method implemented in practice in the creative writing workshops held within prison, I sought a new collaborative way of seeing from the perspective of the aesthetic responses of the research participants living within the institutional space of silencing, in order to move towards a better understanding of their narratives of lived experience. In this chapter I will explore how the opening up of the writing space - both in the prison space and the thesis as representation of the action - embraces arts-based writing as the participatory strand of the research methodology based on the principles of action research.

Hart and Bond (1995, pp. 37 - 38) observe that action research is founded on a research relationship in which those who are involved are participants in the change process – a process described as context-specific and cyclical interlinking research, action and evaluation, as well as being educative in working with individuals who are also as members of social groups, involving an intervention for change with the aim of improvement and involvement. Creative writing as art is used in my study as the research method to represent, understand and further explore human experience and action in the process of the narrative inquiry (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny, 2014, p. 1). It becomes the "mechanism through which to put the rhetoric of participation into action" (Baum, MacDougall, Smith, 2004, p. 854) working with women in prison.

As a research method it is not prescriptive, leading to interesting challenges, because as the researcher, and also as a writer, I place myself in the position of "letting the research and creativity unfold together" in order for the research writing and the stories of creative writing to emerge as the research outcomes (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny, 2014, p. 1). Sullivan (2006, p. 32) views this approach as one where the research action becomes exploratory and responsive.

Arts-related research focuses on both the strands of "the process of and expression of a work in context", as well as on the final representation as end-point (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny, 2014, p. 1). As such it seeks the "opening up of peripheral spaces" – women writing in the hidden space of prison - to challenge the social fabric through "embodied ways of thinking" in order to create new understandings for social practices that are equitable and just (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny, 2014, p. 51). Furthermore, because of the complex and critical nature of art and art-based disciplines, Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2014, p. 2) observe that "the sense of reflexivity" becomes heightened in comparison with other research approaches. As we have seen in Chapter 3, this heightened reflexivity becomes integral to the narrative inquiry, because of the fact that "arts-based research takes a critical stance towards itself" and also of the world around it (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny, 2014, p. 2). This particular "stance and the sense of interruption through art" that flows

from it constitutes the transformative core of the research (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny, 2014, p. 2).

In this chapter, where the reflexive narrative inquiry extends into arts-based participatory action research, I will discuss the co-construction of knowledge through creative writing as a disruption of accepted power structures and relations. With the arts-based narrative inquiry I focus on creative writing pedagogy to explore the "artistic process, the making and doing of art", namely creative writing in prison, as the means and process to understand experience where the researcher and research participants collaboratively use writing to make sense of the lived experiences of women in prison (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny, 2014, p. 7). It is an approach that resonated with me in coming to this research project firstly as an artist/writer becoming a researcher evolving into artist/writer as researcher informed by my own education, training and experience in creative writing. Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2014, p. 34) define the artist-researcher as a person who is trained within the arts or a particular art form:

> with knowledge inherent in art practice as found within the creative process and creative outcome, and who works and practices with aesthetic forms.

They further identify a number of characteristics that imbue those trained in arts practices for the "role of artist-researcher" – three of which have already wound their way into the discussion about arts-based research, namely the artistic willingness to disrupt perspectives by valuing both critical standpoints that also incorporate "play and sensual communication with audiences", as well as innovation and creativity that apply new points of view to existing inquiries (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny's, 2014, p. 34). The fourth characteristic holds that the artist-researcher experience "being within (rather than abstracted from) the arts practice" – writing in this project – "researching through and within that practice" (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny's, 2014, p. 34). It is this fourth characteristic that resonated most in my determination and decisions of how the creative writing workshops as research method would unfold in practice in prison. It was the only part of the research process I had cast in stone, precisely because I had been a participant in creative writing workshops, which have shaped my experiences of the writing process within a group.

The art, the writing produced in the workshops, becomes the research material and is used to inform and illustrate the research findings in Chapters 5 to 7. As such, the aesthetic responses of the women as writers, who participated in the writing sessions in prison, are revealed in their own words to bring about change and contribute to knowledge in the social, personal and epistemic spheres where in

Chapters 2 and 3 we encountered the neglect and absence of their voices in the genre of prison writing.

4.2 Creative writing as a culturally responsive pedagogy

> From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His *(sic)* efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of students in their relations with them. (Freire, 1970 (2017 reprint), p. 48)

In the initial stages of developing the creative writing workshops, I encountered a dearth of methodological examples, studies and accounts of writing with women in prison in the UK. The few instances of where I read about creative writing workshops with women in prison focused on the novel written or the exhibition curated by the creative writing workshop teacher based on or inspired by the experiences of the women in prison that they had worked with. In the case of creative writing workshops held in women's prisons in the UK, where the UK mirrors the US closely, Lucas' (2011 p. 194) observation resonates when she points out the difficulty in documenting "how many such programs have existed, where they happened, how long they lasted, and what sorts of creative work they produced", due to the fact that arts programmes in women's prisons, in particular creative writing workshops:

> like most prison-related activism, is usually done by one or a small handful of people in each locale, records are seldom kept of the creative workshops' activities.

What follows in this chapter, is a discussion of my approach, how I developed, implemented and at times adjusted the creative writing workshops held over a 10-week period in two two-hour sessions with imprisoned women in HMP Downview and HMP East Sutton Park respectively. Applying Ricoeur's three-stage process of mimesis to the development of the workshop content and structure, working from the perspective of Mimesis 1 in coming to understand, my design of the workshops germinated in studying Hunt's (2013) work on "exploring the self in the learning process" through creative life writing. Hunt (2013) describes her experiences and reflections on teaching the MA in Creative Writing and Personal Development at the University of Sussex. From this flowed her observations on reconceptualising the self as a process to contain the different aspects of the self as revealed in writing, particularly by using fictional and poetic techniques (Hunt, 2013, p. 43).

To frame this writing trajectory of reconceptualising the self as a process, I based the overall theme of the workshops on Campbell's (2008) mono-myth story

structure called the journey of life. This framing device enabled me to explain the conceptual process of writing together to the research participants. In this story structure, the main character (heroine) leaves their home and sets of on a difficult journey. They move from somewhere they know into an unknown place. After overcoming a great trial they return home with a newfound wisdom – something that will help themselves and their community. Hunt and Sampson (2006, p. 2) explain the contradiction found in this creative process, a symbiotic wave of push and pull, with writing constituting a deeply personal act connected to the writer's self, but also involving a move away from this self towards becoming something impersonal which entails the adoption of a "different stance towards the personal" through the contradictory notion of an internal distancing from the personal connection to the material to allow for internal spaces to open up so that the material can develop a life of its own within the imagination. It therefore moves from a subjective experience towards something to explore objectively.

Each research participant then embarked on an individual creative journey as writer within the framework of the collective journey of the group, which was broken down into episodes for each of the 10 weeks. At this point, in refining my approach to deciding on the writing exercises and how to structure the workshops, I turned to the Amherst Writers and Artists method (AWA), as mentioned in Chapter 3. Schneider (2003) describes the AWA method in her seminal work *Writing Alone and with Others*. I drew on Schneider's suggestions, prompts and exercises for developing the teaching and writing practice, particularly seeking out those that focused on the poetic and fictional. As my study deepened and evolved, I also delved into Goldberg's (1991) *Wild Mind - Living the Writer's Life* and adapted Schneider's exercises to include references to nature, i.e. the seasons, and works of literature as I sought to trace the path of the self finding itself on a journey of meeting others, encountering animals and listening to music. As such the syllabus and exercises with the focus on reconceptualising the self as a process were specifically tailored for the workshops with the research participants writing in prison in mind. These exercises and prompts included the following:

- Week 1 - Writing the self as a colour and introduction to the river/tree of life metaphor and story structure using the freewriting writing technique.
- Week 2 - Writing the self as the seasons and describing a place.
- Week 3 - Writing in response to postcards of image stills of the animated film *The adventures of Prince Ahmed* made by Lotte Reiniger in 1926 and screened at The British Film Institute.

- Week 4 – Writing in response to music: Satie's 3 Gymnopédies 1 – 3, Talk Talk's *The Colour of Spring*, and bird sounds of the rain forest; Reflecting on sharing; Making a list.
- Week 5 – Reflecting on our colours at the halfway mark – what has changed, what has stayed the same; Writing about animals – familiar and unfamiliar.
- Week 6 - Revisiting our animals – swapping places; Writing about people – familiar and unfamiliar/strangers.
- Week 7 - Pools of reflection – self and others; Finding time.
- Week 8 - Writing the self as a character from a novel, namely Mrs Dalloway who said she would buy the flowers herself in the novel of the same name by Virginia Woolf; Patterns; Turning up and editing.
- Week 9 - Reflecting on the journey of the colours; Exploring kindness and the effects of reading out loud.
- Week 10 – An ending in one place is a beginning somewhere else… keep on writing; Freewriting exercise – I am a writer: What does that mean for you?; Handing out certificates; Celebrating the writers' work – reflecting on the writing that has stayed with us over the course of the 10-week period and asking writers to read it out loud one last time.

Extending the concept of the journey into the practice of the workshops and mindful of the research participants, often vulnerable, writing in the context of confinement within the prison environment, I was further drawn to Howe's (2016, p. 492) exploration of the creative writing workshop in relation to the "concept of *bildung"* within the framework of aesthetic hermeneutics. She explains that aesthetic hermeneutics:

> require a journey of finding sense of identity and personal meaning in experience born in the midst of universal struggles (Slattery, 1996, in Howe, 2016, p. 493)

She expands that this journey is then undertaken by interpreters working together as a community through mutually collaborative efforts to understand the contexts and texts of their journey (Howe, 2016, p. 493). *Bildung* is described as:

> the cultivation of a community of learning that encompasses and utilizes different social, political, racial, gendered, and economic identities (*cultura*) to form a cohesive whole. (Howe, 2016, p. 493)

Bildung is then anchored in the essential capacity to "come together and create a spirit of mutual respect and community" with different people of different backgrounds, ethnicity, politics, gender, race and religion. The element that connects this concept of

bildung to the aesthetic hermeneutical framework of the creative writing workshop is then found in writing. In this context of the women in prison coming together to write their own stories, Schneider's (2003, p. xix) observation about writing seems apposite:

> When we write, we create, and when we offer our creation to one another… Our words, our truth, our imagining, our dreaming may be the best gifts we have to give.

The aspects of writing as the "communication of the essence of lived experience" combined with *bildung,* brought together in the creative writing workshop as research method to provide a collaborative space for the interpretation and reimagining of texts within a defined context constitute what Howe (2016, p. 493; p. 499) refers to as a culturally responsive pedagogy. Therefore, incorporating the notion of *bildung* in the design of the creative writing workshops for this research study, I also engaged with and learnt from the criticisms[3] of the classic workshop model to work with awareness within a framework where these negative experiences do not have to constitute the outcome for all creative writing workshops, particularly as it is a teaching method and methodology which has been shown to have "longitudinal, positive impacts on myriad writing populations" (Howe, 2016, 492). My workshop approach therefore focused on the aspects of mindful communication, ritual, freewriting and viewing the writing produced in the workshop as fiction.

All learning and writing journeys are individual processes, and in the creative writing workshops, whilst the women as writers wrote together as a group, supporting one another through mindful feedback and comments, they also began to embrace and accept their individual differences. It became clear that different voices make for so many more diverse and interesting stories of lived experience. This reminds me of the interconnected metaphor we explored in Chapter 2, of stories growing in groves, where the exploration of experience and meaning through stories weaves new processes that feed into the building of communities, which consequently spread as the collaborative growth of the social sphere.

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[3] Critiques of the classic workshop model bear witness to the "cruel and sometimes violent atmosphere of the workshop" where workshop participants are "encouraged to demean the work of others"; where "hegemonic structures of race, gender and politics" inhibit racialised and gendered writers to develop their unique voices; and where "the influence of the writing instructor-as-mentor may lead to the homogenization of writers' voices" (Howe, 2016, p. 491). Instead of writing workshops fostering empowerment and redefinition of the self amongst other outcomes, writing workshops rooted in these practices have the opposite effects - they silence and diminish the writer's voice, depleting self-confidence, robbing the creative process of moments of joy, "celebration and wonder" (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny's, 2014, p. 34). When Schneider (2003, p. 182) writes of the creative writing workshop setting that "there is no value to be gained from humiliation", I concur.

4.3 The role of ritual in establishing the writing space

Breath work and the tablecloth moved the writing group from the physical space of their imprisonment into the collaborative space of Mimesis 2 where emplotment took shape in the process of writing. Each workshop started with the spreading of the tablecloth and I would pass around copies of the day's writing agenda for each of the research participants. During the 10-week period, the physical workshop classroom space in Downview changed three times, which meant that the tablecloth became the constant, the anchoring symbol of the creative space. Once it was laid out across the tables, mostly over squares and rectangles, and once covering two round tables pushed together in the shape of an eight, the writing could start. Of this ritual of the tablecloth, Raven Hawthorn writes:

> *I love this class. I love how the tablecloth gets us in the zone to write. Transforms the space. Feels like I'm not in prison for the time we are in here.*
>
> (Raven Hawthorn, 2018)

The circular motion of Campbell's mono-myth structure, of the journey ending at the site of the beginning, was repeated in each of the workshop sessions, creating a ripple effect of ritual – starting with a reflection, namely a check-in on the self through breathing, thereafter moving out into freewriting exercises, ending with self-reflection on the writing journey that has taken place within the session.

Breathing played an important role in the creation of the stillness to shift the research participants from their daily prison life to the contained space of the course, and to create a sense of acceptance for each participant. Once everyone was seated, I would ask the research participants to concentrate on their breath, to settle down and check in with themselves. This ritual was repeated in exactly the same way in each of the 10 workshops. In every workshop, I shared with the research participants the wonderful description below of breathing as a skill to slow down time as described in the children's novel, *The Outlaw Varjak Paw* - Varjak Paw is a kung-fu cat:

> Fourth Skill: Slow-Time. Varjak breathed deep, and counted. In-two-three-four. The world seemed to shimmer. Out-two-three-four. Everything slowed down. In-two-three-four. But Varjak felt fast. Out-two-three-four. Power rose up in him. (Said, 2014, p. 21-25)

In the moment of stillness, in the first workshop, participants had to ask of themselves and reflect on, How am I feeling right now? and then think of a colour, writing it down in their notebooks. We would go around in the group and say our colours out loud, one by one. It laid the foundation and the writers would thereafter

refer to their colours in the workshops that followed. Michalski (2019, pp. 74 - 75) writes that this creation of stillness becomes imperative at the start of the creative journey and requires of the research participant to disengage from the immediacy of "the general conditions of incarceration". What becomes imperative is to instil:

> the type of contemplative reflection or meditative practices conducive to tapping into the fountain of creativity. (Michalski, 2019, p. 75)

Once this reflective meditative practice is established, a freewriting exercise would follow where participants would use their colour instead of their names to write down a sentence or two or three. They would look at their colour, holding it up to the light, and ask for example:

> *What does it look like, eg is it clear, opaque?
> *How does this colour feel? On the inside? On the outside? Is it rough or smooth?
> *Why does the colour feel like you have described it?

This approach flows from Elbow's (2000, p.85 - 88) argument, as part of the AWA method, that freewriting gives you material to work with in that it opens up your thinking and helps you find your voice, because it facilitates private or focused non-stop writing and means not having to stay on one topic – the writer can digress freely by not having to think about spelling, grammar, mechanics, and does not have to worry about how good the writing is or even whether it makes sense or is understandable (even to oneself). The only constraint I imposed on the writers in the workshop was that they had to keep their pens moving! Freewriting then gets the writer going, developing the writing muscle.

This approach proved a turning point for some of the research participants who had initially been reluctant to write in fear that they might get it wrong, that they could not spell or that they had nothing to write about. Their reluctance were expressed in different ways, for example in the first workshop Purple Rose turned away from the writing group and stared at the wall; Daisy Dove kept leaving the room for bathroom breaks; Snapdragon and Foxglove passed rolling tobacco and paper back and forth across the table to one another; Periwinkle got up to use the computer to type a letter for another inmate. However, despite these disruptions and deflections, Oriental Redwood, who also struggled to write at first, most vividly illustrates the moment of wonder at having written a story after trying and keeping her pen moving, when she writes and reflects:

The hedgehog forages for food after a long hibernation. It is now ready to travel to fresh habitats. It finds all sorts of places to relax and eat. She likes to sleep under leaves and sniffs everywhere she goes. It helps her to be aware of danger and to find a mate.

There is a fly that hovers around her and she thinks it is highly annoying.

This is an old dry leaf, disintegrating into the ground. A worm is intrigued by this leaf and crawls through it.

The hedgehog comes along and eats him.

*

I can't believe the week has gone by so fast and that creative writing is back already. Writing this mini story of the hedgehog was fun, but it took me the whole hour to write this, as I was unsure of what I was going to write. It surprised me loads!

(Oriental Redwood, 2018)

In the first writing workshop session, the next activity focused on introducing the concept that everyone is a writer. The group contemplated how our words are our stories, and that these words and stories connect us to one another. To start thinking about their stories, participants had to draw their river or tree of life. The river could resemble their own river as life or it could be that of an imaginary character. The river or tree would then become the writing map, the starting framework to aid the storytelling process and introduce the research participants to the journey of life narrative. Once the river or tree was drawn, research participants had to describe their rivers or trees in words:

*What does it look like – wide, bendy, flowing peacefully, clear or dark, churning?

*Does the river have many tributaries flowing through different landscapes?

*Did it surprise you? How? Why?

Lastly, after the biscuit break, the next writing exercise focused on blending the colour described in the first exercise with the river or tree described in the second exercise, in order to situate the self within the larger framework of a narrative. I asked the research participants to think about their river or tree, as well as about the colour they wrote about right at the beginning and reflect on these two different pieces of writing - how it felt describing the character you chose as a colour and her life journey as river or tree.

This pattern established the circular reflective and creative motion of Campbell's mono-myth structure, of the journey ending at the site of the beginning.

Each workshop session thereafter followed this trajectory and the ritual of breath work to check in with the self and create stillness, the freewriting exercises and prompts to establish the push and pull effect of taking the writer on a journey seemingly away from the self, whilst returning at the end with a reflection on the blending of stages one and two as mentioned above.

To allow for the safe space to extend into a creative and reflective space, with the workshop structure, I explicitly also did not follow the classic workshop model where writers submitted writing in advance of the workshop to receive written and verbal feedback and comments from the other writers. Instead, everyone worked and wrote together in the two-hour workshops itself, where all writing was treated as fictional. Fictional in this context does not mean genre-specific, as I will discuss further.

In following the AWA method, I resisted limiting the women's writing to one particular genre and form, because of Schneider's (2003, p. 117) observation that "when writing begins, it needs freedom to take its own form". It is also based on the further understanding that the research participants will have had different reasons for wanting to write, different writing experience and experiences of receiving feedback to their writing. Initially then, some of the writers wrote a few words, some a few sentences, some a short paragraph, some a whole page, and some a poem. Schneider (2003, p. 218) writes that when creative writing workshops are not form and genre-specific all writers in workshops are "strengthened" by "hearing and responding to work in various forms", "because many beginning writers do not know what they write best" or that they can write at all.

Therefore the concept of fictional writing in the creative writing workshops became an important focus point as condition for a safe writing space where the women as writers could express themselves freely and creatively. Considering the notion of fictional writing in the context of women's prison writing, Schneider (2003, p. 139) writes that "fiction is another way of telling the truth". This corresponds and links to the views of the writer, Cora Sandel, who maintained that fictive truth only lived in experience. And it is said that Jean Rhys told her own story to herself in her novels; that way at least she could believe it. Schneider (2003, p. 139) argues, that "all fiction is autobiography" to the extent that that which "we imagine is a collage of images and meanings that have come into, and have been transformed, by our minds". Describing fiction then as "an autobiography of the imagination", Schneider (2003, p. 139) explains that:

> even the things that we imagine are often metaphors for what we have experienced, or are a way of giving access to working on experienced and unresolved personal history.

The concept of their writing as fictional provided a crucial link to the exploration of creative writing and the workshops as a reflective space for the women as writers to explore the notion of reconceptualising the self, themselves, as a process. This is based on Hunt's (2013) work of exploring the self in the learning process, based on the potential of writing and stories to reveal coherence in the interconnectedness of life and, as such for the writers, the women in prison, to recover a sense of the self in the narrative identity.

Therefore linked to freewriting as fiction and the reflective push and pull, which drew in aspects of each workshop in the workshop that followed directly after, the final workshop session in week 10 ended with the reflective acknowledgement and reiteration that the research participants were all writers. This is of significance, because for Michalski (2019, p. 80) the lessons found in the studies of arts programmes in prisons reveal that their value rests in the creative potential revealed by the incarcerated research participants, and further in the "transformation and redefinition of the self as an 'artist" or writer as in the context of my research. The session and the workshops as a whole then concluded with the following message from me for each writer, to be read and reflected on after the workshops had finished:

> Every morning as soon as you wake up and each night before you go to sleep, say to yourself, simply and clearly, "I am a writer." It doesn't matter if you believe it. Just plant the seed. You might feel like a complete fool. That is okay. Step forward and say it anyway. (Goldberg, 1990, p. 105)

4.4 Writing together in a safe space for a rainbow of voices

> I don't think it's just the writing or the art that does the empowering, but the overall educational process in conjunction with the creative effort – as well as the internal search for meaning and the external search for harmony. (Kendig, 1994, p. 163)

The quote above comes in answer to the question, posed by Kendig (1994, p. 163) to one of the creative writers who took part in a creative writing programme in prison, whether the pursuit of creative endeavours "empowered inmates to changes their lives". This answer touches on and reveals the sense and experience of *bildung* and writing together. Keeping this in mind, embarking on the journey of writing together, of finding voices and embracing their difference, Bergold and Thomas (2012, pp. 5 - 6) write that the notion of creating a "safe space" for participation is paramount for the action research methodology to open up space for communication "without the fear of being attacked for saying something wrong".

Schneider (2003, p. xxiv) writes that the task of the creative writing teacher "is only this: to prepare a place, to welcome, to receive and to encourage". Her viewpoint

stems from the belief that everyone is an artist, a writer with a story to tell, and that the writing teacher simply functions as the midwife "to that which is already within our students" (Schneider, 2003, p. xxiv). I found this of particular significance in the context of working with women in prison who might have been excluded from creative writing groups based on traditional approaches to writing and creative writing, which would view low literacy and/or lack of education, dyslexia, ill mental health or where English is not the first language as barriers or grounds of exclusion from participation. Schneider (2003, p. xxii) argues that:

> those whose language skills are impaired nevertheless have a story, and if it can be told in the unique, idiosyncratic form of the author's own way with words, it can be brilliant.

This call to embrace the innate ability within every person to bring forth their own stories and to value their voices underpins my approach to the ethics of knowledge-making as a reflective practice in the creative writing workshops in prison as unpicked in Chapter 3. In doing so we can work towards the possibility of "a canon of literature so much more diverse, interesting and humane than the canon we do we have" (Schneider, 2003, p. xxii) in the context of women's prison writing in the UK. The writing produced by the 18 self-selected research participants attests to this enriching scope that allows for the opening up of unanticipated explorations of the self in writing the life journey. In line with the AWA method the research participants all became writers in a non-hierarchical writing space with its own rules of conduct, ritual and support based on the notions of kindness, respect and listening (Schneider, 2003, p. 187).

I anchored the workshops in the three tenets of reflexivity, creativity and safety, following the AWA method where Schneider (2003, p. xx) argues that a writer can write as deeply as they think and feel, "only if you are safe enough". Safety is explained as the moment where "you can forget yourself enough" - in other words, where you can "let go and tell the truth of what you have experienced or imagined" because you feel safe enough to do so, and only then do you begin to write (Schneider, 2003, p. xx). It follows that from this moment of safety, the tributaries of reflexivity and creativity flow and branch out. And with continued practice and focus, self-confidence emerges and allows the writer to delve deeper in their writing (Schneider, 2003, p. xx). However, Schneider (2003, p. xx) warns that this personal development of a writing practice is not possible for "a person trapped in fear and self-protection". This is an apt description of the women whom I met in the first sessions of the creative writing workshops in both Downview and East Sutton Park. It required sensitivity on my part as the workshop facilitator to acknowledge these personal spaces of fear and self-

protection in each one of the research participants before we started the process of writing together.

The establishment of the safe writing space depends on the development of conditions to create a community of support around the writer to enable them to work and write consistently. Here I need to reiterate that the goal of the workshops was to write together and for the research participants to experience being a writer whose words were heard and respected. The writing workshops were therefore not envisaged as therapy sessions or as literacy lessons (Schneider, 2003, p. 263), but rather as a welcoming space where the research participants could experience a shift in state of being from prisoner to writer with a voice and the freedom to express this personal voice and its experiences in their own words. Schneider (2003, pp. 263 - 264) observes that although the creative writing workshop can be a "profoundly effective setting for healing", healing is not achieved through therapy or the teaching of literacy, but rather in that:

> huge life changes are likely to occur in a person who for the first time truly believes in the worth of his or her own words.

An example of this occurred at the end of the first creative writing workshop in Downview prison, where at the end of the workshop each research participant filled in a feedback form on the day's session. Questions were adapted for each session, but the main three, every week, focused on:

* What went well? Why?
* What did not go so well? Why?
* Anything else you would like to say about the workshop and/or your writing?

As part of the participatory action research process of cyclical action and evaluation, the feedback form became an important and collaborative tool for how to shape and fine-tune the workshops for the following week. At the end of this first session at Downview, it became overwhelmingly clear, as seen from the responses below in answer to what did not go so well, that a large part of the group became frustrated with a group member who had talked throughout the morning's writing session:

~ People thinking this is a counselling session!
~ To be careful/mindful of maybe one person not overtaking the group. Also good to have quiet time when writing so that we can all concentrate.
~ I found it hard to concentrate when people kept talking out loud.
~ People interrupting and talking when we are writing.

This feedback became an important mandate for the next session and the sessions thereafter, to draw the focus of the workshop back onto writing, so that when we wrote together, we wrote in silence and everyone wrote. During the writing sessions we only spoke one at a time when we gave feedback following the reading of another writer's work. This then left the biscuit break as a space where everyone could speak out loud at the same time. As such the women's words from the feedback forms were validated and through this validation they found worth in their words. Flowing from this validation, as a group they began to own, enforce and eventually enjoy the silence of writing together.

Therefore the main foundation for crafting the creative writing workshops as a safe space was built on helpful and mindful communication. Schneider (2003, p. 268) writes that "when difference is acknowledged and respected on both sides, trust will grow". This stands in contrast to the tension of what Michalski (2019, p. 68) refers to as "the anti-social features of the prison environment" that "undermine the quest to discover and express one's artistic self". Because these tensions are enforced at both the institutional and individual levels in the rhythms of everyday prison life, Michalski (2019, p. 69) confirms the standpoint that the "nurturance of one's artistic self requires a distinct orientation, practices and physical space to pursue the transcendental, creative self".

This distinct orientation towards a safe space started in the first creative writing workshop, where counter-intuitively to other forms of prison research, I made it clear that because we are all writers in the workshop I would not elicit any information about the research participants and their convictions (Appleman, 2013, p. 24; Michalski, 2019, p. 73). This orientation served the dual purpose of reinforcing a relationship of mutual respect and trust, which helped me, as researcher, to define the research participants as writers instead as prisoners and for the writers to organically explore their life journeys in writing without the fear of judgement, rejection or stigma. It further served the function of normalising the term writer (Michalski, 2019, p. 73), which in turn created space for the women to begin to view and redefine themselves as writers within our co-constructed creative space, even though the thought of it made them laugh at first. But gradually, in the weeks that followed, they began to show me the writing that they had done outside of the workshop at night on their own.

The notion of mindful and kind communication infused all aspects of the workshop. It continued, when after the completion of particular writing prompts, each writer would read their piece of writing to the group out loud, but only if they felt comfortable in doing so. The women were nervous, uncertain at first and read tentatively. I reminded them constantly that there was no right or wrong way to write,

and with time through the re-enforcement of this mantra, their voices grew in strength and confidence in reading out loud their writing. Feedback focused on what stayed with us from listening to the writing, whether it was an image, a word, or a sentence. We did not critique one another's writing. It became my task, as the workshop facilitator, to protect the writers in the workshop "by keeping the boundaries clear" in reminding everyone that with the feedback we always focus on the writing and not on the person (Schneider, 2003, p. 227).

Schneider (2003, p. 191) writes about the particularity of the experience of this space of the workshop, where people who write together affirm one another's work, as an experience not often encountered in "normal social lives", because it allows for the writers "to meet one another so vulnerably – to laugh and cry and laugh again". Hunt (2013, p. 137) points out that this embodied experiential learning through creative writing, which leads to the "opening up" and development of a "more bodily-felt space for the imagination", can be distressing at first. Reflecting on her writing in the first session, Snapdragon expresses this moment of bodily-felt emotion referring to the moment she cried, threw down her pen and stood up from her chair to passionately speak out after writing on her river, a tightly woven coil, about her experiences in court whilst she was a student still studying at university, navigating a lived experience between court appearances, being out on bail and attending university lectures and completing assignments:

> *I had a little blip where I broke a little about a situation and I am a little embarrassed and even stressed because it made me feel vulnerable.*
>
> (Snapdragon, 2018)

This acknowledgement of vulnerability and embarrassment, and the physical experience thereof, becomes a determining factor in that the writing group needs to provide the collective holding space for these experiences and for the writing to be expressed through trust in, and by each of the writers contained by the group as a whole (Hunt, 2013, p. 137). Allowing for these bodily-felt expressions tests the writing space and the writers within the group because it becomes a shared experience. Oriental Redwood explains:

> *I felt really calm and grounded but then a friend got upset and I started feeling sad and then started to think about my past.*
>
> (Oriental Redwood, 2018)

In this context of the women's imprisonment, considering the intensity of sharing their lived experiences through writing, I was struck by Shield's (2009, pp. 583

- 584) retelling of the impression made on Bion, as a soldier in World War I, by a senior officer who implored the men waiting for "long hours between the desperate struggles on the frontlines… that there was time for poetry", which they then subsequently read aloud. It was this experience on the frontline of sharing an intense lived experience and reading together that lead to Bion's development of the theory of thinking and the use of the study group model to "examine unconscious intersubjective mental processes" (Shields, 2009, p. 561). Because of his experiences he became, interested in the instances that:

> might promote or attack the development of capacities for making links, and for creative and collaborative thinking, among all human beings. (Shields, 2009, pp. 562 - 563)

Writing, and the reading of this writing together within the research writing group, becomes a "containing matrix" within the disruption and chaos of imprisonment and provides a space for Oriental Redwood on hearing Snapdragon's writing to reflect and make links with her own lived experiences in her own writing – a process which then inspires and preserves "a capacity for thoughtful judgment" (Shields, 2009, p. 584). Shields (2009, p. 584) further focuses on the importance of this containment, that in addition to being an option for the development of the mind, it stretches further into becoming an "essential adaptive means to stimulate, enhance and sustain" the vital cognitive activities of creative imagination and consequently the use of metaphorical thinking "in the midst of any intensely lived emotional experience".

In the process of containment practised within a group, considering the writing group in prison for the purposes of my research project, Shields (2009, 563) observes that it is the "deeply personal and heavily affect-laden element that becomes the moving force" between the group members as research participants and also between the research participants and the researcher. This complex, emotionally-laden interaction and influence can lead to "new expressions" because of the "anxiety-provoking challenge" it presents (Shields, 2009, p. 565). Shields (2009, pp. 564 - 565) points out that it has been argued that this "anxiety of influence" could function as inspiration between contemporaries or group members to deepen their own creative explorations. This correlates with the writing group in prison where we have seen Snapdragon's emotions, her *little blip,* where she *broke a little,* function as a moment of influence, inspiring deeper reflection within Oriental Redwood on her own past as an acknowledgement of this development in her writing. Through their work, in their own words, the women in prison as writers reveal the necessity of being able to express their emotions and of being given space to do so despite the intensity of the experience.

Linked to this point of containment is the concept of confidentiality. It became important to reiterate the workshop approach to confidentiality, namely that what was revealed in the workshop writing and readings were to stay in the workshop and importantly that it "must be kept confidential" (Schneider, 2003, p. 235). Because, within the workshop space, when we listen to the other writers and their reading, we begin to gain an appreciation of each narrator's insight and courage, as we begin to understand that in reading aloud, each writer, to some extent, reveals something of themselves in their writing (Schneider, 2003, p. 235). For the writer, in reading their words out loud, the affirmation, acceptance and reward comes not from hearing critique, but instead from the listener's responses to what has stayed with them, the laughter if they wrote something funny, the appreciation of an arresting or striking image, and/or the shared tears when their grief, emotion or frustration resonated with that of the listener(s) (Schneider, 2003, p. 191).

In each workshop session, paradoxically then, against the backdrop of the intense emotional experiences revealed, experienced and shared in the reading of the writing, the mood amongst the writers within the group gradually lifts as the writing session progresses. It begins to change as the writers discover new resources within themselves whilst also noticing changes in their fellow group members. As Sea-Coral reflects:

> *My mood lifted during the morning. I felt low at first and got annoyed at myself for feeling emotional.*

Raven Hawthorn reiterates this reflection:

> *Had a great day. When we first came in everyone had a lot going on. But we all grounded and it turned out really positive.*

Despite the very difficult first session, the writers continued to turn up over the course of the next nine weeks thereafter, because they had become aware of the changes within themselves in the short space of time of writing together. In the writing sessions, none of them shied away from the writing tasks, from what was difficult. They persisted with their writing and showed courage. This continuation of writing became significant in the face of concerns originally expressed by NOMS that writing down their thoughts and deep emotions might be harmful for the women, particularly those known to self-harm and displaying suicidal thoughts. Hunt, (2013, p. 136) writes in acknowledgement of this aspect of writing and points to the significance of continuing to write past the difficulty initially experienced, because of the understanding of the

damage that can occur to the writers themselves if uncomfortable feelings are pushed into the shadows rather than expressed.

Lastly, it is interesting to note how the two different writing groups absorbed and processed the anxiety-provoking challenges of being part of the emotionally-laden environment of the writing process. Contrasts in the writing process were revealed in the approach between writers in the closed prison environment of Downview and that of the open prison at East Sutton Park. At Downview, during the sessions, the writers were focused on their writing practice and did not ask to leave the room. Whereas at East Sutton Park, encountering these moments of discomfort saw the writers asking to leave the classroom for bathroom and/or smoke breaks. The freedom of movement facilitated by the nature of the open prison lead to the writing space at East Sutton Park to become disjointed and disrupted at times, as opposed to the more peaceful, cohesive and supportive sessions in Downview where movement during the writing sessions was more restricted. This restriction of movement, where the writers had to stay within the writing room lead to a seemingly contradictory outcome, in that the writers in Downview had to stay in and write through their discomfort. The focused nature of their writing in an externally restrictive space discouraging movement eventually yielded into the opening up of individual internal spaces of development within each writer on a personal level. These individual internal developments then lead to the group making collaborative progress as a group writing together, expanding their skills beyond the initial boundaries of their collective pain and distress.

At East Sutton Park, Yellow-horned Poppy was the only writer that displayed the same focus as the writers in Downview, pushing herself to stay within the classroom and write through the discomfort and distress without getting up. The other writers noticed this focus and at first made fun of her and her writing, about her age and lack of education, first in subtle ways and later in more overt ways. But as the weeks progressed and Yellow-horned Poppy made progress and developed in confidence, both personally as well as finding her own distinctive, and often very moving writer's voice, the mood of the rest of the group turned and they started to listen to her writing without making fun. Yellow-horned Poppy's writing and her persistence in finding her own voice, writing against the grain of the group, facing down the anxiety-provoking challenge, began to inspire the remaining writers in the group.

4.5 Reading together – *The Snow Child* and *The Summer Book*

> In prison the only friends I had lived in books and songs. (Reed, 2017, p. 564)

Why did you choose The Snow Child for us to read? Is it because we are in prison? Yellowhammer asked and smiled. The book had stayed with me, I said, because of the

vivid imagery, the landscape, the atmosphere and because of Mabel - the main character - especially the question of whether her world is real or a myth. Later on, working on the plans for the creative writing workshops, I was struck by the similarities between Mabel's journey as detailed in the novel, her isolation in a very harsh landscape and the writing journey of the women in prison, and their isolation in an equally harsh landscape. Yellowhammer nodded. *Thank you*, she said, solemnly now, and opened her copy of *The Snow Child*.

This conversation forms the prelude to the introduction of *The Snow Child* by Eowyn Ivey and *The Summer Book* by Tove Jansson – the two novels we read together as writers in a group during the course of the 10-week workshop period. In the month before the start of the workshops, I approached the publishers of the two novels, explained my research project and asked whether they would contribute to it by providing 20 copies of each novel for me to donate to each research participate. They obliged and I could gift a copy to each research participant, to thank them for taking part in the research project, but also from a practical perspective to aid and enable us to read together as a group, to inspire and enrich our writing practice. At the end of the writing workshops, the research participants wrote thank you notes to the publishers describing what the novels had meant to them.

Every week, as homework, I would set the two writing groups a reading goal and stipulate the page number of up to where we needed to read together in preparation for the next session. Reading was an individual activity and every week, in the discussion of the reading section, the writers had to write down an image, sentence or paragraph that had stayed with them to share with the group. They also had to reflect on why the image, sentence or paragraph had stayed with them and on whether their reading practice resonated with their writing practice during the workshop sessions. For example, this could include reflections on whether they became aware of colour, of descriptions of place and emotions, and particularly of the main characters and their journeys depicted in their relationships with other characters and the space they found themselves in. (I have included examples of their reflections on reading together in the accompanying Anthology of their writing as part of our reflections on the creative journey.)

As explained to Yellowhammer, I chose these two novels because I was initially drawn to the solitariness of the female protagonists and their experiences of isolation within remote landscapes. The vivid descriptions of these landscapes and the women's relationships with nature within their particular environments let me understand that these spaces, in and of themselves, became characters in the novel. And as such, how the experience of and response to these particular spaces influenced, challenged and

shaped, to a certain extent, each of the female protagonists and their individual inner/life journeys. From the perspective of writing and reading with women in prison, this notion of space and how it influences relationships, both to the self and to others made me think about the prison space and how women in prison would read and write this space, as a construction specific to the experience of those finding themselves confined within its walls.

The books further revealed themselves to be two pieces of a puzzle so to speak – a diptych of protagonists. On the one hand, there is the childless Mabel and on the other hand there is little Sophia raised by her grandmother following the death of her mother. Together they have come to signify the different ages of development in that they represent childhood, adulthood/middle age and old age. In *The Snow Child* we find Mabel, who is childless and pining to become a mother, and in *In the Summer Book*, we find the little child Sophia and her grandmother, who spend their summer months on a small island in the Finnish archipelago. Theirs is a fierce and tender relationship of love and frustration with one another set on the remoteness of the island. Throughout the novel Sophia's father is a spectral figure. Both novels explore the development of the protagonists and their relationships to the gaps/spaces presented by those who are absent. In this way, the two novels complement one another in the trajectory of their narratives within the bigger framework of the mono-myth structure from which the creative writing workshops proceeded.

The Summer Book, strictly speaking, does not follow the convention and format of chapters, but rather is constructed of independent, standalone sketches, which when read together forms a whole. The sketches are short and the language simple and elegant. Yet, this simplicity belies the richness of the content, the vividness of the imagery and the depth of the relationship between the grandmother and her granddaughter Sophia. It is this structure and style that grabbed my imagination and guided my thinking on the compilation of the Anthology of the women's writing. Independent sketches written by women in prison, but read together to form a whole. The unifying thread in the writing as it emerged through analysis echoed the journey structure.

In *The Snow Child* Mabel starts her journey, at the beginning of the novel, with the words, "I cannot do this. I cannot do this." The structural concept in this novel starts with the main protagonist at her lowest ebb. She contemplates suicide and considers the use of guns, but dismisses them for their violence and also for Jack, her husband, to spare him other people's judgement. She decides on drowning, stepping/falling through the ice of the frozen river – that way none of the judgements would matter if her death is seen as an accident. It is a dark opening chapter that

creates suspense, but it is one that ends in relief when the ice does not crack and she turns back home. This moment of walking back signifies the start and flow of her journey.

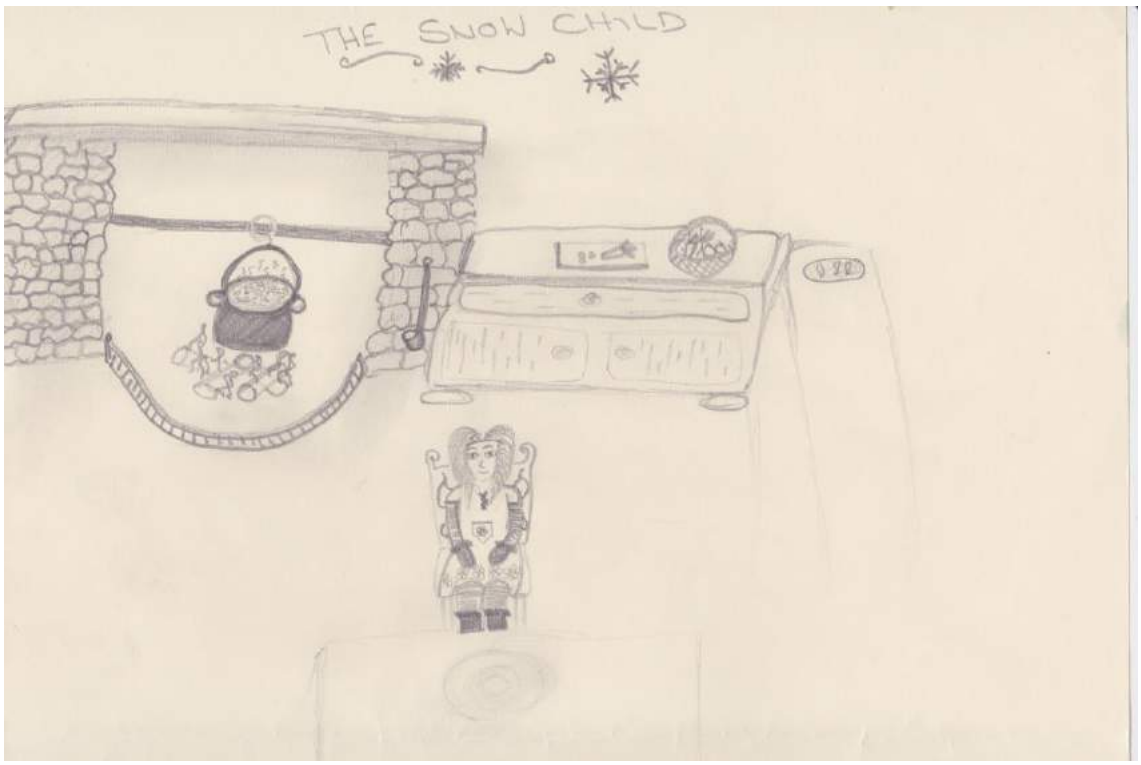
At first I contemplated and questioned the suitability of this opening, taking into account the context of the research participants as writers in prison who might find themselves at a low ebb in their life journeys, as it seemed too menacing in that it challenges the reader to contemplate death and mortality and the possibilities of ending a life. Yet, as we discussed in the workshops, the notion of hope rested exactly in this direct challenge, where the novel starts at a point of darkness, because there would be no book, no story without Mabel as the main character if she had died in the first chapter. So this dramatic start asks of us to continue with our reading, because Mabel's journey is not static and frozen in this moment, but a progressive journey, a process of living through experiences.

Even so, Daisy Dove and Oriental Redwood could not read the novel. The loss of Mabel's child resonated too deeply for them both. However, Oriental Redwood listened intently to the group's discussion of the novel and in the last session presented me with a sketch of Mabel in her house, the log cabin as it is described in the novel. With this sketch Oriental Redwood embodied the AWA concept that one can draw what one cannot say or write. From her initial refusal to participate, locked in the static starting point of it being too painful to read by listening to the group, and through drawing, Oriental Redwood could slowly enter a space of engagement with the novel and Mabel, setting in motion her own creative process where words initially did not exist or were too difficult to express.

Milner (1950, p. 142) argues that this process of free drawing can embody a "form of knowing that traditional education of the academic kind largely ignores" in that these drawings portray reflections and thoughts about "the human situation". For Milner (1950, p. 142) this distinction between "thinking in the private language of one's own subjective images" instead of "thinking in the public language of words" further highlighted the problematic linguistic bias encountered in traditional education.

This argument is of significance in the context of education in women's imprisonment where emphasis on and the classification of literacy levels maintains the hierarchical frameworks of academic education, which in the process curtails an intellectual exploration and development of the self through creative methods, which do not fit the accepted academic/educational mould. What Milner (1950, p. 144) argues is that within the traditional education the essential role of the intuitive image as bridge between lived experience and logical thought is not recognised. A point which becomes

crucial in the bridging the gap between the lived experiences of women in prison and exploring these encounters in writing and reading together.



(Sketch: Oriental Redwood, 2018)

4.6 Creative writing as transformative learning

To conclude, whilst my research as a whole celebrates and acknowledges the advances made under the umbrella term of arts-based interventions, as we have seen in this chapter I have purposely narrowed the scope to concentrate on a specific creative process, namely that of creative writing by women in prison. Lucas (2011, p. 197) champions arts-based education and writing in prison, because in addition to its emphasis on "the humanity of the incarcerated", she highlights the ways in which writing, as art and education, can:

> transform the lives of people who have been systematically discouraged from identifying themselves as intellectual and creative beings.

Now moving into the space of Mimesis 3 considering the process of transformation, both that of the writer and also the text coming into contact with readers, constitutes a further layer of refinement in the focus of my study, namely to remain aware of the "overly simplistic claims about the power of the written word" on the personal level for the prison writer where writing outcomes are mainly aligned with redemption narratives, desistance and employment opportunities (Berry, 2014, p.140). This

transformative focus urges resistance to reliance on these over-determined claims about writing and to questioningly explore the kernel of its transformative effects.

Berry (2014, p. 140) refers to this stance on writing produced in prison as one of balancing in the space between critique and hope. It is embodied in the research framework which views the research participants as writers of their own stories as agents in the participatory, collaborative action research instead of being approached as "passive subjects overwhelmed by situational stress" (Thoits, 1994, p. 143). Yet, Mullen (1999, p. 159) points out that even though incarcerated women benefit from creative writing fostering reflection and increasing feelings of self- and cultural worth, there is still widespread opposition from social communities who voice misgivings about the ability of arts-based prison programmes to produce lasting changes in this context. Berry (2014, p. 140) argues that it is not enough to solely criticize writing programmes anymore for what they do not do, but rather that these criticisms should evolve to also consider the flipside of writing programmes by trying to articulate their value, or potential value. He points out that in considering the value of writing workshops one should be "mindful" of the "realistic possibilities" which are anchored in the work that takes place in the workshops "in the present moment" and that this mindfulness should then further aid the ongoing development of the writing pedagogy (Berry, 2014, p. 140).

The observation about the realistic possibilities of arts-based research in the contextual now – writing in the prison – points to stories as "acts of self-making" and "world-making", actions which allow writers in prison to begin to reimagine themselves in their present experience (Berry, 2014, p. 155). Hunt (2013, p. 9) writes of creative writing as transformative pedagogy as a process with the focus on "facilitating a kind of learning" that gives "rise to a deep transformation in participants' frames of reference for engaging with the world". The foundation for this transformation lies in reflexivity, which Hunt (2013, p. xvi) describes as a "mechanism of consciousness" which aids the acquirement of knowledge of the self and the world through a "relaxed kind of intentionality and at a low level of consciousness" as opposed to acquiring it through more directed and conscious thinking. Hunt (2013, p. xiv) describes this as a "transitional space for change". Creative writing provides this space for weaving and reworking the threads of a life and its lived experiences from which the writer can stand back and reflect on. And perhaps look at differently with time.

This brings to mind a poignant moment in the final creative writing workshop. Whilst waiting for everyone else to turn up, Yellow-horned Poppy, an elderly research participant who thought that she could not write creatively and struggled to read because she had played truant with her friend when she was little and so left school at a

young age, proudly told me that her English teacher in prison, when she had shown her the creative pieces she had written in the 10-week course, could not believe that it was her who had written so many words on so many pages. A few weeks after the completion of the creative writing course, I received an email from the prison librarian at East Sutton Park with a message from Yellow-horned Poppy:

> One of the resident's here, XXXX, who was in your class has come over today and asked I contact you. She wanted you to know that every book she reads she is recording and illustrating with pictures too and is hoping to complete the exercise book you gave her to do this in. She also said how much she enjoyed the course and hopes you will do another one here for other prisoners to enjoy and benefit from as she feels she has.
>
> (Prison Librarian, East Sutton Park, 2018)

This email message from Yellow-horned Poppy correlates with Berry's (2014, p. 148) point of how "the functions of writing are always evolving to suit particular needs", at a particular time. The functions of writing, in the creative writing workshops with the women in prison, further evolved into drawing and illustrating their thoughts. The AWA method also expounds the notion that one can draw what one cannot say or write, as we have encountered with Oriental Redwood's drawing of *The Snow Child*. Here, Schneider (2003, p. 75) uses Flannery O'Connor as an example of a writer:

> who worked at drawing, not in order to become a visual artist, but to train herself to see more clearly in order that she might write more clearly.

Drawing and writing in this context become inextricably linked, where drawing aids, expands and develops the writing practice where words initially do not exist or are difficult to express. Yellow-horned Poppy, in continuing to write about, together with illustrating her reading practice, is reconstructing and re-imagining her reality (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny, 2014, p. 3) as one of a new possibility where she can read and write creatively, as an outcome following her participation in the creative writing workshops. And in doing so, she moved beyond the socially constructed perspective discouraging her identification of herself as an intellectual and creative being because of her lack of education as a young girl.

In Chapter 3, we considered Meretoja's (2018, p. ix) comment that narratives and people become what and who they are in "dialogue with other people and their stories". In continuing with her reading and writing as a practice of self-making, Yellow-horned Poppy is changing the trajectory of her story and the narrative of who and what she is. Through this creative process of the reconceptualisation of her self as a process, Yellow-horned Poppy is starting a new dialogue. Therefore, in coming to the creation and contribution to knowledge from her perspective, her story of growth, as

communicated to us in the email, paves a new way for our socially constructed stories about incarcerated women to adapt and expand our understanding of the effects of writing as a transformative learning process, in the personal, individual sphere for women in prison. As a research participant in the educative and creative action of the arts-based narrative inquiry, Yellow-horned Poppy, through her continued reading and writing, brought about change to her own specific experience in the contextual now of her time in prison.

This moment encapsulates the conceptual metaphor of this chapter and the title of the thesis as a whole, where *Wallflowers have eyes too* come to signify the transformative in the personal sphere and the disruptive in the social sphere where the internal gaze roams into new ways of seeing through the creative process of writing.

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Mimesis 3: Transformation of the research material – Critical engagement and the creative anthology

Chapter 5 Beginning the journey – Thinking back through their mothers

> An emissary… has lately come by way of Tarakot, which lies across the mountains to the north. He says the trail is "very hard, steep and slippery, too many ups and downs". (Matthiessen, 1980, pp. 60 - 61)

Thrashing through the dark dank water I asked myself,

"Why are you doing this?"

From the shore the distance to the tower seemed so short. I knew I was getting exhausted. The sea was so cold and waves were getting larger. Through the icy spray of the waves I looked up and saw the tower close now but so unwelcoming.

Dark slimy walls, tiny windows.

My heart was racing as I swam around to find an entrance. A small wooden door came into view. Brown, battered and wet. With great difficulty I hurled myself up on the ledge with waves lapping at my feet. I reached up for the handle, fingers wet and trembling, saying a silent prayer. I pushed the door. It moved silently. My heart skipped a beat as I almost fell into the dank, dank, musty blackness. I found the slippery soaking stairs going round and round, higher and higher.

With a shaking body I ascended up the tower. What would emerge from on high? Suddenly no more stairs, my heart almost stopped. There was a large wooden table. Sitting around the table were two skeletons with their heads dropped onto it. I noticed scratches on the table. Had they been trapped in here?

I was terrified. I almost fell down the stairs, slipping and sliding, knocking my arms and legs on the side walls. Eventually I was back at the dreaded door. I stood stock still for a second or two, too frightened to move. I pushed at the door, realising there was no knob. Oh my god, the door didn't move! The image from the top of the tower came into my mind. I froze, trembling.

Would the tower now become my grave too?

I stretched and opened my eyes, my bedroom, my bed, my heart slowing down, my tower in my dream. I realized that would be where my tower would stay. I never experienced another dream, but I still sit on the shore staring out at my tower.

(Sea-Coral, 2018)

5.1 Introduction

> Our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories. (Bateson, 1994, p. 11)

For Ricoeur the study of the narrative function is focused on the "ability of the poetic uses of language to provoke us – the readers" to think differently (Muldoon, 2002, p.

5). He argued that discourse "never exists for its own sake" but seeks in all of its uses "to bring into language an experience, a way of living and Being-in-the-world" (Muldoon, 2002, p. 4). To this extent, Sea-Coral's introductory piece about the distant, foreboding tower is an apposite frame to the story of women writing in prison evoking into being an experience of living. Framed against the backdrop of the image of the skeletons sitting at the table with their heads bowed and dropped onto it, Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of my narrative research journey now enters the terrain of Mimesis 3 as the space of critical engagement with the women's creative writing through analysis, reading and interpretation. Ricoeur summarised this process as the natural progression of emplotment in that emplotment "does not end with the text, but with the reader" because:

> The significance of a story finds its springboard of change in what the reader brings to it. (Muldoon, 2002, p. 75)

It implies that the text provides a world for the reader to inhabit by creating distance from the reader's everyday world, and as such the written work becomes a transfiguring site in that it points the reader towards an encounter "outside of us" (Muldoon, p. 75).

With her use of the metaphors of the tower, water and skeletons Sea-Coral evokes "the emotional texture of experience" (Banks and Banks, 1998, p. 17) and foreshadows the discussion of the narrative trajectory of the analysis of the women's writing in the following chapters. She captures her inner world in writing as an aspect of the human condition, the unconscious processing of the felt experience of imprisonment revealed in a dream. This imagery is significant because it introduces the reader to water as the compound element revealing both the process of writing and delving into the subconscious. It extends into the exploration of the metaphors surfacing in and around the women's narratives as conceptual systems to aid the process of meaning-making. Lakoff and Johnson (2003, pp. 210 - 211) write of metaphor as "one of the most basic mechanisms we have for understanding our experience" and argue against the objectivist dismissal and marginalisation thereof precisely because this stance "fails to account for the way we understand our experience, our thoughts, and our language".

Dreaming of the metaphor of water is revealed as a transformative aspect in the critical engagement with lived experience, particularly when Muldoon (2002, p. 78) writes that:

> narrative is no longer the reserved art of poets, dramatists and novelists [...] Is it not true that we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, doubt, plan, gossip, hate, and love by narrative?

Sea-Coral's writing thus foreshadows the question about the relationship between the reader and the writer, and consequently what happens to this writing - whether it is on the one hand approached from the stance of listening, engagement and dialogue with the narratives of lived experience it holds or on the other hand whether it is met with continued dismissal and silence as a response. This notion of dismissal and silence is encapsulated in Sea-Coral's fear that the fate of the two skeletons sitting at the table with their scratch marks etched into its surface, locked away in the distant tower, might become her fate too.

Viewed from the perspective of crossing interdisciplinary boundary lines in determining the scope of critical engagement with the text as an encounter outside of my experience as reader, I found Farrant's (2014, p. 124) three-step process useful when she explains that the inquiry into narrative spans across the following three dimensions:

- firstly, where narrative is used as part of the inquiry into the research questions,
- secondly, to study the narratives in and of themselves, where the narrative form becomes the point of analysis, as is the case in literature, and
- thirdly, investigating narrative from the philosophical stance of becoming and identity.

Where the first dimension of narrative as mentioned by Farrant features throughout my thesis, it is now to dimensions two and three that I turn. In dimension two the women's prison writing as narrative form becomes the point of analysis, as is the case in literature, and I will refer to other works of literature and literary theory in the process. Linked to this is dimension three which explores the women's prison writing as narratives of becoming and identity in that "each narrative is a recounting of someone being and doing – of undergoing and enduring" (Muldoon, 2002, p. 75).

Viewed from the perspective that dimensions two and three are interconnected, I understand when Banks and Banks (1998, p. 11) argue that "the canons of social science" with its focus on the factual in academic research writing "aren't very productive" in the situations where the research focus shifts to "the emotional texture of experience" revealed as "the consequences of the facts in the lives of actual persons". As such I begin to understand my intuitive inclination when coming face to face with the portraits of the women's storied selves in analysing their writing to turn to literature and literary theory.

In the chapters that follow I refer amongst others to the literary writing of Clarice Lispector, Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys and Marguerite Duras. Old friends and mentors, modernists and constants, who have guided my own writing practice and

study of the craft in the process of making meaning of the world and depictions thereof in writing, and also of the self. Together they bring warmth and colour, adding flesh to the bones of experience - a counter representation to the techniques of textual distance maintained in the abstract, bare-boned descriptions of difficult life experiences. Representations that I acknowledge and appreciate as necessary on a grounding intellectual level to understand and study the contextual scope of punishment and prison, but when referred to on their own as a research resource, left me alienated. I could not find any traction in textual distance for the process of analysing the written lived experiences. I needed more, because as I transcribed the women's prison writing, immersed in their inner lifeworlds, I would at times feel my chest grow warm and tight, constricting with an anxiety that was not my own, felt and experienced through their words. I cried at times. Overwhelmed in the face of the multiple layers, the sediments of suffering I encountered in the women's writing, I felt frustration at the lack of systemic progress and change. In these embodied encounters, as a reflexive researcher I found my referral to existing systems of knowledge disrupted, being challenged to take notice and think differently.

> That spring I was reading Woolf obsessively, for she shared my preoccupation with water and its metaphors. (Laing, 2011, p. 8)

Thus, in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, seeking out the writing techniques deployed by modernist authors, namely Lispector, Woolf, Duras and Rhys, I found an avenue to plunge myself into the heart, the depth of an experience in an intellectual, as well as an emotional manner. Hence, I reach for Woolf with her poetry and explorations of the subconscious, her angles that zoom in on the micro-level of experience and zoom out, hovering with a birds' eye view over the macro layout of societal structures. In Chapter 6 I look to Lispector (often compared to Woolf), who although she studied law pursued a journalistic career instead in the run-up to her literary work. Her writing is haunting, infused with "sympathy for silent and silenced women", delving both into the fleeting and the crises, "the dramas big and small that make up a person's life" (Moser, 2015, p. xix). It is from this standpoint that I relate through literary texts as researcher to the women's prison writing in proceeding with the analysis and interpretation.

Desan, Ferguson and Griswold (1989, p. 2) point out that the social scientist uses literature to interpret and exemplify a social process, whereas in literary studies the emphasis shifts to a participation in the production of a literary work with the focus on the aesthetic of the work. Sea-Coral writes and her words etch new images onto the blank canvas of the prison walls presented to the outside world. The analysis of writing then proceeds from this intersection of the narrative inquiry embracing the use of

literary works to study themes, images and metaphors in the women's prison writing. Banks and Banks (1998, p. 29) argue that this intersectional point is integral, because it brings together "the knowledge-bearing texts of scholarly inquiry and the passionate texts of literature", both of which share particularities necessary for working and living reflexively. The main texts studied in this chapter, particularly in relation to the themes revealed in the women's prison writing, are *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf and *The Book of Memory* by Pettina Gappah. Both Woolf and Gappah wrestle with their mothers, and the loss of their mothers, in constructing a self-narrative through their explorations of childhood experiences. In addition, Woolf also meditates on water as a metaphor for the exploration of the unconscious self and its symbolism becomes evident in the women's prison writing.

5.2 The disrupted self

> It was as if Mabel had fallen through a hole into another world. It was nothing like her quiet, well-ordered world of darkness and light and sadness. (Ivey, 2012, p. 32)

Huber et al (2013, p. 214) observe that we draw on stories to understand and share "who we are, who we have been and who we are becoming". Ten weeks long is the women's writing journey encapsulating this process of becoming, sharing and understanding, of mapping their interior landscapes towards the development of a narrative identity in the exploration of the self. Taking time to pay attention, putting down a little bit on paper in each writing exercise, the writers doggedly followed the trail of their life journeys drawn as rivers where they rush deep and foam or lie clear in shallow pools, flood or run dry. They move their hands across the page, digging deep into the roots below the trees, looking up at the branches growing skywards and sideways curved into the shapes of their lived experiences. From this practice slowly emerges what has remained hidden in the unconscious, the discovery of observations, feelings, dreams, memories and opinions (Lamott, 1995, pp. xii - xxiii).

Laing (2011, p. 7) reflects on the nature of rivers that they shape our worlds because they literally move "through time as well as space" and therein lies their mystery in that they:

> rise from hidden places and travel by routes that are not always tomorrow where they might be today. (Laing, 2011, p. 7)

Of this mysterious process, Goldberg (1991, pp. 34 - 35) writes that "the mind is the writer's landscape… We write and then we catch up with ourselves". The women's stories gathered in travels along unsuspected writing routes reveal a narrative

landscape of lives disrupted, before, during and because of the experience of prison and imprisonment. A disruption felt in time and place, in selves lost and identities obscured or changed within these intertwined, challenging and traumatic spaces that compose the layers of the lived experience. Baddeley and Singer (2007, p. 177) write that:

> the life story is not simply an expression of the underlying construct of identity, but is *the* fundamental way in which we know ourselves.

Viewed from this narrative stance, disruption forms the foundation of the narrative identity at the start of the women's writing journey. To explore this concept of disruption, Becker (1999, p. 4) writes that societies are organised around a course of life that is "structured by expectations of each phase of life" with meanings assigned to these "specific life events and the roles that accompany them". Traditionally, this structural organisation primarily conceives of "individual lives as orderly projects", but it stumbles once translated into the lived experiences of individual people, where their real lives are revealed to be "more unpredictable than the cultural ideal" (Becker, 1999, p. 5). Disruption and the experience of inner chaos ensue when these expectations about the life course are not met (Becker, 1999, p. 4). Periwinkle's writing is vivid in situating the reader within the destabilising effect of this resulting inner chaos when the perception of her lived life does not meet the expectation of an orderly project. She plunges us into the destruction of a sense of order when she writes about her experience of death as disruption:

> *My map is chaotic. It twists and turns and reflects the chaos that permeates my life, that is my life. Death is significant. I keep coming up against it and it plummets me deep into a black hole till I am yet again spluttering for breath and struggling to breathe. Unable to see much light or focus on a way forward. Too much sadness, always turmoil dragging me deeper into its depths. Till rock bottom. I can feel it, touch it, then the darkness overtakes everything.*
>
> (Periwinkle, 2018)

Periwinkle's writing embodies this disruption in that the sense of order is completely disrupted by her experiences of death, she cannot see the light *or focus on a way forward*. Embodied, this experience of disruption leaves her *spluttering for breath* and *unable to breathe*. The representation of this disruption is encapsulated in loss, particularly the "loss of the future" (Becker, 1999, p. 4). To restore some kind of order to ameliorate this loss, Becker (1999, p. 4) argues necessitates a reworking of "the understanding of the self and the world, redefining the disruption and life itself". To

create and restore a sense of continuity, the journey story needs reconstruction in order to accommodate a "set of life experiences" which now differ from those originally anticipated (Becker, 1999, p. 142). Becker (1999, p. 176) further describes this transformation as a "Western interpretation of the effort to maintain order in life", in that people can reorder their experiences "by looking at things differently".

The struggle in the narration of a set of life experiences that differ from those anticipated starts for Baby Blue 79 when it becomes the embarkation point for the journey of reflection on and articulating the self. Her struggle links to Nelson's (2004, p. 87) observation that the role of memory in narratives with an autobiographical dimension "form the basis of self-history" which aids the "reconstruction of the self in the past with parents and others". When Baby Blue 79 begins to reflect on time and the memory of her self within time, moving beyond her initial resistance to writing, she begins to capture the reformation of her self-history in the disassociation experienced between the components of the unitary frame that supports the coordinates of space, personhood and time. She redefines the disruption and through writing begins to shape a reflective sense of her self in the contextual now:

> *Time, we can go back in time. If I can go back now, I will go back to when I was born and change the way I was brought up and see how it changes me. ALSO, I would go back to the year 2012 due to what happened to me, and my close family members, in that year. I would change that too.*
>
> (Baby Blue 79, 2018)

What is of interest here is how Baby Blue 79's reflection fits within Nelson's (2004, p. 87) description of the process of shaping the landscape of self-history which starts with a navigation of two coordinates, the line drawn between memory and time, where memory signifies "to begin to self" and time signifies the space "at the end". Baby Blue 79 alights into this complex dynamic, which features the centrality and importance of "human love relationships to life and well-being" in storying the self (Shields, 2009, p. 565). In the context of the cultural ideal, the act of being born and the beginning of her life and hence lived experience, proves a disruptive moment for Baby Blue 79 as an act over which she had no control. In the freedom and space of reflection through writing, she reimagines how she would change this moment. And how this moment would change her. Baby Blue 79 now finds herself in the foothills of agency where through writing she begins to gain a new control over this disruptive moment. For her, how she was brought up does not fit with the perception of life as an orderly project compared to the cultural ideal of expected life experiences and stages. In the following sections I will discuss the disruption to the structured expectations of a

life phase revealed in the women's writing as they reach back into their childhoods and moments of birth to start writing their life journey.

5.3 Birth stories - weaving a shape to the disrupted self in the maternal sea

> As they neared the shore, each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand. The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously. (Woolf, 1992 [1931], p. 3)

For the writers in prison, moving their pens across the page, entering the writing space as a reworking of their self-understanding becomes a painful and difficult process. It signals the moment where writing becomes the dredger, lifting and scraping the layers of sediment from the bed of the subconscious, bringing it to the surface. Sea-Coral's writing captures this process when she exclaims, *Thrashing through the dark dank water I asked myself, "Why are you doing this?"*. In the foreword to Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves,* Beer (1992, p. xiii) writes of her creative approach to writing in which she visualised it in the image of the "imagination as a woman, fishing", where this meditative state gave her access to the hidden layers beneath the surface:

> lying sunk in dreams on the verge of a deep lake with a rod held out over the water. She was letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being.

This moment of entry into the watery meditative state in the process of writing reveals experiences deeply buried inside the writers. Beer (1992, p. xiii) observes that it is held in "the suffusive power of the imagination [which] explores like fish and fisher at once", holding the tale and teller, signalling the onset of differentiation, moving the writer self away from the narrated self towards a new awareness of the self. This moment in the reflective and meditative writing process is framed as a "spatial image [...] a descent into the depths [...] into the world that lies submerged in our unconscious being" (Beer, 1992, pp. xiii - xiv).

Submerged, this world of the unconscious returns to childhood. Of coming to understand a lived experience, Bruner (1991, p. 9) focuses on the evidence that narrative comprehension presents itself as one of "the earliest powers of the mind to appear in a young child" and as such it becomes one of the "most widely used forms of organizing human experience". Baby Blue 79 returns to the moment of birth and through her writing it becomes an important moment of action, of confronting it also as an interaction with others, with a family, when she writes:

> *Finding my birth family and asking them the reasons why I was put into care.*

Bruner (1991, p. 18) writes that "narratives accrue" as stories cobbled together to form a culture, history or tradition and this narrative accrual is also found in families, where shared tales evolve into "more or less coherent autobiographies centred around a Self acting more or less purposefully in a social world". Within this narrative accrual of a life story, McAdams (1996, p. 308) points to "nuclear episodes", namely "particular scenes that stand out in bold print in the life story". McAdams (1996, p. 308) explains the significance of nuclear episodes as those ascribed the most importance in the life story – "high points, low points, beginning points, ending points, and turning points".

Baby Blue 79 is not alone in using this moment of birth as a framing device by her writer self to contain the development of her narrative self. We find an explicit reference to this nuclear episode and its importance in Tall Melilot's writing. It echoes Baby Blue 79's reflection on the moment of her birth as the self-narrative's beginning point when she writes on her river mouth:

Being born – a low point for mum.

Wood Lily also refers to her birth as the narrative beginning point and describes it as:

Born and a mistake, not wanted.

On their tree and river maps the women interpret themselves, in relation to their mothers, as mistakes and low points at the moment of birth or by being put into care. These interpretations, written in short, staccato, abrupt sentences, frame the orientation to the self and its subsequent life journey. Baddeley and Singer (2012, p. 179) write that:

> while our life story begins at birth, our birth story does not begin as our own. We hear our birth story, perhaps a multiple times over the years, before we can tell the story as our own.

From this perspective they point out that "our literal first moments of existence as separate entities in the world are invariably defined by stories told by others" (Baddeley and Singer, 2012, p. 179). For Tall Melilot and Wood Lily their existences at the moment of birth are defined as mistakes and low points in the stories told by others, especially their mothers. The priority given to these particular episodes, according to McAdams (1996, p. 308) "encapsulates in a narrative nutshell an essential and enduring truth about Me" for the writer. It rests on what the memory of the key event symbolizes in the "context of the overall life narrative" at the moment of writing – a kind of "symbolic proof" from the past that "I am what I am" (1996, p. 308). A notion that becomes of particular significance in the context of the woman as writer in prison

viewing herself as seen through her mother's eyes as a low point at the moment of birth where the beginning of her life already marks a mistake. Birth stories, therefore, despite their "secondhand origins" are then incorporated into the narrative self-concept as a narrative component and bears influence on the development of the life story, either positively or negatively, depending on the context (Baddeley and Singer, 2012, p. 179).

Frank (2012, p. 7) writes that family stories become "a story to grow up on" which implies on the one hand that "people grow up being cast into stories, as actors are cast into their parts in a play". However, he finds this description of a life story "too deterministic a metaphor" and instead posits the argument that "people are like actors cast into multiple scripts that are all unfinished" (Frank, 2012, p. 7). This statement allows for an opening up of self-interpretation and determination over the course of a life and proceeds from the conceptual understanding that:

> From all the stories that people hear while they are growing up, they remain caught up in some, forget many others and adapt a few to fit adult perceptions and aspirations. (Frank, 2012, pp. 7 - 8)

The writers in prison start their narratives from the point of view of low points, mistakes and being taken into care. Therefore, where the initial intuitive perception of the disruption in the writers' lives would seem to originate in the moment of incarceration, shaping their lives into the growth off a tree or flow of a river, revealed accumulated disruption and consequent inner chaos over the span of a life, for some starting at birth and thus not just in the moment of incarceration. This is further revealed in the story that the women as writers focused on to start their river or tree, many which return to and feature parts of growing up. Baby Blue 79 wants to find her birth family and ask why she was put into care. For Rainbow Rose her river starts at the moment of disruption when she is taken into care as a very young child. Prison becomes but another moment of disruption and uncertainty later on in life.

Tall Melilot's words, *Being born – a low point for mum,* resonates with Virginia Woolf's oft-noted observation that "women think back through their mothers" (Beer, 1992, p. xxvi; Dalsimer, 2004, p. 713). Dalsimer (2004, p. 713) writes that this process of thinking back through the mother is often ambivalent, intense and complex. It draws us into the literal, personal sphere of experience but also connects us to the reflections of the wider social world in thinking back through Virginia Woolf, for instance, as a literary mother (Dalsimer, 2004, p. 713) who has gone before and struggled with the loss of a mother and sought to come to terms with this loss through her writing. This ambivalence of thinking through the mother is captured in a paragraph found in a

notebook of an earlier draft of the *The Waves* in which Woolf draws on the visual image of the "maternal sea":

> Many mothers, & before them many mothers, & again many mothers, have groaned and fallen. Like one wave, succeeding each other. Wave after wave, endlessly sinking & falling as far as the eye can stretch. (Beer, 1992, p. xxvi)

This image, for Beer (1992, p. xxvi) focuses firstly on the inchoate and opaque "origins prolonged beyond memory" of the self when thinking back through our mothers contained in the moment of childbirth. Within this moment it is held that the successive anonymous waves of mothers giving birth could lead to the loss of the sense of self for the mother, which then becomes more specific and pronounced when reflected in the maternal pleasure and/or conflict as expressed in the living presence of the child (Beer, 1992, p. xxvi). For Wood Lily, Tall Melilot and Baby Blue 79, this maternal conflict expressed as *Being born – a low point for mum,* and *Born a mistake, not wanted* signals the loss of a mother as posited in the cultural ideal at the moment of birth.

In the quest to reconceptualise the self as a process, McAdams (1996, p. 302) writes of the importance to "locate the source of the experience as oneself", because "to self" is to grasp an experience as "belonging to me". This is reflected in Baby Blue 79's writing, as we will explore in the next sections. However, following from this perspective, it is difficult to determine whether Tall Melilot and Wood Lily's writing practice would have developed and continued along a narrative trajectory where they would have reached the point to reframe the starting points to their writing journeys - in reorienting their roles within their respective family stories as low points and mistakes - in relation to their mothers. Both vivid and expressive writers, Wood Lily and Tall Melilot only attended the first writing session each due to the nature of their respective prison environments. For Wood Lily at East Sutton Park her tasks on the farm at the end of the day made it difficult for her to attend the workshops as she was still busy in the field during the first hour of writing. Tall Melilot could join the first creative writing workshop because her make-up class was cancelled in that week. Half-way through the first writing exercise she said out loud, "*I would much rather do this, write, than learn about make-up". "What kind of make-up?,* I asked. *The history of make-up from Cleopatra's time and stage make-up and everyday stuff,* she answered. Afterwards, despite enquiring through the prison librarian whether Tall Melilot could join the writing workshops instead, the request was refused because the make-up lessons formed part of an accredited course, the completion of which played an important role in the determination of her release date from prison.

In the weeks that followed Tall Melilot and Wood Lily would sometimes walk past the writing room, past the open door in East Sutton Park or the closed small window in Downview, and wave - transient authors, the ghosts of fleeting and emerging written self-narratives.

5.4 Thinking back through the silent mother

> Perhaps a better word for the feeling that my mother gave me is uncertainty. (Gappah, 2015, p. 92)

Dalsimer (2004, p. 714) writes that Woolf in her novel *To the Lighthouse*, viewed as a work of autobiographical fiction, expressed how the loss of a mother exerts a hold over the imagination, circling through the thoughts of those who have experienced this loss, again and again, without coming to rest. Parallels can be drawn between the restless recurrence of this hold exerted as expressed in Woolf's own works and the writing by the women in prison. In every writing session, regardless of the writing exercise, Baby Blue 79 would find herself returning to this theme, the moment of disruption experienced in childhood.

As her writing muscles and self-belief grew stronger Baby Blue 79 expanded her narrative exploration in more detail. This growth corresponds with Goldberg's (1991, p. 6) observations that after a while writing practice becomes something simply fundamental, like "moving one foot in front of the other when you walk" from which flows automatic movement, a repetitive action which is not always registered. However, Goldberg (1991, p. 6) argues that this immersion in a writing practice does in fact require of the writer to take notice of the automatic movement of the feet, a process which then extends and branches out into noticing how the writer's mind moves. This moment of noticing your mind as a writer leads to an understanding and trust in it (Goldberg, 1991, p. 6). Therefore, instead of asking her birth family why she was given into care, Baby Blue 79 now begins to take control of her narrative and grapples with this moment herself, untangling it in her own words:

> *I am writing this. Saying that when I was a young child I was put in care due to what my parents had done to me and my siblings. My twin and I were moved to one town and the three oldest children went away to another town with a family member. I always thought what was going through my mum's face when she handed us over to social services? But now I am thinking she was not in a good frame of mind. Or that she couldn't cope with five young children all under the age of five. And dad was away in prison for something. If I ever met her now, I've got a lot of questions to ask her, but I know I am not*

> *going to get to the truth. She will blame it on dad. She is not meeting my family I have got now, due to what she had done to us and she might do it again.*

I am writing this, declares Baby Blue 79, staking her claim, positioning herself as the author with a particular situated knowledge to the reconstruction of her journey story, reclaiming a space for herself as the I within this narrative, *Saying that when I was a young child I was put in care due to what my parents had done to me and my siblings*. McAdams (1996, p.302) writes that "one way to experience something as one's own is to sense that one has indeed constructed, authored or made it". This "process of selfing" centres on the notions of reflecting on, synthesizing, observing and appropriating an experience in such a way that the author can deem the experience and its construction "to be mine" (McAdams, 1996, p.302). In this reconstruction of her journey story, Baby Blue 79 expresses the need to understand through her mother the many unanswered questions she hopes holds the truth to a moment in the past she does not understand. These questions form the missing pieces in her puzzle of reassembling the moment of disruption encountered very early on in her lived experience. She conveys this puzzlement, confusion and anguish in searching the memory of her mother's face at the moment of separation, *I always thought what was going through my mum's face when she handed us over to social services?* It is the face she turns to and not her mother's mind, what is visible to a child. But she cannot tell; the enigma of thinking through her mother in this moment remains unfathomable.

In contemplating Baby Blue 79's emotional engagement with her mother in the moment of their separation, Dalsimer's (2004, p. 715) observation that "It is hard to look into the heart of a child's grief", becomes apposite. It is the child's grief, reaching back into memory, trying to understand a mother's actions *when she handed us over to social services*. When the child lost her home and her mother, the death of her young life as she known and lived it up until that moment.

> [...] and still my mother said nothing. I was leaving my home and my remaining sister. I was leaving my mother and my father and everything that I knew. (Gappah, 2015, p. 134)

In *The Book of Memory,* Memory, Gappah's (2015) protagonist, a female prisoner sentenced to death and confined in a Zimbabwean prison, writes of and relates to Baby Blue 79's expressions of sorrow at the loss of her home, echoing the disbelief at a mother's silence during this moment of separation. In pinning down her grief, Baby Blue 79's writing of herself is encased in Meretoja's (2018, p. ix) observation, as

previously mentioned, that narratives and people become what and who they are in "dialogue with other people and their stories" and also in the silences of their stories.

From within Baby Blue 79's writing emerges the child's story of the past and the remembrance of her mother and the foreboding darkness it holds. Reflecting on this story in the present time, as an adult, she writes of her mother that *She is not meeting my family I have got now, due to what she had done to us and she might do it again*. Baby Blue 79 starts and ends her telling of her story with the repetition of the words *due to what she had done to us*. In the introduction these words are written from the perspective of the child taken away into care. With the ending in the last sentence it becomes significant from the perspective of the child now having become a parent herself, protecting her own family against what she knows or remembers has happened to herself and her siblings as young children. This knowledge is withheld from the reader. With the repetition of the foreboding allusion the reader is left in the same oblique space of not knowing, drawn into the writer's experience of loss.

Attempts at explaining this loss revolves around Baby Blue 79 writing, as an adult, to find a reason(s) for her mother's action, or inaction, depending on the reading of the text, *But now I am thinking she was not in a good frame of mind. Or that she couldn't cope with five young children all under the age of five. And dad was away in prison for something*. Baby Blue 79, in seeking to understand, places herself in the position of her mother responsible for caring for five young children under the age of five whilst her partner, their dad*, was away in prison for something*. It is a situation she comes to reflect on as one that left her mother *not in a good frame of mind*. Yet, even though as she contemplates her mother's state of mind, there is resistance to accepting this as the true version of events. Baby Blue 79 wants an answer, answers from her mother but finds herself resigned that *I know I am not going to get to the truth. She will blame it on dad*. Thinking through her mother, as a mother herself, Baby Blue 79 wants a resolution but anticipates that her mother will deflect the responsibility on to her father. Yet despite the reference to her father's imprisonment, mentioned rather as an aside, Baby Blue 79's focus remains firmly fixed on her mother. She does not seek answers from her father. Her mother then commands the centre of her writing, as it did for Virginia Woolf in the fictional rendering of her mother, Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* (Dalsimer, 2004, p. 714). Yet Dalsimer (2004, p. 719) observes that:

> in writing about her mother [...] Woolf was straining after facts, aware that what she wrote was necessarily conjectural.

This observation is significant because it encapsulates the similarity in the process of writing for Baby Blue 79 and Virginia Woolf, bridging the gap between their education and class hierarchies, uniting them in the experience of straining and searching for a mother in their own words. For Baby Blue 79 too, her writing becomes a quest to find answers, certainty from facts, but instead she is left with her own moments of conjecture in trying to understand the range of complex circumstances of her mother's life at the moment when *she handed us over to social services*. This writing quest leaves Baby Blue 79 with few facts other than what she remembers and from this remembrance she infers possible explanations. Underpinning these explanations, anger and disappointment spill into Baby Blue 79's writing with the words *but I know I am not going to get to the truth. She will blame it on dad.* Her writing draws the reader into "the search after something that is not there" anymore, into her loss and the futility and resignation experienced in thinking through a mother that is not there (Dalsimer, 2004, p. 722).

This becomes of significance when Baddeley and Singer (2012, p. 182) write that as children's "independent autobiographical memories" develop, the content and memory structure that form the groundwork of their recollections are still shaped by "parents and the surrounding society". In the writing exercise on meeting a stranger, Baby Blue 79 delves into the gap she finds in the content structure of her memories:

> *What I will say to my stranger:*
> ** What was the reason I was put into care for?*
> ** Did you ever think about us when we weren't in your care?*
> ** Did you ever have any more children after us?*
> ** Did you love us at all?*
> ** Did you love Dad?*

Her questions repeat over and over. What is revealed in her writing is the absence of a "joint reminiscing" on her childhood. Baddeley and Singer (2012, p. 182) describe this as the cog in the development of the child's capacity to narrate her own life being dependent on the narratives and recollections they elicit from their parents. The repetition of these questions in Baby Blue 79's writing shows the rupture she experiences in making meaning of her lived experience as a child. Her narrative identity is deeply interwoven with this loss of structure in the process of being cut adrift from thinking back through her mother.

5.5 Locating the self as the source of experience – a transformative process

Dalsimer (2004, p. 720) writes that experiencing an early loss not only leaves the writer with memories that are too few, but that these memories of loss and lost ones subjected

"to the transformations of time and grief and rage" become mutable. Baby Blue 79 demonstrates this transformative trajectory in her writing journey when she returns to the theme of writing about her mother in the writing exercise about coming face to face with an unfamiliar animal:

> *I was in the ocean. I was swimming freely when I came face to face with a dolphin. I thought it was a dolphin, but it wasn't, it was a shark. But it was ugly. It had no teeth and not a bone in ~~her~~ his body. I was scared, frightened, and wanted to turn away and swim away to get out of the ocean as quick as I can so he doesn't eat me for lunch. So I turned away and did get away from him in the end.*
>
> (Baby Blue 79, 2018)

At the end of her writing, when reading it aloud, another writer in the group asked Baby Blue 79 a question about the dolphin turning into a shark. She thought about the question for a moment and then smiled when she explained that whilst writing about the unfamiliar animal she suddenly thought about her mother, pointing out that she had changed the pronoun her to his, remembering that there was no right or wrong way to write. What is then not revealed in the transcription of Baby Blue 79's writing is the expressive quality of her reading and acknowledging this new moment of awareness that something has changed for her through her continued writing. Baby Blue 79 now shows control of her writing and the narrative of her story in that through increased self-reflection whilst writing, she realises that she is thinking of her mother and changes the pronoun to fictionalise her experience.

In standing back Baby Blue 79 is beginning to reconstruct the story that she has grown up with in the transformation of how she writes through her experience of her mother. Goldberg (1991, p. 12) writes of this moment in the writing process in that "it requires digesting your experience, whatever that experience is". Baby Blue 79 quite literally expresses this assimilation, the digestion of experience, when she writes metaphorically of fleeing and managing to escape from the shark, *I was scared, frightened, and wanted to turn away and swim away to get out of the ocean as quick as I can so he doesn't eat me for lunch.*

Concentrating on Baby Blue 79's growth as a writer in the continued and sustained 10-week period of time set aside for writing during her incarceration reveals the deep transformative value for the writer persisting in the creative writing sessions which in turns becomes restorative, a restoring practice of the self. Baby Blue 79, in her persistence of returning to her family story, the script that she has grown up with and the role she has been cast into, shows that this too deterministic a metaphor can be

reworked to find a new understanding and frame of reference to slowly change the perception of herself and her mother within the family story. This turning point revealed in her writing would not have been possible through one-off contributions to writing competitions and/or magazines. Instead, growth as increased self-awareness through cultivating writing as a skill is nurtured over time and through individual commitment to the process. Writing about the death of her mother, Goldberg (1991, p. 29) refers to this commitment to one's writing as the process where the writer becomes:

> willing to face her fear… willing to sit at the bottom of the pit, commit herself to stay there and let all the wild animals approach, even call them up, then face them, write them down, and not run away.

Baby Blue 79 continued to face her fear through her writing practice. She sat face to face with the wild animal that approached, the dolphin viewed through the eyes of her self as a child, which turned into a shark on closer contact as an adult, *I thought it was a dolphin, but it wasn't, it was a shark. But it was ugly. It had no teeth and not a bone in ~~her~~ his body*. Toothless and boneless, the shark loses its ferocious qualities that can cause further hurt. Or perhaps, as an adult Baby Blue 79 wanted teeth and bones in her mother, to keep hold of her children instead of letting them be taken away. McAdams (1996, p. 302) argues this process of selfing then becomes responsible for and constitutes the foundation for "human feelings of agency".

5.6 Seeing but remaining unseen in the space of loss and separation

> It was like walking on glass. She could see the granite rocks beneath the moving, dark turquoise water. A yellow leaf floated by, and she imagined herself alongside it and briefly looking up through the remarkably clear ice. Before the water filled her lungs, would she able to see the sky? (Ivey, 2012, p. 7)

In the progression of the narration of the self in the life story we move on from the birth story and childhood to Yellow-horned Poppy and Daisy Dove's explorations of thinking back through their mothers as adults. In *The Snow Child,* Mabel the main protagonist's tale begins from a place of loss as she contemplates ending her own life. This place of loss is revealed in the bleakness of her own inner world following the death of her infant baby. In this fictional framework of her life journey, the cold darkness she feels on the inside is reflected back to her in the harsh landscape of the Alaskan outback and their struggle for survival. In a parallel and unanticipated turn, the writers in prison start their writing journeys, intuitively, from places of lost hope within themselves following the disruptions they have experienced. Disruptions signal the loss of hope in

the demise of an envisaged or anticipated future and Becker (1999, pp. 4; 177) points out that:

> When hope is lost, or absent, people introduce images of death, nothingness or emptiness into their narratives.

In *Down by the Lake,* Yellow-horned Poppy draws us into her experience of this loss when she writes:

> *I was walking down the pathway to the lake. It was such a lovely day. The sun was shining. I sat near the lake just looking at the water when I saw my sister through the water. I was so happy and wanted to jump into the water to be with her. Then I saw my dad and my mum. By then, I just wanted to throw myself in. I could see them, but they could not see me. The sun went down and it became darker. I knew then that they weren't there, that I was just thinking about them. I started to walk to the pathway, to go home with tears running down my face.*
>
> (Yellow-horned Poppy, 2018)

I could see them, but they could not see me. Here Yellow-horned Poppy embodies loss, the experience of separation through the physical severance from her family, her mother, father and sister. Where the day starts brightly filled with sunlight, it fades into darkness with the realisation dawning that Yellow-horned Poppy can see them, but that they cannot see her. Writing the onset of darkness she draws down the veil of loss. Woolf (1992, [1931], pp. 8 - 9), in *The Waves,* depicts the moment of loneliness in separation from family with a similar image of the protagonist seeing whilst remaining unseen:

> Now they have all gone," said Louis. "I am alone". ... "Louis, Louis, Louis!" they shout. But they cannot see me. I am on the other side of the hedge.

Yellow-horned Poppy's writing, and the images it conjures, furthermore depicts her experience of separation from her family as the inversion of Mabel's experience in *The Snow Child.* Where Mabel imagined her own death in staring out from beneath a layer of ice at the start of her narrative journey, Yellow-horned Poppy stares from the outside into death, standing on the shore of the lake, into the water that separates her from her deceased family members. We are caught in the moment of her desperation when she exclaims *By then, I just wanted to throw myself in,* to join them. Vickers (2007, p. 3) writes that:

> Death is outside life but it alters it: it leaves a hole in the fabric of things which those who are left behind try to repair.

I knew then that they weren't there, that I was just thinking about them. I started to walk to the pathway, to go home with tears running down my face. She turns and walks away, unable to join them and thus repair her family circle and the self as she had known it in relation to her family from which she is separated.

Drawn into these spaces of darkness and loss, Daisy Dove joins Yellow-horned Poppy in her experience of separation from loved ones, seeing but remaining unseen when she writes:

> *I'm at the bottom of the wishing well, just me being me. Surrounded by pennies sitting at the bottom on my rocks. So much I've seen and I can also hear them and their thoughts. Things that make me laugh out loud, tears in my eyes, clutching my sides. For instance, a man who was asking for a wish to find a way to remove the toupee he had put on his head with superglue and not having to go to the local A&E to get the wig off and admit what had happened. Lots and lots of wishes for unrequited love, people from all walks of life: the vicar, married people, old people, cats and dogs. Made me realise how much we all just want love. Lots of sadness, wishing for good health and people not to die and get better. Lots of good happy wishes, wishing for peace, a new Barbie, a new bike, for Santa Clause, to lose weight and meet David Beckham.*
>
> *Then one day she appeared. Maybe then I realised it was perhaps a wish I wanted. It was my mum and she wondered where I was and how I was and that she missed me and she wished I'd come home. We all need a wishing well.*
>
> (Daisy Dove, 2018)

Sitting at the bottom of her well, Daisy Dove observes the world passing by, noting its wishes as the pennies drop down on the rocks around her. The image of the well is that of a deep dark hidden space. In this narrative description she observes and writes about the world outside beyond the space of her loss and separation – of the sadness and laughter, the hopes and dreams of others. This extensive focus on the lives of others deflects away from the narrative self. The layout of the text mirrors the shape of the visual image of a well. It depicts how Daisy Dove situates herself in relation to the layers of stories of others above her, unseen below – *just being me [...] sitting at the bottom on my rocks*. She keeps her own wish till last. The longing for a mother who wondered where she was, who missed her, wishing she would come home. She remains

unseen in the absence of her mother from her life where the maternal sea is experienced as a dry well with pennies dropping all around her.

5.7 Reading a divergent portrait of lived experience

> I am writing to keep myself alive. But I am also laying out the threads that have pulled my life together, to see just where this one connects with that one or crosses with the other, to see how they form the tapestry from which I will stand back to get a better view. (Gappah, 2015, p. 85)

In conclusion, in this excerpt from the novel, *The Book of Memory,* the main protagonist, Memory, is writing from her cell to the journalist, Melinda Carter, a well-known American reporter of miscarriages of justice around the world. The significance of Memory's reflections on the writing of her life story for Melinda stems from the fact that she captures, so accurately, the struggle to order her life experiences in the process of writing them down. It involves the process of weaving different strands and standing back to contemplate the tapestry and catch up with its ongoing creation. This holds true for both the writer and the reader:

> But, as it turns out, writing this is not as simple as I had imagined. I thought when I sat down to write, it would be to tell a linear story with a proper beginning, an ending and a middle. I did not realise the extent to which my current reality and random memories would intrude in this narrative. (Gappah, 2015, p. 85)

Gappah (2015, p. 85) encapsulates this transformative moment experienced in the creative process when the realisation dawns that writing a life, one's own story creatively is not a neat and simple, ordered and clinical process. Writing creates malleability where the past and present, memory and reality bleed and blend into one new and messy space in the moment of emplotment where the action and the story of the action begin to meet, and transforms in the process of being read by another. The observations, feelings and memories communicated in the women's writing in this chapter led us into landscapes of loss, where their words drew us into their paintings of spaces of nothingness and silence. Where in thinking back through the absence of their mothers, we experience their writing journeys and narratives of the self through tears of loss and as mistakes in low points, waves rising and falling into the maternal sea and darkness at the bottom of a wishing well.

This proves a new tributary in sociological research into the determination of women's self-identities in prison, an area influenced by the "early emphasis on social relationships" (how the disruption thereof causes women to disproportionally suffer more than male prisoners), as well as the further "preoccupation with social identities

such as motherhood" (Rowe, 2011, p. 572). What is revealed in the analysis of the research material is that the writers depart from the focus on identifying as mothers in the first instance and instead start their own writing journeys from the perspective as children in relation to a mother. The act of freewriting, unguarded in their own words, becomes disruptive as it diverges from the cultural narrative identities woven into 'formula stories', which produce "narratives of typical actors engaging in typical behaviours within typical plots leading to expectable moral evaluations" (Loseke, 2007, pp. 663 - 664). Instead, when the women as writers begin to possess the writing space as narrators, it signals a transition where their lived experiences are made concrete in their own words. Kvernbekk (2003, p. 272) writes that, "The narrators know the whole story. Audience and characters do not."

Senhouse (1966, p. 13) in the introduction to the writer Colette's autobiographical works *My Mother's House and Sido,* discusses Colette's approach to the art of autobiography - a process that she viewed as an attempt at writing a portrait. He quotes from Colette's account of attempting this portrait of writing the life of her mother and her mother's home, noting its rewards and dangers in that for Colette her words could only capture and hold on to moments in the fleeting experiences of describing a life (Senhouse, 1966, p. 13). Whilst Colette argued that these pictures painted with words in and of themselves "have no depth or sense" other than that "which we invest with meaning or sharp foreboding", she however concluded that for the writer:

> They bear for ever the stamp of some particular year, mark the end of some mistake or the culmination of a spell of prosperity. For that reason no one of us can ever swear that he has painted, contemplated, described in vain. (Senhouse, 1966, p. 13)

This holds true for the women as writers in prison where in the engagement with the words that bring their stories to life we find the stamps of their lived experiences imprinted in time. The narrated self comes to embody time simultaneously in the present and the past as an expression of the emergent narrative identity which captures the different stages of the re-storied life journey. The time of the past life is explored and shaped into a personal narrative history through the presence or absence of those that played pivotal roles in their lives, particularly their mothers. Thus, as writers, the women move slowly through writing into the contextual now, reshaping themselves by noticing and reconceptualising their selves as process. Their writing and the difficulties experienced in doing so, in making a start to the process of reconceptualising the self, is not a process undertaken in vain. We invest meaning in their lived experiences as they have written them through reading and the ensuing

critical engagement therewith. This writing bears the stamp of lived experience and moves the reader to transgress into a new horizon.

Muldoon (2002, p. 75) observes that reading and critical engagement with the women's writing break through previous categories of perception and definitions to present the reader with new levels of meaning and understanding. Thus, in close reading and paying attention to the essence of their experiences in writing, the reader can begin to transgress and dissolve the boundary line of viewing the women, the writers in prison, as other. This addresses Bateson's (1994, p. 4) observation where she points out that "We are ready with culturally constructed labels long before we encounter the realities". By inter-linking the women's writing to the work of writers such as Woolf and Gappah, whose narrative texts also grapple with and seek to define the shape of the self in the face of lives disrupted in the spaces left by the loss of mothers, we find they resonate and reflect each other in the search for understanding and making meaning of a lived experience. These reflections of thinking back through their mothers written in the quiet, deeply painful words of the women in prison reveal a portrait divergent from the one-dimensional portrayals of incarcerated women in the master narrative. Instead we find them sitting at the bottom of the well, wishing for a mother and her love.

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Chapter 6 The middle journey – Crosscurrents

> I feel like a river when the tide changes and for a while the waters flow in crosscurrent with no direction, only pulling from all sides. (Sarton, 1973, p. 129)

I'm sorry I let you down. I am sorry I was selfish and only thought of myself. I look back and see someone I do not recognise. What was I thinking? Why was I like that?

Upon reflection I've spent hours and hours and hours on this journey. For ten years, maybe more, from when I found myself homeless and broken, committing crime and hating the person I became. Not caring about my self and seeking solace in the bottle. It's easy to have a drink, that buzz that takes away the loneliness, the hatred, the shame.

Two years for each charge, that's five charges!! I thought I'd got ten years. Then it was explained to me that they run concurrent.

"Take her down", he said!!

Off I went to a world where I lost myself and was totally stripped bare. A world with women and people I've never encountered, and also with myself, my overthinking brain, my anxiety, my grumpiness. Analyzing everything and everyone and how it must be directed at me. Everyone's mood must be directed at me.

Prison life!! Wow this is almost surreal.

(Daisy Dove, 2018)

6.1 Introduction

> If you've never stolen anything you won't understand me. And if you've never stolen roses, then you can never understand me. I, as a child, used to steal roses [...] No one ever found out. I don't regret it: rose and pitanga thieves get one hundred years of forgiveness. (Lispector, 2015 [1951], p. 384; p. 386)

Taken from Lispector's (2015 [1951], p. 384) short story, *One Hundred Years of Forgiveness,* the quote, "If you've never stolen anything you won't understand me", illustrates the entry point into the site of the self, where the narrator reflects on a specific event of her childhood, namely the act of stealing. For the narrator, this act becomes a defining moment in the framing of herself, the narrated self as child in relation to others. She qualifies this positioning, deepening it to a further level of distancing herself from others through adding the detail that as a child she used to steal, roses. With the addition of this detail, "you won't understand me" to "you can never understand me", she places herself in a realm beyond mutual comprehension and

sets herself apart, unless the reader or others had also stolen something, in particular roses.

With this short story Lispector provides the reader with a deft example of how the narrator moves seamlessly between the different layers of the narrated self, whilst these different aspects of the self further give shape to the wider social context within which it develops over time. I apply this framework to the analysis of the women's writing in the chapter. I was also struck by how, when reading Lispector, I would reach back to Daisy Dove's writing and the development of the narrated self in her work. Added to her writing, I would think back to how she had referred to herself from the position of a child in the writing workshops - as the little Matilda and describing the two writers on either side of her as the "two old crooks" - a fieldwork moment I captured in the introductory reflection to Chapter 4.

Thus, this movement between viewing the self from different perspectives is featured in both Lispector and Daisy Dove's respective pieces. The narrators in the contextual now position themselves in relation to their earlier selves, either in forgiveness or apology for how the past self had acted. My analysis of the women's prison writing in this chapter thus moves deeper into unpicking the patchwork composition of the self, the I. It traverses the terrain of the self as an explorative site in the process of rediscovering a sense of the self through the technique of writing the self as a colour. This exploration reveals the layers of an identity formed and shaped through the duality of encounters with the complex multi-layered self in the context of the complex prison environment. An environment that requires of the writers to present different versions of the self.

What is of interest in Lispector's short extract and Daisy Dove's introductory story is that in the positioning and framing of the self in both instances, we find examples of what Deppermann (2013 (a), p. 1) refers to as "narratives being a primary site of identity construction". This is because the concepts of identity and self are "traditionally tied up with the essentials of what it is to be human: across time and space" in the personal, social and economic spheres (Bamberg, 2011, p. 10). Depperman (2013 (b), p. 67) points out that because "narratives unfold biographical trajectories, which are much richer and more individualized" they provide "powerful resources for positioning". Narrative positioning, as Depperman (2013 (a), p. 2) explains follows from the "notion of subject positions" as posited by Foucault in 1969 who argued that these positions are "made available and constrained by societal discourses", which in turn positions "subjects in terms of status, power, legitimate knowledge and practices they are allowed to and ought to perform" thereby "determining the interpretation of the self, (social) world and others". Therefore, in

order to explore the site of the storied self along these lines of demarcation, Bamberg (1997, p. 337) devised the analysis of identity construction in narratives from the point of view of narrative positioning, which takes place at the three different levels. According to Bamberg (1997, p. 337) these levels of positioning are ascertained by asking the following three questions:

> 1. How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events? (namely in the story level)
> 2. How does the speaker position him- or herself to the audience? (and also in interactive situations to others)
> 3. How do narrators position themselves to themselves?

Using Bamberg's initial layout in their collaborative work, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008, p. 385) expand positioning level three for analytic purposes to also include "how the speaker/narrator positions a sense of self/identity with regard to dominant discourses or master narratives".

Thus, in returning to the introductory quote as example, we begin to understand in using positioning level two as a lens, that Lispector's narrator sets herself apart from her audience as unusual because she stole roses. Depperman (2013 (b), p. 66) points out that the "positioning activities", such as the one revealed by Lispector's narrator, all contribute in one way or another to answering the intrinsic question of "who am I?". In the Lispector example, the narrative identity under construction is one forging towards a forgiveness of a self who consciously displays no regret in and through time in level three. The construction of this unrepentant narrative identity unfurls through the reasons given for this act of stealing, namely that the child played in the streets of Recife, a neighbourhood of "countless streets, rich people's streets lined with mansions set amidst extensive gardens" where flowers were planted in well-tended beds and she saw for the first time the rose she wanted "from the bottom of my heart" (Lispector, 2015 [1951], p. 384). Playing in its streets, the child found herself in a space where the personal meets the social in a wealthy economic sphere from which she was excluded.

Juxtaposed to the narrator in this short story, we reach across time away from Lispector's literary social commentary that contained the deft development of a narrative identity unapologetic in its description and acceptance of a particular period during childhood in the development of the self. We now move into another space of exclusion, onto the streets of non-fiction, where homeless and broken, Daisy Dove's contemplation of her own lived experiences stands in stark contrast to that of Lispector's narrator. Enveloped in remorse, steeped in despair, Daisy Dove's narration begins by questioning herself, *What was I thinking?,* the self experienced as another

part or aspect of a larger self, *Why was I like that?* Through this direct line of questioning, she positions herself in level three where the narrative identity revealed is one that is splintered. In an attempt to answer the subliminal question of 'who am I?' Daisy Dove takes herself apart and places her splinters in a linear narrative construction moving across time and space as she configures her past experience from homelessness and alcoholism into the present moment of her imprisonment as another surreal environment. In this construction, the narrative identity configured as explorative site, comprises the present imprisoned self, stripped bare, resting on a past self that is unfathomable. *Broken* is how Daisy Dove describes the crosscurrents in the layered experience of the self.

What links Lispector's narrator and Daisy Dove in level two of the analytic positioning lens, is the experience of being set apart from others following as a consequence of a particular action or actions. Daisy Dove reveals her homelessness, that she committed crimes. Whereas Lispector's narrator benefits from the fact that "No one ever found out", Daisy Dove is confronted with the terms of her sentence which would now also physically set her apart, *Two years for each charge, that's five charges!! I thought I'd got ten years*. In the narration of her descent, *Take her down,* into the surreal space of *Prison life!!,* moving into positioning level three, we find encased an apology to her current self from this past self, *I'm sorry I let you down, I look back and see someone I do not recognise*. *Why was I like that?* Observed in this apology, spanning across time and space, we find no trace of the one hundred years of forgiveness as dispensed by Lispector's narrator to the child who stole roses. Only confusion.

6.2 The self as the site of the struggle

Daisy Dove's construction of her narrative identity deepens with her description of entry into the surreal experience of prison life. Analysed in the story level one, *Off I went into a world where I lost myself*, brings to mind the image of prison as the Hades or Underworld in which she experiences the death of the self, *totally stripped bare in a world with women and people I've never encountered, and also with myself, my overthinking brain, my anxiety, my grumpiness*. Rowe (2011, p. 575) refers to this process of an identity being stripped bare upon entry into prison as the "mortification of the person". Jose-Kampfner (1990, p. 111) writes that women in prison describe this state as "feeling out of their existence", where feeling this existential death is drawn in parallel to physical death. Daisy Dove's context specific prison writing draws the reader into her painful and psychological experience, paradoxically breathing life into the abstract concept contained in the mortification, the death of the self. Her writing

reveals how this state of mortification is amplified through contact with others. How it is deeply entwined in the mental and emotional experiences of this contact, *Analysing everything and everyone and how it must be directed at me*. I discuss the death of the self further in Chapter 7 as part of the ending in the analytic framework of the women's writing along the trajectory of the life journey.

In this mortified state, weaving between the levels of positioning, from level two back to level three, Daisy Dove instigates a conversation with herself, *with my overthinking brain, my anxiety, my grumpiness*, reflecting on the multi-layered experiences of this self and also in relation to others. Immersed in her writing, as I transcribe the introduction to this multi-layered self, the image of an eight-limbed octopus appears in my mind, each limb moving as if on its own accord, sometimes in opposite directions, yet connected together as a whole, drifting in the dark waters of the self, held captive in the surreal sea, the dual space of inhabiting the bareness of the self and the jarring experiences of imprisonment. She becomes the crosscurrent. Her writing plunges the reader deep into the maelstrom of this embodied tentacled self, into the turmoil and confusion of the lived experience of losing oneself in an unfamiliar world. It is a disorientating experience, further distorting the sense of self she had already described as *broken*. Her experience encapsulated in this image, brings to life Frank's (2005, p. 972) observation of the self as the site of struggle with the self when he writes that "any person's story is the site of struggles permeated by multiple voices".

Richter (1970, p. 115) refers to this showing of the "separate selves" in the moment as a pivotal development, because it reveals the crystallization of the self into "time/memory selves", where each of these selves, whilst part of the whole is also separate with its own identity. Thus referring to positioning in level three – how do narrators position themselves to themselves? - what becomes of interest here, is the multiple voices revealed in Daisy Dove's writing and, in particular, the contest between these voices. This becomes of importance and foreshadows the findings revealed from the writing exercise where the writers explored the site of the self in colours. This site revealed the struggle and contest of the multiple voices of the time/memory selves which in turn generated a sense and an image of the social world contained within this conflict, namely the lived experience of the women in prison (Frank, 2005, p. 972). It is this conflict that becomes the instigator of a conversation (Frank, 2005, p. 972) or encounter between the multiple voices of the time/memory selves within the context of a particular social experience, namely in Daisy Dove's case the disorientating space of imprisonment, both physically and psychologically on the one hand, and the emotional impact thereof on the other hand as a consequence.

For Daisy Dove through her writing this conversation begins between the past self who apologises to the present self whilst in the process revealing an image and sense of her social world pre-imprisonment in the descriptions of her poverty, homelessness and drinking too much to numb this experience. This conversation is born from the conflict in the self between *hating the person I became who let you down*, between the I and the you in her storied world. However, with this internal conflict churning, Daisy Dove also comes into contact with, and encounters others, external voices in the alien, underworld space of imprisonment. Others, who themselves represent sites of struggle with their selves, permeated by their own multiple voices of lived experience, which Daisy Dove then absorbs into herself by *Analysing everything and everyone*, positioning herself in the centre of these encounters, *how it must be directed at me*.

What is revealed in writing this conflict, of capturing the self as the site of the struggle, is the emergence and recognition of the lived experience of loss of the self in layers of loss. Thus, just as in Chapter 5, we are again confronted with the spectre of loss, because loss is also the shape of Daisy Dove's story seen from the different perspectives of the time and memory selves. However, in the process of writing her story, in the construction of her narrative identity, Daisy Dove begins to tentatively prod at the multi-layered self, parts of which had been stripped away and died.

The recognition of the multi-layered self through writing for the women in prison opens up to an acknowledgement and validation of the different time selves and the experiences of these selves. This is linked to Richter's (1970, p. 17) observations when she writes of how Virginia Woolf sought to portray in her writing that which welled from the "secret springs of action", namely all "the childhood traumas, conflicts and emotion" by showing how "all of the past which impinges on the present moment" is of importance "not to show emotion for emotion's sake", but instead "to give validity to experience". In addition, Frank (2012, p. 2) observes that whilst writing stories provides information stories crucially also give form, "temporal and spatial orientation, coherence, meaning, intention and especially boundaries to lives that inherently lack form". With her prodding, Daisy Dove begins to move towards stitching together an I, finding a shape in the written patches of her different voices by mining her time and memory selves, because stories bring together "the coordinates of times, space and personhood into a unitary frame" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 378). Within this unitary frame revealed in the three levels of positioning, her writing brings to the surface the symbiosis, the further link between encounters with the self in the inner world and encounters of this self with others in the external world whilst giving a shape to the external.

To explore this symbiotic relationship between the inner world and the external world, my analysis proceeds with a focus on a writing technique that brings to life the different shapes of the self in the different dimensions, the splinters of lived experience. This is used together with the concept of an encounter within the process of writing the self as the site of the struggle. The application of this concept of an encounter to the different layers of the women's prison writing sheds light on the development of the narrator's sense of self, which leads to a deeper understanding of the performative construction of the self and identity within the prison environment. But I am racing ahead.

6.3 Unselfing - recovering a sense of self in colour

> I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious of my surroundings [...] Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. There is nothing now but kestrel. And when I return to thinking of the other matter it seem less important. (Murdoch, 1971, p. 82)

How does the writer move beyond the familiar self and its habitual ways of thinking, acting and being? In the context of writing as a transformative learning process, Hunt (2013, pp. 1 - 2) describes her approach as one that seeks to capture self-experience through the use of poetic and fictional techniques to explore memories, relations with others (present and past), and emotional and physical experience. Fictionalising self-experience, she explains, can lead to an increased sense of agency in writing students. Hunt's method links to what the author Iris Murdoch (1971, p. 82) refers to as the process of unselfing. In the quote above, looking away and back, Murdoch in the moment that she turns her gaze away from herself, looking out of the window and observing the kestrel hovering, finds her consciousness altered. She sees what has bothered her self from a different perspective and writes, which resonates with Daisy Dove's observations about her state of mind, that:

> We are anxiety-ridden animals. Our minds are continuously active [...] Our states of consciousness differ in quality, our fantasies and reveries are not trivial and unimportant, they are profoundly connected with our energies and our ability to choose and act. (Murdoch, 1971, p. 82)

The ability to choose and act, flowing from the moment of unselfing, connects with Hunt's observations of the increase in agency experienced by her writing students. Agency in the form of choice and action, of writing the self, instigates a disruptive act, the moment where the counter-narrative bursts into seed. Growth is not a passive state of being, it is not gentle, instead it bursts, cracks and breaks the seedpod in order to

germinate new shoots in the outer world and spread the roots of development in the inner world - nowhere more so than illustrated in the writing of the self as a colour as the very first exercise of the writing workshops. This emergence of new shoots and life in the women's writing resonates with Virginia Woolf's observation in the diary she kept for *Night and Day,* when she writes, "It's life that matters" (Richter, 1970, p. xii). And with writing, what matters is to communicate this life to the reader by using the subjective modes to express the experience of living this life, to create "an unusually close relationship between the reader and the work" (Richter, 1970, p. 234).

Building this relationship extends into practice in following up from my intention set out in Chapter 1 to give a sensory experience of the carceral world, moving from the outside in towards the inside out. I therefore explore the significance of colour in writing the self with reference to the writing techniques Virginia Woolf deployed and explored in order to give the reader "a glimpse into the internal reality and the essence of lived experience" (Richter, 1970, p. vii) of the narrator's journey.

Richter (1970, p. 6) points out that for Woolf in her quest to move from the old to the new in her writing, she saw the moment of feeling as "the narrow bridge of art", which moved away from "a stable world dealing in absolutes to one committed to the present moment of feeling". Richter (1970, p. vii; p. x) therefore observes that Woolf sought in her writing to convey this sense of lived reality through the subjective modes of "Abstraction, reflection, metamorphosis, discontinuity" to approximate the actual ways of feeling, seeing, thinking, and the experience of change and time, in order to lead the reader into "the consciousness of her characters". Woolf, with this complex and sophisticated method, sought to convey the "many interrelated components of lived experience" (Richter, 1970, p. xii). I used this method during the first creative writing workshops. It was also the very first writing exercise and asked of the women to sit quietly and think of themselves as a colour and to describe this colour in detail in their own words. Slotting in after this exercise, the second prompt asked the writers to map their life journeys by drawing these either as a river or a tree and annotating it with significant moments in their lives. Finally, the third exercise asked of the writers to reflect on the first two pieces of writing and to situate the colour that they have described themselves as within or alongside their drawings of trees and rivers. The first two writing exercises focused on aspects of the self – the first on the present moment of the writing workshop in prison, the second on the women's past and lived experiences. The aim of the third exercise was to situate their present selves within the larger narrative framework of their life journeys.

Writing the self as a colour provided the prison writers with the view of a hovering kestrel, an avenue to concentrate on the self from a different perspective. To

look away from the self in abstraction, to look into the space of feeling and the expression of this feeling in the moment through the lens of colour, which led to the discovery that:

> Then beneath the colour there was the shape. (Woolf, 1996 [1927], p. 32)

Lily Briscoe, the artist in Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, describing the features of the creative process captures the essence of colour used as a form of expression when she remarks that "beneath the colour there was a shape" (Woolf, 1996 [1927], p. 32). It is this transformative aspect of writing the self as a colour that served as the induction to the writing journey of finding a shape to the self and addressing its mortification and being caught in crosscurrents in the context of prison life. For some of the writers, in the face of the nothingness experienced in this death of the self and the disorientation of the crosscurrents of the multi-layered self, writing in colour brought shape and sensory substance to the revival of a felt life. Colour transformed the experience of feeling into aesthetic visibility.

To explore this transformation my attention first turns to the writers in Downview. Their experiences of writing in colour aligned more closely to the trajectory of their lived experiences in the map drawings of their rivers and trees. Their writing differs in this aspect from the writers in East Sutton Park. I discuss the colours in turn.

6.3.1 Orange

Colour for The Mallard, constitutes an embrace of the physical sense of taste to express how she feels. She writes:

> *My name is Orange. My mind is sometimes sweet, sometimes sour. When I concentrate I can read and write, but when my mind flies out, I can't do anything.*

Born in Vietnam, she fled the war-ravaged country with her family as a teenager and lived in a refugee camp in Hong Kong for seven years before being resettled by the UN in the UK. Flowing from this brief life history drawn on her river map, the importance of reading and writing in English is shown as the foremost thought on her mind, followed by the longing expressed for her family. Improving her English, permeates her writing and engagement in the workshops, and reveals the shape of self beneath the colour orange. Richter (1970, p. 232) writes of Lily Briscoe's observation of the shape beneath the colour, that the discovery of the underlying shape springs from feeling it, rather than seeing it. The Mallard explores the shape she finds in the feeling of the colour orange through the physical sense of taste. For her this physical sensation

of the colour is closely linked to the state of her mind and how she perceives its functioning - *sweet* when she can concentrate on reading and writing, and *sour* when she loses concentration, *when my mind flies out*.

This shape solidifies her motivation to keep her mind going, because if she does well in her reading and writing, and partakes in lessons and activities, she hopes it will help her to return to her family sooner. Week after week, The Mallard writes out by hand chapters from *The Snow Child* and the *The Summer Book,* the two books we read together and discussed as a group during the writing workshops. Through the continued use of the medium of colour, she explains this process of propping herself up as one where the physical sensation of the colour turns autumnal as it spreads to the rest of her body and changes from taste to an embodied heaviness of spirit.

> *Sometimes my Orange is autumn. Whenever something happens to me, my head gets heavy and my body is going to collapse, but I try my best to stand up, because I already served over half-way, I only got a few more months to go. So it doesn't matter if they put pressure on me, I will fight for that, to see my family again. So whenever I have got nothing to do, I write my ESOL lesson, I write about the book which I just finished reading. I start to write and copy it from the beginning to the end of the book. I hope by my date of release my English should be better than before. I focus my thinking, to write and read. Everyone in the group gives me more confidence.*

6.3.2 Red

Revealed from the writing exercises, writing the self as colour proved to be the women's writing anchor. As writers, during the weeks that followed on from this introductory writing exercise, they would again and again return to their colours as a measure in their descriptions of how they were feeling. Whilst the colour provided enough distance in the process of unselfing, paradoxically the women experienced containment in the concept of colour. Once their colour was established, the shape or form of the self beneath the colour began to take shape, expand and/or change form, pulsating as it would deepen or fade, depending on the intensity of the feeling within a particular experience. Milner (1950, p. 28) in her analysis of creative process and the use of colour in sketching, writes of this movement, of the "feeling of colour", as something "alive in its own right, not fixed or flat" but rather where the "conscious inner eye" and the experience of the colour meets in the experience.

Tall Melilot's writing is visceral in the description of the movement of her colour, when she writes:

> *My name is Red. It feels sticky, wet. It brings a darkness. Red makes me full of little bug-like creatures, the body can't stay still. I've never killed, but torturous death is always on my mind. Darkness, depth, Red. Blood releasing, rushing.*

Milner (1950, p. 30) describes this developing relationship between the self and the inner world of the self as a "plunge into the full imaginative experience of it". Red becomes tactile and claustrophobic, sticky, dark and wet. Rushing and releasing, it is a colour that expresses movement, inside a body that cannot stay still whilst filled with little bug-like creatures. Milner (1950, p. 30) calls this experience of the imagination as beginning to see with the inner as well as the outer eye. On Tall Melilot's map, the drawing of her river changes from a tranquil flow in even lines (which mentions her acting and the beginnings of a career as a model) into a mass of tight swirls and coils. She annotates this moment of change with arrows pointing to the "wrong crowd" and "sister abused". From this point forward her river spirals into the tributary of prison where it drains into the *black hole*, her *lowest point* where she *hate [sic] having no freedom*.

Tall Melilot's description of Red - *It feels sticky, wet. It brings a darkness. Red makes me full of little bug-like creatures, the body can't stay still* - superimposed on her drawing as if on a plate of glass, blends the colour with her river drawing, visually showing the descent into the darkness of the black hole. Richter (1970, p. 75) comments that this aspect of writing, where moving deeper beneath the colour to reveal a shape, brings in sharp relief the relation of the discovered shape to an emotion, which then in turns elevates the concept of colour beyond that of mere surface-colour but instead transforms it into a "pure sensory stimulus", which similar to the shape then also releases energy within the reader.

The physical experience of the colour red, spilling over into her drawing in angry swirls and described with intensity in her writing in the description of torturous death that occupies her mind's eye, also spilled into the room as Tall Melilot read her words aloud. A strained silence filled the room whilst she read, yet then she laughed and brushed it aside, revealing instead her imprisonment for importing drugs as she had drawn it on her river map. It is this relationship with the imaginative experience through colour that develops and changes as the result of a growing awareness of what one is looking at (Milner, 1950, p. 30). In the case of the writers in prison, this was the self and lived experience in reflection on the two writing exercises. Apposite in this instance is when Richter (1970, p. ix) observes:

> Her interior world is one of constant transformation, for experience is never static.

6.3.3 Purple

This observation links and flows in to Moon's (1999, p. 141) study of the stages of learning using a reflective approach, where the first stage of learning involves noticing. She writes that noticing corresponds with a widening perception, which involves a sensory acquisition of the material one is working with (Moon, 1999, p. 141). However, she points out that this stage which pre-empts the phase of meaning-making is also referred to as the "gate-keeping phase" because it is based on what is known already and also reveals the "constitutive factors" namely self-esteem and/or the emotions, such as excitement, fear and boredom associated with the process of learning and the learning materials (Moon, 1999, p. 141). Sea-Coral illustrates this aspect of gatekeeping in the stage of noticing, when she writes:

> *My colour is purple, it feels a deep purple like a dark purple cloud floating around. Sea-Coral is trying to lighten the purple to make herself feel better. Slowly bits of the cloud are becoming paler. Sea-Coral is feeling better.*

Sea-Coral introduces us to a cycle of feeling in writing colour, where the shape she explores is a deep dark cloud, floating around. A nebulous shape. As the narrator, conscious of the depth and intensity of the colour, Sea-Coral positions herself in relation to the colour when she tries to change it. Aware of what this depth of colour, the deep darkness of the purple, implies to herself, she tries to change it, to lighten it in order to feel better. The cloud drifts and slowly parts of it become paler. The colour is smudged and the reader drifts along.

From the narrative perspective of positioning level three, referring to the self in the third person, instead of using the I, Sea-Coral separates the narrator from the I in writing. In this distance created between the self and I in the narration, as gatekeeper, she tells the reader that Sea-Coral is feeling better. We are not placed within the experience of the I, into the physical sensation thereof. Instead we stand outside, observing the purple cloud from a distance from the position of the narrator. We are not given access to the process of becoming paler or a glimpse inside the cloud itself as to what makes it feel better. It differs in expression to the physically felt descriptions of Tall Melilot's red, where little bug-like creatures crawl in or under her skin in the sticky, darkness of the colour. Red does not aim to alter her colour. Acting from the position of gatekeeper to her lived experience, Sea-Coral chose not to share her tree or river map. The reader is left with Sea-Coral's reflections in the third exercise of tracing the self as colour following her map drawing:

> *The river was stroppy at times but also calm flowing gently. I realised I have grown in confidence. I surprise myself. Hopefully the river will remain calmer*

> *although I expect it will get stroppy at times but I hope I will be prepared more for this. The purple in the river is remaining light purple and Sea-Coral is trying not to let the dark purple return. Sometimes this is hard because the dark purple is strong. The light and the dark purple fight sometimes and this can make things difficult.*

Sea-Coral's reflective writing reveal a deep inner struggle between the shades of purple that she had tried to control and dim from dark to light in the first piece of writing. She situates herself in the contextual now, in the present where the river and the colour display in a lighter purple. Yet, she voices concern for the return of the dark purple, noting its strength and veracity of its onslaught when it tries to overwhelm the light purple. Here she begins to let the reader into the space of her psychological experience, with fear emerging when she takes note of the self as colour. Whilst she acknowledges her fear she draws the reader's attention to her growth in confidence when she exclaims, *I surprise myself.* Her writing reveals a growing self-awareness in the discussion of the multi-layered self as revealed in the lightness and darkness of the colour purple, in how she can begin to control it to dim the intensity of the darkness.

Of the influence of the writer acting as gatekeeper, particularly in the case of Sea-Coral guarding access to her river or tree drawing, Richter (1970, p. 233) writes that "what we see is a merely a stain upon the waters". She further observes that writing in this way, leaves unexpressed "what has transpired below the surface [...] all the activity and pain going on invisibly" and instead transpires "in ways the reader cannot see, but only feel" (Richter, 1970, p. 233).

6.4 The self as narrative anomaly - where colour collides with rivers and trees

> In fact it was as if colour and the light of knowing were differences which must be kept firmly separate, just as objects had to be kept separated and not seen in the mutual effect upon each other. (Milner, 1950, p. 26)

In considering Milner's observation of this notion of keeping colour and the light of knowing apart in the process of drawing and acknowledging the role of colour in the process, I am struck by the similarities in the process of the women coming to write their colours in the first writing exercise at East Sutton Park. The expressions of their colours seemed distinct and removed from the light of knowing in the drawings of their lived experiences in the maps of their rivers and trees. At first, it occurs as if the selves are kept separate from one another in complete unawareness of the inter-relatedness and mutual effect of these different aspects of the selves upon one another. The

moment of this encounter between colours and river|tree maps is revealed to startling effect here, where as the evening's writing progressed the writer experienced a narrative anomaly in their reflections on the two different writing exercises they had just completed. Before we turn to the analysis the women's writing, it becomes necessary to examine and frame the narrative anomaly in the instance of the encounter from where the collision between the narrative selves and identity constructions become apparent.

> So perhaps we write toward what we will become from where we are. (Sarton, 1973, p. 208)

In coming to understand the instance of the encounter, I find Sarton's (1973, p. 208) reflections on writing instructive when she ponders the notion that we write toward what we will become, from where we are. She contemplates this trajectory in the conclusion to the journal she kept during a year of living in solitude whilst writing poetry, charting her writing progress alongside that of the experience of solitude. Re-reading the poetry book that she had written during this year of solitude, she reflects on the process of writing, how despite the fact that she had set out to write a joyful book, the poetry in the end revealed itself to be elegiac, capturing the true state of affairs of her life and lived experience at that moment in time of reading, even though the work was written during the preceding year. It is this aspect of the writing process that she refers to as mysterious, in that the work is somehow "more mature than the writer of it, always the messenger of growth" (Sarton, 1973, pp. 207 - 208).

As the messenger of growth, Sarton implies that this mysterious component of writing reveals to the writer spheres of existence within the writer that the writer might not be aware of in the physical, actual, moment of writing. It is only once the writing is completed that the text, and reflections on the text, begin to reveal these different spheres of existence within the self as the site containing multiple voices. As such, this site holds almost simultaneously the experiences of the past and the present self, both in the spheres of an inner world and the outer world. Presented with the written texts of these episodes, which capture the different spheres of existence, the reflective writer and reader stumble on a conflict revealed in the encounter between the different states of being, namely the writer's existence in her inner world (a simultaneous past and present) which is held aloft alongside her perceptions of her existence in the outer world in the present time considering the future.

Without intentionally setting out to do so, it would seem that writing the inner event then also sketches the writer's outer world. And vice versa, that the descriptions of their experiences in the outer world undertaken as the writing of fiction or poetry or

creative non-fiction, gives the writer a tacit permission to explore this inner space, place or event contained from a distance. Richter (1970, p. xi) writes that these "modes of subjectivity" used in the expression of perceptual experience in writing is often overlooked, because even though we may constantly use them ourselves:

> Like the process of breathing, they exist on the periphery of consciousness – we do not usually think about them, for they interrupt our sense of living.

Therefore, it becomes necessary to dissect what this notion of growth, namely the mysterious moment of the narrative encounter with the felt life of women in prison would entail both for the writer and also for the reader of the text. O'Sullivan (2015, p. 1) explains that an encounter happens when "something in the world forces us to think", and this something or someone is not an object of recognition. He makes a distinction then between an object of recognition and an object of an encounter (O'Sullivan, 2015, p. 1). For the purposes of my analysis of the women's prison writing, I substituted the word object with the word instance – an instance of recognition and an instance of encounter. Because, rather than focus on an object, I am instead interested in the peculiar moment, the instance when something forces us to think. A fleeting moment visually captured when Woolf (1996 [1927], p. 33) writes:

> But something moved, flashed, turned a silver wing in the air.

The distinction O'Sullivan (2015, p. 1) observes between the instance of recognition and the instance of encounter centres on the argument that with *recognition* comes the reconfirmation of our beliefs, values and knowledge and as such:

> the world we inhabit, are reconfirmed as that we already understood ourselves and our world to be.

It is therefore a "representation of something always already in place" which stymies thought, because it reaffirms our habitual ways of acting and being in the world or how we think about a particular world (O'Sullivan, 2015, p. 1). The instance of an *encounter*, on the other hand, disrupts our systems of knowledge and challenges typical ways of being in the world – the encounter produces a "crack" in our habitual subjectivities by forcing us to think (O'Sullivan, 2015, p. 1). The earth quakes and shifts. Cracks appear in the soil beneath our feet, their lines redrawing the world of experience as we knew it. Momentarily, it stops you in your tracks. Your thoughts are redirected into a new thought space revealed in the moment of challenge held in the encounter. I discuss this moment of the encounter, the crack, in relation to the writers' reflections on the collision between their colour writing and their maps of lived experiences as rivers and trees.

6.4.1 Turquoise blue

Turquoise blue – relaxed

My colour is blue as I feel calm and relaxed. I am a turquoise blue like the ocean, serene and relaxed, bringing joy and relaxation to everyone. Life is flowing in sync all around me.

Reflective encounter – a wish for death

My map has indicated to me that my life has been a roller-coaster, happy being young, then followed by lots of trauma. Which I am finding easier to reflect on as I am now au fait with it all and my journey I've been on and how I am in a place of stability eventhough I am in custody. I'm free of the past and looking forward to getting my life back. I'm in love with my life again and being happy. I matter as Daisy Dove and I am brave. Daisy Dove now feels blue, it feels free and can be the brightest blue of the sea with so many prospects and happiness to come with every day that she gets stronger and stronger, more blue and more bright and happy.

(Daisy Dove, 2018)

Daisy Dove's narrator's voice in her colour writing echoes a writing style reminiscent of self-help guides. Yet, this voice changes when she writes on her map - *I wish I was dead. So much pain. I must overcome it.* This stands in stark contrast to the blue she writes of which entails *prospects and happiness* in the days to come because she has got her life back. It is the anomaly, the disassociation between her wish of death in the face of her lived experiences and the juxtaposition of the words *I'm in love with my life again and being happy,* that strikes me as most acute in the example of the encounter - the crack revealed in the differing perceptions of the narrated self.

It resonates with Sarton's observation that Daisy Dove is writing toward what we she hopes to become from where she is, where the self in the contextual now is situated in the crosscurrent of the wish for death and being in love with her life again.

6.4.2 Pink

Pink – crystals and unicorns

My pink is a bright shining Swarovski like crystal that is glowing with positivity. My pink is the positivity of what the future may bring – new beginnings; daughters; granddaughters, ponies; unicorns and clouds.

The encounter – dark twisted turns

Following a fairly ordinary life, Andromeda Marsh's life map took a dark and twisted turn. Andromeda Marsh was the Grandmaster and Matriarch of the

group of unicorns, who had fallen foul of the law and for a period of time had been sent to the stables where naughty unicorns were sent.

Cannot match up the pink and positive colour of today with the river writing.

Pink has spent 18 months in prison and now is the time to concentrate on her future and moving forward. The past is the past and cannot be changed, but the future is hopefully brighter. Historically we rue with hindsight but view with foresight and Pink has to have positive thoughts and hope for the future. Mistakes have been made and regrets are huge and costly.

Pink was dismayed to learn that upon my release I would not be permitted to use party poppers or hold a sparkler with my grandchildren.

(Andromeda Marsh, 2018)

Andromeda Marsh reaches into the genre of fantasy to frame her lived experiences as drawn on her tree. In this piece I note the interplay between time and memory selves where the narrator swaps from Andromeda Marsh when recounting the past, but moves to Pink when considering the future, the colour of hope and positivity. In effect, distancing herself from the past, because it does not fit within the current expectations placed on her to show positivity towards her future. Considered in relation to positioning level 3 from the perspective of the narrator's sense of self positioned to a master narrative, Pink reveals dismay upon learning that she would not be able to hold party sparklers with her grandchildren. This is significant because it reveals a splinter in the narrative self, whilst identifying with a positive future it is still linked to the past and Andromeda Marsh's actions, which continues to bear a negative impact on Pink's future and her envisioned activities with her grandchildren.

Thus, similar to Daisy Dove's writing the theme we find emerging in the colour writing is the insistence on *positive thoughts* and *hope for the future*.

6.4.3 Purple

Prism of purples – just right, peaceful

I can see my colour through a prism against a light background which makes a dazzling spectrum of purples. The colours dance across the surfaces. The room is never cold or hot, just right. The mood is peaceful.

The encounter – lost identity

My map is complex and winding. It shows the point at which my identity was lost. I am still travelling along the river, hoping to find Lily again. At the moment I am safe, no longer drowning. Wood Lily is sad now today, her

> *colour is purple. She has missed both her children's birthdays and hasn't seen them for three months. She hasn't had the simple pleasure of burying her nose into their hair to smell their special smell. Wood Lily is dark purple in colour today, almost the deepest shade of purple, nearly black almost. Wood Lily's purple heart is bruised. The colour will brighten to a lilac when she hears their voices again.*
>
> (Wood Lily, 2018)

Described on its own, Wood Lily's colour is just right, *never cold or hot*. In transcribing this sentence, I am struck by the similarity to the tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears where the last bowl of porridge is just right, not too hot or too cold. But linked to her map of lived experience, Wood Lily's purple is instead revealed to be the colour of lost identity captured in level 3 of positioning the self to the self. Travelling along her river Wood Lily hopes to meet Lily again. The use of the name Lily signifies the past and a different time and memory self, pre-prison.

In prison she refers to herself as Wood Lily whose bruised colour purple is linked to the absence of her children. Almost black, it reveals the depth of her longing to see her children, because *She has missed both her children's birthdays and hasn't seen them for three months. She hasn't had the simple pleasure of burying her nose into their hair to smell their special smell*. Here, Wood Lily illustrates the depth of the emotional impact of the separation from her children due to her imprisonment. She describes herself as a bruised purple. Her words resonate with the work of Baldwin and Raikes (2019), which focuses on the devastating consequences of the separation of mothers from their children due to imprisonment, both for the children left behind and for the imprisoned mother.

Baldwin and Raikes (2019, p. 19) write about the importance of maintaining links between mothers in prison and their children, yet highlight that this is a challenging situation in the UK because of the remote locations of women's prisons, where distance and cost lead to the situation where "many children remain between 60-150 miles away from their mothers, making visits sometimes impossible". This fact is illustrated from Wood Lily's lived experience - she had not seen her children for three months, she had missed both their birthdays. The impact of this separation on Wood Lily's emotional wellbeing is significant, particularly when she writes that her colour purple will only turn lilac on seeing her children again. Her self-reflection resonates with Baldwin and Raikes (2019, p. 19), who argue that:

> [...] it remains vital that their maternal emotions are supported and acknowledged, it can quite simply be a matter of life and death.

6.4.4 Emerald

Emerald – childhood comfort

My colour is Emerald. It is in front of me shining, it's pretty to me. It's a forest stone that holds great power for me when I am feeling lost or upset. I sometimes stop and think of this colour because it reminds me of when I was a young child. I loved being out in the woods and I love nature.

The encounter - speechless

Trees are forever growing, just like life. Water is forever flowing, life will live on. Emerald can easily turn black. Emerald cannot talk. It feels and thinks but cannot talk, it's speechless. The tree is not always filled with colour, there's a dark place under the tree.

(Oriental Redwood, 2018)

On her tree map Oriental Redwood wrote: *Life brings damage*. The colour Emerald holds hope on its own, as the colour of her childhood, but merged with her tree map it turns black. The colour is neutralised in the face of past experience and the narrator uses the neutral pronoun, *It feels and thinks but cannot talk, it's speechless*. Thus the colour personified becomes oblique, it cannot speak. It can think and feel, but cannot express these feelings, Emerald is speechless in the dark place under the tree - a tree that does not always have a colour.

In the context of this reflective meaning making exercise, Milner (1950, p. 33) writes that:

> the substance of experience is what we bring to what we see, without our own contribution we see nothing.

Moser (2015, p. xvi) observes that the "other side of silence is speech". This observation, when linked to the reflective meaning making exercise, shows the substance of Oriental Redwood's contribution to her own experience when she draws down her speechlessness, sees and shapes its depth in her own words revealing the deep darkness of feeling silence. In this description of nothingness, we find her silence transformed into speech, where the voice of the self, speaks the substance of her experience in writing.

For the writers, their encounters experienced as cracks between their colours and lived experiences, thus instigate the challenge to take notice and think differently. In the process of writing and reading, it contains the mysterious moment of growth that Sarton (1973, p. 208) had observed in the reflection on the publication of her writing.

Yet, this moment of growth is not pre-meditated. The women as writers in prison did not anticipate the revelations of the self as encountered in the different writing exercises. What started as a personal encounter in writing then shed further light on the external performativity of positivity as the self in prison, which differed so markedly from the inner worlds mapped in their own words. It is this encounter with the dissonance experienced in the different aspects of the self, that we will now embroider on to explore how the site of the self as struggle highlighted in the encounter, extends into revealing the shape of the external world in which the women as writers in prison find themselves in.

6.5 The self as narrative anomaly reflecting the shape of the external world

> to know the truth of people [...] to grasp the essence of them, whether in paint or thought, you have to combine the partial glimpses into a relevant whole. (Milner, 1950, p. 16)

In conclusion, flowing from the analysis of the women's colour writing which revealed the different perceptions of the narrated self, it becomes necessary to situate this writing as maps of the writers' inner worlds within the larger contextual now of the prison environment as external world revealed through their writing. Daisy Dove leads us into the contextual now of her present lived experience when she writes:

> *Roll check at ESP* [East Sutton Park] *at 11pm. The officers just check for the feet. Three pairs of feet. I'm writing this because I'm very lonely right now as I am going through therapy and a number of courses. This is helping to ease the trauma but my emotions are raw and unsettled. This is a natural progression to help me heal, but I feel cold inside and tired. This is an unnatural feeling for me as my default setting is positive and I struggle with being down and despondent.*
>
> (Daisy Dove, 2018)

Of significance in this piece is Daisy Dove's mention of undergoing therapy and a number of courses related to easing her trauma. When she writes that her emotions are raw and unsettled I understand this as a natural consequence in the progression of the writing process and also of the therapeutic sessions. Writers acknowledge this process in what Sarton (1973, p. 13) refers to as "Cracking open the inner world again, writing even a couple of pages, threw me back in depression". Where from this moment of cracking open the inner world comes, without warning, "a storm of tears, those tears related to frustration, to buried anger" (Sarton, 1973, p. 13). In relation to the storm of

tears and Daisy Dove feeling cold and tired inside following her trauma and therapy courses, Herman (1997, p. 211) writes that:

> Resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete. The impact of a traumatic event continues to reverberate throughout the survivor's lifecycle.

Herman (1997, p. 211) points out that in the recovery process, "issues that were sufficiently resolved at one stage", may later reawaken as new milestones are reached in the survivor's development. In the novel, *Good Morning, Midnight,* Rhys (1967, p. 10) poignantly captures this acknowledgement of trauma, of the remnants of lived experience that remain to reveal themselves at different stages of the recovery process when her narrator, rescued from drinking herself to death in a Bloomsbury bedsit, finds herself back in Paris and reflects on a life resumed:

> Saved, rescued, fished-up, half-drowned, out of the deep, dark river, dry clothes, hair shampooed and set. Nobody would know I had ever been in it. Except, of course, that there always remains something. Yes, there always remains something… Now I have forgotten about dark streets, dark rivers, the pain, the struggle and the drowning…

Daisy Dove's references to the courses and workshops she has taken in prison in relation to the trauma of her lived experiences gives an insight into the current context of women's imprisonment. It is encapsulated in Carlen's (2004a) argument, as we have seen in Chapter 2, against the idea of the existence of a benign prison for women and the use of cognitive behavioural programmes, originally designed for men, as tools for rehabilitative programming in women's prisons. Carlen (2004a, p. 259) examines how the term risk has been adapted to account for the use of these programmes through the use of prison speak as a "translation department", where risk has then morphed into the following incarnations:

> risk as dangerousness has become risk as need; need as welfare need has become criminogenic need requiring psychological readjustment; and the prison accountability which gave us prison inspectorates and prison Ombudsmen has been translated in prisoner accountability, making prisoners responsible for their own rehabilitation or its failure.

The convergence of the repression of knowledge about the social inequality gulf between punisher and punished as was discussed in Chapter 1, and the courses used for rehabilitative programming, require that we refocus our attention on the colour writing from East Sutton Park. And to pay close attention to the disconnection revealed in the positivity of the colour writing in relation to the actual lived experiences of the writers revealed in the multi-layered dimensions of their narrated selves. From the women's

colour writing, we find the emerging theme as one where the colour turns black and is subsumed in the darkness or black hole of lived experiences of the past or the current experience of prison. In this instance, it becomes of significance when Malloch and McIver (2013, p. 210) write that:

> Some of the difficulties that individuals encounter are clearly rooted in the structural organisation and determining contexts of society, and oscillating around the prison for a solution to these social problems will always be limited and limiting in scope.

In addition, Pate (2013, p. 200) argues that faced with the lack of any prospects on release from prison relating to any or limited support in income, medical, housing and educational, the notion of prison as a solution to social problems through rehabilitative programming becomes an exercise in the denial of the lived realities and experiences of women in prison:

> When we know the histories of abuse, poverty and extreme marginalisation that is the reality for most young women and girls with whom we work, it seems quite ludicrous that we continue to pretend telling women and girls not to take drugs to dull the pain of abuse, hunger or other devastation, or tell them that they must stop the behaviour that allowed them to survive poverty, abuse and disabling health.

As such, drawn from the women's writing and experiences, Pate's (2013, p. 200) argument resonates when she points out that we should "rethink, resist and reject such notions", namely the benefit of the continued imprisonment of young girls and women, who are then released back into society, into the streets armed "with little more than psycho-social, cognitive skills or drug abstinence programming" and the "implicit judgement that they are in control of and therefore responsible for their situations". Jose-Kampfner (1990, pp. 110 - 111) extends this view and argues that "therapy done in prison cannot be effective in dealing with "outside behaviour", because imprisonment "holds people out of their existence", which in turn creates a separate, removed existence from their lives outside.

Jose-Kampfner (1990, pp. 112 - 113) in examining the double loss imprisoned women describe in losing themselves, as well as their outside worlds, points out that "most health professionals agree that individuals need to grieve in order to process the traumatic events that happen to them" and that "the denial, or blocking emotions will result in unresolved feelings that will affect the emotional wellbeing of individuals". Yet, prison is not a space that allows for the expression of grief upon following traumatic events, as the focus on positivity in the colour writing in East Sutton Park has shown. Instead, as Jose-Kampfner's (1990, p. 118) observes, women are encouraged "to forget about their depression", "to look at the positive aspects of their situation" so that

they can "keep out of trouble". Thus, what is encouraged in prison is an attitude where "one's depression will go away" if it is not mentioned or talked about. But it does not, as the high incidences of self-harm and suicide rates amongst women in prison in the UK show (INQUEST, 2020).

Daisy Dove's writing, *I wish I was dead. So much pain. I must overcome it,* lifts the veil and provides an insight into her performative bravado and positivity, where her serene and peaceful turquoise hides the trauma of her lived reality which is still very vivid and present in her mind, as well as the time and memory self, despite the courses and workshops she had undertaken in prison. What is described here is what Crewe (2011, p. 518) refers to as the shift in regime, where "the substitution of psychological for physical power" displays its "distinctive grip and potency" on the lives of prisoners.

> When you've been made very cold and very sane you've also been made very passive. (Rhys, 1967, p. 11)

This grip and the passivity that flows from it becomes evident in Crewe's (2011, p. 516) observation about the qualities of the psychological discourse, which he describes as:

> its capacity to bulldoze alternative meanings of selfhood; its rigidity; and its requirement that prisoners therefore adopt a bifocal view of themselves.

As illustrated by the women's reflexive colour writing, in order to advance through the penal system, they feel:

> that cognitive-behavioural courses are telling them to be a different kind of person – at worst, a robotic prototype of responsible citizenship that could not survive the realities of life in the environments from which they are drawn. (Crewe, 2011, p. 516)

Apposite here, from a wider socio-cultural perspective, is Berlant's (2008) concept of cruel optimism. Berlant (2008, p. 33) explains cruel optimism as an "attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realisation is discovered to be *im*possible, sheer fantasy, too possible and toxic" viewed in the neo-liberal context of self-responsibilisation. The cruelty in the optimism refers to the "condition of *maintaining* an attachment to a problematic object" (Berlant, 2008, p. 33). The problematic object in the context of women's lives in prison is the cognitive behavioural focus on positivity for life post-imprisonment or changing their thinking as is shown in their colour writing which reveals the disconnect between their lived experiences and the positive robotic prototype required to advance through the prison system as noted in Jose-Kampfner and Crewe's research. Linked to this notion of cruel optimism is that the person or the group's attachment exists without it ever being realised or "lightening the load" of their current situation.

From the sparse literature on the outcomes of cognitive behavioural studies with women in the UK, a recent study evaluating the results of the use of gender-neutral cognitive skills programmes with women in the UK, found that the reconviction rate of "women who completed the programs was not significantly different" compared to the comparison group who did not receive treatment or the group that did not complete the treatment (Palmer, Hatcher, McGuire, Hollin, 2015, p. 357). The cognitive behavioural interventions used in the English and Welsh Prison and Probation Services - Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) and Think First (TF) - are "designed for male offenders who have committed a range of offenses" to target the "thinking styles associated with offending" and "encourage the development of prosocial attitudes and behavior", and takes place in group settings (Palmer, Hatcher, McGuire, Hollin, 2015, p. 349).

The authors of the study point out that ETS and TF, although designed for male offenders, have been used with minimal adaption with female offenders in both prison and community settings, and that only one study conducted by Cann in 2006 evaluated the effectiveness of its use (Palmer, Hatcher, McGuire, Hollin, 2015, p. 350). The 2006 study found no significant differences between reconviction rates of those groups receiving "treatment for ETS" and those not (Palmer, Hatcher, McGuire, Hollin, 2015, p. 350). In their study, taking into account the design of the cognitive behavioural programmes, Palmer, Hatcher, McGuire, Hollin (2015, p. 350) observe that its aims do not take into the gender-specific needs of women in prison which "are of greater relevance to their offending". They argue that treatment for women in prison should instead focus on "providing women with the capacity to deal with everyday issues, such as financial constraints and relationships, which may lead to offending" (Palmer, Hatcher, McGuire, Hollin (2015, p. 350).

This observation leads back to the argument of cruel optimism. Although CBT takes into account the women's lived experiences of poverty, abuse and ill mental health, it does not change the structural environments to the women will return to on leaving prison. The programmes it would seem are aimed to programme or treat the women to better cope with poverty, abuse and addiction. Therefore, whilst future hopes and plans, and thinking differently, can sustain one in hard times, the fantastical nature of the optimism is not sustainable to survive the realities of the lived experiences in the environments from which imprisoned women are drawn as is illustrated in Crewe's argument.

Taking into account the realities of the lives prisoners have lived, Crewe, Hulley and Wright (2017, p. 1363), in their comparative study between female and male prisoners on the experience of life imprisonment, note that whilst the pre-prison stories

of male prisoners "were often distressing", the "women's life stories read as catalogues of suffering and abuse" in that there was a qualitative difference in the consistency and intensity of the trauma disclosed. Yet they note on the one hand the limited opportunities for women to "process their feelings about their lives prior to imprisonment" and on the other, how although their lives pre-prison are reported and acknowledged in most studies on female prisoners, the abstract nature of this reporting fails to convey the full meaning and implications of the women's experiences (Crewe, Hulley and Wright, 2017, pp. 1363 - 1364). Focusing on this abstract nature of reporting the catalogue of abuse and suffering encountered in the life stories of women in prison, we find that the self as site of the inner struggle traced in the women's own words reveals the shape of the external social world. An external world where the women in prison are structurally removed from the social sphere and their lived experiences drained of life and feeling. The very nature of the realities of their existence are rubbed out in the focus on the insistence of performative positivity as a sign of rehabilitation or progress in the personal and in the social through the use of statistics and objective language.

Pertinent to the argument about the structural organisation of society and the implications of maintaining a failing prison system for women within this structure, I close this chapter with an extract from an article written by Marguerite Duras in 1957 for her regular column in the *France-Observateur* about Lucie Blin, age 71, who appeared before the Tribunal of the Seine for the fortieth time on the charge of "Theft (shoplifting)". Blin, who cannot read or write, sells flowers. Yet, as Duras (1957, p. 35) recounts of the case, there are times of the year "when there are no flowers to sell" during which, "for want of flowers Lucie Blin turns to robbery".

> 'I don't want to die yet', she says, 'so I must steal'. (Duras. 1957, p. 35)

Duras (1957, p. 35) writes of Blin that "she goes to court as other people go visiting", because "'I have no choice', she says, 'It's impossible'". Blin, whose main aim is to stay alive, sees no difference in the different kinds of work, in or out of prison, that allows her to maintain this aim:

> You wash the floors in the Central Prison or you sell flowers at Les Halles at five in the morning. (Duras, 1957, p.36)

In this chapter, alongside the bookending images of the child stealing a rose and an aged flower seller shoplifting to stay alive, we explored the encounters with the multi-layered lived experiences of the women in prison written in colour. Their writing scratches through the veneer of the rehabilitative ideal and the insistence that benign

prisons for women exist in a world where the structural organisation and determining contexts of society remain unchanged.

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Chapter 7 Journey's end – Ghosts

> She was very thin, scraggy and hunted, with those eyes that knew her fate… 'She ought to be put away, that cat.' […] In the glass just now my eyes were like that kitten's eyes. (Rhys, 1967, pp. 47 - 48)

My place is a shed with rotten wood. Spiders and woodlouse are the residents and I am the outsider. I feel the warmth through the window and the wood heats up through the day. Cobwebs glisten and sparkle around the window frame like delicate net curtains. The chipped off wood at the bottom of the door has become a doorway for the little creatures that come to camp out here in the shed. There is quiet and room to be me. I feel equal to the fox and equal to the spider and happy with the woodland mouse.

As I was walking round the cemetery, winding round the paths, hopping over tombstones I was surprised at my resistance to settling on a place. I felt boxed in, trapped. The cold marble of the ancient morgue where bodies would have been laid, quiet and alone, felt dark and empty. Once, it was a time of joy, carelessly walking round, child in arms and wild garlic, abundance, bluebells. Now alone, only the decrepit ruins are all around me.

Living on the edge is a confusing place to be. Raven was alone and lost. Lost in herself. She looked at the squabbling of the other girls. Wistfully longing to belong. Raven longed to talk and laugh with the other folk. There was something inside that stopped the flow. A plug, wedged so tight, it was hard to know where the beginning began and the end, ended.

The only place Raven was happy was in the woodland home. Now she was in a concrete cell, surrounded by high walls, tall fences, barbed wire and with what she felt every fibre of her body was hostile.

(Raven Hawthorn, 2018)

7.1 Introduction

Living on the edge is a confusing place to be, writes Raven Hawthorn. She introduces the reader to the conceptual metaphor of living on the edge that guides the analysis within this chapter as we come towards the end of the women's writing of their life journeys within this thesis. Journeys that continue to unfold in the present beyond the ending of this research narration. The specific focus of this chapter works towards understanding the notion of the edge as an embodied space and what the women's writing reveal to reader about the experience of living within this liminal space. Raven Hawthorn gives us an inkling when she writes of living on the edge as a *confusing place*

to be. Lakoff and George (2003, p. 246) write that the conceptual metaphor is "shaped and constrained by our bodily experiences in the world". They argue that as the "conceptual metaphor is a natural part of human thought" every question about its subsequent role in language and thought becomes an empirical one (Lakoff and George, 2003, p. 247). In this chapter the writers draw us into the edge as a confusing space from the perspective of what is particular to their personal lived experience.

Raven Hawthorn's narrator recounts the quiet loneliness of her walk through this cemetery. It is dark and empty. Raven Hawthorn contemplates it as her place in reference to the writing exercise prompt of week two, which had asked of the writers to think of a place that had an impact on the main character in their narration. On reading this description of a place through the illustration of her character's inner world, the memory trace (Bal, 2017, p. 9) that remains is one of psychological desolation and death. Of a world fallen apart, captured in the references to a morgue, an empty cemetery, lonely and dark. A memory trace is described as the final component of the characteristics of a narrative text, namely that which remains with the reader once the reading of the text is completed (Bal, 2017, p. 9).

The memory trace is of significance in this context of the writers in prison where the reader is continually confronted with a pervasive sense of loss, loneliness and rejection in their writing. The memory traces in this chapter blend and connect forging rippling links with the memory traces left from the women's prison writings of previous chapters. They pool together in a wider encompassing memory trace of loss and silencing pervading the different layers of the women's lived experience. These lingering memory traces come to signify the affect of the relationship between the reader and the writer. Rimmon-Kenan (2002, p. 118) writes that "the text shapes the reader" just as "the reader participates in the production of the text's meaning". In this case, from the perspective of the micrology of the lived experience of the women writing in prison, the links forged between the reader and the writer moves the reader into the particulars of the liminal, confusing space of living on the edge both in terms of the writer's personal inner experiences pre- and during imprisonment of the death of the self and its feelings of out-of-placeness. It also guides the reader into the physical architectural shape and space of imprisonment, into the *concrete cell, surrounded by high walls, tall fences, barbed wire*, experienced as a *hostile environment* in Raven Hawthorn's words.

In a subtle transformation, a mirage or mirror effect we find that Raven Hawthorn's descriptions of an inner lifeworld also extend into the social. As such, when contemplating the edge within the organisation of the physical and structural plane of society, I am struck by Jose-Kampfner's (1990, p. 112) observation that women's

prisons with their "out-of-the-way locations" barely visible to outsiders come to resemble cemeteries, found on the outskirts of towns or cities *surrounded by high walls, tall fences* or at the end of winding country lanes in the middle of the countryside. This imagery of prison as a burial ground and the mortification of the self that takes place within it further interlink with El Saadawi's (2002) writing in *Memoirs from a Women's Prison* of her time spent in prison as a political prisoner in Egypt. She muses on the nature of prison as a form of death, observing that:

> Prison remained in my imagination, like a nightmare, like death… There is a difference, of course, between prison and death: it is possible for one to leave prison and return to a normal life, telling people what one has seen. As for death, no one returns or relates anything… All my life, I have regarded those entering and leaving prison as knowing something which I have not known, and living a life which I have not lived. (El Saadawi, 2002, p. 17)

With this observation El Saadawi argues from a place of lived experience, that those relating the experience of imprisonment possesses a particular knowledge of a life "which I have not known, and living a life which I have not lived" (El Saadawi, 2002, p. 17). As such, El Saadawi as a political prisoner, writer and feminist scholar identifies in solidarity with her companions in prison and "responds to power with exercise and writing" (Scheffler, 2002, p. 3). El Saadawi's (2002, p. 17) argument differentiates between the states of imprisonment and death from the point of view that death yields no dividends because no one returns from death "or relates anything", whereas those who have survived prison can upon leaving tell people what they have seen. She reflects on the silencing effects of imprisonment, how, when "our circumstances in prison would sink to a new low" and "matters would become even worse than they already were" the women "would sit together silent, grave, pessimistic", she would feel something move inside of her "rebelling against passivity and a lack of movement" so that she would say:

> We will not die, or if we are to die we won't die silently. (El Saadawi, 2002, p. p16)

El Saadawi (2002, p. 16), through observing the ensuing gravity of the passivity induced by grief and worry, writes of her rebellion against this passivity expressed in her rallying cry to the other women imprisoned with her not to die silently. For El Saadawi writing is an act that speaks into the silence and silencing effects of imprisonment. It is an explicit call for action to voice the particular experience of imprisonment and as such she foregrounds the writing discussed in this chapter which depicts the different shapes of silence as encountered in the carceral space. Thus, in coming to conceptualise the carceral space through the women's writing, Foucault's

(1986, p. 23) observation becomes significant when he writes that living does not occur in a void, "inside of which we could place individuals and things", but instead that:

> the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and history occurs, the space that claws and knaws (sic) at us, is also in itself a heterogeneous space.

The significance of this heterogeneous space for Foucault (1986, p. 23) lies in the argument that life is then lived within, and amongst, "a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another" and are categorically "not superimposable on one another". From this argument flows Foucault's (1986, p. 24) interest in sites that possess "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites", but that this relation proceeds in a manner that inverts or neutralizes the relations that are reflected, mirrored or designated. And as such, although these spaces are linked with the other spaces, they contradict them (Foucault, 1986, p. 24).

These sites are contained in Foucault's notion of the heterotopia, which he outlined on three different occasions between 1966 and 1967 – firstly in the preface to *The Order of Things,* thereafter in a radio broadcast on the "theme of utopia and literature", and lastly presented in a lecture to a gathering of architects (Johnson, 2006, p. 75). In the radio broadcast, Foucault defined heterotopias in the context of children's inventive play where playing "produces a different space that at the same time mirrors what is around them" in that it becomes a space that simultaneously reflects and contests, a "counter-space that are in different ways outside of the ordinary" - included in these counter-spaces, found in all cultures, are holiday villages, brothels, cemeteries, prisons and asylums (Johnson, 2006, p. 76). Foucault associated modern heterotopian sites with "separating out some form of deviation rather than marking a stage in life", which then sets it apart from the liminal state of being (Johnson, 2006, p. 76). Johnson (2006, p. 77) explains that in the discussions of heterotopia, Foucault is focusing "on the formal, spatial qualities of certain places, which are both mythical and real, and (their) specific historic mutations". Johnson (2006, p. 78) discerns that Foucault's different examples of the heterotopia in essence all refer, in some way or another, "to a relational disruption in time and space", becoming "spatio-temporal units" – also found in Raven Hawthorn's description of living on the edge. The prison is then mentioned in the context and descriptions of heterotopias where "the displacement of time is matched by the disruption of space" and Johnson (2006, p. 79) uses the example of the regulated and "meticulously arranged enclosure" of prison with people constrained within this space that then exposes the "jumbled mess that we tend to live in" on the outside.

Therefore, the carceral space can then be established as one that fits within the remit of the heterotopian concept. And in the context of this chapter, following El Saadawi's call not to die silently, it expands to include the creative space of writing as a further heterotopic space within the heterotopic carceral space. Baer and Ravneburg (2008, p. 208) point to the "seemingly incompatible juxtapositions" found in heterotopias where places, which seem completely "unrelated to one another" come to "exist side by side". This is seen as being "symbolic of the rest of society" where "heterotopias are places that have a return effect" such as the mirror and looking into it. The mirror, as a placeless place, provides a counteraction to the place that one occupies – a place that is "at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it", and also at the same time "absolutely unreal" because "in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there" (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Therefore, in this reflection, the heterotopia is then viewed as a space which "draws us out of ourselves" in unusual ways because it introduces and displays difference, a challenge to the spaces we might find familiar (Johnson, 2006, p. 84).

Writing, in my fieldwork and thesis, function as the mirror, the placeless place, where the women's writing disrupts the mystery that enshrouds the hidden world of the carceral space with the focus on the particular in their lived experiences as opposed to generalisations. With the focus on the action of writing, what becomes of further interest here is that Foucault's discussions of heterotopia, whilst maintaining close similarities, denote different spaces. In his first reference to heterotopia, in the preface to *The Order of Things,* he considered heterotopias from the perspective of textual spaces, whereas in his radio broadcast and lecture, it was considered as social spaces (Johnson, 2006, p. 75).

From the perspective of the women's prison writings, we are then led into the textual space of their words where the heterotopia then comes to "dissolve our myths" (Knight, 2017, p. 142) in the reflection of prison as the placeless place in the social through the memory traces of living on the edge. As such, even though Raven Hawthorn and her fellow writers in prison reach out to colours, metaphors and literary styles such as the fairy tale, we are constantly confronted by the harsh reality of their lived experience of confinement and their lives pre-imprisonment. Their writing makes the reader aware of the outer lifeworld of the prison environment and beyond. Juxtaposed, it forms a diptych of the verbal shape of the self, hinging on two different perceptions of place, the psychological and the physical. In what follows, I draw on three distinct moments that capture living on the edge, namely the experience of a foreign national being placed on mute; the relational aspects of the refusal to write and how this made me as researcher and writer aware of noise and shouting in prison; and

lastly the ghostliness of identity as reflected in the mirror as a refraction of memory and haunting as the return effect of the heterotopic space.

7.2 So Sorry Lovely

Walker (1994, p. 53) writes that whilst writing has been used throughout history to "record events of all kinds" in the macro, social level, we find alongside it the extension into the personal where its use records the individual's "insights into life". It is from this perspective of the individual insight into the experience that I find The Mallard's writing about her relationship with a little pigeon of interest because of what it reveals of her own personal lifeworld in relation to her incarceration as a foreign national.

Goodbody (2016) observes that in Kafka's work animal narratives become mechanisms of depicting estrangement and therefore allowing for reflection on a personal situation. He studies Kafka as a modernist writer whose literary domain eschewed realist depictions to instead focus on the concerns of the "inner life" depicting "outsider situations accompanied by feelings of inadequacy and guilt" and the "yearning for self-identity" from within these spaces of marginality (Goodbody, 2016, p. 249). The heterotopic textual space opens the exploration into feelings of out-of-placeness and marginality within the carceral environment when the relational animal narrative appears in the reflections of The Mallard, who identifies with a little grey pigeon, but not explicitly so. She tells her children of the pigeon she feeds every day:

> *I have been in this prison for six months. Every day I stand next to the window and look at the pigeons. Every day I see a little pigeon with one leg. It is a lovely grey colour. I feed the pigeon with my food. I eat some food and leave some for the pigeon. I feel sorry for the pigeon. It just has one leg so it is difficult to chase the food that I put outside because the other pigeons are very much quicker than the one with the one leg.*
>
> *The pigeons are friendly and look at me when I feed them.*
>
> *I also told my children about the pigeon with the one leg. They feel sorry for the pigeon as well. My children asked me,*
>
> *"Mum why don't you let the pigeon stay in your room with you?"*
>
> *Now I think I can give a name for the pigeon, which is So Sorry Lovely. Every day I can feed the pigeon I am happy.*
>
> (The Mallard, 2018)

Pigeons provide companionship to The Mallard, they *are friendly and look at me when I feed them*. It is important to The Mallard that the pigeons look at her when she feeds them, because they notice her existence. She exists in their world. They see her in the

present with them, which affirms her existence in her prison cell in the moment of feeding them. It constitutes a relational moment within the prison environment. Goodbody (2016) writes that:

> Meeting the look of animals, their gaze on us and the world, reveals our human limitations. By becoming attuned to animals we can overcome some of the limitations of our so-called 'rational' condition.

The little grey pigeon assumes a significant role in The Mallard's present lived experience, to such an extent that she names it, *Now I think I can give a name for the pigeon, which is So Sorry Lovely*. So Sorry Lovely is a poignant and descriptive name, acknowledging her limitations in effecting a change to the pigeon's difficult situation. So Sorry Lovely also captures the challenges inherent in the pigeon's physical state of existence and her empathy for it. The bird is maimed. With only one leg it misses out on food when the other pigeons can chase after the morsels, speeding along on their two legs. She pities the bird for its disadvantage.

Encapsulated here, two aspects of her present relationship with the bird become of importance, namely the sharing of food and the bird's leg. The importance of these two aspects is revealed as her writing unfolds in reflections and revelations of her past. Writing in response to music, to birdsong and Satie's Gymnopédies 1 – 3, The Mallard writes:

> *The piano sounds make me sad for myself.*
> *I miss my children, my family, my home. I am not there for my children. They have to take care of themselves. I always want to share my life with my children.*
>
> *The sound of the forest brings back memories of about thirty eight years ago. At that time four countries were at war over Vietnam. We were moved into the forest and hid there. One morning we woke up and heard that a lot of people were killed everywhere in my country. When we were hiding in the forest, we were hungry, scared and thirsty. Nothing for us to eat. That time I was about ten years old. That war I will never forget. It is still in my mind.*
>
> *The piano sound makes me very sad for myself.*
>
> *About thirty six years ago, when we were in a refugee camp, we always shared sweets and biscuits together. I still remember it, until now. We broke the biscuit into four pieces and shared it with one another.*
>
> (The Mallard, 2018)

Evoked in the sounds of the forest and the piano notes, this narrative text peels away at the layers of her childhood, and reveals The Mallard's narrator's sadness for the self, for her children whom she misses. To compensate for this sadness and loss, she is drawn to the one-legged bird, taking it under her wing, perhaps in a subconscious act of vicarious caring. From her writing, we begin to understand the significance of food and being able to feed the bird, because of her childhood in Vietnam, fleeing the war when she experienced hunger and thirst, *When we were hiding in the forest, we were hungry, scared and thirsty. Nothing for us to eat.* Every day, after lunch and supper, she stands by her cell window and waits for the pigeon. Establishing this ritual, she feeds the bird from her food, *I eat some food and leave some for the pigeon*. The symbolism of food and the sharing of it, takes on a greater significance as we learn of The Mallard's lived experience in the refugee camp, where her family shared biscuits and sweets, *We broke the biscuit into four pieces and shared it with one another.* Feeding the bird becomes an act of caring for another being, how she would have liked to care for her children, worrying whether they are taking care of themselves, whether they have enough to eat. This act of caring, of feeding the pigeon sustains her emotional wellbeing, *Every day I can feed the pigeon I am happy*.

Yet, this state of wellbeing undergoes a setback. We come to understand this setback in relation to the bird's physical affliction when we are drawn further into The Mallard's present lived experience when she tells the reader of her sadness at the failed request for re-categorisation to an open prison and revealing her own injured leg.

> *But since yesterday I am very sad, because my re-cat* [re-categorisation] *is still not open yet. I don't know why and they told me to wait until December. I am heartbroken and have been crying all night.*
>
> *Twenty minutes ago they rang and said to go up to OMU [sic] and speak to them. They said they haven't received any report from security yet.*
>
> *I always join with all the activities in prison and am never impolite with all the officers. I do not understand the reason for refusing my re-cat.*
>
> *A few months ago I injured my leg. It is very painful, but I never cried. I always talk to myself to keep me strong and let the time run by quickly. But last night I cried and was very upset and sad.*
>
> *Every day and night, I stand next to the window in my room and look up at the sky and pray for everyone,*
>
> *"Please keep healthy and be careful at all time".*
>
> *It doesn't matter how strong you are, in a minute's time you feel very weak.*

> *I am very disappointed with myself, because my English is not good enough to explain about my situation. Some people could understand when I talk to them, but some say they don't. At the moment I try all my best to concentrate on studying English. I don't want to waste my time in here. Hopefully one day very soon, when I am released and out of prison, my English should be much better than before.*
>
> (The Mallard, 2018)

Despite the physical injury and pain to her leg, she has kept herself strong and does not cry. However, it is the lack of progress with and the postponement of her re-categorisation application that breaks her resolve, affecting her emotional and psychological wellbeing, *I am heartbroken and have been crying all night*. The Mallard is at a loss as to the reasons for the refusal of her re-categorisation to an open prison. There is a delay in the report on her conduct and she despairs, because *I always join with all the activities in prison and am never impolite with all the officers*. However her experience chimes with Benedict's (2019, p. 18) research that points out that foreign national women in prison are:

> Routinely denied opportunity and progression in custody in the form of day release, open conditions, or work experience [...].

Physically, she identifies with the bird in that she too is hindered by a sore, fractured leg. But she is also hampered with the disadvantage of English not being her first language. She blames herself for not being able to explain her situation adequately to be moved to an open prison. Yet, her situation highlights the linguistic challenges and difficulties for foreign language speakers in engaging with institutional bureaucracy when English is a second language, *Some people could understand when I talk to them, but some say they don't,* and the anguish she suffers at not being understood. This aspect of situational stress is also highlighted in Schliehe's (2018) work about the anxiety induced for the imprisoned woman as foreign national by not being able to understand the language in prison or conversely of not being understood. By showing sympathy to the bird she is also acknowledging her own hardship.

In the weeks that follow, she is often tearful in the writing workshops, resting her head on her arms, too tired to write. With the deferral of her re-categorisation to an open prison, the object of her hope has been removed. The present loses its anchor and she drifts in the gloom of a despondent future, the hope for re-categorisation remaining an ever-receding horizon. This expression of her inner world links to Benedict's (2019, p. 26) observation that "the experience of waiting, of living with sustained uncertainty" is what becomes "a trigger for a significant deterioration in mental health".

The memory trace that thus remains from The Mallard's writing is the image of a woman standing at a prison window, feeding a pigeon with one leg. However, unearthed in this vision, through their daily interaction, lies shrouded the layered depths of the traumatic events of The Mallard's lived experience. It is through her writing that she evolves to the reader, and to the other writers in the workshops, into a multi-dimensional being with a depth and range of lived experience. In her institutional interactions she is dismissed and overlooked in her attempts to make herself understood, because of her limited and still developing English linguistic abilities. She finds herself imprisoned in the culturally alien environment of indifference to who or what is other, more so because she does not speak the language.

Analysing The Mallard's writing extends Carlton and Segrave's (2011, p. 552) argument when they write of the need to expand research spaces that challenge "the assumptions that imprisonment comprises a discrete traumatic episode within women's lives", but instead to take into account "women's experiences of institutional pain" and connect it to the wider interplay between "legacies of trauma, criminalization and imprisonment". This approach becomes of importance because it highlights and brings to the fore the relationship between "trauma and the multiple harms and disadvantages that women experience inside and outside the prison system" (Carlton and Segrave, 2011, p. 553). A relationship which, although acknowledged in policy frameworks, is often ignored in practice where imprisonment becomes an extension of the trauma that pervades the lives of women in custody rather than the single focal point (Carlton and Segrave, 2011, p. 554). The women's writing point to lives where experiences of "structural disadvantage" interact with "institutional harms" spread across a lifetime (Carlton and Segrave, 2011, p. 556).

In the silence wrought by structural hierarchies of disempowerment and imprisonment, The Mallard's traumas are further intensified. She is placed on mute when told that she is not being understood.

7.3 You can't tell me what to do

Walker (1994, p. 53) writes that the crucial element of writing as a learning process, which seriously works with the experiences of life, is that it paradoxically "fosters that important and essential counterpart to experience: reflection". The symbiotic relationship between experience and reflection contained in writing then foster both a self-reflective learning experience in the personal sphere for the women as writers in prison, and for me as writer of the thesis, but equally it also requires reflection on experience in the social sphere from the reader (Walker, 1994, p. 52). Green (1990, p. 84) writes that this moment presents the dual challenge: to challenge the traditions

that have shaped this system, namely for this thesis the silencing the voices of incarcerated women in writing and reflecting on their lived experiences, whilst at the same time, having to write within the system that has shaped the tradition. To engage with this challenge, she argues that the tradition can be opposed by making readers aware of how this system "has shaped their expectations of life" (Green, 1990, p. 84).

To explore this notion of how the system shapes expectations, I return to week three of the creative writing workshops. I had planned that the writers would turn their attention to the main character that they had been writing about in their story worlds. An introductory warm-up exercise required each writer to draw a postcard from a pile. They then had to describe a detail from the image on the postcard that stood out for them. Portrayed on the postcards were silhouette animation cut-outs, still images captured from the film, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed,* by Lotte Reiniger made in 1926. This exercise was a pre-cursor to the next writing exercise which first asked of the women to concentrate on the main character in their writing up to that point and to draw or make a collage, focusing on the unique characteristics of that character and then to write about it. I had envisaged this as an exercise to explore the particular and the individual, the specific details or characteristics of the main character that the women had been focusing on in their writing in weeks one and two.

Whilst the postcards had proved unusual and prompted animated discussion and writing in Downview, the follow-up writing exercise did not translate well in practice as the women found it difficult, an uncomfortable exercise to describe their main characters in writing and drawing. One of the research participants, The White Cow, refused to draw, and subsequently to write, and argued with me throughout the whole of the quiet time allocated to the writing exercise. The group discussion that followed was muted. Led by the women's reactions to The White Cow's agitated state, the difficulty of the writing exercise and by Baby Blue 79's removal mid-session for what would turn out to be a random drug test, I stepped back and refrained from this direct approach to engage with descriptions of their protagonists, the selves described in colours in the weeks before in order to determine a particularized individuality. Instead we spent a bit more time resting in the biscuit break.

Afterwards, reflecting on the workshop in my notebook, I wrote: "And maybe it is because of her trauma that she does not want to see or write about herself". Of trauma, Borg (2018, p. 449) writes that it is a rupture which undoes the self and strips it of:

> its familiar dwelling in the world, and reveals a painful fragmentation at the heart of subjectivity. One's self and one's relations to others are undone by trauma, leaving the

> survivor with the difficult task of recovering a sense of self, remaking one's world, and rediscovering meaningful attachments to others.

From this follows, as Herman (1992, p. 134) points out, that "disempowerment and disconnection from others" constitute the "core experiences of psychological trauma". For recovery to take place, Herman (1992, p. 134) writes that the survivor "must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery" based on the notions of empowerment and the creation of new connections from the perspective that recovery cannot take place in isolation but only in the context of relationships.

Reading this against the background of the state of imprisonment experienced as the mortification of the self, of the existential death of the self, particularly from the point of view of its disempowerment and disconnection from others, it seems consequently difficult to imagine recovery from trauma experienced pre-imprisonment within an institutionalised environment that also causes the further trauma of the erosion of the self (Rowe, 2011, p. 578). Thus, when The White Cow repeatedly said of the writing exercises, "Don't tell me what to do" and "You can't tell me what to do", even though I had explained quietly and continuously that these are just prompts for her to interpret in whichever way she wants and that she could write in any way she felt inspired to or that she could ignore them completely, I came to understand through reflection and reading of Herman's (1992) study on trauma and recovery, that fundamentally The White Cow was seeking to determine her own self-narrative pace and style in a relational context with me in the safe space created within the writing workshop situated within the wider context of the institutional environment of prison. This was the prominent and dominant relational context in which she had no or little power for self-determination. The White Cow connected with me in a relational context in making her resistance to the writing exercise known. In acknowledging her resistance, we talked again about writing, how there was no right or wrong way to write and tell her story, how she had the choice whether she wanted to participate or not and that whatever she chose would be good and fine.

Not knowing what to anticipate the following week, whether she would return or not, The White Cow returned and smiled. Her continued participation in the workshops and support of the other writers became a revelation - she did not miss a single workshop and took part in all of the writing exercises. She brought along to the writing workshops her poetry for me to read - pages and pages that she wrote at night, particularly about the girls' scouts. She gave thoughtful, kind and considered responses to the other writers about their writing. The White Cow made a decision, namely the choice to continue as a participant in the writing workshops, committing to them and being a supportive workshop member towards the other writers in the group. This

choice signalled a turning point in her writing journey with the rediscovery of "meaningful attachments to others" (Borg, 2018, p. 449) within the space of the workshop.

7.3.1 Shouting into the void – of trauma and noise

Prison or the prison environment is viewed as a multi-dimensional space, where for prisoners on the one hand this space is "a place from which they never become really *free*", because of the "internalised experience" thereof which means that the "emblematic power of that experience last for ever" (Medlicott, 2000). Inside prison, this experience of space is made concrete in the process of how the emblematic power reduces their autonomy through physical and "structural constraints" which range "from the bleakness of the architecture to the compulsory daily timetable with its paucity of activities" (Medlicott, 2000). Medlicott (2000) argues that these constraints "are so extreme that they seem designed to drive out opportunities to express personal identity", which inevitably leads to an "extreme environment" that produces unpredictable and extreme responses. These extreme responses form a continuation of the "constitution of the self" which follows a "whole set of lifelong social forces and processes", constantly recreated in the "dialectical process" between prisoners on the inside with the prison space and the prison society (Medlicott, 2000), and on the outside with society for whom prison is a constructed mythical space.

Whilst reflecting on The White Cow's insistent resistance to writing, the ensuing non-writing in the workshops and my yielding into a space of listening, the themes of trauma and noise in prison came back into my view and took on a different perspective. When Raven Hawthorn describes her experience of noise in prison as:

> *Conversations that I hear of absolute dogs dinners, tripe, fodder to feed the hens. Voices that pierce my very being. How I detest the sound of some of these girls' voices. Sometimes I want to drown out the voices. I welcome the night time bang up. At least there is quiet. No chatter, no arguments, no alarms, no "last call medication", no "last call dinner".*
>
> (Raven Hawthorn, 2019)

She reaches across time and space to El Saadawi (2002, p. 21) who writes in her memoirs that she thought that prison would consist of "total silence" and solitude in isolation, in a cell in which one lived alone. Instead she found constant noise and quarrelling until she understood that:

> in prison, torture occurs not through solitude and silence but in a far more forceful way through uproar and noise. [...] I enjoyed neither solitude nor silence, except in the space after midnight and before the dawn call to prayer. (El Saadawi, 2002, p.21)

Both writers, Raven Hawthorn and El Saadawi focus on the noise in their prison environment and long for silence. They welcome the dark of night, the stretch of time when everything goes quiet. Wener (2012, p. 189) writes that noise in a correctional setting is defined as "unwanted sound". And that this sound carries with it psychological and physical components which include "its loudness and discordant nature, how unpleasant it seems, the signal qualities of the sound relating to its content, and the information it carries" (Wener, 2012, p. 189). What is of interest in Wener's (2012, p. 190) observations about noise in prison, is that he points out that although the definition of noise points to the psychological element of the noise being unwanted, the "further psychological elements of noise never play a role in the measurement of noise". It is this psychological element that links to El Saadawi's (2002, p. 21) observation that it is the uproar and noise in prison that she defines and describes as torture.

We find this reference to noise and its stressful effects from multiple sources of sound in the writing of Daisy Dove, Rainbow Rose and Sea-Coral too, where each piece of writing describes a different part of prison life accompanied by the soundtrack of shouting, alarms and officer calls. Their writing is rather more prosaic than Raven Hawthorn's, yet combined with her descriptions of the conversations she hears, *absolute dogs dinners, tripe, fodder to feed the hens*, their words create a sensory experience of the noise in prison environment, at breakfast, in English lessons and on Saturday mornings that only abates at night time with *no alarms* when the officers go quiet as well, *no "last call medication", no "last call dinner"*.

> *Everyone else knew what they were doing, getting toast and milk, lots of shouting and clanging.*
>
> (Daisy Dove, 2018)

> *Back to English after lunch, a hectic afternoon, girls shouting not wanting to learn.*
>
> (Sea-Coral, 2018)

> *Thank god it's the weekend. I can chill out and try and have a lie in. Well try to is the only thing I can do. So here we go. Everyone is unlocked, the shouting and loud music starts!*

> *Oh what now? The officers are at the door. They are doing room checks and testing the smoke alarms. That noise goes through me. It is very loud first thing in the morning. I know it is prison but I just want to chill out.*
>
> (Rainbow Rose, 2018)

From a physical perspective, considering the harmful effects to health following the long-term exposure to noise, Wener (2012, p. 199) finds that administrators of correctional facilities "should consider noise an important issue in facility safety and also for inmate and staff well-being". This recommendation is borne out in the women's writing, where they highlight noise as a particular issue that affects their wellbeing in the prison environment. Wener (2012, p. 199) continues that in the prison environment great care should be taken from the perspective of the particular effects of noise in settings "where noise levels must be endured for long stretches of time", because of "the consequences of any situation that results in increases of stress, frustration and anxiety".

In order to determine the amount of stress noise causes, for Wener (2012, p. 197) it becomes important to consider the "level of control people have over the noise". In the dominant context of the prison environment, from a psychological perspective, for the women who have suffered trauma and for whom the prison environment is a traumatic space, shouting and making noise becomes a relational mechanism of seeking to find some control within the prison environment and its concomitant noise. Their noise drowns out the other uncontrollable sounds within the lived experience of prison. Paradoxically, within this institutional environment, noise becomes both a coping mechanism for the traumatised on the one hand, but also torture for the traumatised other, who shares their space, on the other hand. Chapter 6 showed that the denial of expressions of feeling, another prominent feature of this existential death, further leads to the creation and development of an external performative self which stands in contrast to the lived experiences of the internal, preceding self. Shouting becomes trauma externalised, the performance of powerlessness as resistance through noise.

From the women's writing we see how every space in the prison environment is claimed through this resistance in noise, at breakfast, in the English lessons and on weekends. And as no one listens, and their needs are not met, the cycles of noise and shouting repeat both in the personal sphere and the institutional carceral environment as the sensory memory trace of despair.

7.4 Ghosts in the mirror of refraction

> She mechanically looked at herself in the mirror atop the filthy and cracked sink, full of hairs, which matched her own life so well. It seemed to her that the dark and tarnished mirror didn't reflect any image. Could her physical existence have vanished? (Lispector, 2011, p. 17)

Considering the alternative to shouting as a form of expression, I turn to Hunt and Sampson (2006, p. 73) who, in studying Bakhtin (1986), observe that writing and speaking always are "acts of communication" in that the audience and/or reader contributes to its shaping, precisely because:

> Our words are never simply ours; they are always seeking a response.

Following on from this perspective of writing, or particularly the not-writing as in the case of The White Cow, as seeking a relational response in the process of self-empowerment, I became interested in Hunt and Sampson's (2006, p. 73) discussion of Voloshinov's view that a word is a "two-sided act" in that it becomes the product of a reciprocal relationship between the writer and the reader, the listener and the speaker, particularly when he writes that:

> I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view. (Voloshinov, 1973, p. 86 cited in Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p. 73)

Thus, proceeding from this position of giving the self a verbal shape from another's point of view, having learnt from and listened to The White Cow through our communication and her response, as well as reflecting on the difficulty of turning the writer's gaze directly onto the traumatised self without an intermediary space to deflect the intensity thereof, a few weeks later I adapted the writing exercise and used the analogy of a distanced space, namely a pool or a mirror, in which the writers caught only a fleeting glimpse of the self. They did not have to stand and stare.

Of significance here is the verbal shape the women give themselves in writing the reflections they find in the pool or mirror. Kellog (2009, p. 87) writes in a review of Volsinov's (1929/1973) classic text, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language,* that for Volsinov:

> the organizing centre of expression never entirely lies within but also somewhere between them.

The mirror as the organizing centre of expression as used in the women's writing is revealed as a portal into memory, becoming a refraction, a deflection instead of a reflection. What becomes clear in the women's writing is that the mirror as lens adds

layers of complexity to the verbal shapes the women give themselves, because the images or moments of lived experience described move beyond the physical reflection of an image viewed in the mirror in moment. Looking in the mirror, the women's identities are defined in relation to how they perceive themselves within societal norms. Rhys (1967) alludes to this phenomenon when Sasha Jansen, the protagonist in *Good Morning, Midnight,* leads us into her inner lifeworld through the looking glass, when she observes of the instance of the reflection that it does not always tell the story that we seek, expect or anticipate.

> I look at myself in the glass of my handbag... There are hollows under my eyes. Sitting on the terrace of the Dôme, drinking Pernods and talking about sanity with enormous hollows under my eyes?... I am empty of everything. I am empty of everything but the thin, frail trunks of the trees and the thin frail, frail ghosts in my room. (Rhys, 1967, pp. 47 - 48)

It is as if Sasha Jensen foretells the future, where the vision in the looking glass, belies the lived reality of the woman staring into it, seeing only its ghosts flitting through the trees of the lived life. As such she also describes the experience of the writers in prison as writers, what they see is silence in response to the physical existence of self in that society does not see or hear them, hidden away in their concrete cells. Sea-Coral writes of her reflection and refers to herself as Purple, the colour she described herself as in the first writing exercise:

> *Purple was not having a good day. So much had gone wrong. Purple started talking out loud. She had been late for work, she had words with her boss and got upset. Purple was now crying, her voice quivering in between sobs. Purple stood up her voice now rising, shouting that her boss was so rude. She shouted loudly that she thought she was going to lose her job. She picked up all the bills she knew she could not pay and threw them in the bin. Her voice now was hysterical. She screamed in anguish and poured another drink into her large glass. She shouted so loudly that her voice became hoarse.*
>
> *She suddenly stood up and looked in the mirror. She had been staring at her own image, talking to herself. She now screamed at her own image, "Why don't you answer?!" With one throw the wine glass hit the mirror. She was done talking. No one ever answered. She just lay there in despair. Why did the mirror never answer? She had no one else to tell her troubles to.*
>
> (Sea-Coral, 2018)

For Sea-Coral the mirror is silent. The mirror is both the self, *she had been staring at her own image,* but it also extends into wider social context, *where no one ever*

answered. She collapses in despair when having voiced her anguish and financial worry, she was met with silence where the mirror represents the dual organizing centre of expression, both her own perceived powerlessness in the personal deflection and the silence of the social, *Why did the mirror never answer? She had no one else to tell her troubles to*. The catalyst for this eruption of emotions poured into the space of the mirror is an argument with her boss and the ensuing fear that she will lose her job and not be able to pay her bills. Even in the face of the building crescendo of her sobs turning into shouts, the mirror remains unresponsive. Hoarse with spent emotion, she gives up on the idea of communicating, *She was done talking*. She becomes a ghost and the memory trace that remains is that of an unheard plea.

In the context of the women's prison writing, this is of significance when Bennett and Royle (2016, p. 182) write that ghosts have a history in writing, because they do not come from nowhere but instead they are inscribed in a context, they "belong to and haunt the idea of a place and belong to and haunt the idea of a time". The women's writing haunts the lack of progress, the resistance in the practical implementation of the policy reforms and recommendations spanning from the Corston Report in 2007 followed by the Female Offender Strategy in 2018. Writing into the mirror highlights then "ghostliness of identity" (Bennett and Royle, 2016, p. 184) the women experience living within this institutional environment when they deflect from what they see in the mirror or where the mirror does not answer as Sea-Coral depicts in her mirror writing.

The "ghostliness of the I" (Bennett and Royle, 2016, p. 185) is captured when Purple Rose, using the mirror as the in-between space for shared expression, writes:

> *I take a look in the mirror and I see myself and how times have changed. My hairstyle for one. When I was little I had blonde hair. It then turned a mousie brown and really thick. I hate the way I look. I am not the prettiest person.*
>
> *In here, HMP, it's not easy to have a choice of nice clothes to make you feel a bit better about yourself. Even the image you get when you go past to the shop and you see your reflection. Oh that horrible view! Not very nice.*
>
> *Also, my reflection can be looking back at my childhood and how I grew up and who was around me at the time. I ask myself, are memories a reflection?*
>
> *I am not keen on seeing myself in a mirror, but looking back at a memory, I think that can be my reflection. When riding the horses, we had big mirrors in the school. We had to look at ourselves as it helped with our postures and positions. I guess, I don't mind looking if there is a reason.*

> *Sometimes you can see a reflection in the water bucket. Quick, put it away in the stable. Now I can hide.*
>
> (Purple Rose, 2018)

Purple Rose is *not keen on seeing myself in a mirror* and chooses instead to focus her gaze on the past as a reflection that she can identify with, an image from her childhood. She cannot look at herself in the present, only in a different time of the past, when as a young child there was a positive reason to examine the exterior of the self. For Purple Rose, the mirror also reflects society's expectations of her, an upright posture and the correct riding positions. Whilst imprisoned there is no upright posture or correct position to look at in the mirror, except *that horrible view* of the present reflection in the window on the way to the prison shop. This acceptance of the physical version of the self that existed in the past, when wearing pretty clothes with blonde hair, is also present in Yellow-horned Poppy's writing:

> *I was getting ready to go out to a party. Looking in the mirror I saw myself when I was old and grey. It made me stop, but then I walked away. I wanted to stay young like I was as a little girl, blonde, pretty, in a pink dress. Or when I got married, I was nice-looking in a lovely white dress walking down the aisle to meet my new husband.*
>
> *Now, I am 58 years old, getting grey hair and looking older than I am. I saw myself as about 80 years old. I didn't like what I saw, so I covered up the mirror.*
>
> (Yellow-horned Poppy, 2018)

Both Purple Rose and Yellow-horned Poppy reject the images of the physical self in the mirror. For Purple Rose, seeing her reflection as a child in the water bucket cleaning out the stables prompts her to write, *Quick, put it away in the stable. Now I can hide.* Where Yellow-horned Poppy covers the mirror because she did not like what she saw as it did not live up to the perceived ideal of aging. But beyond this layer of exteriority also lies a deeper complex relationship with the blotting out of the reflected image. It brings to mind Derrida's (2002, p. 373) reflections on coming to terms with what is revealed in the mirror as lens and focus on the present, as "a reflected shame, the mirror of a shame ashamed of itself". The notion of shame, not explicitly referred to in the mirror writing clouds the view of the image of the self, adding to the ghostliness of the I. In the refracted light of the specular image, the women write the version of themselves, the image they find to be more acceptable, socially and to the self, in memories from the past, from childhood and getting married. The writers give themselves a verbal shape

from the perspective of the social, in the mirror as a space that holds an untold narrative of shame.

Raven Hawthorn alludes to this complexity of viewing the layered self when she describes this organising centre of expression as herself. Where this pool of the self, on the surface, is a mirror image. Yet, if she enters and engages with this mirror image, it shatters in *a thousand pieces*. It becomes a broken mirror, which she describes as:

> *Delve deep. The pool on the surface is still, a mirror image.*
>
> *I stand on the high cliff edge. I want to jump in. Dive down.*
>
> *The crystal image is broken. Shattered in a thousand pieces.*
>
> *The puzzle building begins.*
>
> (Raven Hawthorn, 2018)

Raven Hawthorn's writing highlights that it is only in the transformative space of the blank page, writing themselves in their own words, that the puzzle pieces of the women's selves find a shape. A verbal shape of lived experience becoming a memory trace in the mind of the reader where voices from the grave extend a bridge from statistics into a life lived. When she looks into the mirror and begins to assemble its thousand pieces, she writes:

> *I walk past the glassy pool. Shocked by my reflection. How long has it been since I really saw myself?*
>
> *Who was this woman looking at me?*
>
> *I felt sadness at life lost. Where had it gone? Years that I can never get back. They are told on my face, each line telling a different story. I didn't see them all. I hide from my reflection sometimes. I don't want to see my past. I feel scared of my future. I try to find the good in what has been.*
>
> *These are the same young eyes that once saw the magic and delight in all. When did it disappear? I try to carve a new shape.*
>
> *This is my time to grow. I look in horror as I see what I have become. How do I get out of here? Tell me where the exit is please. I want to escape to be anywhere else where I am far away from me.*
>
> *Strong dislike and battle with me. Somehow I've become my own worst enemy. The negativity swells up and the huge wave crashes against me. Wash away my fears and renew my self view.*
>
> *King and Queen I can be. Master of my own destiny. Rise up and fight. The goblins that live under my bridge, sit with a riddle waiting for me. I never get it right. Maybe one day I will. The grotesque figure taunts me. She glides past me knowing one day she will defeat.*

> *Don't be afraid anymore, know that I can look after me. I am the green of a tree, the wing of a magpie. Nature is part of me. Always my true friend, it has never deserted me.*
>
> (Raven Hawthorn, 2018)

Lowrie (2008, p. 1) writes that the mirror as encountered in the narrative text mesmerizes in that the sightings of the self capture both spaces of fascination and fear. To view one self in a mirror holds the dual experiences of reflection and reflexivity (Lowrie, 2008, p. 1). Raven Hawthorn is shocked by the sighting of herself - *How long has it been since I really saw myself? Who was this woman looking at me?* - where the lines in her face tell the story of her past. In the dissonance of the mirror reflection, the writers in prison experience the self as a process through reflexive writing and engagement with memories. The duality contained in the reflection and reflexivity leads into her confrontation with the narrative of shame and a desperate plea to exit from herself, *I want to escape to be anywhere else where I am far away from me*. She has become her own prison, where her punishment resides in the battle with herself, *Strong dislike and battle with me. Somehow I've become my own worst enemy*. With eyes that used to see beauty in life, she now hides from her past and fears for her future. The mirror becomes an infinite refraction of lived experience, holding expressions of the past, present and future. In order to make meaning of this refraction, Raven Hawthorn reverts to the style of the fairy tale which allows space for her narrative to explore this captivity of the self in the self through the metaphor of the goblin residing under her bridge, taunting her with the riddle to her life. She does not know how to make changes in her self for a different future, she does not know the answer to the riddle of her life, *I never get it right. Maybe one day I will. The grotesque figure taunts me. She glides past me knowing one day she will defeat*.

Through a sustained writing practice, Raven Hawthorn delved deep in her explorations of her lived experience. As such, her narration comes full circle in the assembly of the shattered puzzle pieces, always returning to nature as her only friend. From where we started this chapter, following her walk through a cemetery with a child in her arms, it now ends again in a cemetery with her despair disappearing into the concrete cell and its noise.

I conclude with her response to the opening sentence of the novel, *Mrs Dalloway*, by Virginia Woolf, "Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.", where Raven Hawthorn relates and finds her communicative connection in Woolf's character and her actions, when she opens up and tells the group that she worked as a florist. She writes:

Raven said she would buy the flowers herself. She would get it right.

I wanted purple peonies with lemon freesia. The smell was wonderful. I bought flowers every month. Placed them on the ground where his ashes were scattered.

I love to see something living by this sacred spot. I sit on the grass next to the flowers in their heady sweet scent. I look to the sky above. It is white-grey.

I lie back and hold the flowers on my chest. They rise and fall with my breathing. I didn't want to let them go. A strange fixation that took me back to when I held him in my arms.

Stop. Don't go there.

No. It's ok.

Breathe. Let the feeling pass through me.

I delicately arrange the flowers. Find stones from around and place them in a circle. They look beautiful. A lonely figure I cast. I know that he will see them too.

Enjoy my little one.

(Raven Hawthorn, 2018)

Her narration and the theme of the cemetery ties in with Bennett and Royle's (2016, p. 189) observation that through her writing she tries to find meaning and understanding in the personal sphere where the "sense of trauma as ghostly… comes back again and again, hauntingly".

In the social sphere, Bennett and Royle (2016, p. 182) write that the focus on ghosts in literature relates fundamentally to our thinking about what it is to be human, namely to be "human is to have a spirit, a soul, a *Geist* or ghost". It is this focus on ghosts that is unsettling or frightening because ghosts "disturb our sense of the separation of the living from the dead" (Bennett and Royle, 2016, p. 182), which is what takes place during imprisonment where the death of the self, of what it is to be human, defined in the concept of the mortification of the self takes place in the prison environment, an institution of social separation. The women's prison writing inhabits this space of separation within which the ghosts of time and space roam the current context of women's imprisonment, and as such resemble other literary works with the focus on ghosts which Bennett and Royle (2016, p. 184) refers to as "a place of ghosts, of what's unfinished, unhealed and even untellable". The women in prison tell of this heterotopic space, the placeless place of lost time and lost selves in their own words. As such, their writing requires close attention, for their narratives reveal that:

> Ghosts are paradoxical since they are both fundamental to the human, fundamentally human, and a denial or disturbance of the human, the very being of ~~the~~ inhuman. (Bennett and Royle, 2016, p. 182)

And yet, the women in prison live, writing the edge in the memory traces of their lived experiences in the placeless place, seeking a response.

~~~~~
~~~~~

Chapter 8 The research journey concludes to continue

> The business of stories is not enchantment.
> The business of stories is not escape.
> The business of stories is waking up. (Shaw, 2020, p. 3)

In the kitchen at East Sutton Park, moments before the workshop is about to start, by some strange accident, the coffee cup slips on the counter and I pour boiling hot water over my left hand. It burns like fire. Heat is everywhere, under my skin, in my bones, scorching. The librarian opens the tap but I do not feel the cold water as it runs over my hand.

Outside, at the end of the day at the 18.00 start time of the workshop, the sun still bakes hot. Inside the classroom, everyone is lethargic with heat. The windows are stiff and barely open. Daisy Dove tries and pushes at their aluminium frames. They stay stuck, opening only in thin slivers of heavy air that does not move.

I sit with my arm outstretched, resting it behind me on the back of the chair, holding my burning hand in front of the feeble fan. Periwinkle picks it up and stretches the cord to bring it as close as possible to the writing table. Daisy Dove brings me a cup of peppermint tea and a glass of water. At the end of the evening, Yellow-horned Poppy will gather the pens, fold the tablecloth and pack my writing bag. But for now, Oriental Redwood runs out of the classroom to fetch an aloe leaf from her room. She comes back with two in her hand,

– *One for now and one for later on the road, when you drive home*, she says.

She squeezes the succulent and its sap oozes out onto my hand, a blessed relief. The burn finds it shape. A raw blister, fierce and red, drawn in the pattern of the boiling water as it poured across my hand, spirals spreading from my knuckles down towards my wrist where it gathers in a coil. A firework of pain.

I keep an eye on the clock above the classroom door. My time with the writers is precious. We make a start, everyone breathes and the writing begins. Silence falls and the workshop settles into its familiar rhythm. Nobody complains about the noise of the fan. It is a good evening.

8.1 Shutters opening on the hidden world of imprisonment

As I write this overview, it is now April 2021 and I am preparing to submit my research thesis *Wallflowers have eyes too – A critical engagement with women writing in prison and their narratives of lived experience,* as well as the accompanying anthology. The anthology, H*ow Bleak is the Crow's Nest*, forms the creative companion piece to this critical narrative thesis. These two texts, deeply interwoven, each exists because of the other. They share the collaborative focus on the process of writing in prison and the

stories of the lived experiences of women in prison told in their own words – two shutters opening on the hidden world of women's imprisonment.

Scheffler (2002, p. xv) describes women's prison writing as "the marginal texts too often lost in the marginal literature of prison". *Wallflowers* contains the narrative of the research journey, grappling with the questions of the dearth of women's prison writing as a genre and why the critical engagement with women's prison writing is under-represented in the cultural and academic sphere in the UK, where bodies of work in this area have been steadily growing in other parts of the world. *Crow's Nest* is the creative outcome of this narrative research journey, showing and sharing the voices of women in prison; to this end, I used creative writing workshops as the research method. This had the dual purpose of allowing the women in prison to write about and explore their lived experiences in their own words as research participants over a sustained period of time, while also enabling their writing to form the research material for the critical engagement in my thesis.

The research material was thus produced within the creative strand of the methodology, moving from data to words using participatory arts-based action research, contained within the wider reflective narrative inquiry as the critical and theoretical framework for the research and analysis. The research participants selected themselves; no requirements were imposed when it came to literacy levels or English language proficiency. I did not elicit any information about the writers' convictions and what is known about the writers' life journeys flow from what is explored in their writing.

Drawing on the Amherst Writers and Artists (AWA) method (Schneider, 2003), the women were all writers in a writing space with its own rules of conduct: ritual and support based on the notions of kindness, respect, and listening to encourage a supportive and reflective space for engagement with their stories and writing. The workshops focused on the theme of reconceptualising the self as a process, writing the self amongst others as a colour, the seasons, in response to listening to three pieces of music, and in conversation with a stranger. In the workshops I emphasised that there was no right or wrong way to write. With this method I focused on mindful communication, ritual and freewriting as establishing the writing space as distinct within the prison environment.

> *The tablecloth adorned with reds and blues, oranges and green, becomes my parachute that saves me. Diamond, circle, flower and birds, repeat. A repetition before my eyes. I write.*
>
> (Raven Hawthorn, 2018)

Scheffler writes (1984, p. 65) that women's prison writing and narratives are a rich storehouse of records, both empirical and practical, of the physical surroundings, attitudes, people and events that make an impression on the woman as writer in prison. Yet, this writing stands neglected and unexplored because it is not viewed as a necessary element in theorising punishment on the grounds of not being cerebral or theoretical enough. In my thesis, I examined this assertion from the perspective of epistemic justice and my research finds that this exclusionary stance enforces the hegemonic status quo of the master narrative of punishment. As Crewe and Liebling (2017, p. 890) observe, "prisoners are sensitive and well-informed evaluators of their own predicament" and articulate in their descriptions "how power feels" in prison, how it impacts on their well-being and psychological security, and what it means in terms of their opportunities for self-determination. Exactly as we find expressed in this collection of writing.

The memory of the writing produced for this thesis and the anthology is infused with the heat wave of the summer of 2018. In the 10-week period stretching from the beginning of June to mid-August, I worked with 18 writers, writing and reading together. They chose their pseudonyms from books – books about birds, flowers and trees that I had brought to the workshops – to protect their own identities and for confidentiality, but also to open up a personal creative space sheathed in anonymity. Each writer chose a name that resonated with them, and these inspired the illustrations used in this anthology; each drawing representing one of the writers.

Writing and reading in Downview, we encountered *Baby Blue 79; Hearts; Sea-Coral; Purple Rose; Rainbow Rose; Raven Hawthorn; Tall Melilot; The Mallard; The White Cow* and *Yellowhammer*. Writing in East Sutton Park, we met *Andromeda Marsh; Daisy Dove; Foxglove; Oriental Redwood; Periwinkle; Snapdragon; Wood Lily* and *Yellow-horned Poppy*. Before the start of the workshops, I approached the publishers of two books – *The Snow Child* and *The Summer Book* – and explained my research project, asking whether they would contribute to it by donating 20 copies of each book. They kindly obliged, which meant I could gift a copy to each writer, to thank them for taking part in the project, but also, from a practical perspective, enable us to read together as a group so as to inspire and enrich our writing practice. At the end of the writing workshops, the research participants wrote thank you notes to the publishers describing what the novels had meant to them, as included in the anthology.

How Bleak is the Crow's Nest writes into the silence of the lived experiences of women in prison. The aim of publishing it is to present the writers in prison – the research participants – with a concrete outcome of our time spent writing and reading together as part of the participatory arts-based action research exploring their aesthetic

responses to and communication of their lived experiences, both in and out of prison. It is also to feature their work in the wider social and cultural sphere beyond my thesis, in its own right, as real-life contributions to knowledge in the area of women's imprisonment; the acknowledgement of the prisoner viewpoint in the wider cultural and academic dialogue pertaining to punishment and prison reform.

The titles of both this anthology and my research thesis draw on the notion that "Our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories" (Bateson, 1994, p. 11). *Wallflowers have eyes too* is a line from a poem by The White Cow. This metaphor encapsulates my thesis' critical engagement with the aesthetic expression of the internal gaze by women in prison through their writing. Likewise, *How Bleak is the Crow's Nest* is a companion metaphor from the writing and reflections of Raven Hawthorn. Continuing this thinking through metaphor, referring to Sea-Coral's introductory piece in Chapter 6, the distant, foreboding tower becomes an apposite frame to the story of women writing in prison, where prisons exist on the outskirts of towns and cities, hidden from sight, behind high walls topped with rolling barbed wire or concealed by trees at the end of remote country lanes.

Though removed from everyday life, prisons form part of the collective subconscious. Embedded in the communal social and cultural mind's eye, the story of prison and punishment has been shaped over time by a choir – or rather, a cacophony of disparate voices – its range conjured in a collage of images and writing drawn from articles in newspapers and magazines, crime novels and true-crime stories, popular television shows and films, political speeches and arguments. These narrative representations remain one-dimensional and flat, more often than not depicting women in prison as hardened criminals, yet, unless you have experienced prison life itself, either personally or through an incarcerated family member or acquaintance, or through someone working in prison or the criminal justice system, what we know is filtered through this external, normative gaze. Thus, from the outside, the story of punishment, told in the official language of statistics and headlines, obscures the textured lived experiences and realities of those who live and work within these institutions. It is a lopsided story.

When Raven Hawthorn writes that *We are all part of the puzzle*, it poses the question about what we do with and how we respond to these pieces of the puzzle – the lived experiences of women in prison, written in their own words. It indicates a future where two very different paths might be taken: either listening, engagement and dialogue with women's prison writing and their narratives of lived experience, or continued dismissal and silence as response, in which Sea-Coral's fear that the fate of

the two skeletons – locked away in the distant tower, sitting at the table, with their scratch marks etched into its surface – might also become her fate.

8.2 Ending into a beginning

> Tally, as the term progressed, painted the things she saw on her walks with Clemmy: rowan berries on laden boughs; late foxgloves; fallen leaves, veined and crimson on the grass – and Clemmy realized that Tally was seeking comfort in nature as people have always done when their lives have run into difficulties. (Ibbotson, 2008, p.272)

In conclusion, at the end of this journey in the textual space of thesis, I turn my gaze again to the canvas of the distant prison wall. It is no longer blank. Or perhaps no longer so bare is a better description, because alongside the prison writing of *Criminal Women,* Lady Constance Lytton/Jane Warton, Joan Henry and Ruth Wyner as referred to in Chapters 1 and 2, it is now filled with aesthetic expression, encapsulated in the images, words, colours, rivers, trees, emotions, tears, laughter and reflections of the 18 research participants as writers. Together they have written a portrait of lived experience, an imprint of time and space from within the mortuary of keys. The blank canvas has become a mural of memory traces teeming with individual and particularised portraits, captured in patterns and rhythms, the landscape of life and loss as a real-life contribution to knowledge. It haunts and speaks where the blank canvas and dearth of women's published prison writing have maintained the silence of lives hidden from sight.

Of this speaking out, Josie O'Dwyer (Carlen, Hicks, O'Dwyer, Christina, Tchaikovsky 1985, p. 181), one of the contributors to *Criminal Women,* writes:

> Writing about my prison experiences has also helped me to sort out some things about my past, though it is never easy to use one's private pain to inform a public issue.

O'Dwyer's observation accurately captures the duality of the women's experiences of writing in prison where the personal, as the explorations of private lives, moves into to the social sphere to inform the wider public issue of women's imprisonment. Reflecting on this observation, I find myself at the end of this research study sitting on the pebbly shore on the other side of rivers, the maternal sea and the deep waters of the self explored, surveying the distance the research participants and I have travelled together. For a moment I am startled to hear birdsong on the beach, so conditioned am I to the familiar cry of seagulls. It quietens down and the tide rolls out. The reef lies exposed, chapters lined up following the curve of the shoreline. In the reflection of the rock pools I realise that I have come to know the writers in prison during three distinct phases of the research process. First in person as the research participants in the creative writing

workshops, thereafter through their experiences as women living in prison in the transcription of their writing for the critical engagement and analysis, and lastly as editor reading their work as writers for the compilation of the accompanying anthology.

Whilst reflecting on this trajectory and the three different meeting points, I have a moment of recognition when I detect the now well-known and worn pattern of Ricoeur's three-stage process of mimesis where each stage tells the story of the research journey as it unfolds - coming to know the research participants in the workshops (Mimesis 1), emplotment as transcription for the critical engagement in the analysis (Mimesis 2) and reception by the reader as editor of the anthology (Mimesis 3). It had been humming in the background all along, existing on the periphery, as Sarton described this mysterious component of the writing process referenced in Chapter 6, containing the writing and research journey as it unfolded in the present, revealed in reflection.

This layered three-stage process of mimesis provided the framework for my understanding of the narrative structure in contemplating time and experience within the creative process of research in the engagement with my own writing and the writing of the women in prison. The ripple effect of the theoretical application of three-stage process of mimesis continued its spread and repeated in the three stages of meeting the writers which further interlinked with the three research questions - where question one focused on the development of writing as transformative learning in reconceptualising the self as a process; question two on the notion of the writing produced to form a counter-narrative to the master narrative of punishment; and question three on the production of the anthology.

Thus the theory became the practice and in the process evolved into an embodiment of the narrative structure incorporating what Vanhoozer (1991, p. 34) refers to as "the ingredients of narrative, namely imagination, time and possibility". This multi-layered application of Ricoeur's three-stage process of mimesis constitutes my knowledge contribution in the theoretical dissection of coming to know, moving through my participatory arts-based methodological and epistemological approach of emplotment into analysis of the research material through reading. It embraced ethics as part of the process in the production of knowledge, evolving from the procedural aspect through the relational into the sphere of epistemic justice highlighting the prisoner viewpoint from the perspective of lived experience as knowledge contribution through the art of writing. As such, procedural ethics is absorbed in Mimesis 1 of coming to the know the field in engaging with gatekeepers, and gaining permission and access; relational ethics grows in Mimesis 2 as emplotment in the process of producing the research material and leading to a particular relationship of mutual trust between

the researcher and research participants, as well as disciplined empathy on the part of the researcher as the writing evolves and takes shape; and finally in Mimesis 3 it leads to epistemic justice in the transformation of both the procedural and relational into knowledge.

It signifies a moment of unselfing from traditional criminological approaches to creative writing used in prison, in that it is then not used as a tool working towards desistance or rehabilitation, but instead to examine and inform about living within the institutional environment of prison and coming into contact with the criminal justice system. And it enters into dialogue with the slow progress in bringing about structural and systemic change in practice in the sphere of women's imprisonment – an area of the social which Player (2014, p. 276) commented on as "so exhaustively researched to such little practical effect", as I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Bringing to the fore the women's prison writing in this dialogue with time and the slow progress of change, links to Ricoeur (1991a, p. 30) who writes of this mimetic process, and particularly of how it relates to Mimesis 1 as:

> The pre-history of the story is what connects it up to a vaster whole and gives it a background. This background is made up of the living imbrication of all lived stories. The stories that are told must then be made to emerge out of this background. And as they emerge, the implied subject also emerges. [...] Recounting, following, understanding stories is then simply the continuation of these unspoken stories.

Following the trajectory of the research questions, I reflect in conclusion on each of these interwoven mimetic ripples in turn as they frame the research findings.

8.3 Naming the shadow people

Research question one asked: How might creative writing workshops, with the theme of reconceptualising the self as a process, contribute to the self-affirmation of female prisoners in re-establishing their own identities, confidence and therewith agency for life post-incarceration? In answer to this question, Mimesis 1 comes to life as the transformative learning takes place both as part of a group learning to work together and through the process of reflection in which the writers begin to take notice of the self. In time, the situated inner landscape is painted in words of emotion and feeling, reflecting lived experiences and revealing a shape to the external world. Of this process of sensuous knowledge production O'Neill, Mansaray and Haaken (2017, p. 214) write that:

> An awareness of the complex relationships that exist between thinking, feeling, and doing and their articulation within systems of knowledge, power and reason are central to PAR [participatory action research].

The White Cow explains the first steps of writing into the inner lifeworld of feeling when she writes:

> *As a machine, I know little of this language. Although at times I am full of feeling. I am a robot.*

Oriental Redwood embroiders this description when she writes:

> *The writing class has given me the chance to start using more of my imagination. It has helped me to find my true feelings. Almost, not quite, but I'm now learning to not be afraid of writing how I feel.*
>
> *The Shadow People*
> *Each shadow person represents an emotion:*
> *~ Sad Shadow – This person sits with their head in their lap.*
> *~ Anxious Shadow – This person stands against the well's wall twiddling their fingers.*
> *~ Scared Shadow – This person stays in the foetal position.*
> *~ Intrigued Shadow – This person is standing forward with their head tilted to one side.*
> *Writing helps me understand myself.*
>
> (Oriental Redwood, 2018)

Oriental Redwood's writing is both poignant and revelatory as she captures the transformative dimension in the reconceptualising the self as a process. She begins to observe herself from different perspectives as she names her emotions. This extends to Ricoeur's (1991b, p. 198) argument that narrative mediation brings to the fore self-interpretation as a characteristic of self-knowledge. However, it is a process that takes time and this underpins a finding of my study. For creative writing in prison to become a transformative learning process, it needs to be a sustained practice over a period of time. Many of the writers requested that the writing workshops continue as they were just finding their feet at the end of the 10-week period. This is of significance, because as Ricoeur (1991b, p. 1998) writes:

> The refiguration by narrative confirms this aspect of self-knowledge [...] namely that the self does not know itself immediately, but only indirectly by the detour of cultural signs of all sorts which are articulated on the symbolic mediations which always already articulate action, and among them, the narratives of everyday life.

Methodologically my contribution therefore found that once the writers understood that their writing was taking place in a space removed from academic attainment and/or evaluation, and unconnected to the prison environment, they relaxed because they did not have to perform. Framing the writing practice by reiterating that there was no right or wrong way to write opened up the space for exploration of the writer's life journey from their personal perspective and pre-occupations. I began to understand their transition into the unguarded writing space as a process of dismantling the layers of inhibition.

A further example included not asking the writers question about their convictions. I purposely maintained the focus of the group on writing, and as such our conversations and the personal information revealed all stemmed from the women's writing when they read their pieces out loud. The non-prescriptive writing prompts allowed for the writers to find their own creativity and intellectual engagement. The paradoxical process of unselfing opened up non-threatening spaces for self-exploration, whereas I learnt and found that the approach of the more direct gaze led to resistance and agitation.

I provided the women with coloured notebooks I bought at the University of Sussex's bookshop. The writers took pride in their books and their work. They kept their original writing and I received the photocopies thereof at the end of each lesson. The notebooks provided continuity and some of the women started talking about the books they were writing, and revealed the nuanced difference in approach to wanting to do something as opposed to having to do something.

8.4 Writing as counter-narrative

> Stories are not to be treated lightly as they both carry, and inspire, significant obligations and responsibilities: stories must be cared for as they are at the heart of how we make meaning of our experiences of the world. (Huber et al, 2013, p. 214)

With research question two I set out to examine how the narrative inquiry into women's prison writing could contribute to a re-imagining of the narratives of justice and its outcomes for social transformation, by contributing a counter-narrative to the master narratives about prison, punishment and life in prison? In my research I then moved towards studying the complexity of the micrology of lived experience as revealed in the particularities of the women's prison writing.

The workshops were an enriching experience, both in terms of writing for the women and for me as researcher. I listened and learned from the writers, their writing and our conversation and as such the workshops became a symbiotic space where I

adapted my approach to foreground the prisoner viewpoint. This required patience and intuitive trust in the creative process in which I deviated from criminology's focus on crime as starting point. As such I adhered to Sullivan's (2006, p. 20) observation, as discussed in Chapter 4, that "what is known can often limit the possibility of what is not and this requires a creative act to see things from a new view". Of this perspective Ricoeur (1991a, p. 25) writes:

> [...] the work of imagination does not come out of nowhere. It is tied in one way or another to the models handed down by tradition. But it can enter into a variable relation to these models. [...] for it is the very rules that become the object of new experimentation.

In practice, instead of imposing my ideas of the writing exercises I took my lead from the writers and thus blended it became a collaborative workspace, waves pushing onto the shore and then pulling back. In this responsive, participatory space the writers revealed their return to the maternal sea and showed the struggle of being caught in the crosscurrents. My work found that the freedom created in this writing space for self-exploration revealed and opened up to new and unanticipated frontiers in the critical engagement. Notably in thinking back through their mothers at the start of writing the narrative life journey, the writers diverted from the focus on motherhood as having children rather than being mothered as a main identifying identity principle of selfhood for women in prison. The women's writing opened up a different set of knowledges in understanding the complex multi-layered site of the self. It preceded this focus on the self as mother, and instead retreated to the start of the river or tree or well, waiting and longing for the mother indicating the depth of their traumatic lived experiences that preceded the moment of imprisonment.

Whilst the women's writing and narratives are a rich storehouse of that which makes an impression on women in prison, in this instance of seeking the mother figure to make meaning of their lived experiences, the women's prison writing reaches out and further reveals itself to be timeless, crossing boundary lines in its relation to other women's writing outside of prison that have gazed back into childhood to find structure in the narrative of their life journey. Yet, at the same time this writing developed in tandem with other writing that concentrated on the narrative identity of the self as mother, which further contributes and feeds into existing knowledge.

The creative research approach afforded the writers time and space to write and reflectively engage with their life journeys. It allowed the women to show the particularities of their insights and brought the micrology of lived experience to life. Van Manen (2016, p. 103) writes that it is "the nature of the lived space that renders

that particular experience its quality of meaning". For The Mallard this existed in her relationship with the pigeon and showed her how she had internalised the experience as a foreign national in the women's prison from the perspective of self-responsibilisation.

For the writers in East Sutton Park writing in colour and reflecting on their lived experiences revealed the complexities of narrative as revealed in the anomaly experienced between the performative, institutionalised self written in colour and how this self did not match the map drawings of their life journeys. This crack produced in the encounter with the site of the self as crosscurrent expanded the critical engagement with their writing to include the prison environment and the focus on rehabilitative programming. Through the process of unselfing, the knowledge produced in the narratives of internal landscapes, of the personal, then came to reveal the structural organisation and shape of the external narrative landscape within which the women live and write. Therefore, moving to the consider the future, creative writing opens new spaces for dialogue, because:

> As we attend to people's experiences through narrative inquiry, a new language, a language of landscapes, of stories to live by, of lives in the midst, develops. Perhaps, as we begin to speak and live different experiences we start to change the stories. (Huber et al, 2013 p. 236)

8.5 How bleak is the crow's nest

> Publishing women's prison literature is one method of reminding society that incarcerated women exist. (Scheffler, 2002, p. xxi)

Research question three considered how the publication of this prison writing in an anthology might demonstrate the value of the creative process and output by providing encounters for understanding the lived experiences of female incarceration, thereby informing cultural perceptions of the wider community, to recognise human dignity across the lines that divide and differentiate socially? In answer to this question, in the course of reading the women's writing for the anthology, a new alchemic process took place. Retracing our creative journey together in the shape of the anthology, placing the individual fragments to form a whole, I get to know writers from a different perspective, reading not to analyse their words but to find the flow of the composite story comprised of individual reflections, thoughts, images and ways of expression. It is a moving process how they write themselves piecemeal, bit by bit, not all at once.

The space created for me as researcher not to interpret and analyse serves as a further moment of unselfing. With this distance from the process of findings and analysis, I look at the writing with new eyes and each writer becomes more layered and

textured. The more I read the more clearly the writers and their characters and pre-occupations, loves and fears, hopes and dreams emerge. I begin to understand when Milner (1950, p. 31) writes that:

> the bit of oneself that one could give to the outside world was of the stuff of one's dreams, the stored memories of one's past, but refashioned internally to make one's hopes and longings for the future.

As such, this informed my conversations with the editor and publisher of the anthology in how we approached the women's writing - to change the authentic voices of the writers or not. We engaged in many discussions about the ethical treatment of the women's voices and concluded on maintaining their unique and individual expressions and observations, to keep the work as they had written it, to only change the spelling where it was needed. It enforced the stance I had adopted in the transcriptions of the women's writing in the critical engagement phase. I also reflected on the importance of self-recognition for the women when they come to read their work in the anthology. Of this process, writing in the review report of the placement to produce the anthology, the publisher observes:

> I have found the whole process to be eye-opening. The challenge to put together an anthology of this nature is very different to any anthology I have been involved with before now [...] Rosa was able to skilfully balance the need for sense and clarity with the need to preserve the character of these women in their writing. Very little was corrected, and only with agonising decisions that took hours to resolve. The anthology was typeset with care to ensure that the form of the writing was exactly how the women wrote during workshops. (Everett, 2021)

Both the publisher and the editor commented on the women's pseudonyms. How they resonated with them as readers leading them into relational spaces with the writers centred in the image portrayed by the pseudonym. They began to know and identify the writers and their writing according to their pseudonyms. In our final meeting the publisher mentioned the pseudonyms again and how he experienced them as containing a humanising element when reading the women's prisons writing. I note this as a finding in my research, because in my research design it was conscious decision to move away from using anonymised names in attribution to the women's writing. Instead, I used the books about nature, of plants, trees, birds and flowers, for the writers to choose names that resonated with them.

> One of our concerns was that the writing would not be well-received precisely because of those negative connotations, of deserved punishment, of rightly 'doing time'. Yet the

> women featured in the anthology demonstrate immense vulnerability; often remorseful, often reflective, yet there is a sense that they are each overwhelmingly grateful just to be able to express themselves as human beings in a thoroughly dehumanising place. All pseudonyms the women used were respected and represented with beautiful illustrations – of flowers, birds, and animals. (Everett, 2021)

The contribution to knowledge from my research is encapsulated in The White Cow's line *Wallflowers have eyes too,* in that the women's prison writing is now added to the marginal literature of women's prison writing within the marginal canon of prison writing and the critical engagement therewith. This contribution to knowledge – theoretically, methodologically and creatively - breaks into a new wave and begins a conversation in relation to the personal, the social, the cultural and academic spheres of what is viewed and considered as knowledge in the sphere of critical engagement with the narratives of lived experience, particularly the experiences of a marginalised group, women in prison living on the edge. The women's prison writing and their stories are therefore not published or shared to entertain or to be consumed passively. Instead, I view their work as messengers of growth to instigate an encounter with the reader of their words in the social, cultural and academic spheres. Pinkola Estés (2008, p. 387) observes that:

> If a story is the seed, then we are its soil.

As the soil looking into the future, ending into a beginning, I now conclude this narrative stretch of my research journey with Sea Coral's poem:

Remember the poppies in the field
Emotions held in like a shield
Good times, bad times, maybe despair
Remember things are not always fair
Emotions closed in like a door
Trust is poppies growing ever more.

*

Red poppies in a field of gold
Each poppy head blowing so bold
Good times, bad times, all come along
Reminding me I have to be strong
Each poppy head bright and red
Thank you for making me face what I dread.

*

Red blanket standing like spies

Each poppy under blue skies
Golden fields glow under the sun
Ripening as we do, each and every one
Emotions fighting, I need to be free
Trust me, I am trying just to be me.

(Sea-Coral, 2018)

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A1 Access HMPPS Questionnaire Response

HM Prison &
Probation Service

[redacted]

HM Prison and Probation Service
National Research Committee
[redacted]

23 October 2017

REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION – HMPPS RESEARCH

Ref: 2017-284
Title: In their own words - An anthology of creative writing produced by women in prison, in conjunction with a narrative inquiry into female offender discourses and the creative writing/storytelling process within the context of prison reform

Dear Mrs. Whitecross,

Further to your application to undertake research across HMPPS, the National Research Committee (NRC) has considered the details provided, alongside the requirements set out in the HMPPS research instruction (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/her-majestys-prison-and-probation-service/about/research) and has requested the following further information:

- **1. Please clarify what you see as being the primary benefits for HMPPS?**

  Following the guidance of PSO 4800 for the treatment of female prisoners whilst in prison and in preparation for life post-incarceration, the primary benefits of this research for HMPPS are set out as follows -

  *In the first instance, I refer to p. 2 in PSO 4800 and the General Equality Duty (GED) which places a statutory General Duty on all public authorities to promote equality of opportunity between men and women, and to produce evidence and outcomes that this requirement have been considered.

  A review of literature for my research proposal revealed that in the UK, the focus on creative writing is overwhelmingly concentrated on male prisoners and based around youth practices. A survey of "published prisoner life writings" in the UK found the majority of authors of these works to be middle-class white males.

  Whilst women in prison benefit from arts initiatives, such as music, drama and visual arts, writing initiatives extended to them in prison tend to include one-off contributions to writing competitions, charity magazines and reading drop-ins, and not sustained programmes. This situation is consistent with most countries around the world, apart from America demonstrating a growing body of work in terms of women's prison writing.

  This research project would benefit HMPPS in addressing the promotion of equal opportunities for women prisoners in alignment with opportunities provided to male prisoners.

* Secondly, the research addresses PSO 4800's aim of building self-esteem and confidence, which follows as a benefit of engagement with learning and new skills.

Research in America with incarcerated women and their engagement with creative practices found the value of artistic expression and the work it produced, is reflected in "evidence of personal growth, intellectual and social development" (Mullen).

This research will benefit HMPPS in providing an offender service to female prisoners, on the one hand, and on the other investigate how this service can reduce re-offending. Existing research on creative arts in prison, point to it as being instrumental in desistance and also as a benefit to the prison environment.

- **2. What is your estimate of the overall staff resource required to assist with the project?**

In consideration of the project requirements, the estimate staff resource required of HMPPS staff seems minimal. As a lone researcher I would need access to the prison library, ie to be escorted there and back.

In preparation for the workshops, I will liaise with the prison librarian by providing posters and postcards to promote the workshops, and ask for the librarian to keep a register of participants wanting to join.

There is an open invitation to staff from the library to join the group as another writer participant, but there is no expectation or requirement that they do so.

Furthermore, as part of the action research methodology, which views knowledge sharing as inherent to the action, I will provide copies of my session workplans, reading lists and writing exercises to the Prison Governor and librarian, to continue with the weekly prison reading and writing groups, beyond the research, should they find it useful.

I would also need to be informed of prison protocol in terms of health and safety, and fire regulations. The guide provided by the Scottish Prison Service for artists working in Scottish prisons sets out areas for mandatory training before commencing a creative research project in prison – these include:

** fire training

** personal protection training (PPT)

** issues related to health and safety

** ACT2 – suicide care risk management

I would have to discuss each of these issues in turn with the prison staff of the establishment where the research is to take place.

- **3. Please elaborate why action research is the preferred option?**

My research proposal expands in detail on the choice of action research to conduct this research project within the framework of narrative theory. In a nutshell, my reasons for action research as preferred option are:

* Action research emerged from the notion that theory needs to be developed and tested by practical actions and|or interventions.

* As the field of action research developed it has moved towards models where research participants work together with the researcher to contribute to knowledge and change.

* Action research is context-specific and educative, and works with individuals, but also views them as members of social|cultural|institutional groups working towards change|improvement, and in doing so the action, research and evaluation are interlinked.

* To engage in action research is to be interested in change for improvement, rather than solely to understand a particular situation.

This criteria then correlates with the research aims based on the use of creative writing pedagogy|workshops with women in prison as research participants, both as individuals but also part of a social|institutional group, to bring about change in their own personal lives. But also through the publication of their writing, published in an anthology, to communicate and represent these transformative processes to the wider community.

- **4. What are the research questions being tested?**

The research questions, as set out in my qualitative research proposal, were developed in response to the overall rationale for the research and are as follows:

* How might creative writing workshops, with the theme of reconceptualising the self as a process, contribute to the self-transformation of female prisoners in re-establishing their own identity and therewith agency, and feed into support programmes for life post-incarceration?

* How might the publication of this prison writing in an anthology demonstrate the value of the creative process and output, in terms of understanding female incarceration and informing cultural perceptions of the wider community, to recognise human dignity across the lines that divide and differentiate socially?

* How can a narrative inquiry of offender discourses of women contribute to understandings of justice, and personal and social transformation?

- **5. Please outline what happens during the two hour workshop sessions? How will the workshops be delivered? Who will deliver the workshops? What topics are covered in each of the workshops?**

* The workshops will be delivered by the researcher and will run as creative writing classes. The women will be viewed as students in a reflective and supportive writing space with its own rules of conduct based on the notions of kindness, respect and listening as set in the Amherst Writers and Artists (AWA) method. This method focuses on minimising hierarchies in supportive groups, where everyone writes to find confidence in their own voices.

* The themes covered in the research are writing:

** i) the self as a colour – as introduction to the creative writing process

** ii) the self as the seasons (each in turn)

** iii) in response to a painting|photo

** iv) in response to listening to a piece of music or bird sounds

** v) a conversation with a stranger

** vi) as a character from one of the group's reading books or short stories

** vii) a reflection glimpsed in a pool of water

** viii) the colour coming face to face with an animal

*** Course description:**

Intention: Participants should experience creative writing as a practice to support self-awareness, self-expression and wellbeing.

Outcome: Participants will be familiar with a range of writing exercises, prompts, and techniques. Participants will have written a short story or poem to be published in an anthology.

Lesson 1:

* ***Opening*** (15 mins)

To shift participants from daily life to the contained space of the course and to create a sense of acceptance and worth for each participant -

- share name and a colour for how each person feels in that moment – participants to write down the colour

- introduce the course – explain the information sheet and the research aims

- explain the rules of engagement and discuss the safe space of writing together as a group – read through and reflect on group ethos

- discuss confidentiality and anonymity

* ***Activity*** (15 mins)

Choosing a pseudonym – visual activity as a way for participants to think of and find a pseudonym for writing and anonymity in research reference

Resources: Pens, paper, postcards, illustrated gardening and art books, colour swatches

Reflection: Write a few words on what and why I chose my writing name.

****Activity*** (25 mins):

Stories – what is a story? Discuss and draw the river of life or tree of life - this is a drawing activity to introduce participants to the monomyth structure or journey of life narrative and to start thoughts about the storytelling process

- explain the river of life|tree of life drawing exercise

- participants draw the life journey of a character

Resources: A3 paper, crayons

Reflection: Write a few words about the tree or river you drew - can you see the beginning of a story?

** 5 minute break*

* ***Activity*** (25 mins):

Writing in colour – writing exercise

- participants to think of a character in a story, using the colour they had felt at the beginning of the session to name or as means to describe this character

- thinking back to the river of life/tree of life exercise - participants can choose an event in the journey of this character and then begin to describe it in words

Resources: paper and pens

Reflection: Write a few words on how it felt describing the character I chose as a colour.

* ***Activity*** (20 mins): Reading

Reading together from the novel *The Snow Child* and discussion based on journey of life narrative structure

Resources: books

Reflection: Think about my story – where would I start?

* ***Closing*** (15 min)

- To end session and communicate any writing homework and preparation for following session - communicate necessary information

Feedback and reflection: one word for how each person feels now at the end of the session – what went well and why; what did not go so well and why?

- **6. Participants self-select themselves onto the workshops. What happens if more than the proposed sample of women volunteer to participate? What are the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participants (e.g. what about women who want to take part but struggle with literacy such as dyslexia? What about women with mental health concerns or who are actively suicidal or self-harming? What if women behave aggressively in the session?)**

* The size of the research group is kept deliberately small so that each research participant can receive attention and focus on their writing. The researcher will keep a waiting list should participants be unable to continue or where demand exceeds the class size. Should time and resources permit, the possibility exists to run an additional class. This will be dependent on HMPPS.

* The research selection is not prescriptive and is open to each female prisoner who wishes to join, regardless of ability. Writing as an art form belongs to everyone, regardless of educational level or economic class. The workshops will be adapted towards every participant's needs, because "where language or literacy are impaired, a story still exists and it can be told in the unique and idiosyncratic form of the author's own way with words" (Schneider). The writing itself would always proceed from the first copy|rough draft, also referred to as the sloppy copy, to capture the main ideas. Spelling, punctuation, word choice and craft will follow in editing the first draft – the researcher will provide close support here.

* The whole aim of this research project is to create a safe space for wellbeing through self-expression. National guidelines on support for young people who self-harm point out that self-harm can stem from a desire to escape an unbearable situation or intolerable emotional pain. It explains that negative emotions such as sadness, anger, despair translate into tension, ie the inability to control emotions,

culminating in dissociation|self-harm to cope with this tension. Creative pursuits are an established way of dealing with negative emotions.

* Every care would be taken not to cause any harm to research participants and I would discuss with the prison staff at the outset what further support are available for research participants within the prison environment beyond the scope of the research. I also refer to point 2 above in being made aware of participants at risk of suicide.

* In the case of possible aggressive behaviour - the aim of the research is to provide a calm, supportive and reflective space within the prison library from which the writing sessions will proceed. At the start of each session, the group as a whole will reflect on the group ethos –

** there is no good or bad writing, no right or wrong, just writing the words of our stories;

** because we are all writers in this group, working together, we treat all our writing with equal kindness and respect;

** when we comment on each other's writing, we always point out something positive first, what we liked and why.

Research points to the therapeutic effects of writing and I will discuss the necessary prison protocols and procedures with the prison staff of the establishment where the research is to take place on how to alert or inform a member of staff.

- **7. Are the samples likely to be representative? Will it be possible to check for any sampling bias?**

The aim of this qualitative research project is not to treat the female prison population as a pre-determined dataset to be analysed, but rather as individual research participants each with their own story/ies who have selected themselves to partake in the research. Sampling bias as yardstick is not applicable in this project.

The focus of this research is to examine the creative process of writing and how this process can contribute to the self-transformation of each research participant in re-establishing her own identity or sense of self, and therewith agency in life post-incarceration and desistance.

Desistance is viewed as an individual process – a process of human development in social context, which refers not only to shifts in personal behaviour or identity, but also in a sense of belonging to community (McNeill). Change therefore depends not just on how one sees oneself, but also about how one is seen by others, and how one sees one's place in community (McNeill).

This further ties in with the ethos of action research as chosen method – to bring change in the research participants' own lives but also to inform the wider society.

- **8. How will course completion be encouraged? Will those who decide not to continue be replaced? Has consideration been given to seeking the views of those women who do not engage?**

* From the outset of the course, it will be communicated to participants that the spirit of the research is to communicate the essence of lived experience through the craft of writing as a collaborative effort. This collaborative effort will culminate in the anthology of the women's writing and the research thesis. Participants will receive a copy of the anthology and a certificate on completion of the workshops.

* It is also understood that the prison environment is transitional in nature and that it can be difficult to retain a regular list of participants. The classes are designed as standalone explorations of the creative process, yet together they will form an integrated whole. Writing and reading together will form the core component of each session. The researcher will keep a waiting list should participants be unable to continue or where demand exceeds the class size. Should time and resources permit, the possibility exists to run an additional class. This will be dependent on HMPPS.

This research project is about facilitating self-expression through writing and storytelling. Within the remit of the research framework, contact with women in prison will extend to those who self-select to participate in the workshops. Future research projects, following on the culmination and completion of this project, will broaden the scope to enquire after women who do not engage.

- **9. How will the qualitative data be analysed (e.g. how will the contents of the writing)?**

Analysis of the writing will consist of the social science techniques of thematic analysis used alongside the literary analysis of close reading to examine the stories of action within theories of context.

Thematic analysis looks not only at the topics and concerns revealed in the writing, but also at the progression and transformations that take place over time within a particular context. The content analysis will also focus on the emergence of identity as revealed in the telling of a story, ie in the meaning-making of experiences through the practice|action of writing – on the individual level, but also as part of the collaborative activity of writing together.

- **10. How will the research data be transported, stored and destroyed? For how long will it be kept?**

* The writing from each session will be transported from the prison in a box folder. Only the researcher will have access to the data. Copies of the creative writing will be made and saved in secure password protected electronic files. The original writing will be returned to participants the following week. Consent forms will be stored as hardcopies in a locked cabinet folder.

* The secure data storage back up management plan will include three copies of all data, ie the original, an external copy kept locally and an external copy kept remotely. For the local external copy, I have currently identified the secure N:drive on ITS at the University of Sussex, and for the external copy kept remotely, I will consider Box.com suggested by the University of Sussex for which anonymised data is considered acceptable. Anonymised data is data that is not personal according to the 1998 Data Protection Act (DPA). Personal data then "refers to records or other information that on its own or linked with other data, can reveal the identity of an actual living person".

* The research data will be kept for up to seven years to allow the researcher to write and publish peer-reviewed journal articles on the research findings.

* Hard copy data will be destroyed by shredding and all electronic data will be destroyed by data disposal software such as the recommended BCWipe.

- **11. Further details are required around confidentiality issues and the disclosure of certain information obtained be addressed during the research (e.g. what if the women write about something related to the security of the prison, or the safety of themselves or others, or crimes that they have not been convicted of?)**

HM Prison &
Probation Service

From the outset of this project, the distinction must be made clear that creative writing|fiction will constitute the focus of this research and not the genre of true crime writing or autobiography. As part of the Amherst Writers and Artists (AWA) method, all writing will therefore be treated as fiction. However, as explained in the consent form, confidentiality will pertain to that which falls within the legal limits.

- **12. What avenues of support are in place for women who feel distressed or in some other way vulnerable after engaging in the writing process?**

  Every care will be taken not to cause any harm to research participants. It is acknowledged that the writing process can access deep emotions, yet research also point to therapeutic effects of writing as an outlet in processing experiences. I will discuss with the prison staff at the outset what further support are available for research participants within the prison environment beyond the scope of the research, such as care plans and mentors, and signposting participants to The Samaritans.

- **13. Bearing in mind the small sample size, how will it be ensured that individual respondents cannot be identified in the final research report?**

  All writing will be anonymous and written under a pseudonym. As pointed out above, the writing will be treated as fiction and no personal information that have the potential to reveal the identity of the research participants will be elicited or referred to in the research.

- **14. Has the project been approved through your University ethics committee?**

  This research project has been submitted to the University Governance Research Committee - Sponsorship Sub-Committee, which will convene on 26 January 2018 for its next meeting to discuss university sponsorship of particular research projects. I will let HMPPS know of the outcome of this meeting and the decision reached.

- **15. The accompanying participant information sheets/consent forms should be sent to the National Research mailbox once available.**

  Please find these attached in addition to this document.

Please send this further information (quoting your NRC Reference number) to the NRC (National.Research@NOMS.gsi.gov.uk) within 8 weeks of the date of this letter. If your response is not received within 8 weeks your application will be treated as withdrawn and you will need to submit a new application should you wish to apply for NRC approval. Please note the research must not commence until the NRC has granted full approval, and a formal letter to that effect is provided.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

A2 Workshop invitation poster and postcard

IN MY OWN WORDS

Creative Writing and Storytelling

10 WEEK COURSE

09:30 - 11:30

Every Tuesday

Starts 5th June 2018

Sign up at the library for a place

Writing and storytelling can help us to understand ourselves and the world around us.
Come write with me - I am a research student interested in you and how writing can benefit your wellbeing and tell a different story about your lived experiences and prison.
There is no right or wrong way to write.
We will write a short story together and publish it in an anthology with your permission.

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

A3 Participant Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Participant Information Sheet

I am a research student at the University of Sussex working towards a PhD. My interest lies in storytelling and writing, and how this process can help us to understand ourselves and the world around us. I am particularly interested in exploring your lived experiences through writing stories together - how this creative process can benefit your wellbeing, and at the same time tell a different story to the world about your experiences and prison.

Research project title

In their own words – An anthology of creative writing produced by women in prison, in conjunction with a narrative inquiry of female offender discourses and the creative writing|storytelling process within the context of prison reform.

Participation is entirely voluntary

- Before you decide to take part, we will read this sheet together and you will have a chance to ask any questions. There will be no advantage or disadvantage to you if you decide to participate in the research or if you decide not to.
- You can withdraw from the research at any time. When withdrawing from the study, you should let the researcher know that you wish to withdraw. It would be helpful if you could give a reason for your withdrawal from the research, but this is not a requirement.
- When you withdraw from the research you can also request that your writing be withdrawn from the research. You can withdraw your writing from the project up until November 2019. Data that is withdrawn will be destroyed.

What does the research involve?

- The research will involve 10 creative writing classes in which we will write and read together. We will treat our own words with kindness and respect, and we will do the same with the words of others.
- In the class, you will be a research participant and guided through the process of writing a short story using different techniques and themes. The story will be of your own making and will be treated as fiction. This means when you write your story, you will have characters with names of their own and lives of their own. They may have had similar experiences to you or they may not have.
- We will discuss the story structure called the journey of life. In this story structure the main character (heroine or hero) leaves their home and sets of on a difficult journey. They move from somewhere they know into an unknown place. After overcoming a great trial they return home with a newfound wisdom – something that will help themselves and their community.
- In this research there is no right or wrong way to write. Everyone has a story to tell and we will find a way to tell it together. You do not have to read your writing out loud or share it with the group as a whole if you do not feel comfortable doing so.
- At the end of every class, there will be a chance for you to give your thoughts on how the workshop went, what went well and why, what did not go so well and why. You will also have a chance to reflect on what has changed for you from one writing class to the next.

Why should I take part?

- The project will be a supportive and creative way of exploring and representing your experiences of life before, during and after prison through fiction.

- It will give you a chance to express your own experiences and further the understandings of others on how these experiences have shaped your life journey.
- If you agree and give your consent, your writing will be published in an anthology. This anthology of writing will be used to evaluate how the experiences of women who find themselves in prison can be improved. In other words, your writing will not only be of benefit to you, but will also become a map to others.

What if the writing brings up deep emotions and memories?

- This research project is designed to increase self-awareness and wellbeing through self-expression in writing in a supportive environment. Sometimes this can bring up deep emotions and memories. This is normal and you do not need to keep these feelings to yourself. However, if you find these feelings overwhelming, let your mentor or care worker know or you can contact the Samaritans.

Confidentiality and limits

- I will not ask for any personal details in the writing workshops.
- The research and creative writing workshops are undertaken separate from other prison activities.
- All the writing in the workshop will be treated as fiction and with confidentiality, within the legal limit. However, should you disclose information regarding previous uninvestigated/unprosecuted crime or behaviour against prison rules it may be necessary to pass that information on to appropriate authorities.
- You will choose your own writing name/pseudonym or can write anonymously.
- Every care will be taken to remove identifying details of all participants in the written thesis.
- There may be unforeseen circumstances or exceptions to the confidentiality agreement where I become aware of potential harm to you as a research participant (eg self-harm or suicide) or to other third party/other person(s).
- If I feel that it is necessary to break confidentiality, I will discuss this with you as research participant first and explain my concerns. Unless doing so would increase the risk to you or the third party.

Has the project been ethically approved?

- I have designed this research project and can confirm it follows the University of Sussex's Ethical Guidelines. It has been approved by the University Governance Research Committee - Sponsorship Sub-Committee and by the National Research Committee (NRC) of HMPPS.

Contact for further information

If you would like further information on this research project you can direct your queries through your prison librarian, which will pass it on to the researcher.

Please date and sign below to confirm you have read and understood the information sheet

Sign…….

Date…….

A4 Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

CONSENT FORM FOR PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

PROJECT TITLE:
In their own words – An anthology of creative writing produced by women in prison, in conjunction with a narrative enquiry of female offender discourses in exploration of the creative writing|storytelling process within the context of prison reform

Project Approval Reference: 031 WHI/ HMPPS 2017-284

Please initial or tick

I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project. ☐

I have had the project explained to me, and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for my records. ☐

I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- Take part in the writing workshops. ☐
- Make myself available for a further meeting to give feedback on the anthology and also to receive an update on the research progress and give feedback. ☐
- Allow my writing to be published in an anthology – anonymously or under a pseudonym. ☐
- Allow my writing to be discussed in the research thesis and analysis – anonymously or under a pseudonym. ☐

Copyright for the anthology rests with the publisher and editor of the publication.
I understand that as a contributor to the anthology, I will retain copyright for my own work and will sign a non-exclusive contract with the publisher of the anthology. ☐

I understand that any information I provide is confidential within legal limits, and that no information that I disclose will lead to the identification of any individual in the reports on the project, either by the researcher or by any other party. ☐

I understand that should I disclose information regarding previous uninvestigated/unprosecuted crime, behaviour that is against prison rules or behaviour that is potentially harmful to myself or others it may be necessary to pass that information on to appropriate authorities. ☐

I understand that I will write anonymously or under a pseudonym to prevent my identity from being made public. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, that I can refuse to answer individual questions and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. ☐

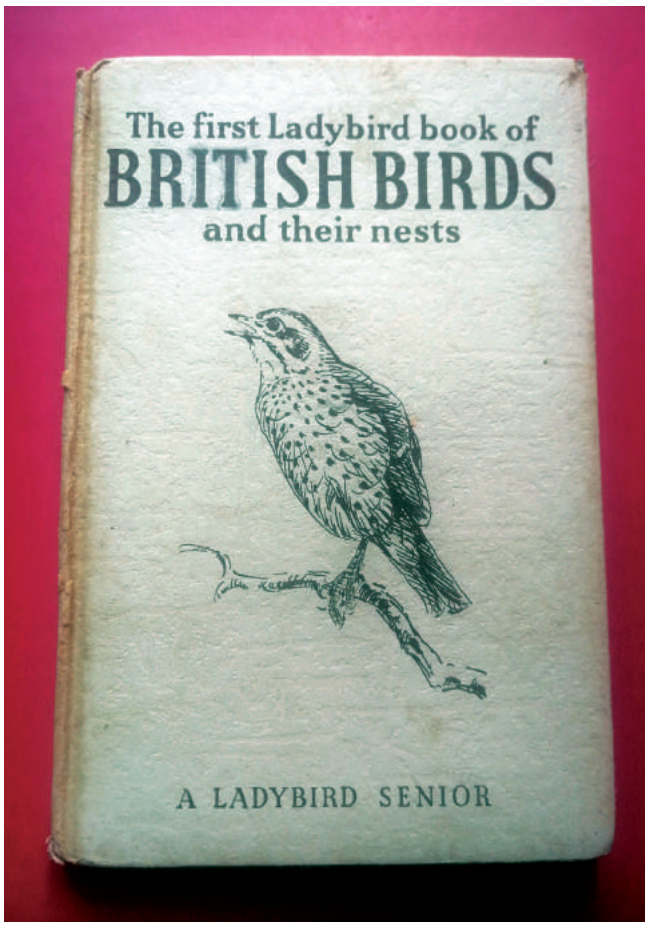
I understand that I can withdraw my data from the project up until November 2019. Data that is withdrawn will be destroyed. ☐

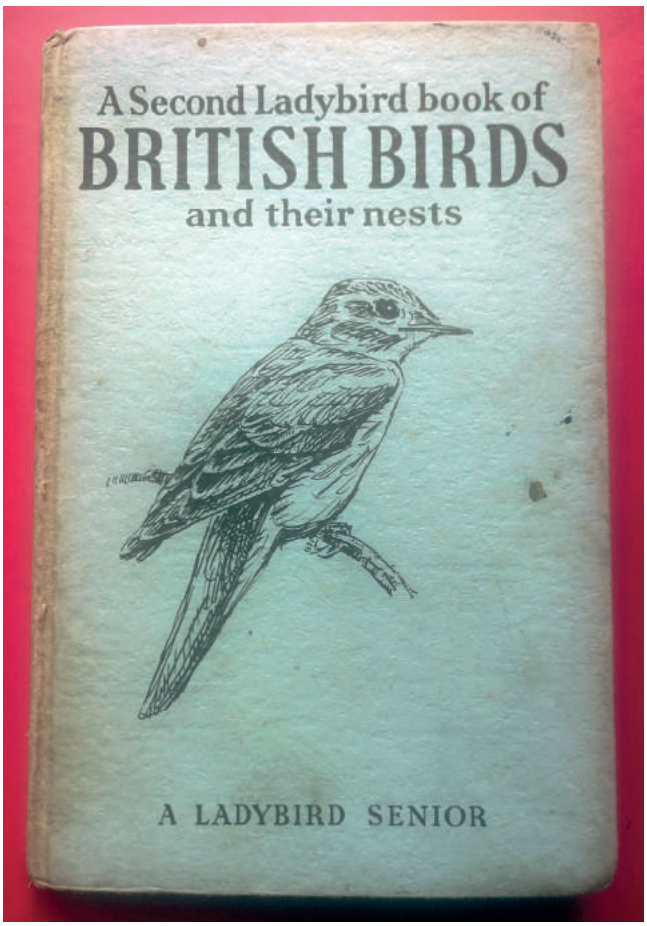
I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. ☐

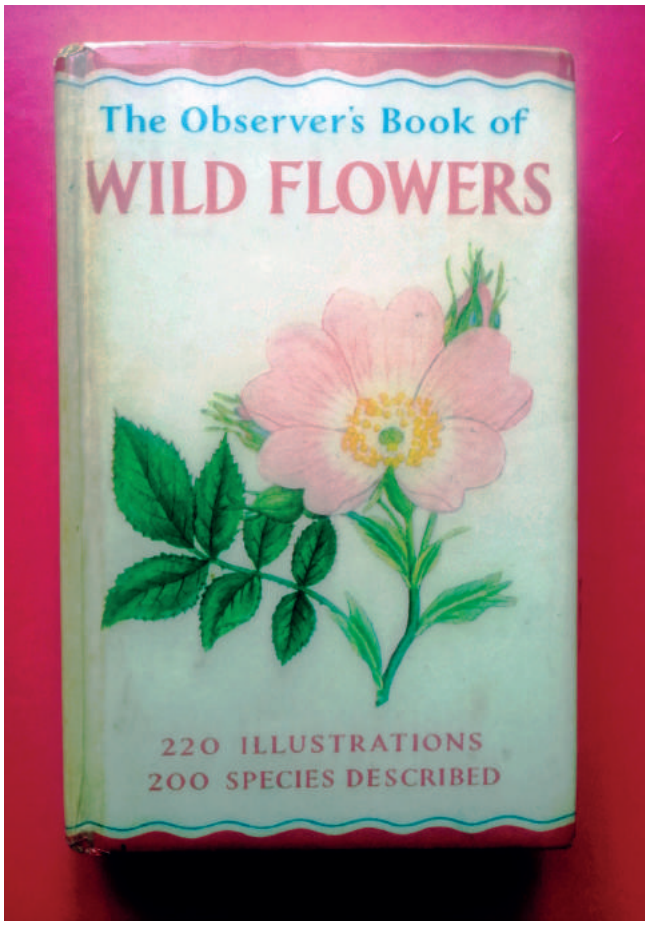
Name: Signature:

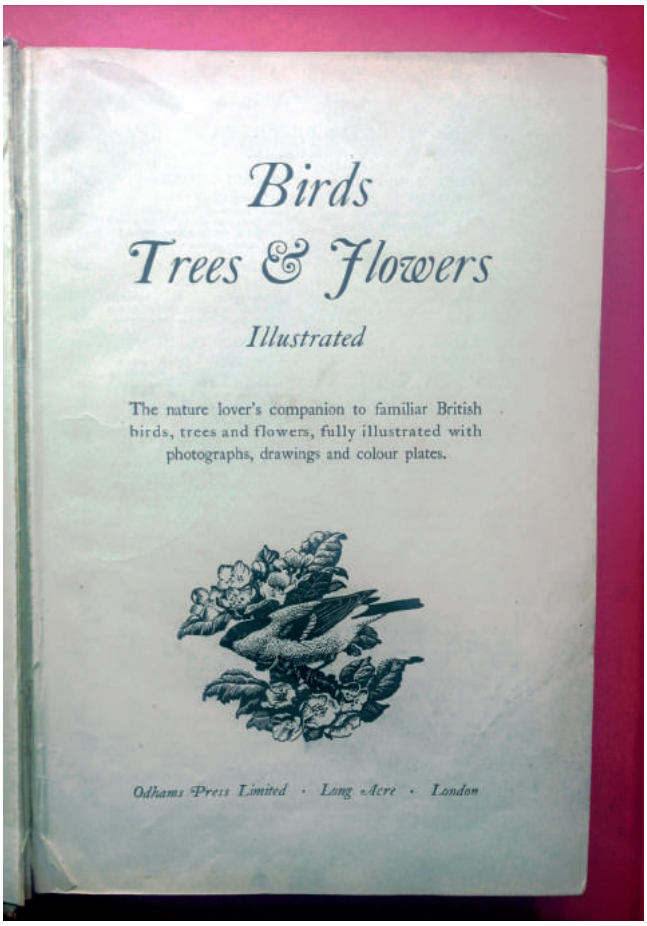
Date:

A5 Pseudonym reference titles


The first Ladybird book of
BRITISH BIRDS
and their nests
A LADYBIRD SENIOR


A Second Ladybird book of
BRITISH BIRDS
and their nests
A LADYBIRD SENIOR


The Observer's Book of
WILD FLOWERS
220 ILLUSTRATIONS
200 SPECIES DESCRIBED


Birds
Trees & Flowers
Illustrated
The nature lover's companion to familiar British birds, trees and flowers, fully illustrated with photographs, drawings and colour plates.
Odhams Press Limited · Long Acre · London

A6 Workshop lesson plan

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

General Overview

The workshops will be delivered by the researcher and will run as creative writing classes. The participating women will be viewed as students in a reflective and supportive writing space with its own rules of conduct based on the notions of kindness, respect and listening as set in the Amherst Writers and Artists (AWA) method. This method focuses on minimising hierarchies in supportive groups, where everyone writes to find confidence in their own voices. When giving feedback, the group will only comment on the writing, ie a sentence, paragraph and/or manuscript, and not on the writer.

Course description

Aim: Participants should experience creative writing as a practice to support self-awareness, self-expression and wellbeing.

Outcome: Participants will be familiar with a range of writing exercises, prompts, and techniques. Participants will have written a short story or poem to be published in an anthology with their permission.

Themes

The themes covered in the research are writing the self:

** i) as a colour – use *freewriting* as introduction to the creative writing process

** ii) as the seasons (each in turn)

** iii) in response to a painting|photo

** iv) in response to listening to a piece of music or bird sounds

** v) in conversation with a stranger

** vi) as a character from one of the group's reading books or short stories

** viii) the colour coming face to face with an animal

** vii) as a reflection glimpsed in a pool of water

Session 4 – Reflecting on sharing, writing to sound and making a list

Part 1

i) Opening

Welcome and greeting - to shift participants from daily life to the contained space of the course and to create a sense of acceptance for each participant.

Take a breath – repeat this process in exactly the same manner as in the previous session

– Participants to find seats and concentrate on their breathing - taking deep breaths and settling themselves (workshop ritual to be repeated at the start of every session). A description of breathing as a skill to slow down time comes from the novel, *The Outlaw Varjak Paw* (Varjak Paw is a kung-fu cat) –

> Fourth Skill: Slow-Time. Varjak breathed deep, and counted. *In-two-three-four.* The world seemed to shimmer. *Out-two-three-four*. Everything slowed down. *In-two-three-four*. But Varjak felt fast. *Out-two-three-four*. Power rose up in him. (Said, 2014, p. 21-25)

– Participants to take a moment to reflect and think of the word sharing – what it means for them. Share one word with the group.

Activity – freewriting our thoughts on sharing [Remind the group that when we write together we need to be quiet so that what we can all concentrate – writing time is quiet time]

– Participants now to think about the word sharing – what does sharing feel like? What does sharing look like? What does sharing sound like? Why do we share? How do we share?

Resources: Notebooks and pens

****

ii) Checking in on the homework - freewriting and reading

– Participants to share if they had managed to do any freewriting in the past week – how did it go? For how many days? What did they write about?

– Participants to share if they had read up to p. 287 in *The Snow Child* – share an image or a sentence that has stayed with them – why?

iii) Writing in response to sound

Activity – Listening to bird-sound and music

- Participants to listen to birdsong and then write in response to it.
- Participants to listen to classical piano music and then write in response to it.
- Participants to listen to a song and then write in response to it.

Resources: A4 paper, pens and CD player

Reflection: Take a few minutes and think about the different pieces of music – was writing to music different than to writing in silence? Why? How did it make you feel? Did it make you see differently when you write your thoughts down?

*****

5 minute biscuit break

Part 2 – Making lists

i) Writing Together

Activity – freewriting exercise: Make a list of 5 things you enjoy doing

– Participants to make a list of 5 things they enjoy doing.

– Participants now to choose one activity/item from their list and write it down – spend time with this activity in their own words. What does it look like? What does it feel like? Is there any particular feature of it that stands out ? Why? How?

Resources: notebooks and pens

***Reflection*:** Take a few minutes and think about the activity you chose - did it surprise you? How? Why?

*****

ii) Reading Together

Activity

– Participants to read together from the novel *The Snow Child.*

– Discussion based on journey of life narrative structure – what we can learn from the novel for our own writing craft.

***Resources*:** books

***Reflection*:** Think about Mabel this week - what part stayed with you? Why?

Part 3

Wrapping up

i) Writing and reading homework

End the session and communicate writing homework and reading preparation for following session.

To do:

Participants to write and explore their season and place:

* freewriting for 10 minutes a day (or more if you want to!)

* find one image or sentence you like from your writing and expand it/rewrite it into a paragraph

Participants to read:

* up to p.355 in *The Snow Child*

* find a sentence or image you like and come share why

* find mentions of sound

*****

ii) Feedback form

– Participants to fill in the feedback form - what went well and why; what did not go so well and why? Any other thoughts – has anything changed for them in their writing since last week's session?

*****

iii) Final Reflection

– Participants to think of sharing - is this still the same season or has it changed? Why? How?

*****

A7 Workshop agenda for research participants

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

10 July 2018 – Agenda session 6 Writing together and reading

Revisiting our animals – swapping places; writing about people – familiar and unfamiliar/strangers

Part 1

i) Welcome and settling in

* Take a breath – how am I feeling today – describe in one word – you can also use your season

* Activity: Revisiting our animals – swapping places

a) freewriting exercise – what if… you and your animal (pet or unfamiliar) swapped places? What if you became the swan, the pigeon, the dragon, the lion, the puppy?

- For example, explore how it feels to show unconditional love and loyalty (as you described your pet show to you).
- Or, describe how does it feel to have the power, protectiveness, aloofness that your pet or animal has.
- Or how does your pet or animal view the world and you? Why? How?
- Describe how it feels like when someone cares for you.

ii) Checking in with Grandmother, Sophia and *The Summer Book;* and last week's freewriting homework

* Share an image or a sentence that has stayed with you – why?
* How did you find reading the new shorter, standalone chapters?

Part 2

i) Writing together -

* Activity: Try and see what happens when we write about people…

a) freewriting exercise - write about you or your season in conversation/talking with a stranger.

b) freewriting exercise - write about you or your season in conversation/talking with a person that you know or have known.

c) reflection - take a few minutes and think about your different pieces of writing. Compare the two experiences of being in conversation with a stranger and with someone you know. Were you or your season different when you spoke/communicated with the familiar person to when you with someone unfamiliar? How? Why? Did it surprise you?

** 5 minute biscuit break **

ii) Reading together – if there is time!

* Activity: reading from *The Summer Book*

Part 3

i) Wrapping up

ii) Feedback form

iii) Homework…

a) Write

* freewriting for 10 minutes a day (or more if you want to!)
* look back at your own writing – see if you can bring two different parts together and begin your story

b) Read:

* from p.59 up to p.94 in *The Summer Book*
* find a sentence or image you like and come share why
* find mentions of colour, seasons, sound and animals

*****

Writing by our own writers taking part in the workshops

Sharing

Sharing is growing close to the people that I engage with. The silence around me, when we write, feels heavy and full. I can almost touch it, pregnant with anticipation. I feel excited to know what is going to be shared. Something to be guarded over like jewels that are important, highly prized, because the moment is fleeting. What may be shared in one moment may be gone in the next breath.

[26 June 2018]

The black bird and his baby do not visit anymore.
Maybe they have moved?

[3 July 2018]

Driving feels like I am in charge. Just being by myself.

[26 June 2018]

Swimming in the sea

Swimming in the sea
envelops me
makes me light
crisp and clear.
Sunlight reflecting off the salt
dazzles and calms
allows me to think, to focus, stay calm.
Swimming in the sea
gives me energy.
It is my peace and tranquillity.

[26 June 2018]

Walking in the rain

Walking in the rain
is the feeling of a thunderstorm, brewing in the air suddenly bursting from the sky
a deep relief, like an overflowing bosom
crescendos of delight as the thunder cracks and whips, ferocious and alive
free and sublime, the delight of letting go
drenched from head to toe, not a care in the world as the rain washes away my fears.

[26 June 2018]

A8 Completion Certificate

Certificate of Participation

This certificate hereby certifies that

_____

participated in and made valuable creative writing contributions
to the PhD research project - In their Own Words

From: 5 June 2018 to 7 August 2018

_____

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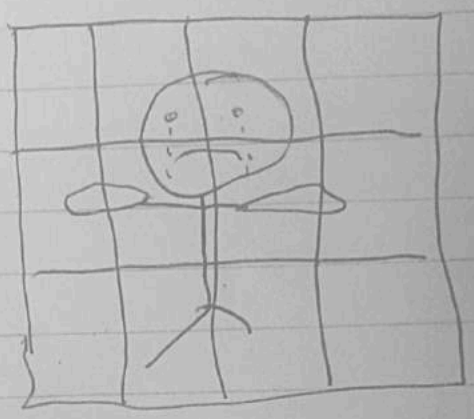
A9 Research material example – Writing together

MY WORST NIGHTMARE BEING IN BRONIZEFIELD PRISON

UNHAPPY

FOOD BAD

BARS

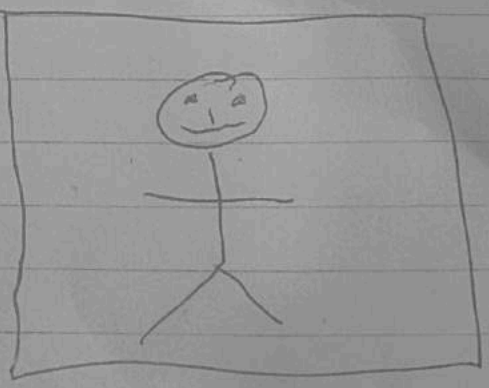


Came to prison I was so scared and crying lot I didn't know what to think Being in prison Bars everywhere lock up all the time food was Bad Tea was trouble I was so scared to even come out of my cell officer come in to my room and said to me stop crying and get on with it still crying and scared the officer even made me worst got letters from family that cheer me up seeing my family cheer me up got little bit better when officer said if we can get you in to a open prison would you like to go yes please I said I stop crying and cheer up alot better

EAST SUTTON PARK

OPEN PRISON
NO BARS

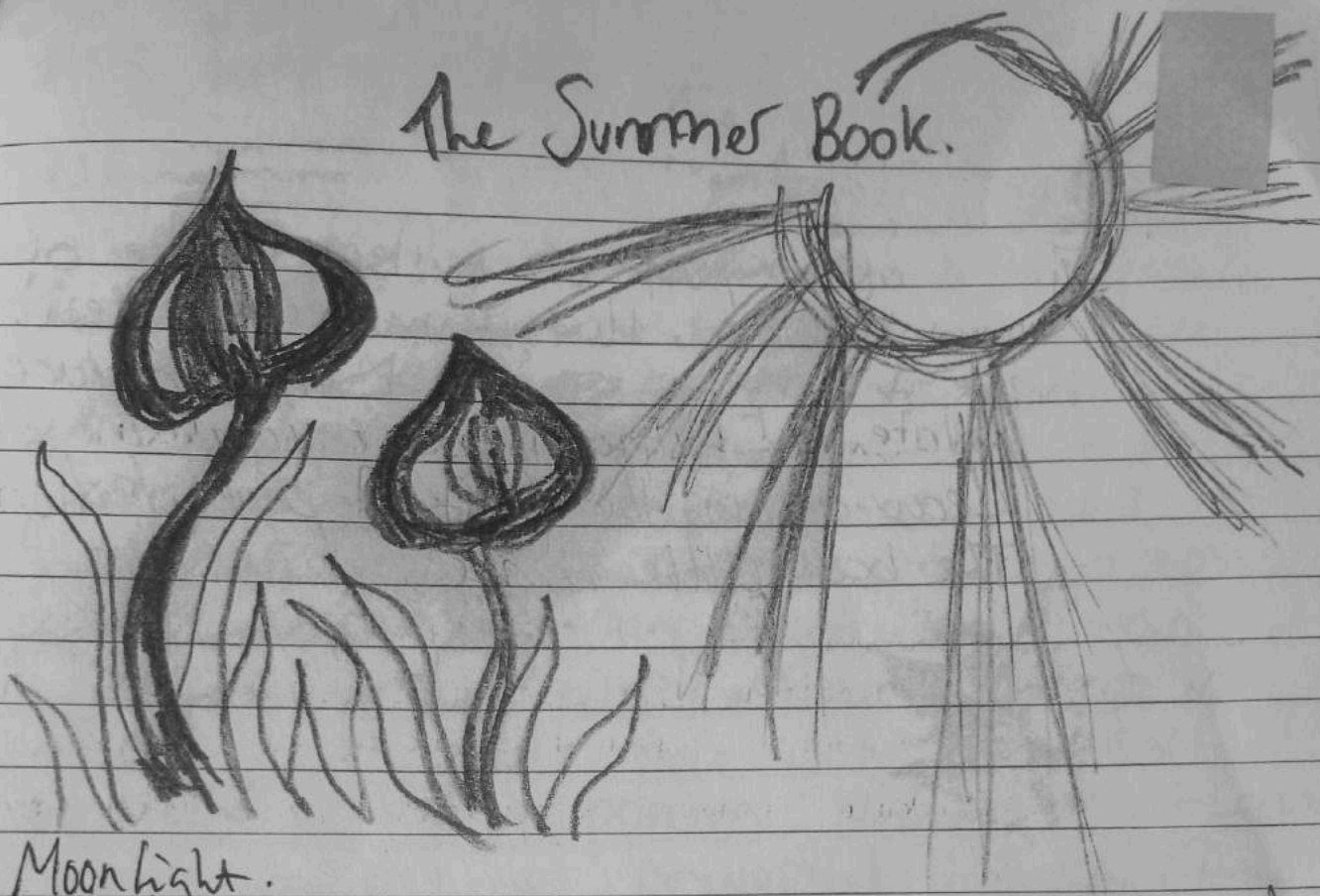
VERY HAPPY
FOOD NICE



So happy here in East Sutton Park girls are nice officers are nice 12 weeks now doing lot of work here courses to do maths English cooking I will be home on Tag for christmas, reading books

A10 Research material example – Reading together

The Summer Book.



P.26 Moonlight.

"A channel opened very slowly in the floor, and all the thier luggage floated out in the river of moonlight. All the suitcases were open and full of darkness and moss, and none of them ever came back."

Each 'chapter' seems full in it's self. Has a beginning - Middle and End. More abstract in its writing. Challenges the reader to search and imagine the scene.
I enjoy the description so much. Really descriptive.