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Repetition as Revision:

Explored through the Revision of Place
in Jackie Kay's *Fiere*, Kathleen Jamie's *The Tree House*,
and *Crane*, a Creative Composition by Lynn Davidson

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Abstract

This thesis examines anaphora, parallelism, and repetends, and asks if and how these techniques of repetition allow for negotiation among meanings, contexts and possibilities in contemporary poetry. The thesis is comprised of two sections, creative and critical, with a seventy percent creative and thirty percent critical split.

The critical study is based on a close analysis of anaphora and parallelism in Jackie Kay's *Fiere* (2010) and repetends in Kathleen Jamie's *The Tree House* (2004), while repetition is explored creatively through *Crane*, an original collection of poetry shaped and informed by the critical research.

Crane uses techniques of formal repetition to enquire into cultural and emotional links to place, and the impact of return journeys to significant places on a reimagining of place and self. There are five sections in *Crane*, each of which uses repetition slightly differently to engage with questions of movement between places. The collection uses repetition to explore how 'going back' can be a powerful part of the process of revising identity and integrating change. The critical portion argues that Scottish poets Kay and Jamie emphasise the effects of repetition to explore the perceived dichotomy of having deep roots in a national poetic tradition yet questioning nationalistic ideologies that can come with that tradition. Kay uses the highly structured techniques of anaphora and parallelism to layer possibilities for place and belonging; Jamie's use of the less formally structured technique of intertextual repetends draws attention to the responsive and mutable nature of language in order to ask questions about compositions of place within the natural world.

The thesis argues that repeated words alter in meaning due to the influence of syntactic environment. Further, it claims that as the repeated word moves through different syntactic contexts with the resulting alterations in aspects of its meaning, it can

develop figurative meaning and provide possibilities for re-imagining some established narratives – specifically for this thesis, concepts of identity and place.

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Preface to *Crane*

There are five sections, or movements, in *Crane*. I prefer to call them movements because they are about journeys and they also push off from each other in different directions. The movements are called “In Circles,” “Return to the Island,” “Crossing Over,” “The Old Machines,” and “Into Composition.” There are many return journeys in *Crane* and they touch on cultural and spiritual links to place, or to places, and raise questions about how places are shaped by what we bring to them and how we remember them. In *Place, A Short Introduction* (2004) Tim Cresswell describes place as “always in process” (37) and “negotiated over time...through reiterative social practice” (38) and “made and remade on a daily basis” (39). I wondered, when you go back to an important place – for example, the place you were born, or the place where you fell into or lost love, or the place where you felt autonomous for the first time – what do you find? Do you find the same place? And when you return, as you must, are you changed? At the same time as knowing I wanted to write about return journeys I also knew I wanted to write about poetic repetition because I recognized that I could put the same questions to it. Repetition is a form of “going back” and of return. The return, as with physical returns to places of importance, involves a shift in place and alteration in meaning. The poetry I read showed me that going back was powerful and powerfully linked to change, so I thought I would use repetition in my own work in an attempt to understand its machinery.

For example, I used anaphora and parallelism, which are among the oldest of the world’s poetic techniques. Anaphora repeats a word or words at the beginning of successive lines or phrases and parallelism repeats grammatical patterns with a poem. Both techniques are often used in religious and devotional poetry. I wanted the long

reach back to tradition that these techniques can bring with them, along with the way they reach back structurally within a poem. I am interested in what the long reach back brings with it, particularly the resonances of words and images, from such far and deep traditions. I also use an intertextual repetition in *Crane* – the word “compose” (sometimes composed). “To compose” means to make a considered arrangement of various elements into a single form, for example an arrangement of notes into a tune or words and sounds into a poem. I use the word “compose” to explore the influence of context on meaning. For example, the placement of “compose” in “The Poet Composes His World” suggests an unexamined confidence in what poetry and the composition of elements can achieve. Other placements suggest a more organic and interactive composition: for example, the last appearance of “compose” in “Southern Lights” presents a kakapo feather which may also be the aurora australis or a piece of art. I wanted the use of “compose” through the collection to instigate a shift from reflecting a culturally and politically composed “world view” through the lens of poetry to reflecting a more fluid and inclusive politics of identity and environmental awareness through the lens of poetics.

Using repetition includes an element of working in the dark. My challenge was to catch up with and make the most of the alterations that repetition enables. I knew that the techniques of repetition would “do something” to the meaning, connotations and resonance of the poem but it wasn’t immediately clear what the change would be. I followed along behind the machinery of repetition to divine and define direction and emphasis of meaning.

I chose to write a long sequence of linked sonnets, “Kapiti Island Sonnets,” in part to practice the repetition of form (with variations). In the sonnets I wrote about journeys to, and from, the New Zealand mainland and Kapiti Island. I wrote linked

sonnets rather than a prose piece because I wanted to drop down deeply into moments rather than achieve a linear account. The poems fracture the storyline, which suits my themes of recalibration and movement away from and back to the “mainland” with its presiding narrative.

This is one of two island sequences in the collection; the other is about a return visit to the Isle of Islay in Scotland. Islands in the sense of being a geographical fragment, an outlier, tempt one to imagine they are, if not liberated from the ideas and ideals of the mainland, at least at a distance from them. Either in the being on, or in the going to these islands, there can be a recalibration in one’s relationship/s with the past, as one moves between the fragment and the whole, between the past and the future, between the socialised and the individual self, between potential selves and between knowing and not knowing. In going back to the island the speaker/s in the poems renegotiate and update their identification with a significant place.

My exploration of repetition and its impact on concepts of place has been guided and informed by analysing how Scottish poets Jackie Kay and Kathleen Jamie use repetition to address the complexity and fluidity of place in their collections *Fiere* and *The Tree House*. Although the poets have different emphases in their work – Kay more focused on identity and the possibility of multiple origins and Jamie on our interactions with the land – both poets use devices of repetition to suggest multiple possibilities for belonging. While the work of both poets is informed and influenced by their Scottish literary forebears, especially Robert Burns, the poems are at once less certain than these earlier works and more accommodating of a fragile, mobile and diverse world. Both poets use repetition to speculate on the shape of that world and our possible interactions with it. In *Crane* I similarly use devices of repetition to reveal how a different point of

view can provide new ways to imagine and connect to place, or to places, including my own connection to New Zealand and to Scotland.

Using repetition to help me explore why going back was so powerful and so powerfully linked to change confirmed that both sorts of “going back” involve resonating with a previous iteration at the same time as revealing change. A new placement provides a new viewpoint that may alter connotations, evocations and ways of seeing. Both parts of the process seem vital for a reimagining of self and of place.

Crane

Lynn Davidson

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The Poet Composes His World

The Poet was born into his poetry – expelled bawling into its long lines.

First he fell in love with the form of language, the spirit of thought, the tension that drew them together. Maybe what he loved was like a woman that he picked up by her mobile waist and moved around.

Maybe what he loved was like a child who did not know and brought all of his not-knowing into the house in his small, full hands, like a dog bringing a paper or a pipe. How could he not love the child?

He loved the child as much as he could say.

Black, white, young, old, boy, girl, he received them the same because, he wrote, they are equal: equal daughters, equal sons, in that they are like grass that grows along the long lines of his birthplace.

The lines he loved and coupled with and impregnated and birthed and raised. Equal daughters equal sons.

Maybe they had a few hard winters when the winds came and the shapes of all the different letters created their own unique howling sound. It is only time and weather he told himself. Consoled himself.

All the while the young and old men, the women and the children were still fetching and gathering the creaking, lapping, tumbling world in – holding it to their chests as it washed around their feet.

In Circles

Bonfire on Kapiti Island

The mainland is rendered down
silvers and is gone.

My heart is green and raw – a pea not a heart –
front to the fire back to the wind.

The groan of stone on stone unsettles
me as I unsettle them.

A passing orca's generator heart opens
and closes the island like a door.

Behind me green bush is a swaying glossary
I could lose myself in –

leaf bird tree feather bone

rock ponga pebble koru stone

bone-fire oil-lamp song

heart gale right whale wrong

Inside Kapiti Island

It's no use turning my head aside now – this is what I wanted
to be inside the island, inside its green puzzle

so this empty house with its stroke victim slump
is history – press in

the brown-edged rhododendrons with their sharp, glossy leaves
the freesias so sweet in the half-shade they suggest their own decay

press them in. Make a daybook of yesterday. Note how the island
absorbs the house, the garden, into its dark, vegetable centre.

But I want to say *is this your freedom?*

And why would you live here? Would you live here?

And how would you make differences in the repeating days?

And who would chose loneliness?

It didn't look like this from the mainland.

Don't you think? It didn't look like this?

The Interislander

In the ship's café a man with a heart attack wouldn't release
a pamphlet of the Kepler track which in his fist went damp, obscure, a contour-map.

The ferry slowed then turned a circle so hard it seemed to be turning on us,
its passengers, so when the captain announced we were returning we already knew –

we had felt the deep spiralling of water beneath –
we got that we were going back.

Those of us not so obviously dying walked quickly away from the café,
each footstep's pressure on the deck, its sound – the slap

or clack – bearing no relation
to the man who clutched and grimaced on the floor.

We didn't stop walking until far enough away (at the bow, the stern) to think
death a kind of life-long disability we luckily luckily didn't have.

But the helix twist beneath all of us wouldn't let go; it compromised
our walking, made a flutter in our eyes.

Our talk lifted like gulls above our bodies at the railings
with their scattered surface rhythms from their ancient deep-red gorges.

Back to Front

My lover and I had been
to the hot baths at Hanmer Springs
– Hanmer in the fold of mountains.
Warm from the inside out
we drove past a country fair and stopped to
let the outside in because we were so
so in love with everything –
the clamorous vaults of winter air
our bird lungs warm
the warmth between our legs
(it seemed we had released our past
our dead) we were
greedy for the fair brewing among the black-
beech and rimu.

We hopped out
pushed the cold doors shut with the tips of our
fingers and walked into
a rack of pigs on hooks – small to large
close-up bristling coat, black-blood at the nose
fat silver hooks passed between tendon and bone
breeze whistling through the cleft of skyward hooves –

this was the corridor in – there was more to come.

Boys and girls in swannies and gumboots
doing an obstacle course, their parents
on the side-lines yelling blunt motivations
each child's neck bound
by the front legs of a piglet
dead – strapped to their backs.

The children staggered with their burdens

like old men and old women
the piglet heads tipped back and juddering
and when they dropped to crawl under a pole
the dead face thumped forward onto their neck, or head
or shoulder. A thump, a thump, *a tap*.

And when they climbed over the last hay bale
and reached the end the parents called
'Now go back!' and my lover laughed.

At the car the sky had fallen messily
into the valleys,
my hand was clumsy, cold and blue,
I pulled at the door handle then let it slip
bent my fingernail right back.
Belted in and facing out, your hand
beating time on my thigh
to some infernal inner song you knew
you'd lost me somewhere back between
the pigs and kids – who knows?
You just felt something in me
and between us fade.

We will not wake up
again together spooning
the universe
spooning the perfect, perfectly composed
universe into each other
into each other's
hungry mouths.

A Hillside of Houses Leaves

Steeped in weather the old wooden houses
remember their bird-selves and unfold
barely-jointed wings.

Door frames spring apart into
the steeple shape of breastbones

there is a woody straining
then the clatter of press and lift
and dozens of pairs of outstretched
wings slow-beat.

The mainland shuffles back
the sea floods underneath.

Splinters feather frost-burr
along leeches beams.

People curl inside
the bones that keep them
that will not keep them long.

The Desert Road

Mount Ruapehu breaches clouds –
a whale arrested in a dive
fluke still planted in the earth.

Driving back through tussock
barnacles of shining white
and the high ice-creaking calls locate us.

Wet banks move, striated, through slow day-lights
shunt time, whole eras, ahead and behind
carry small architecture on great backs.

We cut across this old wake, our father,
the suspension shakes and shakes
we can't make the corners fast.

It gets dark and the languages come out
in constellations and even though we don't know how
we follow them to familiar places.

Return to the Island

Kapiti Island Sonnets

The Father

i

Two weeks back this only child, this daughter
on my doorstep – glittering and tense –
I ask her in
(under the rough bridge of my arms). She
trails a questionable lover
whose wary look I recognise and pity
almost. She wants ... she says, and I tense,
poised to grab this gift, this chance to say *yes*
because between us lately there is nothing
but arriving and leaving –
so yes, okay, we'll take the boat two weeks from now
her, me, the boyfriend, and go back to our first house on the island.
The island. We look at it through the window, across the Bay.
I keep my mouth closed. A journey steps us forward.

ii

I'd have liked us to sit on the clean shoreline listening to driftwood tick in
late on stilettos from some giant wake
but my daughter has rushed off with that boy and ...
it's dusk and I know how quickly the bush closes in
to swallow a person. I thought they might be here,
in this clearing, this globe of light – the sort of place
where homes are imagined, *see*
this is where we lived.
I built a home in this yellow space.
We shouldn't have returned
to where she was a child. These far places
release their stories like spores.
There's danger in living on earth's edges
only sipping at what sustains us.

iii

There are no parks

no playing fields

no game of spotlight quartering

the dark.

No place to raise a child.

From such extreme experiments

extreme mistakes are made.

Look here, under the rotting deck

a plastic sack of compost.

That's rich when the whole place

the whole island

its so-called pristine beauty

just grows and falls and rots –

it generates decay!

iv

He's got a silver spike
above his chin. I can't help it
I imagine the bit inside his mouth
chipping at his teeth
and I wonder if the spike hurts my daughter, or
if it makes her hurt him. A kiss!
Was it ever such a dangerous thing?
Does he take it out or does the moon
glean off it as he sleeps, keeping her awake
back at the flat where she lives –
where newspapers flap at the back door
in a slicing wind, and each night
ambulances gush along the street like debris
in a spring tide.

v

I smell their fire.

It drifts over and raises the songs through me

like spirits through a still,

old notes through a rough stack –

the songs my father sang into a reel to reel tape –

lyrics netted by whisky.

Let them have their fire.

Let them slip sideways into each other's arms.

I can't find anywhere to sleep, sleep also requires

usual rhythms. The language of taps and windows

doors and sheets. The racket of TV turned off, the drag of drapes.

I sing ballads to their bitter ends. What

is that gull flapping around for? Shouldn't

gulls be asleep? Shouldn't I, for safety's sake, stay awake?

vi

When I first visited this country

from Aberdeen

I had the oil in Shetland's Sullom Voe

and its rewards on my mind – but

I met her mother and was lost

to home and slick new ways of making dough.

I let go and woke up to these whole new

architectures of light – I mean sunshine not holy –

lean-to's of light, I-beams of yellow,

(I look back as if to childhood, to those early days)

and love, a woman's curve, moorings for the names of places –

Falkirk, Shetland, Taranaki, Kapiti.

And drawing deep beneath them

Grangemouth, Sullom Voe, Petralgas, Motonui.

vii

Only me now, and the morepork.

My daughter with her spiked boy has,
out of temper, drawn away.

She still blames me for you, my wife, my love,
who when losing all the heavy business of pulse
and neuron

lifted your hollow singing bones and, shimmering double
like a kingfisher or swallow, left us,

we frayed primaries

cast

bound

to this covenant –

to re-form without you,

and carry on.

viii

I hear you say leave her
to make her own mistakes
and so I would, I did!

But she invited me
on this ludicrous journey
and

I
came!

Leaving things at home undone.
And you would say that's probably
enough, that she invited me
and I came, and that the rest
is just theatre.

And you'd be right my sweet, she has
this night, this moon, our worried love, again.

The Daughter

i

I was a child so

finely pitched

tuned

in perfect measure

to wavelength

and crosswind

ribs cut on the quarter,

spruced for acoustics.

Like all children

I amplified –

vibrations through hair,

turns and returns. Gull cries.

My violin made high notes

above the sea's deep percussion.

ii

Wearing a red sleeveless dress and with her long hair loose
my mother shook the whole world into being.

She pulled silver vessels from the oven
tipped out steaming bread, then sunk them.

She centred the Mirek Smíšek soup dish on the table,
its clay a blend of West Coast and Golden Bay –

the warm speckle of salt glaze
my fingers knew –

she drew from it like drawing
from a well our winter soups, our stews,

then angled gently into the sink
poured water over it – a nightly baptism.

It's all we had and all we needed.

Made of here and not here.

iii

The crystal-chandelier-tinkle of our old dinghy
moving across water. Our starry life

tightened across night until the bow deepened
and the hair was taut.

My mother showed me how to rosin the strings
to avoid slick spots

or silence where sound should be. I
played in a jersey brilliant with salt. I played at sea.

I carried my violin carefully up the beach
while behind me my parents

hauled the clinker into gravity
grinding it through pebbles.

On solid amber afternoons inside the pine scent
of trees I barely knew, I kept made-up friends afloat.

iv

Wishbone is what they called me
when I snapped the bone and wished

to leave.

At school on the mainland I found

so many kids it made me ordinary
and the swarm of us supreme – a stand

of bones, a canopy of hair
and, at our desks, a root system of arms and legs.

Perhaps, in retrospect, I wasn't
at the centre of the universe.

Perhaps we left the island
because *they* wanted to go.

Perhaps they decided things for me
despite me sitting cross-legged and stubborn at their feet.

v

I had the tui tattooed into me
after I left New Zealand that first time.

I showed the man in New Orleans a photo
and made a garbled attempt to sing one of its songs –

he laughed and leaned over my ankle
and the needle started a monotone hum. He found the bird

and drew it up through me. *Stop holding your breath*
he said, and, *Why didn't you get it done back home?*

Everyone says *back home* when they're away.

And now I'm back and nowhere more back to go. The island

is the same – constant change with rhythms. It was no ideal
life for me. It was life. So I came back to get the girl who stayed behind

daydreaming on the mustard-coloured cushions of the window seat
and bring her to the mainland inside these grown-up bones.

The Boyfriend

i

Who would call their daughter Ballad?

I mean, most people want their kids to turn out

a certain way, but that's pushing things,

wanting too much to orchestrate:

the demotic voice,

calling history song by song. And talking

of singing, that's the old man

singing in Scots.

Like the pulsing dot on a GPS

I can hear right where he is.

Her face has that scuttling, ears-back look.

I put my arm around her.

No questions.

I hold her cold hand as night rises.

ii

He doesn't much like me. But

I've been around longer than he thinks.

Picked his songbird up in my cab in New York

- both of us on our OE. Me driving and learning
about the wide, the long economic migration.

The Pakistani and Punjabi cabbies

with their million-mile-eyes

reciting poems to each other, book-length epics

across the Himalayas into mobile phones on conference call

while carrying their fare (who are deaf to flowering meadows).

Distance making their hearts grow

distant – like a radio. The heart knows the way home – they told me,

and the back of the hand, and the cupped hand

into which is dropped currency.

iii

In New York in those popping streets with
the chew and yaw of Manhattan speech
I ran some home rhythms through my cab –
slid The Little Bushman in the machine
cracked open some conversations
got past mere information with its same
end-point address to share deeper
coordinates – the original
places, the places we come from.
If I didn't sing a prince's journey through villages suspended
below terraced irrigation
above a milky winter river
I talked up home some nights until it flared like new growth
after the dropping down of water.

iv

I caught this kiwi girl, the old man's one daughter, on a cold night.

She was busking around New York all skin

(bright) and bones (long)

she, they (violin and girl), hail me. Later

when I turn with my hand out she drops

a coin and dips into the dusk

of the leg/feet zone, her fingers scrabble

and it's like she's dropped inside me just

like that. I could count my slow-mo heartbeats

on the abacus of her upper spine, that place

where spine meets skull it stops

completely. I said *This one's on me*

if I can buy you a drink

Okay, she said, retrieving the coin. Slipping it into her coat pocket.

The island

i

They cut through weed and current
flicker and fin to get in. Bare
feet on bones and feathers
the socket-tug of boat
the clip of stones.

I show them the oystercatcher
who bends to a brimming water hole
like the musculature of consonant
bends to sip at vowel
to make words make
this wind that howls, make
the frequencies for language
from what was once just
clicking sounds.

ii

The last time she came her little-girl ankle was bare,
where now a storm-blown tui – one wing fetched
out of symmetry – is tattooed
like it fell out of flight
against her and wild weather
holds it there.

I am

(to think in human terms)

reminded

that I can also petrify by process:

there was a day, a loud southerly, when she

became pressed against a taupata

with so much of my breath in her

she couldn't breathe.

iii

The mother liked when the cold
shot through without warning.

That last day she and the girl
were pulling mussels off rocks
and she cocked her head bird-like as if
to better hear temperature.

Next stop Antarctica she laughed.

Her geography shaky.

Twelve mussels in a red plastic bucket. A song
about the earth and its crust. A song
about a bird's back. Blue soup bowls
bristling with shells and mantles.

The girl wore a dark-red woollen cloak.

The sky turned red. And then the water.

v

The boyfriend's face emerges from a hood

like a face in a Fomison painting –

coming into presence as you look.

But when he crouches over fire he could be

Zurbaran's St Francis. Framed in soft folds

the branches of his hands hold

a white skull like a bud.

I'm trying to say he's doing his best and

I know he will not charge the girl

for shelter. This sort of love

the father shies away from because he wonders

how, in the end, you balance the books. For his confusion

look to their stories about daughters.

Look to their stories about sons.

vi

It's not my usual way to speculate.

I offer shape

form and light.

It's their gig to broker

substance

(example: *stone is mostly air*

and constantly

moving.)

Parts of me are stone

and those parts

are heavy.

But willingly I share the sounds

and spaces with those who answer some deep call

to sing my vowels and consonants. To make me.

Crossing Over

We Talk of Crossing

I was lost in the middle of a field.
Couldn't imagine danger, peril
hungers. Couldn't ascend, couldn't
test my muscle.

Canopy and dapple gone –
tipped out like dog-bowl water.
I wavered in the depressions
from sheep and cattle.

In the empty field I was missing
the bother of children and parents. I was
adrift. Longing
for company's enclosure.

To my surprise they gathered
out of the dimness,
nosed at my hand – leather-winged bats
with their old-world smiles.

I followed them to a valley
with kahikatea, ferns and
the lily's soft nightlight. And shells

for tools and above me, along the spine,

beech forest with the wind that scares
and scatters us. And below me the creek we talk
of crossing. And shells for tools
and the river of the spine and the great

shoulders of the great

hills lifting

and it's dark and the bats leave me and all this
still to climb.

On Going

The plane drops its grey shadow in the sea
and the shadow pulls back slightly, like an anchor.

I'm going, yes, but tangled up with leaving.

I close my eyes and try to reassemble.

Hours go by and elements still gather.

At dawn I caught a taxi to the airport
and saw first light ignite the hillside houses –
and I thought about how still life artists deepen
the surface of their objects with a bloom
that, without saying, evokes a place with people
the way those rising houses implied rooms
to escape the wind, to circle in, to slacken.

Hours go by and elements still gather.

Each day my waking children, just by naming
assembled all the solid things of world,
the bath, stove, chair, the bed, the window,
the shoe, the dinosaur, the door, the wall.

Then in a kind of via negativa
they composed two empty rooms by leaving home.

I said it was an anchor but it's not.

It's a shadow roughly like a kiss.

Across the sea our shifting, hopeful image.

Some say that planes are dead and airless spaces.

Not dead, I think, but deep, with lights on exits.

Hours go by till I look out my window –

to see this second dawn, this rainbow morning

uncouple at its centre from red earth.

At first I feel unravelled, without purpose,

- a cloud, a crease in sky and I am lost.

We tilt into thin air, that fragile outscapes,

we press our bulk against some scrubby cloud

as though against our mother's side for safety

as though there is a place for us to hide.

Then this second dawn that rises all around me –

this long, slow morning with its double bloom –

evokes those first, wild moments of strange waking

from the dream's uncanny tilt to steady places.

Inside the plane we turned to face our windows,

we clutch of hatchlings straining from our nests.

The ground like an oiled platform lifts to meet us

and we fumble with warm buckles on our laps.

We stand in aisles with fists around our baggage.

We stand in isles with wintered earth behind.

We stand like grass in summer, barely moving,

yet like an ear the earth hears news of us.

Inside our cells the numbers of our children.

Inside this surface life, a living room.

At an Art Gallery in Melbourne

I am encouraged
to lay a white sheet on the floor
and flick the paintings open across it.
I haven't looked at paintings
this way before
with touching and opening.
I cradle the big, loose curl
of canvas then flick
and tip
and the desert rises like bread,
the red soil rises.
My fingers burn
with touching and
the dots lead me astray.
Why did she say to unravel
such big country
I do not have words for?
The hot sand hisses, buries
my feet.
A taxi pulls up outside and
breathes the artists out
and the gallery assistant
turns up the tape of their singing

and I step back being very
very careful not to step on
all the unrolled
all the colours
and the rhythms.

My legs burn where I have crouched
my feet burn from the sand
my fingers burn from rolling back.

The taxi doors bang

I put my hot hand against my face
and someone

steps in

and looks at me

from a distance

all the way across big country

to where I stand

between fire and sun

small as an ant

deep in-

land at Fitzroy Crossing.

Yellow Feathers

I'd been teaching in the old
Infectious Diseases Hospital –
we'd been talking about voice
for four hours.

I went to the Aids Memorial Garden
to unwind.

First I saw the sign:

Men Doing Tree Work.

Then, from the white gum's vast spread
of branches
thick ropes hung, almost
touching the ground.

Up in the branches
where the hanging ropes begun
crouched men
in high-viz vests
– yellow, orange, green –
quite still, barely flickering
up there in the eucalypt haze.

Below the men
the heavy ropes hung
deep and still in pooled sunlight.

I also stood still,

my hands hanging.

All of us as if

and the tree trailing its ropes

like a hot air balloon

except

then later, on the train, going home

a shabby man sat beside me.

Perched on his arm

a sulphur crested cockatoo and

without words, just with a gesture

he had the bird unfold

one wing to show the sweep

of yellow feathers beneath.

Then he said, you can touch him.

He won't hurt you.

Touch him here.

Like this.

After the Fall

Is this still the day of days?

Will the whole town shift beyond the plains?

A slow sun lifts its bulk above our rooves.

The poppies bow and drop their scarlet ruffs.

Then it is done. Just pack what you can carry.

Go through the list of creatures that must come.

Tell the power men to disconnect the power.

Unfurl the pythons from the power lines.

The hermit's shoulders lift above her sill.

She draws her chair as close as she is able,

eats her breakfast toast and crows

fly from the grey tin roof like arrows.

She's long been ready for this breaking day

of silver rivers closed and red earth opened.

She built stonewalls to shade the hives and hutches –

Each quick hand a solace for the other.

Some leave on bikes and others leave on foot.

We pass a field liquescent with rosellas

all tugging at scant grass and murmuring

prayerfully we look, as though light turned us

and as we pause the tall gums drop green shadows

like lizards drop – all suddenness and stillness.

We say we wish the bright birds could come with us.

We mean we hope the bright birds will survive us.

The town beyond the plains has grey stone houses

and the rustling ancient music of skirts and bells.

So still. The day of days.

The whole town moves from plains into the hills.

There will be a first baby to be born here

inside the arm-deep windows with diamond crosses,

and when the child is coming the town will turn

towards the mother's long unbroken ground note

the wordless song, the sound that still contains us –

our pitch, our drift, our codas codas codas.

The hermit picks a small house in the valley.

We call her prophet and she calls us mistaken

We rest our bikes against the gates and trees.

Lift water from dark streams to lips through wells.

The children gather like lambs at a milky bucket

to see the sack undone and the quick flat faces

that peer and part the grass and disappear.

What else to do but love again, and wildly,

the snakes, the birds, each other, our blameless sun

that illuminates the hills above our houses.

The Underground Loop

The train is down. We are waiting at its heaving side
for the fresh train to come. The train that will come.

We grow transparent with the rain we brought down on us.

Out of darkness and into the Southern Cross
where a cantering light adjusts its stride to run alongside us.
The inner place we risked our lives for.

The Old Machines

The Old Machines

1. Infusion

After twenty-seven years I catch the ferry
to Islay again and it glides in
on a mirror and a deep reflection
composing the low, white distillery
from which shapely copper chimneys
rise to draw peat smoke through whisky
for a taste immediate and remembered.

The glass contains glacier and winter rains,
the endless ploughings of our head-
down big-shouldered moon.

Deep in the peat the peasant's body,
deeper still, the grains in his gut.

The longboat's old excitements linger, all
times and seasons gilded as though we could
live the one fine life
again and again.

2. Bere

body-like

Roland shows me the heart they made stone
after stone from the ruins
long after the barn had dropped
down on one knee.

Walking to my B&B, slithers
of the low white houses
peel into the sea
and tilt

in moon-shine.

Once called bere
“body-like”
the barley for the bread.

As if not dead, you duck your head to hear
the whisper-sound of my palms
rubbing together – a drift
of barley flour

for bread.

Up lifts the wave to saturate

the peat with salt. Don't

worry, tomorrows briny

seaweedy breeze will dry it off.

A drift of barley flour for bread.

We will be salt-drenched

before we are brackish dry.

On this wondrous cold island

this is what I hold in mind –

you cannot go inland enough

to avoid the salt

and it will dry against you

and it will rise up through the still

and even

through the broken bread.

3. The age of machinery

I've been thinking about maintenance, about continuity,
and my age, the age of machinery.

At the Kilbride River, beyond the dam
for Laphroig's water, by iron-tinted stone,
a crane's long arm hovers
poised to mimic what humans do
for benediction,
pour water into water
pronounce the valid, valid
the blessed, blessed.

A kind of benediction before I left –
dinner at a rambling Breaker Bay house
with the best of Wellington's dramatic coast,
cliffs behind and sea out front –
and the salty clamour and peaty thump of Laphroig
to toast me off. Because we know each other
you and I. We have our oily bodies
of sea, our bull kelp, our seals, our rough tracks
our ordnance survey maps.

I've been thinking about machinery,

about continuity.

I've been tasting the intense malts of the south shore

and the gentlest extremes of the north.

I've been following the old machines

- those temple-shaped distilleries that keep

rising up.

4. An tigh seinnse

Pub or house

The room is small and dark.

Three old men around one table

absorb the table's surface with their shapes

their fraying elbows, their swollen hands.

The still, dry air coiled and threaded through rafters

like old sails.

My hot chocolate comes with its provenance.

The dark-haired waitress

describes how they bring quality African cocoa

into the island – she leans in

see how the brown is almost purple –

the way the best things always edge towards

being something else.

How small this room is and how

dark the interior

with the furniture that little bit

too close together.

She asks

Have you seen a cocoa pod?

I have, I have.

It's this size, like a draw-purse or wee coracle.

You could go to sea in it.

I did. I went to sea in it.

And here I am.

4. Perhaps wherever I am

I am
marginal, a guest.
The best of poets tells me this
and it sounds true.
Still, doubt's little motor
turns
threatens to catch.
I catch up with a friend
who shares a walk into
shallow russet hills.
We talk about home, incline into
our conjurings, conjure up
our upbringings – until we run
dry and stop so the ground
can sound – say moorland.
And I want to say *undulating*
but that's us, so up and down,
drumming up memory and rites of passage
over this shifting underlay
of mica schist and limestone.
Salt blows from the coast
into the hinterland.

6. Midday

Fiona and George indicate across the bay to Fairy Hill
where the Fairy Queen lives. They guard her privacy
and charge those who disturb her peace
a sorry note (appropriately addressed)
secured to the hill
by a bottle of whisky.

In the bay, the seals turn their blacklight eyes on us,
un-glaze themselves on rocks.

For decades, not just on a whim
or fancy, Fiona has composed for seals
the violin songs she sits on rocks to play them,
and each time she plays they lift
slicked heads from bull kelp and velvet
water to listen.

George and Fiona's leggy steampunk fairy daughter
–Hannah Titania, born one midsummer –
sleeps through each day.

The doctor has his diagnosis,
but weak
in the mortal world George says.

Behind us the great shadow of Kildalton Castle
ruined and crumbling.

I saw the drawing room where the largest
mirror in Europe (of its time) left its mark,
and peering up through broken floors
and fireplaces the tower the wife had papered in black
after her husband died, then sealed herself in.

Others say *decline* and *terminal* and *shame*.

George and Fiona are letting the trees grow through it.

7. Who am I again? Are you lost again?

We're stories telling stories, nothing

Ricardo Reis/Fernando Pessoa

The slow unspool of glacier

across a winter-tightened land.

A seaweed-brindled reef

grown from an old gas-line.

The morning or the evening

the mourning or the even-ing.

You could be any thing you like

(although, dressed as you are, as a person,

I'd suggest going with that despite its time-consuming

reflections and undulations).

Just do me this favour,

stop divvying up past and future

here and not-here

or there'll be no vantage point

that isn't just a trick

of light.

BTW I saw you add Titania to your computer's lexicon.

Think you'll be using it again?

8. Old crane

I went further along the road towards Ardbeg
and stopped by another crane
paused and forgotten, arm extended
where it has lifted water from the river's mouth,
water the slipstream from shipping lanes
spiked with rust.

I sat with it and it unsettled me
with its creepy sudden creaks in the northerly –
and yet that stiff reach over water, over time
suggested private beauties I couldn't know –
the nights when that dark arm holds out a bowl of snow
or releases, once or twice a year,
the full moon.

Then I wondered if, out of wildness,
the teenagers might go. And see. And know.

9. With my ordnance survey map

I find Kildalton Church
where steep and roofless walls
compose their steeple
and deep in a grassy corner
a border collie trembles.

I circle the Kildalton Cross –
how busy and how animal it is
with its interlaces of creatures.
Although parts of the stonework
are worn, life has gathered here.
And here are life's patterns.

I'm walking the thin road back,
one slow movement in dusk's animation,
when the sky washes out
exposing the bens splashed with gold light
then washes in again, stained sea-
anemone-red, and this red sky
flickers drawing me in
releasing me beyond Laphroig Distillery
at Port Ellen where all the stone
white-washed soft-lit houses

stand on one leg

at the Bay's gleaming edge.

Into Composition

Islay, Aberdeen, Lothian, Brisbane, Pukerua Bay

I saw
a dipper in and out of a stream
pouring through composition into song.

I saw
bull kelp on Islay
make a shore like my shore.

I saw where my great aunt stepped out
in her stylish cinch-waist coat
out of private violence into the frail home of the street.

I saw
the language inside my language
yolk, shell, nest, foreknowledge: a chaos of need, then flight.

I saw
at the top of a rise, the round church
so the devil can't hide in the corners. I circled it, couldn't get inside.

I recalled my son's favourite Attenborough clip:
a snow leopard running like milk or glacier down a mountain,
and mine – us side by side in front of it, on the L-shaped couch.

I recalled my daughter after school broke up
in winter, woollen hat and jacket hurled on, paddling the kayak
across the bay. No life jacket and not about to stop. A quick wave.

I remind myself to finish The Divine
Comedy – I've never yet made it out of hell. The dolphin-backs
arcing out of pitch. The hooks.

And I'm going to say again that I saw the dipper,
and I saw bog cotton – outside of a poem
for the first time. Leaning in. Listening.

Earthed

The deer, a fawn
it's four spiked legs gently
to the ground.

Gently, if at all,
and real? I stand there
for long seconds wondering
then move to see it
move, and then
it's gone.

What stays behind is how
two bodies listened to each other
and then I'm sorry
for the idea of spikes and floating
because we listened with noses,
lungs, eyes and ears.

So I write this
resting the heel of my hand
on the imprint of its hoof –
both of us marking the leaf litter
as we go.

Vest

The Pentland Hills are the colour of my father's boyhood

Fair Isle vest, muted purple, brown, green.

Fishermen hitch silver reins

and the loch trembles.

Beyond the lines trout breech water and hang

in air. We pause, boot to boot

on a rotting bridge spanning a creek.

As a kid I balanced on whole tumbled

trees in surf, washed down from the Whanganui

roots and all, a slowly accumulating grey-white forest

silvery (as sea trout) washed

trunks, washed branches.

The freckled fish drops back into water

then crests and hangs again.

A colourful scratchy vest on a skinny

1930's kiwi kid. Socks to match

a stutter all his own

to call his own three girls, a boy

a quartet of bright Bermuda shorts,

teeshirts, a peeled citrus son.

They are feeding from beneath, the trout,

and shoot up, filling their mouths.

My friend thinks when I call, come back

fish, and the fish comes

that I am a fish whisperer as though

I say come back fish and back it comes

in its dappled colours

brown, green, a muted purple.

Peerie Flooers

a hat for Tamara

The middle name you don't much like
she didn't either, your Great Grandmother
went by Nen not Helen and
among other less traditional things
she knitted Fair Isle for her children.

So, an old pattern and an old address:
O child of mine, green
and revolutionary,
here's a garland of flowers
to circle your head.

Inside you'll see the stranded knitting –
nothing cut and reattached, just carried
and the warmer for it.

Southern Lights

How brief the play on Earth
from the soundless drop
of this striated billow,
these southern lights –

theatre of forest greens
and yellows –

mirrored in this kakapo feather
I lean across my desk's edge to see
composed lightly
in pencil and in watercolour.

Zurbaran's St Francis in Meditation

After Alison Watt and Don Paterson

In the act of meditation he presses a human
skull against his chest
through the fabric of his robe
which seems almost a living mass.

I wonder why the material
dead so impress the heart,
and make more vital this light
that falls on his partly open mouth.

Man Dressed as Bat

After Peter Doig

Behind him the sky is dark and the ground darker
but day draws light blue at the horizon.

He is pale as a moth.

He is half-formed with long thin legs
and great creamy sheets of wings that stutter
through the two shades of dark
and the hinge of light.

I cannot see features, but imagine
in the blurred face an open mouth
banked up with fruit syrup.

The noise he makes in my head
is a plucked note – high and tightly coiled.

I can see how
the fluttering is composed
– the captured after-image –
and how the subject wants
to fly but
first humanness
and then paint

like fly paper

won't let go.

Aotearoa Crane Songs

i

I can point in four directions –
North, South, East, West –
but separately, not all at once,

not like the quartet of spouting faces
on the great fountains of Paris
and Verona.

Almost the opposite.

Each night lately
a young man sits on my lowest strut

eating wasabi peas,
the cold wind gushing
into his hot mouth.

ii

Some days the rain swallows
our enmeshed shadows.
Our imaginary cogs.

iii

A city – to a crane –

is a river.

Men in their bright vests

snag in its deepest corners.

iv

It's hard to describe

–except as an act of balance –

a crane's relationship

with another crane.

v

We couple slowly and

in daylight.

At night we look inward.

Are still.

Some of us pray.

vi

At our feet

all that crossed steel,

the flash of silver shields,

and yet we never fight.

I suppose it is enough

carrying the impossible weight

of things

and dividing up the sky.

Drift

Stephen Burt says snow
makes American poetry American,
and so I wonder if the sea –
let's just say water –
makes New Zealand poetry New Zealand.

Take the stream that runs
under the carillon – it goes on ringing,
drops flicking against stone and singing,
at night when in the tower the stilled bells
become women in great brass dresses, ascending.

We could hear the stream as
a four or five-note memory
of sky and loss and journeying. An Aotearoa sound
that drifts up from underneath
rather than from a ringing-cold sky
descending.

Matuku

I was walking north, on farmland,
had dropped down from the ridge and its storm,
was blinking away the dead magpie
feathered on a fence – both wings torn.

When I saw lift up from the valley
through hound's tooth and nikau and fern
the lazy long sweep of a heron
with its cracked call like stones in a burn.

Its white face was carving a flight path
its trailing legs damp with the swamp,
I watched its nuanced navigations
and I held them in mind as I walked.

I'd been after a long view of the island
had risked Paekakariki Hill road
but the storm on the ridge was blazing
so the violet-grey crane took the load –

evoking the shapely blue island
which floats on a bowl of bright sea

with peals from a whale swimming past it
and an old rhyming song in its leaves.

**Repetition and the Revision of Place
in the Poetry of Jackie Kay
and Kathleen Jamie**

Introduction

Under the entry for “repetition,” *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* notes: “Lines simply reintroduced once in a poem generally are meant to bear an altered and enriched significance on their second appearance” (701). Perhaps counter to repetition in other areas of our lives, such as our daily routine and our jobs, repetition in poetry can signal change. The critical portion of this thesis asks whether and how formal repetition, specifically anaphora, parallelism and repetends, can be used in contemporary poetry to reflect changes in presiding narratives. Specifically it asks whether techniques of repetition enable multiple possibilities and nuances of meaning for the concepts of place and belonging.

Place is, and has been for decades, a contested term in the scholarship across a number of disciplines. In *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004), human geographer Tim Cresswell writes, “there is very little considered understanding of what the word ‘place’ means.” He goes on to note that although “place” is “a word we use daily in the English-speaking world” (1), as a theoretical term it has been understood in many different ways. He claims that “the most straightforward and common definition of place” is “a meaningful location” (7). Further to his discussion of the “meaningful” nature of place, Cresswell also posits the idea of place as an “understanding of the world” (11). In all of its many possible permutations, place is seen as both a necessary social construction and a political and contested concept. He writes:

Writing about and researching place involves a multi-faceted understanding of the coming together of the physical world (both ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’), the

processes of meaning production and the practices of power that mark relations between social groups. (122)

I was particularly interested in geographer Doreen Massey's idea of place as process and how thinking about place as process "helps us get away from the common association between penetrability and vulnerability" which make "invasion by newcomers so threatening" (69-70). She claims that both place and identity are fluid and interactive: "If it is now recognized that people have multiple identities then the same point can be made in relation to places" (68). Massey's definition of place suggests that there is no singular essential identity for a place. She writes that geographically and politically drawn boundaries do not define place (68). My definition of place lines up with Massey's in as much as she claims that both place and people can have multiple identities and that both are always "in process" and will intersect at different points depending on a variety of contingencies. Geographical space is made meaningful by our human imposition onto the land, and these impositions can be physical, such as buildings and boundaries, and /or intangible, such as cultural beliefs, laws, stories and significant memories. As social and personal situations change and evolve, some of these aspects of place can also alter and evolve. The alteration of remembered, imagined and learned aspects of place can result in new awareness about the political and cultural mediation of place and belonging.

I chose the specific context of Scotland to look at the impact of repetition on the representations of place in contemporary poetry because of its strong tradition of writing about place combined with a complex history around land ownership and governance. I explore the thesis question through the work of two contemporary Scottish poets, Kathleen Jamie and Jackie Kay. The work of both Kay and Jamie has a

powerful and distinct connection to a national poetic tradition, yet their work questions concepts of place and belonging that are often embedded in those traditions. In Kay's book *Fiere* (2011) and Jamie's book *The Tree House* (2004) it seemed to me that what significantly enabled the connection *and* the speculation were techniques of repetition with which they could subvert, expand and layer concepts of place and belonging. I also explore the thesis question through my collection of poetry *Crane*, which uses techniques of repetition to accommodate and emphasise the implications of return journeys within Scotland and New Zealand, as discussed later in this introduction.

The choice to explore my research question through the work of two Scottish poets was also influenced by the fact that I have Scottish grandparents and grew up with an interweave of Scottish and New Zealand cultural traditions. There were cultural resonances that I responded to in Kay's and Jamie's work; the Scots language and Burns' poems and songs were not unfamiliar to me. Kay's focus on her two ancestral homes and Jamie's foregrounding of place and engagement with concepts of wilderness also resonated with my own experience and interests. However what really interested me was the fact that, despite their different styles of writing, and despite the fact that they employ repetition very differently in *Fiere* and *The Tree House*, I perceived that they use repetition to achieve similar effects.

As mentioned already, there are layers of complexity in writing about place, belonging and identity for Kay and Jamie and for Scottish writers generally. This complexity includes historical issues such as Scotland having had three centuries without a national parliament, the erosion of the Scots and Gaelic languages, and the use and ownership of Scottish land. The "Scottish Renaissance" of the early and mid-twentieth century was spearheaded by poet Hugh MacDiarmid who began writing poetry in a hybrid language he called Lallans. This used a combination of dialects from

different areas of lowland Scotland and words from *Jamieson's Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*. MacDiarmid's revision of the Scots language was the impetus for the renaissance of a robust and unsentimental Scottish literature. In the introduction to Hugh MacDiarmid's *Contemporary Scottish Studies* (1995) Alan Riach describes MacDiarmid's essays on poetry, art, theatre, the novel, music, history and education as proposing "an almost total demolition of Scotland's cultural identity as it had come to be accepted through the nineteenth century" (Riach vii). In 1997, just two years before a national parliament was finally convened in Edinburgh, Dorothy McMillan wrote that "perhaps there increasingly is no standard English" to which Scottish poets with their polyphony of voices and languages can either align themselves or reject, and that "Perhaps we should rejoice in the exciting possibility that if the centre cannot hold, it cannot imprison either" (McMillan 569). At that point both Kay and Jamie were writing in English and Scots (and in variations of these languages). It was becoming generally accepted that the "polyphony" of languages (Scots, Gaelic, English) were the mother tongues of Scotland.

McMillan notes that Kay's writing at the end of the twentieth century is concerned with the "place of the unplaceable" and that Jamie's work explores and tries to reconcile the "here" and "there" of home and exile, past and present, and that a reconciliation of these apparent dichotomies is "achieved through language" (569, 562). The impulse at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century towards poetry that reflects diversity rather than a national narrative is evident in Gaelic poet and translator Christopher Whyte's question of why individual poems should be expected to "act like iron filings, leaping into place when the appropriate magnet (the appropriate historical or political narrative) is applied beneath the paper they are scattered across?" (7). In 2007, poet and academic Roderick Watson noted an

important shift in the focus of contemporary Scottish poetry on the issue of national identity, writing that both Kay and Jamie “share a very contemporary sense of belonging and not belonging” predicated on questions of race, class or sexual orientation rather than “framed in terms of a national identity” (2)¹. Departing from the tendency to see Jamie’s work as re-writing the “narrative of the nation,” Matt McGuire’s 2009 essay situates her writing “in the gaps, in the places where other discourses fail to reach.” He describes Jamie’s work as disrupting “the demarcation lines within recent Scottish criticism” (McGuire 143/142). In the same publication, in an overview of the direction of Scottish poetry after devolution, Alan Riach notes that Kay insists on “the relativity of identity” (Riach “The Poetics of Devolution” 12), and Fiona Wilson writes of Kay’s collection *Off Colour* that “if there is an argument being made here for the necessity of identity politics, subjectivity is never a simple issue in Kay’s work” (Wilson 27). These observations suggest that Kay and Jamie (along with other contemporary Scottish poets) are reimagining narratives of belonging and identity as fluid, contingent and not necessarily predicated on politics and history or gender and race.

Writing that comes from “the places where other discourses fail to reach,” I would argue, suggests writing that is neither marginal nor mainstream but that focuses on the dynamic and revealing interaction of language/s with content and context. This interaction is often achieved through techniques of repetition such as anaphora, parallelism and repetends. Repetition is able to sustain a focus on diversity and relativity raised by this interaction because the re-vision is embedded in the formal

¹ Andrew Neilson makes a similar claim in his article on Jamie’s book *Jizzen*, writing that, “The cohesion of the collection can be seen in the way in which Jamie melds the personal and political, so that a sense of the a “new” devolved Scotland is genuinely captured” (46).

structure of repetition. By its action of moving a word or words into new contexts, albeit contexts arranged by the poet, the formal act of repetition can revise singular notions of place and belonging by demonstrating the alteration of meaning, which may include alterations in connotations, evocations, interpretations and denotative scope.

It has been a significant part of the work of poetry to articulate, by embedding in language and form, a sense of place that is fully imagined, locatable and particular, so before discussing how repetition can speculate on concepts of place, I want to consider the rituals of the “making” of place in pre-literate societies; rituals that had repetition as a central compositional device.

Many people argue that repetition has its roots in rituals that bind humans geographically and culturally to place. Observers as diverse as cultural historian Walter J. Ong, poet Don Paterson, philosopher Anna Christina Ribeiro and theology scholar Catherine Pickstock have all made the point that repetition in terms of the patterning of language such as words, word groupings, and rhymes was (and is) employed in oral cultures to conserve knowledge that is to do with immediate concerns of survival and community (Ong 34; Paterson 2; Ribeiro “Toward a Philosophy of Poetry” 72; Pickstock 160). These concerns include features of the land, important food and water sources, rites of passage and genealogy. In discussing the shift from oral to literate cultures, Ong argues that the advent of chirographic (writing) culture and typographic (print) culture allowed for a restructure in thinking that he calls “the modern evolution of consciousness.” He claims that, released from the need to conserve knowledge of one’s immediate life-world, individuals could focus on using language to speculate, which leads to deeper philosophical, scientific and literary thought. That is, he argues

that the text took on these “conservative functions” and this allowed the mind to “turn itself to new speculations” (Ong 41).

That the mind could be freed up to speculate allowed for divergent individual points of view on philosophies of being and aspects of art and literature. In examining the role of repetition in the exploration of place, I wondered if repetition, with its movement within and between poems, could likewise transcend aspects of content in the text to explore wider possibilities for meaning. Specifically, in examining the role of repetition in the exploration of place, I am interested in how repetition becomes a means not to conserve meanings, but to expand them².

At the 2013 Edinburgh Book Festival Kathleen Jamie read a poem that used repetition to demonstrate its roots in a national poetic tradition while offering alternatives to nationalistic ideology. The poem, “Here lies our land” is now inscribed on a commemorative rotunda at the site of the Battle of Bannockburn – where Robert the Bruce defeated King Edward II’s English army in 1314. In writing a poem to commemorate that battle, Jamie is quoted as saying that she wanted the poem to make “a profound bow” to the Scottish literary tradition. “Because Barbour, Burns and Scott had all written about Bannockburn, and had all done so with a 4 beat line, I decided my piece would be in tetrameter too, as an homage” (“Stirling Professor and Poet making her mark on History”). At the Festival reading, Jamie began by saying that she had particularly wanted the poem not to be nationalistic. Here is the poem in full:

² There are some similarities here to Ezra Pound’s idea of logopoeia as a type of poetry that uses words for their direct meaning but also “takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word” (*Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* p 25). But while Pound plays with expectation and habits of usage, my argument focuses on the demonstration (by enactment, not implication) of the mutability of words and meaning by the process of repetition.

Here lies our land

Here lies our land: every airt
Beneath swift clouds, glad glints of sun,
Belonging to none but itself.

We are mere transients, who sing
Its westlin' winds and fernie braes,
Northern lights and siller tides,

Small folk playing our part.

'Come all ye', the country says

You win me, who take me most to heart. (Jamie, University of Stirling)

While including the metre and aspects of language and natural imagery from the John Barbour, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns Bannockburn poems, Jamie manages to subvert the sentiment of war, ownership and nationalism evident in their poems. For example, what comes after the colon in the first line is a little of what you might expect: the unfolding of the features of the land from “every airt” possibly meaning every point of the compass, but perhaps also meaning every type of “art” – the other meaning of the Scots word “airt.” However, the last line of the first stanza reminds the reader that despite human interpretation and division the land belongs “to none but itself.” This poem, which employs rhythms and images from some of Scotland’s most loved nationalistic poems, also manages to achieve a shift in focus away from war and the

ownership of land, towards a sense of belonging through attentiveness to and interaction with the land. What is retained, undiminished, from the earlier poems is the elevation of community and a strong connection to a poetic tradition such as Burns' "Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn" and Barbour's "The Bruce," both of which celebrate freedom:

Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn

Wha for Scotland's king and law
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
Freeman stand or freeman fa',
Let him follow me! (13-16)

The Bruce

A! Fredome is a noble thing
Fredome mays man to haiff liking.
Fredome all solace to man giffis,
He levys at es that frely levys. (From Book I: In praise of Freedom)

Jamie connects to these famous poems about the battle of Bannockburn by incorporating the tetrameter used in their poems in her Bannockburn poem, "Here lies our land." And in a move that observes Scottish poetry's traditional attentiveness to nature, she uses phrases from well-known ballads and poems in her poem. For example, poet and Highland folklorist Hamish Henderson wrote a song called "Freedom, Come All Ye" for peace marches in Glasgow in 1960, a phrase that Jamie uses in her poem in the line "'Come all ye', the country says"(8). In the seemingly counterintuitive act of imagining a "voice" for the land, Jamie "calls up" words that have, in a previous

iteration, articulated a desire for peace and the preservation of the natural world. The phrase “westlin’ winds” (5) in Jamie’s poem appears in a border ballad, “Thomas Rymer,” and in the opening line of Robert Burns’ “Song Composed in August,” one of his most famous poems that reflects on the beauties of nature and laments the brutality of shooting birds for sport. The border ballad “Thomas Rymer” describes “True Thomas” meeting the Queen of the Fairies on the Eildon Hills on the Scottish borders and being given the ability to see into the future. So Jamie’s poem achieves the shift from a nationalistic concept of place by incorporating (repeating) words from the tradition that the poem, in certain aspects, departs from.

Specifically, while in their Bannockburn poems both Burns and Barbour use anaphora (for example, the repetition of “freedom” or “fredome”) to emphasise and exalt the idea of winning through war, Jamie uses the less emphatic but deeply resonant repeated phrases, which could be interpreted as a cross-textual repetends. While connecting with the Scottish tradition of shared “songs” and poems about battles, losses and triumphs, Jamie’s poem foregrounds the elements of nature that have long been treasured and cannot be won or lost. “Here lies our land” posits a different perspective on winning and on freedom with the line “*You win me, who take me most to heart.*” Robyn Marsack, Director of the Scottish Poetry Library and chair of the judging panel for the Bannockburn poem, said, Kathleen Jamie’s poem is a moving meditation on the relationship between people and their land, taking it beyond nationalism to what is enduring” (Marsack).

I want to make a link here with the “enduring” relationship between people and the land that Marsack notes, and the enduring nature of poetic repetition itself. Jamie’s Bannockburn poem emphasises what is enduring about the Scottish relationship with the land by repeating memorable phrases from earlier Bannockburn poems. Both the

repetition itself and the repeated memorable phrases remind the readers of this long history with the land and with the many songs and poems that celebrate the land. The phrases Jamie repeats are embedded in Scottish cultural history, and repetition itself is central to the songs and ballads that Jamie's poem refers to, so the connection with the land is both enacted and emphasised by this further repetition. In her article "Intending to Repeat: A Definition of Poetry" Ribeiro discusses what she describes as the ubiquitous nature of repetition in poetry. She claims that repetition in poetry is the one feature that has remained constant throughout history: "the history of poetry is one of texts whose universal and enduring characteristic is their exhibiting certain types of repetition schemes" (191). She discusses a variety of repetition schemes, rhyme, stanza forms, meter, alliteration, anaphora and parallelism that are all "patterns of recurrence that began with literature but have remained central to poetry alone." In exploring why repetition in poetry is the one feature that has remained constant throughout its history, she quotes poet and critic, Robert Pinsky, who argues that "the technology of poetry, using the human body as its medium, evolved for specific uses: to hold things in memory, both within and beyond the individual life span; to achieve intensity and sensuous appeal; to express feelings and ideas rapidly and memorably." She goes on to say that, "If repetition is also a way of adding levels of information without adding words, this would further speak for its cognitive advantages and consequently for its universality and endurance" (191).

It is evident that, outside of the genre of poetry, repetition can be used to achieve quite different effects to those mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. It can shut down connection, resonance and possibility – for example when it is used to emphasise a single point and its singular message. While I maintain that the use of poetic repetition, in any poem and regardless of content, demonstrates the mutable nature of words and

meaning by showing how words absorb nuances of meaning from syntactic context, there may be instances where repetition is deliberately employed to shut down connection, resonance or nuances of meaning. My thesis is interested in looking at how repetition in poetry can allow for negotiation among meanings, contexts and possibilities.

An aspect of repetition that is not often discussed and which this thesis explores through anaphora, parallelism and repetitions, is how repetition can create and deepen meaning in the way that figurative language deepens meaning; through representing one thing in terms of another. While a metaphor or simile makes a comparison between two seemingly unlike things to allow the reimagining of a scene or idea, or personification unsettles usual perspectives and opens out possibilities for the revision of points of view, the re-presentation of a word into a new context can also have the effect of layering and transforming meanings³. I refer to the oed.com denotation of the word ‘transformation’ here: “The action of changing in form, nature, or appearance; metamorphosis.” In figurative language the transformative medium is an “unlike” thing, while with repetition the transformative effect is achieved by moving the “same” thing (the repeated word) into a new context. In repetition the medium for transformation is a new context. The new syntactic context may create shifts in evocation and connotation, and from these alterations create shades of meaning. The “same” word has acquired a new

³ *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia* describes repeated lines of poetry as allowing an “altered and enriched significance” (701), and in “Toward a Philosophy of Poetry” Ribeiro writes that certain patterns of repetition are “implicitly telling us to pay attention to them, and so is expediting the comprehension process” (62). However, neither suggests that formal repetition can take on figurative weight.

“point of view” and this, potentially, allows for a re-vision of previous compositions of meaning. The process of repetition enables revision while retaining connections to previous iterations – in fact it enables revision because of its connections to previous iterations, as evidenced by Jamie’s Bannockburn poem with its repetition of familiar phrases that gain new layers of meaning because of their introduction into a new context.

Before going on to look at anaphora and parallelism in *Fiere* and repetends in *The Tree House*, I will outline the techniques and their definitions: Anaphora is the repetition of a word or words at the beginning of successive lines or phrases within a poem. It is one of the oldest poetic techniques and has been widely used in religious and devotional poetry including in the Psalms in The Bible. Parallelism is the repetition of a grammatical pattern such as “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” from Macbeth’s soliloquy on the death of his wife. Parallelism is another very old poetic technique used in religious and devotional writing. A repetend is a word or a phrase repeated (usually irregularly) through multiple syntactic contexts within poems or through poetry collections. The device was often used in medieval ballads. The repetend can also be considered a type of refrain, although more commonly a refrain is a phrase repeated at regular intervals within a poem. The tradition of these techniques is significant, and is in many ways inseparable from the machinery of the technique itself, as will be analysed through Kay and Jamie’s poetry.

Essential to the poetics, the thematics and the politics of Kay’s and Jamie’s work is the fluid and unfinished act of poetic making, significantly enabled, this thesis argues, by techniques of repetition which return and revise to sustain connections *and* enable change. While neither Kay’s *Fiere* nor Jamie’s *The Tree House* has had critical attention paid to repetition as a central structural and thematic aspect of their work, this

thesis suggests that it enables a useful exposition of their poetics and their politics. Kay and Jamie are not often discussed in tandem: Jamie is usually grouped with other “nature” poets and Kay with poets writing about identity and belonging. However, both explore ideas of place and belonging and both ask questions about the mythologising and division of land. In neither *The Tree House* nor *Fiere* does the focus settle on answers to questions of nation, nature or identity. Rather the focus is on the effect of context on meaning. By context I am referring to a syntactic environment, and by meaning I refer to language, tone, atmosphere, connotations and evocations that interact to suggest ideas and feelings in a poem and themes through a collection of poems. The tension between the tendencies to connect to a national and poetic tradition and to question elements of those connections is to an extent resolved in the work of these poets, this thesis argues, by the use of techniques of repetition that create possibilities for interpretation and revision. It is the layering of possibilities and alternatives that drives the work of repetition in *Fiere* and *The Tree House*. Repetition’s emphasis on multiple contexts (viewpoints) and the porous nature of language can provoke questions about supposedly fixed socio-political ideology that suggests belonging through language, race, religion or geographical boundary.

The ability for repetition to sustain roots in a national poetic tradition while the poem speculates on alternatives to nationalistic ideology is central to Jackie Kay’s *Fiere*, and this is analysed in Chapter One of the thesis. Like Jamie, Kay explores ideologies of nation and place and maintains a focus on the fluidity of place and self. Kay, born to a Scottish mother and Nigerian father and adopted by white Glaswegian communist parents, has written in poetry, plays, memoir and fiction about her experience of being adopted, the search for identity and about belonging in terms of being black and lesbian in a predominantly white heterosexually oriented society. Kay’s writing is more overtly

political than Jamie's. She writes about colonial histories, slavery, racism, gender and transgender issues, and most recently about the plight of asylum seekers in Glasgow. In an interview with Janet Christie for *The Scotsman* Kay describes writing as a kind of protest. She says, "For me, it's the same as marching." Kay writes of her own experience of discrimination and exclusion, and of the exclusion and inhumanity she sees around her. In the Christie interview she describes the articulation of such stories as "a writer's job ... You're a modern-day witness and some of your job is to see what's going on in your own time." I argue in the first chapter that the poetic refrains in Scots, English and Igbo in *Fiere* evoke multiple versions of a search for place and belonging in her poems. The complex and culturally alert layering of points of view is enabled by the dynamic interaction of content with context in the action of repetition. There is repetition of rhythms of speech and song in *Fiere*: in the many languages and dialects in the poems, in dramatic monologues, in poems responding to Robert Burns and Hugh MacDiarmid, and in the motifs of blues and jazz. These rhythmical repetitions provide a way for Kay to connect to a national and poetic tradition and, conversely, to imagine her way out of a national and poetic tradition – vital for Kay as she explores the various layers of her own identity and experience both inside and outside of the borders of Scotland.

Jamie, like Kay, uses repetition to connect to a poetic tradition while her questions examine the environmentally detrimental ideologies of nation and ownership. In her two collections of essays, *Findings* (2005) and *Sightlines* (2012), and in her poetry, Jamie observes these entangled issues of nation and environment. I argue these issues are most significantly engaged with in her collection *The Tree House*, which is the focus of the second chapter in this thesis. The question that repeats through Kathleen Jamie's poetry collection *The Tree House* is "how should we live?" In attempting to

explore that question, the book addresses how humans interact with and impose ideas onto the natural world. Jamie is a poet who, while being acutely observant of the “natural” world at hand, within and underfoot, often contextualises her observations within the larger world – the earth. This wider contextualising of self and place has the effect of lifting the fact of our “earthly” existence to the surface of her work, which in turn has the effect of slightly de-centering the question of place and belonging. In my interview with Jamie I asked her if, in the light of her attentiveness to the land, she felt a strong sense of belonging: “To geographical places? No, I get on quite well in most places. I live in Scotland. All my cultural background is there of course. I don’t have a strong sense of belonging to anywhere” (Jamie). While claiming not to have a strong sense of belonging to the geographical area of Scotland, she indicated a strong connection to the literature of Scotland, such as the border ballads which she said were “reawakened” in the writing of her own ballads. When I asked about her reading she said,

I go back to the ballads every so often and I’ll go back to the Scottish writers. At the moment it’s W.S. Graham who I’m having a hit on. There are books that come off the shelf every so often and books that never come off the shelf. I wonder if I could get rid of the ones that never come off the shelf? That’d be quite an interesting exercise.

Jamie is politically alert. Her earlier poems explore issues of nation, Scottish devolution, Scottish culture and its representation of women and more recently, in her collections *The Tree House* and *The Overhaul*, environmental issues. However, Jamie shows a clear aversion to what she described in my interview with her as “hectoring

people.” Her poems explore the areas of tension between certainties: between the human requirement for “place” and the greater, more enduring and environmentally urgent fact of our earthly context, between a connection to a national literature and an aversion to ideas of nationhood and ownership, and between an alert political engagement (as evident in her engagement with the recent Scottish referendum) and the fact that she “hate[s] the idea of telling people what to do, they’ve got to do it in their own way” (Jamie). It’s clear that throughout her writing career Jamie has attempted to free herself from labels marking her as a writer of a certain type or subject. Jamie has expressed irritation with being labelled a woman writer or a Scottish writer. She describes such reductive descriptions as fundamentalist⁴ and not usefully applied to herself or her writing. Her techniques of repetition are also fairly subtle in terms of making their point: she uses repetends that weave through the collection rather than using more formally structured techniques such as anaphora and parallelism that can have the effect of lifting repeated lines above the narrative flow of individual poems, clearly alerting the reader to their effects.

While both Kay and Jamie use repetition as a way of layering possibilities for identity and place, they use the device very differently. Kay’s *Fiere* is full of overt repetitions. The content includes twins, possible other selves, possible other lives, hidden and unfolding selves. There are repeating rhythms influenced by jazz and blues motifs, and techniques of repetition including refrain and anaphora, rhyme, repetend and alliteration. Kay plays with the idea of the refrain as fulcrum or “still point” in “Between the Dee and the Don” when the refrain is used merely to state and re-state the facts of her conception and birth, and refuses to “grow” in meaning or narrative weight. In poems such as “Black River” Kay uses the technique of anaphora to shift and layer

⁴ In an interview with Attila Dósa in *Beyond Identity: New Horizons in Modern Scottish Poetry*

viewpoints rather than the more usual application of the technique which is to create a sense of accumulating urgency, authority and “truth.” Repetition in *Fiere* tells several stories at once, suggesting that a single narrator can have many stories and multiple orientations. It is also used to bring the present into conversation with the past as in “Black River” when the repetition of “a black river” references the Jamaican slave trade, a river in Nigeria, and a blood line that reaches from the present into the future. The repetitions in some instances drive the poem, as though it were a song, but rather than building on certainty and singularity, they carry multiple and sometimes divergent voices.

Jamie’s use of repetition, by contrast, is not obvious on a first reading of *The Tree House*, but the impact of devices of repetition on the book as a cohesive thematic work is significant. Her techniques of repetition include alliteration and nested rhymes, but most significant are the repetends – words repeated in different contexts to produce different shades of meaning. The repetends work to expand the theme of how we attend to and interact with nature. Jamie repeats words such as “unfold” (or “unfolded” and “unfolding”) “rim” “look” “light” and “dark” intertextually through the collection, and each shift in placement affects a shift in meaning. The placement is not, of course, arbitrary. In my 2013 interview with Jamie she talked about being someone who “watched language” and how *The Tree House* took a long time to write as she came back and back to the “sound and euphony thing” (Jamie).

One of the effects of the intertextual repetends can be to create an awareness of language as a type of ecosystem, each movement affecting the shape and resonance of the whole. Perhaps more significantly, the repetitions accumulate nuances of meaning with each placement. To give an example, the word “unfolding” carries very different freight in “a god, or creation unfolding,” which is a line in “The Buddleia,” (2) than

“unfold” does in “Water Lilies” with its description of the unfurling leaves of a lily: “unfold: pale green / almost heart shapes” (10-11). As I will argue in more detail later, the first iteration is infused with a vague and amorphous idea of “creation” – the unfolding gains significance from its placement at the end of the line as well as from the powerful concepts of “god” and “creation” preceding it. The second iteration, with its placement at the beginning of the line and the tentative-sounding “almost” in “pale green” and “almost heart shapes,” suggests a process of unfolding into a shared and unfolding world while submitting to the uncertainty of such organic interactions.

A changed context can alter perception, atmosphere, connotation and emphasis in repeated words. It may simply raise a question in the reader’s mind as to why the word or line was repeated, and this question will alter how the repeated line is read and understood. Jamie and Kay’s contemporary, Glyn Maxwell, in his book *On Poetry*, argues that there is in strict terms no true repetition in poetry: “What’s intervened between the two technically identical lines is *the need to say the same again*. Either side of that are different worlds. The relation of the two lines *to thought* is entirely different” (53). Maxwell’s claim that there is no such thing as repetition has been articulated before by poets such as Gertrude Stein, who on a different tack to Maxwell, argues instead for a layering of distinct moments – which she describes as “insistence” rather than “repetition” (Stein 166). However the implication within both Stein and Maxwell’s claim is that there is no redundancy to repetition in poetry (or that there shouldn’t be). Each repetition offers a new, expanded, layered or differently nuanced interpretation.

In Kay’s and Jamie’s work repetition does not create a momentum towards agreement, conclusion or consensus; rather it permits the conversation or exploration to remain open and attentive to the influence of context. This is where, in my reading, the thematic and structural focus rests in both books – on the influence of context on

meaning. Kay and Jamie use very different modes of repetition, yet both effectively employ repetition to suggest more nuanced, less fixed (although culturally located) understandings of place, belonging and identity.

While I emphasise the possibilities inherent in repetition, I am aware that repetition is often used in poetry unconsciously, or that the use of this “ubiquitous” poetic technique may only become conscious during the process of editing and revising the work. I put the question of intentionality to both Jamie and Kay when I asked about their use of repetition. Jamie claimed that she didn’t consciously consider the use and effect of repetition in her work. When I asked her about her repetition of the word “unfold” in *The Tree House* she replied:

I wasn’t aware I used the word ... does it crop up often? Right. I better look at the book again. [Laughs]. I must have had it in mind then, to keep going back there. (Jamie)

What Jamie points out in this quote is the unconscious process of writing a poem where you circle or keep going back to preoccupations and particular words that carry particular freight. However, it is worthwhile pointing out here that the word “unfold” first appears in a quote by Hölderlin as an epigraph to *The Tree House*. It seems then that this word is, from the outset, consciously significant to the book. Both Jamie and Kay talked about consciously using rhyme in their poetry. Jamie uses rhyme (usually half-rhymes, nested rhymes and alliteration) to achieve what she calls “the sound and euphony thing” (Jamie), and Kay described enjoying using rhymes “from exactly how I speak, from the sounds of my own voice” (Kay). However, while Kay sometimes uses

repetition consciously, drawing significantly from music, she, like Jamie, seemed to find the process and effect of using word repetition difficult to define:

I use a mixture of different styles and ways and sometimes I use deliberate repetition where, like a piece of music, I've arranged when it will repeat. Other times I intuitively follow where I want it to repeat. Like hearing notes, I'm listening out for how it's sounding. But I like not to get too bogged down in the explanations of that. I think that's something that you could probably tell me about more than I could tell myself about my own work. I think there's an element of what you do in poetry that is explainable and I think there's another element that's really not. But definitely I think repetition is hugely powerful and I like different forms that repeat. (Kay)

Both poets suggested I, as critic, could possibly explain their use of repetition more effectively than they could as they were reluctant to analyse a process of writing that seemed "unexplainable." Kay went on to describe rhyme and repetition as "mysterious" and "like signposts" (Kay). In exploring this "mysterious" element in repetition that Kay perceives as having "huge power," I want to consider the dynamic between repetition – with its emphasis on process – and the lyric form which Scott Brewster in his book *Lyric* (2009) describes as "potentially the most radical and subversive of literary genres" (114).

The lyric poem is commonly identified as a short poem of a private, emotional nature that allows the reader into the poet's world. However the lyric poem with its single speaker, its subjective "I," was originally written to be accompanied by the lyre – most famously by Sappho – and intended for performance at public events. In the 18th

and 19th centuries the Romantic lyric foregrounded the conceit of the subjective “I” as the solitary introspective poet, increasing the distance between the lyric poem and its performative role. In 1833 British philosopher John Stuart Mill described the lyric as “confessing itself to itself.” He suggested that lyric poems are introspective reflections that are “overheard” rather than “heard” (Mill 12). This is a claim that many contemporary scholars have identified as isolating “the poet from an audience and from social engagement” (Zimmerman 1). Sarah Zimmerman, for example, notes that the idea of delivering poems to the self divides “eloquence from poetry” (1) and that this perceived divide changed the modern and contemporary (particularly poststructuralist and postmodern) critical approach to the work of the Romantic poets. She notes that “an emphasis on disinterestedness and transcendence continues to haunt critical accounts of the mode” (2).

Some years ago in his book *Lyric* (1985), David Lindley attempted to define the term lyric and draw the parameters of the lyric poem. He concludes that the only precise way to use the term “lyric” is with a clear awareness of its historical context. While agreeing that no poetic state or form is completely lost, Lindley cautions that the contemporary poet looks back to the past through the lens of contemporary political and cultural concerns, and should be aware of the particular historical context of the poetic past they return to: “The only proper way to use the term “lyric” is with precise historical awareness” (85). That is, its varied histories have shaped it in different ways, such as by its connection with music (28), as a form for intense and emotional disclosure, and in response to the imagist movement (85). The cross-over between the dramatic and the lyric poem has changed lyric poetry again, as has differing perceptions of the lyric “I” and questions around the individual first-person speaker (51). Lindley

writes: “As societies change, so do the situations that lyric poetry may be called upon to represent” (19).

Lindley’s caution that one should have a clear awareness of the lyric’s historical context thus emerges from a perceived division between the various historical phases of the lyric since it is primarily history that shapes the lyric and so it should always be read with the appropriate historic lens in mind. This argument is expanded upon by Scott Brewster in his book, also called *Lyric* (2009). In the introduction to his book Brewster notes that recurrent issues arise during different historical periods, including the question of voice, persona, performance and the lyric’s “intersection with other cultural representations.” He continues, “Thus the following chapters analyse lyric forms as performances, structures of address and complex interventions in the politics and philosophical debates of their historical moments” (11). These “complex interventions” and “performances,” Brewster claims, transcend the limitations of historical imperative and reveal the lyric as a site of radical articulation. Brewster suggests that the lyric can transcend historical context because of its long tradition of accommodating socio-political polemic. This type of transcendence is very different to the, albeit contested, Romantic notion of a “timeless” poetry that is unaffected by history and historical context. Brewster writes that the lyric “I” is a fictive presence and that “Lyric is not just a facet of “high” culture. (149). Far from being an utterance of personal emotion divorced from the public sphere, Brewster claims that the lyric is “potentially the most radical and subversive of literary genres” (114) and that it has often been employed to this end in political and popular culture. These observations lead Brewster to conclude that the lyric “is most itself when it goes beyond the self” (149).

Seamus Heaney, in a 1990’s interview with Henry Hart about his “Station Island” sequence, said he wanted to employ a lyric that speaks *out* rather than inwardly muses”

(Hart 161), and in a more recent interview with Dennis O’Driscoll, described “Station Island” as “refusing ‘lyrical sweetness’” (Heaney “Stepping Stones” 239), he is addressing the fiction that the lyric is a form for inward musings and that it is “sweet” possibly because of a disengagement with history and politics and an association with song. Heaney’s contemporary “bare and public” “un-sweet” lyric draws to the surface a pre-Romantic tradition of using the lyric form to speak “out” about history, politics and community; a tradition that causes Brewster to define the lyric as “radical.” This thesis suggests that Kay and Jamie, with a more global perception of place and identity, chose the lyric mode as a mobile form that can accommodate a diversity of voices and points of view.

I argue that the lyric form’s potential for radical articulation is at times enabled by the action of repetition that has a refusal of closure inherent in its structure. Repetition is not an innate act, but it is, to an extent, structural and can bring expansiveness and re-vision to a poem in ways that are never wholly predictable. These changes are able to be absorbed and contained because of the mutable nature of the lyric form. Mutlu Konuk Blasing, in her book *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* (2007) claims that lyric language is a profoundly public one but insists that “it will not submit to treatment as a social document . . . because there is no ‘individual’ in the lyric in any ordinary sense of the term” (4). She foregrounds the fact that poetry is a formal practice rather than merely another system of communication:

It offers an experience of another kind of order, a system that operates independent of the production of the meaningful discourse that it enables. This is a mechanical system with its own rules, procedures, and history. It works with a kind of logic that is oblivious to discursive logic. (2)

While not entirely agreeing with Blasing's idea of poetry as a "nonrational" (2) form, this thesis does claim that much of the meaning enabled in poetry is created by the mechanics of techniques such as repetition, and those techniques because of their own "rules, procedures, and history" can cross cultural and political boundaries.

I am interested in how the lyric often presents what appears to be a personal reflection, yet that personal reflection is activated and understood through its history as a form for performance in a public sphere. When a single voice imagines speaking to a single reader in a lyric poem, the conceit is built upon the tradition of a multiplicity of poets, performers, audiences and readers, and multiple interpretations of text. Kay makes use of this sense of the many voices behind the one voice in *Fiere* to engage with the idea of many selves and multiple identities in poems such as "By Lake Oguta" discussed in Chapter One. Jamie, in foregrounding nature while attempting to de-centre the lyric "I" in *The Tree House*, draws on and complicates the received conceit of the Romantic lyric which often foregrounds the introspective "I" in conversation with itself by presenting it "through" nature. Many of the poems in *Crane* seem very close to the conceit of the single speaker sharing personal reflections with a single reader, for example in the series of poems called "The Old Machines" where "I" write about a return journey to the Isle of Islay. However, that series has as framework the idea of past voices, past journeys and previous iterations indicated in the text in several instances by "old machinery" that is reactivated by a contemporary voice. This series, and the collection as a whole, suggests that a single voice with its individual reflection – the lyric "I" – is not just indebted to, but formed by, the many voices before it (the old machinery) and around it (the different "selves" or voices, with their different points of view). I also explored this multiplicity of voice and point of view in "Kapiti Island

Sonnets” where memory is articulated through different members of a family and also through the island where they once lived. The many voices with their discordance in memory complicates the idea of a single version or a single “truth” and engages with the idea of the lyric as performance and repetition as a tool to reactivate and revise these performances.

In the creative portion of this thesis, as mentioned in the Preface to *Crane*, I wanted to explore writing lyric poetry that finds its meaning through repetition as a central transformative strategy, not just through figurative language. Hence, I also wanted the poems to engage in a variety of ways with repetition.

Crane, is about return and re-vision in the search for a sense of place and identity. The theme is signposted in “The Poet Composes His World” in which the speaker attempts to present a singular notion of place and home, simplistic ideals of equality and somewhat inflated notions of “the poet.” The poem strains towards a Romantic world where inspiration and nature’s beauty conflate, but shows in its concluding image a world larger, messier and more shifting than the poem can contain. This poem also includes the first iteration of the repetend “compose” which appears intertextually in *Crane*.

The collection opens with “In Circles.” This first movement of *Crane* is meant to reflect an anxiety about the interactive and shifting “making” of meaning. One cannot return to the “same” world, no matter how many times one goes back. The use of parallelism and anaphora in a poem would traditionally help to create a tone of authority and “truth,” however, in “In Circles” content struggles either to underscore or to counterpoint technique and the resulting tone is of insistence in the face of uncertainty.

“Return to the Island” is a long sequence called “Kapiti Island Sonnets.” It is told in four voices that have the subtitles, *The Father*, *The Daughter*, *The Boyfriend* and *The Island*. If the repetition in “In Circles” revealed a desire to hold places and the past still, the repetition in “Kapiti Island Sonnets” emphasises the process of change. Words from the “glossary” in the first poem from “In Circles,” “Bonfire on Kapiti Island,” are scattered through the sonnets. I wanted these fragments such as a feather, a bone or a stone, to act like a refrain, echoing with the other parts of the manuscript, but also suggesting some of the ingredients of “home.” In this section, anaphora and parallelism emphasise fundamental and interactive elements of the family and the island. Rather than insistence, as in the last section, I wanted anaphora and parallelism to achieve a sense of emotional intention and certainty, assisting the reader to see what is central, what is at stake, what is emotionally “true,” and what the focus of the story will be.

“Crossing Over,” includes a series of crossings or transitions between places: between old and new worlds, between islands and between New Zealand and Australia. I use anaphora and parallelism here to layer imaginings of place, and also to create a mythological tone.

There are two long, blank verse poems in this section. The first, “On Going,” charts a flight from New Zealand to Australia. I used anaphora with blank verse to attempt an effect of gathering pace and gravitas. I wanted to write poems with an authoritative voice so readers could lose themselves in the story without wondering about the reliability (or not) of the narrator. I also used anaphora to create an expectation of continuity that the poem can then break away from for effect:

We stand in aisles with fists around our baggage.

We stand in isles with wintered earth behind.

We stand like grass in summer, barely moving
yet like an ear the earth hears news of us. (53-56)

The following movement, “The Old Machines,” is another poem sequence. It gives an account of a trip I took to the Isle of Islay in Scotland 27 years after my first visit. The “old machines” in this section include whisky distilleries and cranes, which I hope suggest something about the machinery of language, particularly repetition and its ability to carry words through a poem. The past and the present come together in “The Old Machines” as the machines reach “over water, over time” (9 “8. Old Crane”).

“Into Composition” is the final movement, and begins with the poem “Islay, Aberdeen, Lothian, Brisbane, Pukerua Bay,” which uses phrasal anaphora to move slowly through what was “seen” in these different parts of the world, before finishing with a focus on language. I wanted “Into Composition” to centre on attentiveness to place through language and the integration of experience into art. The separateness of the many places in the opening poem is, I hope, transcended by an attention to language, to poetry, and how it can accommodate many places and times.

The final poem of the manuscript, “Matuku” mentions each of the elements from the “glossary” in the opening poem, “Bonfire on Kapiti Island.”

I applied my critical research on devices of repetition to my own work, with formal repetitions within the poems and intertextually to explore the idea of returning to places of belonging and how the return to and departure from these places can reveal aspects of one’s own changing and evolving sense of self and place.

In my creative work, and in the work of Kay and Jamie, the impulse is not to rest on a single resolution about place, nature or belonging, but to enable a “wider” view that encompasses the many versions of place and the many possibilities for belonging.

While Kay and Jamie's work is culturally located and connected, it uses repetition to draw "place" into the wider conversation about ways of belonging and into the wider context of "world."

Chapter One

Carrying an old song home

Anaphora and Parallelism in Jackie Kay's *Fiere*

We exist in a world community, not just a single community or country.

Jackie Kay, interview *Scotsman* 2013

There are two opening quotes to Jackie Kay's *Fiere* (2011); one by Robert Burns and one by Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, each a caution to the other. The Burns quote is from "Auld Lang Syne," "And there's a hand, my trusty fiere / And gie's a hand o thine," and the Achebe quote is from a Nigerian proverb, "Wherever someone stands, / something else will stand beside it." The apparent simplicity of offering a hand to a "trusty fiere" (friend) in the Burns quote is counterpointed by the Achebe quote which suggests that each person is ghosted by "something else." The quotes indicate two significant, and interwoven, themes in the book. One theme is a celebration of friendship and the other is the exploration of a complex family history. Burns and Achebe themselves also represent Jackie Kay's origins: her birth mother and adoptive parents are Scottish and her birth father is Nigerian. They also signal a concern with doubling as repetition that runs throughout Kay's work.

Fiere is a Scots word meaning companion, friend and equal, and *Fiere* is a book about connections, both human and literary. It asks how those connections might provide alternative coordinates for people whose sense of belonging is not grounded in a single place or a single time. The quotes by Burns and Achebe set up the themes and preoccupations of *Fiere* with its juxtaposing of strange and simultaneous truths, its multiple voices, languages and countries and possible other lives and other selves. They are also the first of many literary references. The poems in *Fiere* have a wide literary

reach alluding to and conversing with, in addition to Burns and Achebe, poets such as Edwin Muir, Audre Lorde, Robert Frost and Dante Alighieri. They include Scots, English and Igbo languages which, in their multiplicity, make demands on the lyric to accommodate diverse stories of belonging. The poems demonstrate a deep rootedness in the Scottish poetic tradition yet agitate for a more diverse and complex concept for place and belonging.

Before analysing how Kay uses anaphora and parallelism in *Fiere*, I will discuss how the lyric poem, by engaging the dynamic of repetition, can “free” itself from some constraints of time and place and thus accommodate multiple origins, languages and “selves” in Kay’s poetry. I will also look at how Kay’s poems of “exile” and return both align with and depart from other such narratives in the poetic tradition. Finally, I take up the question of defining a sense of place for those with complex and multiple origins through an examination of the use of anaphora and parallelism in *Fiere*. This exploration focuses on examples of repetition that suggest paralysis and disempowerment, such as the anaphoric negations in Kay’s poem “Between the Dee and the Don,” as well as examples of repetition that enact mobility and change, such as the anaphoric repetitions in “Black River.” Specifically, I argue that anaphora and parallelism are used in *Fiere* to question, speculate on and unsettle traditional frameworks for belonging.

The companion piece to *Fiere* is a memoir, *Red Dust Road* (2010), about, among other things, Kay’s search for her birth parents. However, *Fiere* reaches beyond particulars of time and place to ask what might constitute a sense of place and belonging in a diverse and geographically mobile twenty-first century. *Fiere* is a mid-life book that is interested in releasing history from the strictures of single places and particular times

(while maintaining and naming them in memory) to enable the revision of life experiences to this mid-point. In a 2013 interview with Kay I asked her whether her memoir *Red Dust Road*, and *Fiere*, published within a year of each other, and both of which trace her search for her birth parents, took different paths through the story. She responded:

I think they take different but complementary paths. Hopefully one book is a companion to another, so a traveller if you like on the same road. I wrote the books simultaneously, and it was just that some experiences I could write about in poetry and some I could write about in prose. I found that quite fascinating, the relationship between poetry and prose. For instance in *Fiere* there's a poem called "Egusi Soup" where the father literally becomes a myth and flies off. I couldn't really do that in prose, but in poetry you can have that moment of lift-off, where the poem almost takes leave of its own senses; it literally lays down the path and then rises either above or below it. It's much more difficult to do that in prose without seeming fanciful or too artful. It was the same with the poem "Burying my African Father." I couldn't have written that in prose because it might seem potentially vindictive, and it's not, it's just an exploration of how to let go of something. In a poem you can write about the letting go of something more easily (Kay).

Kay makes the point that lyric poetry can transcend some time-bound and place-bound constraints, a point that is central to my argument about the dynamic of repetition and the lyric form. Essential to *Fiere*, as well as, as I argue in the following chapter, *The Tree House*, is the continuous act of poetic making, an act enabled, this thesis argues,

by poetic repetition. Repetition's action of return and revision sustains connections (return) and enables change (revision). In this chapter I will analyse how the formal structures of anaphora and refrain, with their roots in oral and Biblical poetic traditions, can challenge the politics inherent in questions of place and belonging.

Throughout *Fiere* Kay explores the fluidity, geographic mobility and the continuity of language, most particularly her mother tongues Scots and English and their sometimes problematic and sometimes creatively generative interweave. In our interview, Kay also talked about writing in many languages:

I write in a mixture of languages, I use Old Scots, my own version of it, which would be in a poem like "Fiere." I use Shetland dialect in a poem called "The Knitter."⁵ I use Glaswegian from the 70s, which would be in "English Cousin Comes to Scotland."⁶ Then I use more contemporary Glaswegian and contemporary Scots. I'm always playing around with the language and one of the fascinating things for a poet is how language is very, very fluid, and how it changes depending on immigration, influx of people, movement to places. I find that a fascinating thing. Here for instance in New Zealand you have a lot of Scottish people and you have a lot of echoes of old Scots in the way you hear people speak, even how they use their vowel sounds echoes back to Scotland.

(Kay)

For Kay the "many languages" are versions of English and Scots as well as Igbo and other non-English or non-Scottish languages. Languages not only cross boundaries in

⁵ In *Red, Cherry Red*.

⁶ In Jackie Kay and Shirley Tourret's *Two's Company*.

Fiere, they provoke questions about the geographic, gendered and racial component of these boundaries or divisions.

Both the Scottish and the Nigerian content of Kay's work make it relevant to post-colonial theorists. Jahan Ramazani writes in his essay "Black British poetry and the Translocal: Blackening Britain"⁷ about a post-colonial British poetry which he describes as translocal. By translocal he means a poetry that is not regionally defined, and though often "located" in London, allows poets such as Jamaican Claude Mackay, Louise Bennett, Wole Soyinka, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Grace Nichol and Bernadine Evaristo to see London freshly because of their "non-metropolitan history" (Ramazani 201). Ramazani claims that this unsettles hierarchies around place and identity. While not including Kay in the sampling he uses to discuss translocal poetry, he mentions her along with poets such as Benjamin Zephaniah, Fred D'Aguiar and Derek Walcott as poets who have been part of the "diasporic and black British poets with African-Caribbean and African backgrounds, who have played a crucial role in the early and sustained blackening of British poetry" (201). By including Kay in this group Ramazani suggests that Kay's Nigerian ancestry (from her biological father) de-centres her sense of identity with Scotland, so her poetry is not "regionally defined." It is true that hers is certainly a poetry of "multiple and mobile positions" (Corcoran 202) and that her later work, including *Fiere*, explores her Nigerian ancestry. However Kay, born and raised in Glasgow by Scottish parents, was not a child of an immigrant family. The poetry of the Black diaspora in Britain, though apparent in the content of and influences on her work, is not Kay's story.

Instead, as Matthew Brown notes in his essay on race and citizenship in Kay's writing, Kay is one of a vanguard of black writers who distinguish their voices from

⁷ From *The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry* edited by Neil Corcoran.

preceding postcolonial generations by claiming their Britishness as a first principle.

Brown writes about Kay's pride in being Scottish and her experience of being treated as an outsider due to the racism she receives from some Scottish people:

While Kay clearly shares Craig's eagerness to envision a Scottish civic space that is unfixed, non-essential and open to constant revision, she never fails also to expose the restrictions on inclusive citizenship by depicting the lives of Scottish people still living at once inside and outside Scotland. (Brown 221)

However, despite Kay's claiming Britishness (it's possible Kay would prefer to call this Scottishness) as a first principle, Kay's early awareness of being perceived as different and to an extent (outside of her home anyway) as "foreign" informs her writing, especially in her focus on multiple personas, multiple histories and multiple narratives of place. In her book about the African-American blues singer Bessie Smith, *Outlines: Bessie Smith*, Kay describes her own childhood growing up in Glasgow where, aside from her brother, she didn't see other black people. She writes about the sense of companionship she found in the black singer:

When I was a young girl, Bessie Smith comforted me, told me I was not alone, kept me company. I could imagine her life as I invented my own; I would not have grown up in the same way without her. (Kay *Bessie Smith* 15)

In her 2013 interview with Janet Christie in *The Scotsman*, Kay talked about the poems she had written for asylum seekers in Glasgow. She said, "The way a country treats its immigrants says a lot about that country. It stirs memories because for a lot of

the time I was growing up, I was treated like someone who didn't belong." Kay suggests that part of a writer's job is to be a "modern-day witness." Part of this role of witness is to repeat the familiar (but not identical) story of prejudice, exclusion and inhumanity. In the light of Kay's comment about being a modern-day witness I will look briefly at her use of the lyric poem which she describes as having the ability to both to "lay down the path" and to rise "either above or below it."

Kay, who is neither part of the black diaspora, an immigrant, nor part of the greater cultural melting pot of the larger cities of England, finds in the lyric a form able to accommodate broader, less nationally defined versions of self. She employs poetry's ability to simultaneously tell a personal and particular story by locating it in place and time, and also to open speculation around the politics of belonging. I suggest that laying down the path involves articulating events and memories in a spatial and temporal way, while "rising" above or delving below the laid down path has to do with transformation through figurative language and repetition.

As noted in the Introduction, Seamus Heaney describes wanting to employ a lyric for his "Station Island" sequence that speaks *out* rather than inwardly muses; a mode for the lyric form that he describes as "bare" and "public." Heaney's bare and public lyric enables him in "Station Island" to encounter and converse with "shades" of the people who shaped him: his literary influences and people from his Northern Irish community. Both *Fiere* and "Station Island" are influenced by Dante's *Divine Comedy*. On Station Island is St Patrick's Purgatory, an ancient pilgrimage Heaney performed as a child and to which he returns as an adult, as detailed in the poems. The sequence presents a fraught and bloody historical moment while also enacting a literary Orphic bridging of worlds – bringing Heaney's literary and cultural worlds together. In an interview with Dennis O'Driscoll, he describes needing to push through, "a pile-up of

hampering stuff, everything that had gathered up inside me because of the way I was both in and out of the “Northern Ireland situation” (Heaney “Stepping Stones” 235, 236). Heaney describes “Station Island” as “refusing lyrical sweetness”(239), yet chose the lyric for its ability to speak “out” about history, politics and community. Kay also employs the lyric form to speak about history, politics and community, but unlike Heaney, who speaks out from a place of a deeply rooted sense of place, Kay engages the lyric’s ability to incorporate multiple voices across geographical and cultural divides.

While Heaney and Kay in the “Station Island” poems and in *Fiere* both allude to and to an extent employ as framework *The Divine Comedy*, Kay departs from the narrative of this traditional poetic journey at a certain point in the book because, unlike Dante and Heaney, Kay does not have a defined and singular notion of “home” to be exiled from or to return to. This lack of defined coordinates is a theme throughout *Fiere* and it is from this point of difference that Kay progressively widens and explores the scope of the “return journey” home. The following analysis of poems will attempt to demonstrate how Kay combines the potentially radical fictive “I” of the lyric with the dynamic of repetition to subvert the notion that identity and belonging are inextricably linked to a single place and a particular time.

The opening poem in the book, “Fiere,” was written in response to a Robert Burns poem, “John Anderson, My Jo.” Burns has a strong presence in the collection, partly, I would argue, because his work captures an essence of Scottish experience and character that is important to Kay, including a new approach to nation and language. Scottish scholar, Alex Watson, wrote that “Burns’ creolisation of English and Scots resists the linguistic totalitarianism that is a key aspect of both eighteenth-century attempts to enforce English as a universal tongue within Britain and the concept of nationhood

itself” (Watson 17-18) Burns is also the poet around whom Scottish exiles and emigrants gather to maintain and revive (through performances such as Burns nights) memories of home. Kay’s poem, “Fiere,” about a long friendship, is written in Scots and has the line: “C’mon, c’mon my dearie – tak my hand, my fiere!”(14). Along with echoing the book’s opening quote by Burns it also makes an echoic link with the last poem in the book, “Fiere Good Nicht.” This last poem is also written in Scots and is inspired by the song “Good Night Irene” written and recorded by American Blues singer Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter in 1933. Lead Belly’s version was in turn inspired by “Irene, Good Night” written by the African-American songwriter Gussie Lord Davis in 1886. If this multiplicity of influence, from Burns to Lead Belly to Davis is positive and enriching with each version infused by another, the second poem in *Fiere*, “Longitude,” describes the more complex and difficult aspect of living with dualities. “Longitude” explores the sense of having one’s lived life ghosted by an un-lived other life. I will look briefly at “Longitude” before more in-depth analyses of poems that use repetition too because it sets out the theme of a “starting position” (9), a phrase I will refer back to.

The title “Longitude” denotes a coordinate. It may also suggest its missing coordinate – latitude defined by the OED as a coordinate between North and South and also a “freedom from narrowness.” As already mentioned, a strong theme in *Fiere* is the search for evolving, alternative coordinates for a sense of place and belonging. This second poem, about an attempt to reconcile two culturally diverse origins, opens the conversation about alternative coordinates as it explores the complexity of having more than one “self” and of living between places. Here is “Longitude” in full:

Longitude

And though we share the same time
and we sleep and wake in unison
you are further away, in my dark mind;
odd times, I glimpse you walking
along the red dust road,
same age as me, same hands, feet, toes.
I anticipate where you are by
the light of the half moon in our sky,
but there is no starting position,
something else will have to be chosen.
When I look in the mirror
I don't see a foreign face,
no *Heart of Darkness*,
but you, who were with me all along,
walking that road not taken,
slowly, enjoying the elephant grasses,
holding my hand: two young lassies,
the breeze on our light-dark faces.

The repetition of “same” in the first six lines “same time”(1) “same age” “same hands, feet, toes” (6) suggests the observation of a self “double” but a double who is separate and “further away, in my dark mind” (2). Later in this poem the perspective changes so that what was observed is integrated, “you, who were with me all along” (14). The poem speaks to this identical but unknown “other” self but admits to having “no starting

position” (9) from which to meet and know her. The following line states that “something else will have to be chosen.” The poem attempts to resolve this duality by suggesting that literature might provide a starting position from which to define oneself. The poem references Joseph Conrad and Robert Frost: “no *Heart of Darkness*, / but you, who were with me all along, / walking that road not taken,”(13–15). The poem suggests that Kay chooses Frost’s poem about an alternative less travelled path over Conrad’s novel of an exotic and foreign African interior. The deliberate construction in the repetition of “same” and the effort inherent in the slightly clichéd “dark” and “light” descriptions, e.g. in the lines “my dark mind” (3), “light” of the “half moon” (8), and “*Heart of Darkness*” (13), suggest the “light” and “dark” aspects of the speaker are not assimilated or even particularly easy with each other. If these two sides never quite assimilate they are, in the last line of the poem, released into a hyphenated integration, “the breeze on our light-dark faces” (18). This hyphenation could be considered a starting position for integrating selves. It could also be suggesting that perhaps assimilation is not easily, or ever, achievable. Kay may be raising questions here around the assimilation of culturally diverse aspects of self as a useful or achievable “starting position.”

Kay explores familiar and unfamiliar selves and histories through a series of devices of repetition in “Black River.” In the Notes and Acknowledgements section Kay writes that “Black River” was inspired by attending the Calabash Poetry Festival in Jamaica. Black River is a town in Jamaica with a river of the same name. Now a tourist destination, it was once a sugar port and a place where slaves were landed and sold. The poem uses devices of repetition to evoke Black River’s slave trade history and then, more problematically, to attempt to integrate this history into a contemporary conversation:

The Black River

We took a boat down the Black River,
the water darker than the darkest mirror,
the mangrove roots trailing the river bed –
as if searching for the dead down there.

We passed a tree shocked by the hurricane
whose spindly limbs had transformed
into a Rastafarian's dreadlocks,
rising from the river bed's rocks.

We passed crocodiles masquerading as logs
under the mangroves, and snow egrets
fluttering like blossom in the branches,
and the river carried us as if carrying us home –

wherever we were, wherever we came from:

a black river running through our arteries,
a black river putting our hearts at ease,
a black river touching our skin like a lover,

a black river to remind us of our ancestors,
running through the swamps and secret marshes
when freedom was a belief the river rushes
passed along the dark water like a breeze.

Then, later, when the river ran to meet the sea,
and the colours changed – black, to brown, to blue –
there was my son at the helm of the boat
as the boat lifted and crashed and smashed on the waves,

and there were the jack-fish leaping,
the dolphins' diasporic dive, and those strange birds
– whose name I have forgotten –
carrying an old song home.

The opening stanza sets a scene of loss; the loss of home and the loss of identity and reflection of self. At Black River where slaves were landed and sold the water is unable to reflect, it is “darker than the darkest mirror”(2) and the mangrove roots are “trailing”(3) for the “dead”(4). What is normally deep in the land – a tree's roots – are not in the land but “trailing” this dark river. However the story of travail set up in the first stanza gains a sense of “lift” or relief in the following three stanzas with the idea of going “home” – “and the river carried us as if carrying us home”(12).

The poem tells both an individual and a collective story. The collectivity of “We took a boat”(1) changes towards the end of the poem when it becomes an individual story with “there was my son”(23). With the shift from a collective ancestral story to an individual story comes a shift in pace and rhythm that allows for a more complex poetics. The progressive, parallel repetitions from “darker” to “darkest mirror” (2) evoke Black River's “dark” history – a place where slaves were landed and sold. The first three stanzas with their stanzic anaphora – “We took a boat,” “We passed a tree,”

“We passed crocodiles” – suggest a slow journey down the river. On this journey a series of physical elements are described as transforming into something else – the river into a “dark” mirror (2), the mangrove roots into the suggestion of arms and hands that search “as if” (4) searching for the dead, the bare tree limbs “transformed” into “a Rastafarian’s dreadlocks” (6-7) etc. That Kay explicitly uses the word “transformed” rather than using metaphor with its transformative power, signals something a little distanced or deliberately arranged about these transformations. In the following stanza the upbeat connotations of the snow egrets “fluttering like blossom” (11) on the branches of the hurricane-stripped tree seems a little too easily achieved. The restorative simile – the birds standing in for the blossom on the ravaged trees – is too closely juxtaposed to the “crocodiles, masquerading as logs” (9) to seem a reliable symbol of uplift and promise. The use of the word “masquerading” (9) with its roots in the concept of mask-wearing and performance, like “transforming” in the previous stanza, draws the reader’s attention to the artifice of the poetic construction.

The last line of the third stanza has the consoling image of going “home” – “and the river carried us as if carrying us home –” (12) yet the word home is followed by a dash and then a space between stanzas rather than a full stop which would have underscored the idea of a destination reached. Instead of a sense of resolution the dash leads the reader to a clause that brings complexity to the concept of home: “wherever we were, wherever we came from” (13). This qualification modifies the traditional “carrying me home” trope. The comforting trope of being “carried home” is unsettled by an awareness of diverse and perhaps uncertain places of origin (and thus home) for those travelling on the river. The line puts strain on a trope already modified and distanced by the simile in the final line of stanza three, “and the river carried us *as if* carrying us home” (12) (emphasis added). Line thirteen with its parallel clauses and

slightly laboured repeated “wherever’s” strains to accommodate diversity on this journey that is already straining to imagine the solace of going home.

The line beginning “wherever we were” (13) with its parallel repetition is the start of the central stanza of “Black River” and it marks the end of the slow progress down the river with its figurative transformations. The focus shifts from the journey – unpacked at a slow pace by the stanzic anaphora “We took” (1), “We passed” (5), “We passed” (9) – to the river itself and the metaphorical weight it carries. Metaphor comes from the Greek *metaphora*, meaning “a transfer,” and literally “a carrying over” from *meta* meaning “over or across” and *pherein* meaning “to carry or bear.” The central stanza refers to the poem’s underlying metaphor – the river – and its employment in both the transporting of people as slaves and the means by which enslaved people attempted to escape. What follows are four lines of anaphora.

Anaphora, from the Greek for “carrying back,” or “bringing up” is described by *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* as a poetic technique that draws from primitive religious chants that have developed into “the sophisticated and subtle rhetoric of contemporary liturgies” (Preminger et al. 699). It is an established technique of repetition, notably in Biblical verses such as the Song of Songs and in poems such as Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” where anaphora creates a gathering momentum, a sense of almost ecstatic emphasis which can lend the sound of “truth” and authority to the words. In stanza four of “Black River,” the line-by-line anaphoric repetition of “a black river” is used less to embed certainty than to create a shift in the scope for the definition of home and community. In contrast to the hesitant and weak figurative transformations in the previous stanzas, the urgency and authority of anaphora draws up and embeds a common heritage drawn from various parts of the world. Before the repetition of “a black river” the poem spoke of a shared journey: “We

took a boat down the Black River.” This is a specific group of people and a specific river. At the point of anaphora a shift in focus takes place. “[T]he River” becomes “*a black river*” (my emphasis), a river that is progressively blood, consolation and lover. This shift from a specific river to a figurative one suggests a consolation that does not occur by memorialising the past or by applying a workable simile to soothe or mask its pain, but by drawing history into a contemporary context. After the end-word “lover” (16) in stanza four, the anaphora finds its final repetition in “a black river that reminds us of our ancestors” (17). The word “ancestors” in the context of Jamaica and Africa calls up the history of slavery, “when freedom was a belief the river rushes / passed along the dark water like a breeze” (19-20). By lifting the simple phrase “our ancestors” into the present, the poem makes the common connection for a diasporic people, a single connection which transcends the earlier attempts to encapsulate and include huge diversity of place and circumstance with those repeating “wherever’s.”

The device of anaphora in stanza’s four and five signifies a resistance to the backward looking “as if’s” (that search for “the dead” in stanza one and imagine going home in stanza three) by evoking the river in the present tense, carrying history into contemporary memory and living “bodies” in a process of transformation and assimilation. This assimilation is not straining towards an almost culture-denying “sameness” as in “Longitude” but brings a collective memory to individuals. The anaphoric lines mark the beginning of a shift in temporality and a change of narrative direction. The poem opens with a chronological narrative of a remembered journey vivid with similes that are secured with rhyme: bed/dead, dreadlocks/rocks, river/mirror. In stanza four the anaphoric structure shifts the narrative away from the limits of “real” time and the river becomes unspecific – “a river” (14). The indefinite article turns river to figure, such that the river becomes more broadly relevant in meaning and resonance.

The anaphoric repetition becomes an incantation calling up history in its physical manifestation – through DNA, through shared stories and through memory. Each iteration, each return to the words “a black river,” brings history “back” to life. The repeated “black river” transcends linear narratives of nation and diaspora and becomes specific and personal: “a black river touching our skin like a lover” (16). The anaphora carries “up” the transporting river with no need to navigate the temporally bound question of “wherever” a person was, or “wherever” they came from. The perceived problem of not having a single, definable home to return to after a period of exile is overcome by this anaphoric incantation that calls the past into “being.” To bring history into being the repetitions focus on places of human connection in memory and stories and blood. It’s interesting here to consider that the Anaphora Prayer is another name for the Eucharist Prayer which articulates and enacts the embodiment of communal (spiritual and cultural) memory. When history is remembered and assimilated or embodied it can be experienced as an alternative coordinate for a sense of home, a sense of community and a sense of belonging. Repetition’s distance from temporal organisation (in the shift to and repetition of “a black river”) allows the poem to invoke a different process of identification that gives shape to a more contemporary, mobile, unifying and less nation-bound idea of home.

After the anaphora which has “called up” a shared community, Kay moves us forward in the penultimate stanza with a simple, “Then, later.” We are back in the chronological narrative. But now the personal specifics of the narrative take on some of the river’s new figurative freight. The place where the river – both literal and figurative now – pours into the sea is where the speaker places herself by referencing her son sitting at the helm of the boat. The helm is where the steering gear is, so this articulation of her son sitting at the helm implies that the next part of the journey – a journey that

began with these ancestors and their suffering – will be directed by him. Kay may be indicating both danger and exhilaration with the use of the words “crashed” and “smashed” (24). The line “as the boat lifted and crashed and smashed on the waves” (24) pulls away from the more rhythmically anchored arrangement of the first four stanzas and the incantory repetitions of stanzas four and five. These fractured, unresolved rhythms may be suggesting that “home” is not yet a place to relax into.

At this point in the poem the anaphorically achieved consolations of a journey “home” gives way again to strangeness and diaspora. Even the dolphins – which are in their element and no doubt specific to the area – are described as “diasporic” (26) in their movements. Names are forgotten and strangeness is perceived: “and those strange birds/ – whose name I have forgotten” (27). Although the names of the strange birds (that create an echo with Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit”) have been forgotten, the songs – including the spirituals that tell the story of slavery – have not. Conflating the “forgetting” with her son talking the helm suggests movement into the future despite lost and forgotten details. As the poem reaches the last line there is a steadying of meter and pace that recalls the opening line. The last line of the poem “carrying an old song home” suggests that the act of singing links the singer, or the poet, to a timeless and formative narrative of belonging. Unlike the snow egrets – standing in for blossom thus standing in (rather perilously) for hope in stanza three, the “strange birds” whose names are forgotten can carry the song, if not the people, home. For Kay who, growing up, was treated “like someone who didn’t belong” (Christie) performing the songs of one’s ancestral and literary communities in a new context links past and present and creates a sense of belonging. Anaphora in “Black River” has allowed an embodiment and reiteration of home that is not reliant on shared physical coordinates but rather comes from calling the past into the present to provide unity and community. The structural re-

vision embedded in this most ancient of poetic techniques allows for speculation beyond existing narratives of place and of belonging.

In “Black River” the past and future are juxtaposed and explored in the repetitions – the journey into the recent past by the repetition of rhythm, rhyme and parallel phrases – “We took” (1) “We passed” (4) and “wherever we were, wherever we came from” (13) – and the continuum of time accessed by figurative transformation enabled by the anaphora (the river that runs through us all). The rhythm shifts markedly from the bluesy repetitions of the first three stanzas, to the incantory repetitions of the central section and then to the less musical rhythm of the final stanzas. These rhythmical fractures, and the difficult scansion in “as the boat lifted and crashed and smashed on the waves” (24) suggests that the language has not found a graceful way to articulate a way forward. The metrical structure strengthens again in the final lines, which describe diaspora and forgetting. When the poem links to the poetic tradition of anaphora, aspects of the past can be invoked and re-membered. In the absence of this poetic tradition with its lineage in chant and liturgy and their ordering repetitions, communal connections become vulnerable to the complexity and anxiety of individual memory. Formally, the poem seems to finish on a question about accommodating and sustaining diverse histories within the fractures and competing currents of “free verse.” It finds stability finally in the last line of the poem, which links back to anaphora, with its musical rhythms, unifying repetitions and its revised concept of transport with the idea of “carrying an old song home” (28).

In contrast to “Black River” which attempts to assemble coordinates, “Between the Dee and the Don” explores the possibility of inhabiting a place of no specific context, past or future. This sense of no-place in the poem is largely achieved by shutting down the natural resonance and recall of the anaphoric structure so the

repetitions no longer converse with the past or the future. The poem uses a refrain (also anaphoric) that repeats only the bare, known details of her conception and birth:

Between the Dee and the Don

"The middle ground is the best place to be."

Igbo saying

I will stand not in the past or the future
not in the foreground or the background;
not as the first child or the last child.

I will stand alone in the middle ground.

I was conceived between the Dee and the Don.

I was born in the city of crag and stone.

I am not a daughter to one father.

I am not a sister to one brother.

I am light and dark.

I am father and mother.

I was conceived between the Dee and the Don.

I was born in the city of crag and stone.

I am not forgiving and I am not cruel.

I will not go against one side.

I am not wise or a fool.

I was not born yesterday.

I was conceived between the Dee and the Don.

I was born in the city of crag and stone.

I can say *tomorrow is another day* tomorrow.

I come from the old world and the new.

I live between laughter and sorrow.

I live between the land and the sea.

I was conceived between the Dee and the Don.

I was born in the city of crag and stone.

For a poet who most often infuses one thing with another, writing multiple personas, voices and histories, “Between the Dee and the Don” is notable for its defined coordinates articulated in an unchanging refrain, “I was conceived between the Dee and the Don./ I was born in the city of crag and stone.” The refrain appears as a couplet after each of the four quatrains. The refrain states the facts of Kay’s conception in Aberdeen (Aberdeen is situated between the rivers Dee and Don) and birth in Edinburgh (a city with steep rocky hills or crags and buildings made from local varieties of sandstone).

“Between the Dee and the Don” is prefaced by an Igbo saying, “*The middle ground is the best place to be.*” The first three lines of the poem set out the places where you will not find the speaker: not in the past or the future, not in the foreground or the background, not as the first child or the last. The speaker stands without context “alone in the middle ground” (4). The three opening lines are the only example of enjambment in the poem. For the rest of the poem each line is a separate, self-contained,

end-stopped statement that begins with “I.” Although the repeating first letter creates an anaphoric structure, the anaphoric potential for expansive effect is deactivated by the negative arguments and their arrangement into short, end-stopped statements. The consequence is that there is no accumulating rhetoric or momentum to describe a life of context and connection. The potential for expansive, inclusive rhetoric in the technique of anaphora is well illustrated in Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself”:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loaf and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form’d from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their
parents the same, (Whitman 22)

This excerpt, with its strong sense of home and familial lineage has the accumulating rhetoric of belonging that gathers towards this celebration of belonging. While both poems employ the powerful present tense in their “I” declarations (“I am” “I lean” “I celebrate”), Kay’s statements are often negatively defined (“I am not”), while Whitman’s are allowed to develop and expand. His “I” repetitions run on using enjambment to explore and expand the initial statement, “For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you” (3). Whitman’s poem, in its liberal use of Biblical allusion,

makes the sound of the tenets of faith. This poem contains, perhaps, the “starting position” that Kay longs for in “Longitude.” There is longitude and latitude in “Song of Myself,” the scope enabled by a link to a poetic as well as a familial, spiritual and communal tradition where one’s family line is direct and entrenched in place in this poem celebrating America and the American spirit:

And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters
and lovers,
And that a keelson of the creation is love, (Whitman 31)

The “keelson” is a longitudinal beam fastening the planks or plates of the floor to a boat’s keel. The poem’s foundations are a strong belief in the enduring structures of place, religion and community. Whitman uses repetition to create expansiveness and connection in “Song of Myself.”

In “Between the Dee and the Don,” Kay takes a different journey towards identity and place. The “I” in “Between the Dee and the Don” is constructed by descriptions that seem to oppose each other: the powerful declaration “I am” is followed by its opposite “I am light and dark./ I am father and mother” (9-10). In other poems Kay would be employing this doubleness to signal, if not a cohesion of variables leading to a sense of in-placeness and at-homeness, at least the accommodation and exploration of possible selves. In this poem, with its context of negative construction, the doubling presents a way to construct an alternative persona that is both everything “I am light and dark” and nothing “I am not forgiving and I am not cruel” (13). Against

the repeating “I” she negotiates a persona whose ground is between the scant details of her place of conception and her place of birth. Instead of accumulating a sense of place and belonging by calling “up” a poetic and ancestral tradition, the anaphora separates and negates the foundations of identity such as a link to community and a sense of future, underscored by the line, “I will stand alone in the middle ground” (4).

A refrain is a repetition of identical words that usually repeat at the end of stanzas. It might act as a still point in a poem, the fulcrum that the rest of the poem moves on, or as a way of reorienting the reader to the central impulse, or pulse, of the poem. It might also, as with a ballad, be a way of dividing the narrative into scenes. However the refrain in “Between the Dee and the Don” seems merely to state and restate two incontestable facts. It finishes with the word “stone” and seems set in stone in that there is no imprint of experience and there is no deepening of meaning or of feeling carried into new contexts by the repetitions. If the poem articulates a sense of home, it is a home found outside of the traditional structures of community; certainly not the home that Whitman writes about constructs from faith, community, lineage and heritage. In her poem Kay seems to refuse the cohesive and resolved poetic heritage of anaphora with its expansive repetitions. In “Between the Dee and the Don” Kay uses repetition to undo formally any cohesive sense of identity and identification with tradition, refusing a particular lineage formally even as she refuses it by assertion. She achieves this by harnessing negative and end-stopped descriptions to the anaphorically repeating “I.” Content and the tradition of anaphora are in dispute in the poem. In the poem’s impulse towards separation – or “standing alone” – rather than cohesion, the usual work of anaphora, to connect and expand, is impeded, but not shut down. The “I” that repeats at the start of almost every line, visually suggests the potential for multiple identities. The repetitions of “I” (22 repetitions in a 24-line poem) and “I am,” “I will,” “I was,” “I can,”

“I come,” and “I live,” also provide the context for self (past, future, present) and agency that the speaker seems to argue against. The resonances and connections of anaphora undermine the argument the poem makes about living without context and connection.

The repeating “I” is used to shift from “lost” to “found” in “Fiere in the Middle,” the poem immediately following “Between the Dee and the Don.” It achieves the shift by providing a powerful literary context and guide. That “Fiere in the Middle” speaks back to “Between the Dee and the Don” is signalled first in its title, “Fiere in the Middle,” and then in the first line “I was lost in the middle of my life.” Along with referencing the Igbo saying that prefaces “Between the Dee and the Don,” the first line “I was lost in the middle of my life” evokes the opening lines of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, “In the middle of the journey of our life I came / to myself within a dark wood where the straight /way was lost” (Dante 23). *Fiere* is a book about connections, human and literary, and how these connections might provide alternative coordinates for those whose sense of belonging is challenged and undermined. As her poem “Longitude” states, “something else will have to be chosen” (10) to stand in for the confluence of elements (longitude *and* latitude) that define one’s place of belonging. What stands in for Kay is the literary tradition, rejected in “Between the Dee and the Don”: here it is “recalled” in the making of the poem. Specifically, the vivid description of the wood, the exile and the loss of those things that seemed to define her makes a strong parallel with the opening canto of Dante’s “Inferno.” The literary journey back into the wood also parallels the structure of Dante’s journey.

Fiere in the Middle

I was lost in the middle of my life;

I couldn't see the wood for the trees –

the silver birch, the beech, the sycamore.

It was summer: a chaos of leaves.

I went in further, deeper, than I'd been before.

I'd lost my way, my heart, my wife.

I couldn't read and I couldn't write.

Birds fell from branches. I lost my senses.

The dark came down and held me too tight.

I didn't want to be found; or let in the light.

You took the risk and cut through the forest.

You tracked one shoe and then another;

until you saw – as if from above, from further –

the haphazard symmetry of footsteps . . .

and you held my hand and led me out.

*

Then last year, it was you – lost in your middle years.

Your father died; your lover left in the coldest winter.

And the years you'd been there changed over; I was here.

The trees had no leaves, bare branches;

winter trees revered pure structure, odd symmetries.

Strange things happened on same days; coincidences.

I saw the girl you'd been; the old woman you'd be.

I came to your garden when no apples were on your trees;

I danced an African dance so your ghosts would leave.

Finding is an act of faith, you once said in the woods.

Should you be lost in the middle years . . .

the true fieres appear: *able, sound, equally good.*

Dante's poem of poetic guidance and the resurgence of art has long been the guide and standard for poets writing of exile, loss and return. Heaney discusses with Michael Cavanagh the influence of Dante on his work at a time when he was wrestling with his identity and allegiances as "an Irish poet raised in the English language" (Cavanagh 121). Heaney notes that the residents of Northern Ireland have "become adept" at living in two places at once:

Like all human beings, of course, they would prefer to live in one, but in the meantime they make do with a constructed destination, an interim place whose foundations straddle the areas of self-division, a place of resolved contradiction, beyond confusion. (121)

Heaney was drawn to Dante's ability to be faithful both to the collective experience and the individual self, "faithful to the collective historical experience and ... true to the recognitions of the emerging self" (121). One can see how apt it is for

Dante, with his story of exile and poetic guidance, to be influence and guide for poets such as Heaney with his dividing tensions and Kay with hers. However, Kay's situation has a singularly complicating element. For Kay, even where she is "at home" (with a loving adoptive family in a city that she grew up in) she is often taken as a foreigner by her countrymen and women. In "Fiere in the Middle" Kay describes what I interpret as her own mid-life crisis and how she was supported and guided by a friend who ultimately "led [me] out" (15) of the forest. The accumulating rhetorical power of quickly relayed losses "I'd lost my way, my heart, my wife" (6-7) is a very different repetitive effect from the full-stopped, deconstructing "I" statements of "Beyond the Dee and the Don." However, both poems raise the question of how to argue the wrongs and variables and nuances of one's exile without a "starting position" of unequivocal belonging – a sense of home and belonging that is central to the journeys in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Heaney's "Station Island" sequence.

Kay uses parallel repetition in "Fiere in the Middle" to define and sound out the scope of her losses. In stanza two she repeats the possessive "my," "I'd lost my way, my heart, my wife." (6) in combination with an iambic tetrameter rhythm that stresses the words "lost," "way," "heart" and "wife." The next line embeds a second loss – "I couldn't read and I couldn't write." (7). This time the iambic tetrameter foregrounds the words "couldn't" in each of the two statements. Juxtaposing the catalogue of losses side by side over two lines means we read them quickly and in this quick reading we can "hear" the intensity and sense of mounting panic in the accumulating losses. The first three stanzas resolve with another person, a friend, "taking the risk" of cutting through the forest and following the "haphazard symmetry of footsteps" (14) to find the one who was lost, to take her hand and lead her out of the forest. These first three stanzas are composed of formal symmetries applied in a haphazard way. The rhyme scheme

changes from stanza to stanza and the content seems to move between formal structures, or perhaps it struggles to settle on a formal way to contain this piece of the journey where the speaker is lost.

In the second part of the poem an important transformation takes place. The guiding fiere becomes lost in her “middle years” (16) and the one who was lost becomes the guide. The fractured, panicked sound of the first half of the poem shifts at this point to a less fractured form achieved by its organisation into three-line stanzas with long, cohesive and conversational lines. The wood in the second section of the poem is a winter wood with sculptural branches rather than a “chaos of leaves” (4). The bare wood has a “revered pure structure” (20). In the shift of focus from “I” to “you” an important change takes place; the friends swap places: “And the years you’d been there changed over; I was here” (18). The lost speaker in the first part of the poem is somewhere now, in that she has a coordinate: she is “here.”

The “haphazard symmetry of footsteps” (14) in the first part of the poem suggests a panicked, unsteady movement through the “chaos” of leaves. The clear and steadying form of the winter trees’ “revered pure structure” (20) in the second part make odd symmetries (in that their similar parts are irregularly arranged) but these odd symmetries of form have their own order, or arrangement, unlike the “haphazard symmetry” (14) in the first part of the poem. Similarly, the second part of the poem is more formally structured than the first – it is arranged into four tercets with an abarhyme scheme. In the last tercet the speaker recalls her friend advising her that “*Finding is an act of faith*” (25). Faith suggests community and shared values and, above all, human connection. In the last line ‘the true fieres appear’ to provide guidance and context. The poem’s achievement of order out of chaos and consolation after loss also

alludes to Dante's *Divine Comedy* in that it constructs the life in two parts; the second part in middle age, looking back at and making art from, the first.

In the penultimate stanza the anaphoric lines "I saw," "I came," "I danced," invoke and accumulate a context for place and belonging. They include a connection to the past and the future, "I saw the girl you'd been; the old woman you'd be" (22), and to a particular place (the garden) in a particular season (there are no apples on the trees). Because the speaker now has those coordinates in place, even if they span countries, cultures and languages, she is "here" and her actions can affect change: "I danced an African dance so your ghosts would leave" (24). Cavanagh writes "The whole purpose of the Dantean endeavour is to turn random life into purposeful art; on the personal level it is to turn one's own life to art." (123). The Dantean act of cultural detachment (exile) to "retrieve" one's life to this point with a view to turning "random life into purposeful art" (Cavanagh 119) is mirrored in this narrative of the retrieval by "friends" (poetic as well as familial) from the chaos of exile into the clarity of structure. In "Fiere in the Middle" the "turn" from chaos to order is most effectively achieved by techniques of repetition. Kay uses anaphora – again, – a technique with roots in an oral culture and the preservation of geographical and spiritual links to place – to re-imagine community and belonging, and to contextualise the speaker's life, moving from loss: "I was lost," "I couldn't see," "I couldn't read," "I didn't want," to agency and context: "I saw," "I came," "I danced." The anaphora emphasises a movement towards the cohesion of "parts" and creates a sense of agency.

Turning again to literature, Kay openly employs Heaney's poem "Digging" to write a poem about leaving behind or "burying" her African father. Heaney as literary guide is closer to home for Kay, but the repetition of images from Heaney's famous poem becomes more point of departure than parallel. What is, however, brought to the

surface in choosing Heaney's poem as reference point for her own is the power of fathers, lineage (literary and familial) and inheritance. "Burying My African Father" traces the process of going to the home village of her father, against his wishes, and gaining a sense of ownership of her ancestry. "Now that I have finally arrived, without you, / to the home of the ancestors, I can bid you farewell, *Adieu*." (18) After that arrival she can leave the imagined (hoped for) version of her African father behind. To do this she calls up "Digging," a poem about maintaining connections with one's father despite choosing a different life for oneself, as described in this excerpt:

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it. (Heaney *Poems, 1965-1975* 25-31)

Kay's poem uses the same imagery as Heaney – the pen in place of the spade – and attempts to make a similar psychological move in terms of letting go of her father while holding on to his legacy; her African heritage:

For I must, with my own black pen – instead of a spade –
ashes to ashes and dust to dust,

and years before you are actually dead,
bury you right here in my head. (20 – 24)

The line from a Western burial service “ashes to ashes and dust to dust” with its word repetitions, its theme of repetition and its link to an inherited cultural liturgy attempts to formalise this ritual burial of an imagined father. The burial, it seems, is an important part of the process of claiming her African ancestry for herself; engaging the agency “called up” by anaphora in “Fiere in the Middle,” (“I danced an African dance”). However, if both Heaney and Kay’s poems chart a return to one’s roots to define their individual journeys, the poems have very different resolutions. Heaney’s poem makes a strong connection to his father and his father’s legacy through writing, while Kay attempts to “bury” her father with her pen. This strains the analogy Kay is attempting between “Digging” and “Burying My African Father” and calls into question her choice of language from a Western burial service to symbolically bury her African father. Kay’s poem attempts to shortcut the journey back to her roots in “Burying My African Father.” The use of anaphora in this poem also suggests an anxious rush through the process of claiming her origins: “and seen the lizards and geckos / and goats and all God’s creatures,” “and walked beside the elephant grasses,” “and held the tiny baby,” “and said *Odimma*.” The final “and” in the penultimate line of the poem emphasises the tension between what the speaker is trying to achieve and the actuality of her situation. At the end of the sixteen-line first sentence with its accumulating “and’s” Kay writes, “Now that I have finally arrived, without you, / to the home of the ancestors” (17-18) and follows this with the lines about burying her father with her “own black pen,” in the last couplet she writes, “and years before you are actually dead, / bury you right here in my head” (21-22). To arrive at the home of your ancestors, the familial dead, only to

claim a living parent as an ancestor is an unconvincing move and its uncertainty is emphasised by the poem's final "and," which is modified and thus defused by "years before you are actually dead." The tradition of anaphora, with its origins in the performance of ritual and liturgy emphasises the unconvincing nature of this "burying" of her father. "Burying My African Father" is a precursor for the following poem, "Limbo," with its insistent narrative about moving through purgatory.

"Limbo" intensifies Kay's struggle with the Dantean framework in her transition from the chaos of exile to a purposefully constructed "second life" (Cavanagh 119). Cavanagh notes that the second life is "associated in the *Commedia* with Purgatory...Dante himself insists at the very outset of *Purgatorio*: 'ma qui la morta poesi resurga' – "but here let dead poetry rise" (122). "Limbo" opens with "Last night I felt myself crossing over / coming back from the dead." But the positive movement in this opening couplet is quickly eclipsed by the overwhelming number of dead who seem to repeat endlessly "everywhere, / behind and up ahead" (4). The poem goes on to repeat, almost without meaning or sense of an accumulating pattern, the two words "head" and "dead" – words which appear in the last two lines of "Burying My African Father." In "Limbo" they are repeated in a chaotic way: "Maybe the dead are loved more / than the living, I thought, light-headedly" (5-6). This light-headedness gains gravitas and complexity by its juxtaposition to the following lines that refer, in my reading of them, to both Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Heaney's "Station Island" sequence in that they evoke a purgatory or limbo of the "newly dead"(16) with their repetitions of personal torment and injury and fury. The poem describes the relief of

not waking to the glassy-eyed monstrous heads
the staggering, shattered people, newly dead.

At last I was away from the furious dead
and the deadening lives and back to the land of the living

freer, more carefree than ever,
the wind in my black hair, my dark eyes clear. (16-20)

The repetition in “Freer, more carefree” after such a progression of horrors seems deliberately ill-constructed and insistent – “freer,” so similar to “more carefree” that the repetitions of “free” lose distinction and impact. The repetitions of “back in the land of the living” (13) and “back to the land of the living” (18) are repetitions of clichés and do not accumulate to move the narrative forward. *The Divine Comedy* is described as a story of the emergence of art from life, referred to by Dante as a “second life.” Dante scholar Jeffrey Schnapp describes the journey of *The Divine Comedy* as “the transformation of gravity to levity” (Schnapp 194). Heaney could be describing this process when he describes writing “Station Island” as working through “a pile-up of hampering stuff” about the Northern Ireland situation (Heaney “Stepping Stones” 236). However, Kay’s Dantesque move from gravity to levity in “Limbo” seems incomplete and unlikely. Having crossed over, the speaker finds herself “skipping and singing / an old song from the store in my head” (7-8). This is not the sober levity of stepping out of the dark forest and into the light. Or hearing, as in the final, liberating line of “Station Island,” the “shade” of James Joyce saying “You’ve listened long enough. Now strike your note.” (XII, 18). The poem with its erratically repeated words: “the staggering, shattered people, newly dead. // At last I was away from the furious dead / and the deadening lives and back to the land of the living” (16-18), and repeated clichés seems

disconnected from literary influence and guidance. The “buried” father seems to keep raising his head and the speaker is stuck in the chaos of Limbo. She does not have a literary guide or the right literary guide for this moment in the journey, to offer a poetic order and enable a movement forward. Kay’s particular journey out of exile is complicated by its missing coordinate – the single, definable, knowable place. At this point in the journey, when one should be stepping into the “light” of poetry and order Kay seems stuck in limbo, sending the compass, and the repetitions, spinning.

In the following poem, “By Lake Oguta,” Kay finds the literary guide who can take her back to her “buried” father and her African home. The guide is the Igbo novelist and poet Flora Nwapa. Nwapa is the first Igbo woman novelist to be published internationally in the English language, and she proves an able guide for Kay’s journey into levity from gravity. *Efuru* tells a story of love and loss in the life of an independent Igbo woman. Kay recalls “reading *Efuru* / years ago by Flora Nwapa // and of all the roads that led to here” (3-5). The line “and of all the roads that led to here” also once again evokes Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” and yet in its use of “roads” rather than “road” it moves beyond the idea that one must chose a singular path, and could “not travel both / And be one traveller” (“The Road Not Taken” 2-3). The implication in Kay’s poem is that one traveller can travel more than one road. These literary and cultural touchstones with their messages of an independently chosen journey lead to a “second” (18) journey towards her father. The erratically repeated “head” and “dead” in “Limbo,” as though that poem were haunted by the final couplet of “Burying My African Father,” contrasts with the calm unfolding of this journey towards her father and to Nigeria which “holds out its brown hands” (19). The image of hands link again both to the Burns quote about giving “a hand” and to the Achebe quote with its

implication of multiplicity. The unfolding journey is embedded in an anaphoric structure:

Not so far from here, the River Niger,
not so far, the Niger Delta,

not so far from Imo State, Anambra,
not so far from here, my father.

I have travelled the roads and the miles;
I've crossed the rivers and lakes;

I have landed on African soil
for the second time. I've got what it takes.

The country holds out its brown hands,
the lake allows me to draw some water.

Later tonight, I will eat till I am full,
some fish, some yam and some cassava. (11-22)

The anaphoric repetitions with their enjambed lines enable the accumulating composition of this second journey towards Africa. They create a map of a place with the repeated coordinates – “not so far from,” and a personal journey – “I have travelled,” (15) “I've crossed,” (16) “I have landed” (17). Place is contextualised in the repetitions

of “not so far” with each iteration finding a different coordinate culminating in the last coordinate, “my father” (14). In this poem her father is not buried as in “Burying My African Father” but found through the incantatory calling up of place. The “elements” of Africa, its red soil and grasses and creatures and food that appear somewhat erratically in the “Burying My African Father,” find shape and order in “By Lake Oguta.” The structure that wrests order from chaos in “Fiere in the Middle” enable in this poem a journey that is logical and accumulative. It starts with a coordinate, “I went to where the Lake Oguta,” followed by a reflection on her literary guide “I thought of reading Efuru,” and of “all the roads that led to here.” This poem brings together identities and landmarks that are separate and different (“The river ran into Lake Oguta // but did not mix its waters”) and yet compose a single place. Having followed process (“I have travelled the roads and miles”) on this “second” visit to Africa, the land reaches out its hands to her, echoing the Burns quote, “And there’s a hand, my trusty fiere / And gie’s a hand o’ thine.” The land also allows her to draw water and finishes with the anticipation of a meal, “some fish, some yam and some cassava.” The anaphoric lines are likewise divided into punctuated units that accumulate towards an evocation of place that is multiple and unified.

The first two poems of *Fiere*, “Fiere” and “Longitude,” set up the question of living with multiple cultural inheritances, the complexity of which is explored in this chapter through the analysis of the next six poems. Five of the six poems use anaphora to slightly different effect. In “Black River” anaphora creates a still point between the movement of the first journey down the river and the last part of the journey from river to sea. The repetition transcends – temporarily – the complications of time and diaspora, to call up a communal memory that predates diaspora and exile: “a black river to remind us of our ancestors” (17). Anaphora in “Between the Dee and the Don” attempts to

resist its strong poetic lineage and connective resonances. The poem attempts to imagine living without context or connection. However, the repeated “I” in its very recurrence (on every line) points to the mobility of identity and the potential for re-vision. “Fiere in the Middle” wrests order and community from chaos and exile in the anaphoric repetitions in its penultimate stanza, an order that seems lost in “Burying my African Father” with its anxious and impatient accumulation of milestones in the journey to Africa, “and seen the lizards and geckos / and goats and all God’s creatures” (3-4). The difficulty of this attempt to bury what hurts and keep what nourishes haunts the following poem “Limbo” with its erratic and disordered repetitions. Finally, with the help of the right guide, “By Lake Oguta” achieves a Dantean “second” journey to Africa and to her father and it achieves this second life of order from chaos using the technique of anaphora with its ability to transcend limitations of time and place.

Anaphora calls up “our ancestors” (17) in “Black River” and “my father” (14) in “By Lake Oguta.” Anaphora’s roots in an incantory oral tradition led to its employment as a speculative and transformative device in song and poetry. By its action of return and re-vision it enables a constant and expanding “liturgy” across time and countries. Anaphora calls up communal memory (no matter how dispersed the community is) and, with the embodiment of this communal memory, a sense of place strong enough to accommodate the journey of exile and return.

Chapter Two

The negotiating process

Repetends in Kathleen Jamie's *The Tree House*

I feel I am, and guess always will be, in negotiation with the languages and cultures and tradition which surround and pressurise me ... Not to mention the other negotiations one carries out between self and God, self and world, and yes, private self and public self. People sometimes say writing is about “expressing oneself,” which is ridiculous. It is the scene of our constant negotiations.

Kathleen Jamie *Beyond Identity*

When *The Tree House* won the Forward Poetry Prize in 2004, judge Lavinia Greenlaw described it as “a book which enlarges not only Kathleen Jamie’s own oeuvre but the scope and capacity of poetry being written today” (Jamie “Forward Prize Goes to Kathleen Jamie.”). This chapter argues that devices of repetition, such as the use of the repetend analysed here, significantly enable the scope and capacity of the work in *The Tree House*. Among the many questions *The Tree House* asks there is a central and repeating one of how humans might best live in the world. In asking this question in a variety of contexts the poems engage with mythologies of place in order to ask questions about our perceptions of the natural world. In the context of this chapter, “place” refers to geographical areas and the stories and mythologies connected to those areas that make them meaningful. I will begin with an example of how Jamie’s poetry connects with and evolves from a Scottish poetic tradition of writing from nature. This example includes Jamie’s engagement with a poem by Norman MacCaig through replicating imagery and aspects of inquiry into the relationship between the human and the nonhuman world. In the next part of the chapter the question of reimagining nature will be explored through a series of repetends in *The Tree House*. In particular I will

look at the repetition of “unfold” and its various iterations in poems that pose questions about place – its securities and limitations – and the natural world. Poems in *The Tree House* regularly ask questions about perspective that can “tilt” the familiar, such as in “The Puddle” when the speaker asks “What is it to lie so / level with the world?” to encourage the “black-headed gulls, / goal-posts, willows, / purple-bellied clouds / to inhabit us, briefly // upside down?” (9-10 13-17). The intertextual repetends that might have provided an orientating refrain to counterpoint the tilt of the familiar in individual poems, in fact further engage with liminal spaces – the words are to do with thresholds and process, including views of the “rim” of the world and imagining a pre-human “unfolding” of the world.

The movement of a word through multiple syntactic contexts reveals the porous nature of language – how words can alter in meaning (connotation, evocation, definition, interpretation) depending on their syntactic environment. The use of repetends with their potential impact on meaning has the effect of allowing individual poems in *The Tree House*, and the collection as a whole, to settle on possibility rather than on consensus and on process rather than resolution. Repetends are one poetic technique that can foreground process and enact the making of meaning, and I argue that Jamie uses this technique to explore aspects of the making of place (how we make spaces meaningful) and then to ask questions about the implications of place-making on how we imagine and re-imagine nature. I also suggest that the poems do not attempt to posit particular theories of place; rather they ask if it is possible to imagine ourselves as part of (but not the centre of) the ecosystem of the earth. While Jackie Kay uses quite formally structured repetition to demonstrate multiple possibilities for identifying with and belonging to place, including “calling up” ancestral voices, Jamie uses this less formally structured style of repetition to emphasise, at certain points in the book,

economic, spiritual, domestic and geographical narratives of place in order to ask if it's possible to look beyond their edges and constraints at the greater context, towards our wider (and wilder) "nature."

Crucial to the movement, via repetition, of word and meaning is the lyric, a form that Don Paterson in his essay "The Lyric Principle" describes as having "non-fixity of interpretation" (Paterson 6) and Scott Brewster in *Lyric* claims "is most itself when it goes beyond the self" (Brewster 149). The lyric can accommodate social, historical and political content without being defined by it, as has been demonstrated by it being seen, variously, as song and public performance, as a seemingly personal disclosure between poet and reader, as vehicle for the precise image and exact detail, as a form that fractures sense and sound, and as a gathering place for postmodern pastiche. In bringing the dynamic of repetition to a form that is able to accommodate diverse voices and interpretations, *The Tree House* can ask the question of how best to live in the world without settling on answers and conclusions – rather it focuses on the influence of contingency and context. In asking the question of how best to live in the world both within individual lyric poems and across the collection, *The Tree House* draws on the lyric's multiplicity of voice and form to foreground the impact of context on meaning. The simultaneous connection to language and release from the site-specific limitations of language is, I suggest, a significant element of the 'capacity' that Greenlaw references in her comments on *The Tree House*.

The Tree House is Jamie's eighth book and since its release she has published two more collections of poetry, *The Overhaul* (2012) and *Frissure* (2013), and two collections of essays reflecting on the natural world, *Findings* (2005), and *Sightlines* (2012). The question of how humankind might live less destructively with nature, or more consciously as a part of nature, is a preoccupation in Jamie's more recent work.

This preoccupation has resulted in her being linked with the loosely-termed New Nature writers – a link that Jamie takes issue with possibly because it tends to eclipse other aspects of the “scope and capacity” of her work, a concern I explore further in this chapter.

In critical literature on *The Tree House* no significant reference is made to Jamie’s use of devices of repetition. However, repetition is central to both content and form in the collection. In terms of repeated images, *The Tree House* is a collection vertiginous with edges, borders, rims and brinks. The poems take us from the fold between parishes to the verge of a road, from a cave’s mouth to a coast, from a forest’s edges to daylight’s rim, from the brink of a horizon to the edge of a cliff, from parapet to the border between water and air, from the edge of a town to the rock ledge of a disused quarry. This repetition of ‘border’ images emphasises a theme of a fragile world at the edge of disaster. But this sobering theme is relieved by acts of regeneration and important returns: the song cast from the “frail enclaves”(18) of the bower in “The Bower” “returns in waves”(20), in “The Falcon,” the falcon “returns and returns”(4) to his nest in the disused quarry. Every Spring, the treehouse which Jamie describes in “The Tree House” as the tree’s “own dead”(44) is “drape[d] in leaf and blossom, like a pall.”(44-45). The flight path of the plane in “Gloaming” may be “towards a brink”(1) but as it gets closer this “wire-thin/ rim” (1-2) gets larger and individual elements can be seen, known and named – and by naming be re-membered, “enough to let us name, by hill or river mouth, each township below”(3). The repetition occurs, too, in a number of formal ways such as in the use of intertextual repetitions that draw the reader’s attention to particular words and their connotations. The resonance of these words create interactivity between poems that, individually, are structurally resolved and complete – thus questioning these resolutions.

One way in which the repetends unsettle individual poems is in the way repetends are used to layer perceptions of place. By making an echoic connection across poems where place is being considered in different ways, the repetends demonstrate a transcendence of boundaries and foreground the fluid and interactive process of the making of meaning. I use transcend in the broad sense of “to go beyond the limits of (something immaterial)” (oed.com), including the perception of being at one with a greater (than human) order. *The Tree House* repeats a series of words that interact with central preoccupations (structures of place) from a variety of viewpoints. The words “unfold”, “rim”, “look” and “see”, “light” and “dark” all move through different syntactic communities and so cannot be secured to one particular iteration of place. In an interview with Attila Dósa, Jamie said that “the role of the poet is not to be political but shamanic [...] mediating between various worlds and bringing messages back and forward between them” (Dósa 142). My argument here is that the repetend is one vehicle for enabling and enacting this movement between worlds as it enters and engages with, alters and is altered by the different syntactic and thematic worlds of the poetic line.

The central analysis of this chapter focuses on how syntactic context influences meaning through looking at the alteration in repetends in *The Tree House* and, further, how it uses this effect to develop the theme of contextual influence on structures of place, structures from which we ‘view’ the nonhuman world. First, however, I want to contextualise my argument by looking at the Scottish poetic tradition in terms of a particular approach to writing “within” rather than “about” nature. Scotland has a strong historical base of ecocritical study. In her book on ecology and modern Scottish literature, Louisa Gairn suggests that emigration, exploitation of land, especially of the

Highlands, industrial blight and urban relocation backgrounds Scotland's literary conversation about issues of ecology and attitudes to coexistence with non-human nature. She describes a tradition developed by one of the earliest ecological thinkers, Patrick Geddes (1854 – 1932), whom environmental historian, T.C.Smout, describes as:

...remarkable as seeing man as a prime actor among other animals, instead of searching for a 'natural' world uninvaded by man, which was more characteristic of ecology in the south of Britain. (qtd Gairn 2)

Gairn points out that Scotland, particularly the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, has been framed and re-framed according to the requirements of colonisers, empire-builders, wealthy land owners or tourism operators. One conceit that many of those "frames" carry with them is the idea of Scotland being unpopulated and "wild" – perpetuating a romantic concept of isolated beauty with the potential for "discovery" and "exploration." However, this misconception is countered by generations of Scottish poets such as Sorley MacLean, George Mackay Brown, Nan Shepherd, Edwin Morgan and Kathleen Jamie who continue to write of a *peopled* land rather than a virgin wilderness. Gairn notes Sorley Maclean's assertion that "anthropocentric or unreflective Romantic responses" were critiqued in Gaelic poetry which "accorded a greater significance to the physical experience of being 'in the thick of it'" (qtd Gaird 5). Gairn suggests that this empathy with and for the land has proved central to post-war Scottish poetics. Important to this perceived difference in approach is the point of view of the writer seeking to write from within nature, acknowledging themselves as part of nature, rather than writing "about" nature and having it reflect human preoccupations.

One post-war poet of this sort is Iain Crichton Smith. Crichton Smith lived on the Isle of Lewis, then in the Highlands and writes about the land – yet he does not consider himself a “nature poet”. In the blurb for his poetry collection *The Exiles* (1984) he is quoted saying he is not a nature poet, perhaps because “I was brought up in close hard contact with it.” Growing up in “close hard contact” with nature in any part of the world may predispose a person not to take the Romantic, idealized view of its features. In his poem “Going Home” (Crichton Smith 209), for example, Crichton Smith parodies the tradition of the Pastoral and its idealization of a remote and removed paradise. He writes of going home to “my island, / trying to put a world into forgetfulness” (1-2) and in the next stanza undercuts this idealized vision of retreat to a “tranquil” island life by employing the natural features of the island to evoke the brutalities of WWII. Forgetting is not an option in this poem that goes on to name Nagasaki and Hiroshima, both cities on islands, and both at the centre of some of the war’s worst atrocities. In line six he writes, “There will arise (I presume) a thrush.” The “(I presume)” in its ironic take on a poetic tradition converses with that tradition and, despite brackets and irony, depends on it, as Crichton Smith no doubt suggests, to progress. Jamie’s poetry also clearly converses with tradition to maintain and to progress the poetic “conversation” about human and nonhuman nature. In an author statement on the British Council Literature website Jamie reflects on the placement of “self” and “nature.” She notes:

I couldn't even say what I write ‘about’, because I distrust the relationship expressed by the word ‘about’. I'd rather say that I write ‘toward’. Or perhaps ‘within’. At the moment, I'm writing a lot ‘toward’ the natural world.

In the following section are examples of the Scottish context and how Jamie situates the speaker “in place” to articulate a different approach to the natural world.

Having looked briefly at the tradition of writing, as Jamie describes it, “toward” or “within” nature rather than “about” nature, I want to consider some differences between Jamie’s poetry and three of the writers mentioned above who are her immediate literary predecessors. I will compare poems by Crichton Smith and Dunn and then poems by MacCaig and Jamie. In both cases one poet repeats images from the other yet demonstrates a shift in preoccupation and approach. The comparison is intended to demonstrate a connection to a poetic tradition at the same time as demonstrating how the same (or similar) content is given very different meanings in the poems.

Dunn’s poem “Landscape with One Figure” speaks back to Crichton Smith’s “The Exiles.” Both poems address exile from and return to a native home, exile from and return to a native language and the tensions of these – real and imagined, imposed and chosen – journeys. Read together, the poems demonstrate a shift in perspective about place and belonging that depends as much on the poems’ connections as their divergences. Crichton Smith’s “The Exiles” (in translation from the Gaelic) is about the departure of Scots to Canada after the Highland Clearances and the diaspora that brought the Gaelic language to the brink of extinction. It opens with:

The many ships that left our country

with white wings for Canada.

They are like handkerchiefs in our memories

and the brine like tears (1-4)

With a clear reference to Crichton Smith's poem, Dunn's poem expresses an unachievable desire for a sense of belonging to place. Stanza four describes:

The wings of gulls in the distance wave
Like handkerchiefs after departing emigrants.
A tug sniffs up the river, looking like itself.
Waves fall from their small heights on river mud. (9-12)

Crichton Smith's poem suggests a powerful sense of place that is static and constant; as it is "our country," a place to belong to and from which one can be exiled. Dunn's poem is less certain, and so is elegiac in a different way, suggesting a land (the Clyde estuary in Glasgow rather than the Highlands) that is being continuously shaped into place – by tugs and cranes and waves and mud. In Dunn's poem the birds are described as looking like handkerchiefs being waved to "farewell emigrants," while in Crichton Smith's poem, the sails on the ship are first "wings" and then "handkerchiefs." Dunn's poem "waves back" to Crichton Smith's poem about exile and loss, but foregrounds a less romantic version of Scotland. The tug, untransformed by memory, just looks "like itself" (11). What is foregrounded in Dunn's poem is a place that is in process, with a human figure who feels alienated from the scene. In Dunn's poem there is a desire to hold still, so there might *be* a sense of belonging. Here is the last stanza:

If I could sleep standing, I would wait here
For ever, become a landmark, something fixed
For tug crews or seabound passengers to point at,
An example of being a part of a place. (13-16)

The desire to become a “landmark” and “something fixed” implies that being “part of a place” may be as problematic (if not more problematic) than for those who have not gone away, and who do not look back with a different perspective.

Rather than a strongly imagined and felt sense of home and nation as Crichton Smith’s poem describes, or an unachievable longing for a (lost) sense of place described in Dunn’s poem, Jamie’s *The Tree House* considers a sense of place with dimensions beyond those of nation and city and town and community. This sense of place is sharpened neither by staying nor by going away but by a process of intimate encounters with a shared world as described in Jamie’s poem “Basking Shark.” Her poem echoes a poem with the same title by Norman MacCaig. It’s useful to look at them together:

Basking Shark (Norman MacCaig)

To stub an oar on a rock where none should be,
To have it rise with a slounge out of the sea
Is a thing that happened once (too often) to me.

But not too often – although enough. I count as gain
That once I met, on a sea tin-tacked with rain,
That roomsized monster with a matchbox brain.

He displaced more than water. He shoggled me
Centuries back – this decadent townie
Shook on a wrong branch of his family tree.

Swish up the dirt and, when it settles, a spring
Is all the clearer. I saw me, in one fling,
Emerging from the slime of everything.

So who's the monster? The thought made me grow pale
For twenty seconds while, sail after sail,
The tall fin slid away and then the tail. (MacCaig 436)

Basking Shark (Kathleen Jamie)

When I came to the cliff-edge
and lay down, all beneath
was space, then green-
tinted sea, so clear
it revealed, level below level,
not void, but a living creature.

Behind me peat moor
careered inland. I gripped
sweet rock – but it was only
resting, berthed as though
drawn by the cliff's
peculiar backwash,

precisely that its ore-

heavy body and head –
the tail fin measuring back,
forth, like a haunted door –
could come to sense the absolute
limits of its realm.

While it hung, steady
as an anvil but for the fins'
corrective rippling – dull,
dark and buoyed like a heart
that goes on living
through a long grief

what could one do but watch?
The sea heaved; fulmars
slid by on static wings;
the shark – not ready yet
to re-enter the ocean
travel there, peaceable and dumb –

waited, and was watched;
till it all became
unbearable, whereupon the wind
in its mercy breathed again
and far below the surface

glittered, and broke up. (23)

To compare Jamie's "Basking Shark" from *The Tree House* with MacCaig's poem is to see that both poems capture with great clarity the physicality of the shark and both also attempt to find a description to match the creature. But their respective descriptions are quite different. MacCaig describes a "roomsized monster with a matchbox brain" (6), while Jamie describes "the tail fin measuring back,/forth, like a haunted door" (15/16). While MacCaig settles on what seems monstrous about the shark, its great size and small brain and the brutality that suggests, what Jamie finds "haunting" about the shark is the tail fin's movement which raises the spectre of how the basking shark has been hunted for its fins. "Hunted" sits within "haunted" like a lexical demonstration of action and consequence. In MacCaig's poem the shark encounter leads him to consider human and shark evolution and then to ask "So who's the monster" (13). Jamie's poem describes the shark as "not void, but a living creature" (6) and because the shark is not viewed as monstrous, that adjective cannot then be applied to the human subject.

Unlike MacCaig's poem that suggests a fixed and predictable natural landscape ("a rock where none should be"), Jamie describes the edges or border places where one thing becomes another. She describes the shark as "come to sense the absolute / limits of its realm" (17-18) as the speaker also, clinging to the edge of the cliff above the sea, must sense the absolute limits of her realm. Both realms are in process or being "made." In the second stanza the "peat moor / careered inland" (8), pointing to the movement of land – the making of the peat moors during the Atlantic period, and the fact that the land is still in process. The process of transformation is also referenced in the following lines "I gripped / sweet rock – but it was only / resting" where in a typical and deliberate ambiguity the poem allows the possibility that "it" could be the rock or the shark (or

both) that is momentarily resting and “berthed...drawn by the cliff’s / peculiar backwash” (10-12).

This difference in perspective is also apparent in the representation of the shark and what the meeting between shark and human might evoke. MacCaig’s formally powerful poem opens with him rowing on the sea and stubbing his oar on the shark, or “a rock where none should be” (1) and finishes with comparing the shark to a sailing ship. Perhaps in the “sail after sail” metaphor, figuratively aligning the shark with a human history of exploration and colonisation. The poem characterises a self-referential mind-set which uses “nature” to reflect a human-centric world – the shark is first a “mis-placed” rock, then monster, then sailing ship, but it is never quite represented as what it actually is. Jamie’s poem takes a different perspective, looking at the shark and the “self” as part of an ecosystem. Jamie’s poem is less formally arranged in sestets with echoing internal rhymes. The poem opens at the edge of the land: “When I came to the cliff-edge / and lay down” (1/2) and the human subject “lies down” it does in several poems in *The Tree House*: “we...threw ourselves / flat on the fore-deck” (“White-sided Dolphins” 5-6), “What is it to lie so / level with the world” (“The Puddle” 10). Jamie’s “Basking Shark” concludes with the speaker watching the shark rest, “what could one do but watch?” (25), and describing the shark passively being “watched” (31). Perhaps what is “unbearable” in the poem is the awareness of the shark’s vulnerability as it “rests” close to the land, “buoyed” (22) by the fins for which has been hunted almost to extinction. “Unbearable” could also be referencing how the water bears the shark, the land the human, the rock the peat, and when one thing becomes “unbearable” (for example if the ocean cannot “bear” the shark) the whole interconnected structure of nature is threatened. In conversation with MacCaig’s poem, Jamie draws attention to the

natural context of the shark (and the facts of its endangered status), rather than, as in MacCaig, focusing on the human experience.

There is one more echo from the MacCaig poem that demonstrates a difference in what is being revealed by the composition of the poem. In MacCaig, the shark initially unsettles the water and then in stanza four, “when it settles, a spring / Is all the clearer. I saw me, in one fling, / Emerging from the slime of everything (10-12). Jamie’s poem opens with a view of the sea that is particularly clear directly above the basking shark, a clarity which may be a reference to the shark’s ability, as a filter feeder, to keep the sea clean, “so clear / it revealed, level below level, / not void, but a living creature” (4-6). When the water “clears,” MacCaig considers human evolution and shark evolution, but Jamie looks through “clear” water to the shark itself, “a living creature.” The rhyme in MacCaig’s penultimate tercet draws the epiphany to the surface of the poem; the meaning is “clear” both in the statement of it and in the cohesive resolution of “spring” and “fling” and “everything.” In Jamie’s poem alliterative repetitions are internal and accumulative, drawing meaning together while avoiding resolution. In lines four to six, the “l” that repeats in “clear,” “revealed,” “level” and “below,” terminates in “living.” The repetitions of “v” in “revealed” “level” and “void” also terminate at “living.” This creates a natural pause that suggests the presence of a “living” shark rather than the (potentially monstrous) “void.” The poem brings four living and transforming elements together: the land, the sea, the shark and the human. Jamie’s “Basking Shark” suggests that humans, as part of the earth, are as much in process as the “sweet rock” they “rest” on. The poem likewise suggests the ongoing making of meaning by an act of repetition dependent on its referent (MacCaig’s “Basking Shark”) for its breadth and meanings. Like the shark in both poems, the single

poem is dependent on a greater ecosystem for its continued survival and development, including changed perspectives, as evidenced by these two poems.

Before looking at the repetitions in *The Tree House*, I want to differentiate between my argument about the revision of place through poetic technique and the Heideggerian argument of accessing nature through poetic language and by extension Jonathan Bate's study of Romantic ecopoetics in *The Song of the Earth* (2000). In my 2013 interview with Jamie, she claimed not to have a strong sense of belonging to Scotland. She said "I don't have the mental apparatus in the way that Seamus [Heaney] may have had. He had a strong sense of where he came from, going back to omphalos and all that. I have to make it up as I go along." (Jamie). In his article "In Poetry and Voice: The Urge to Nowhere" (*PN Review*, 2011) poet David Herd advocates place-making as a process, a continual and contingent "making-up." He begins by questioning the Heideggerian concept of poetry as a function of place. In a series of three lectures published as "The Nature of Place" Heidegger discussed the connections between words and place, for example noting that both "building" and "thinking" have traces of the word "dwelling" in their etymology. He argued that as we dwell in language we recognise its close connection to place. Heidegger considered that the poet could most powerfully voice these connections, and interpreted 19th Century Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin's poetry to illustrate this philosophy. Herd's article raises political concerns around the privilege (and in the contemporary world the feasibility) of 'dwelling' in places grounded in meaningful language. He argues that the Heideggerian construction is challenged by consideration of what Herd terms "non-places" such as detention centres where written records are minimal – for example where deportation hearings are unrecorded. If places are made meaningful by the connection of language with land and constructions for dwelling and living, particularly for Heidegger by the

genre that most intimately considers language – poetry – what is the implication for places outside of this poetic grounding? A consideration of place that relies on definitions of poetic language as a mode of thinking, Herd suggests, writes against the “intrusions of modernity” and “can be located in various versions of Romanticism.” (41) He suggests a sense of place might better evolve from what, referencing French philosopher Alain Badiou, he describes as “a politics and language of sites and events” (Herd) and what is proposed by Badiou instead of voice “is an idea of shared subjectivity, or as he sometimes terms it, ‘agency’” (Herd 43). He writes, “implicit in Badiou’s disentanglement is the requirement that people be entitled to make things up as they go along.” (43) Herd asks what the implications are if one considers the “non-place not as annexed or exceptional but as a point of orientation, as the site through which differing interpretations of the relation – politics, place, voice – can emerge” (ref). I want to link this idea of place as something that is “made up” as one goes along to Jamie’s sense of place that she also describes as being “made up” and draw these contemporary ideas about how we know and construct place to my argument about repetition.

There is, of course, a difference in how the “making up” is framed in these two cases. Herd’s argument is that the “making up” of place is something one should be entitled to, while the “making up” in Jamie’s case is something she describes as “having” to do as she doesn’t have a strong and indisputable sense of place and belonging. While this may indicate a difference of focus in terms of those who need to make a foreign place meaningful, such as immigrants or refugees, and someone who re-imagines her hometown and country as a local particular of a shared earth, the difference also highlights a distinction between a theoretical consideration of place and a poet-practitioner’s regular encounter with place and language.

The Tree House opens with a quote by Hölderlin: “But it is beautiful to unfold our souls / And our short lives” from the poem “When Over the Vineyard,” translated by English poet David Constantine. It is the first instance of the word “unfold” which will appear a number of times in this collection. In the light of Heidegger’s claim that the language of poetry, demonstrated by his interpretation of Hölderlin’s poetry, embeds a sense of belonging to place, this quote opens a different conversation about place. The conversation in *The Tree House* is about reimagining the earth in its long evolution, from our contingent and transient places of being. Hölderlin’s quote juxtaposes an aspirational “unfolding” of one’s “soul” with the simple fact of our “short lives,” and in doing so raises concerns central to *The Tree House*: how to imagine and articulate the interactivity of the temporal and the transcendent, a connection that Jamie describes as a negotiation between “self and God” and “self and world.” In the following analysis I am going to suggest that this poem’s engagement with a greater than human world is significantly aided by the use of intertextual repetends, with a detailed focus on the repetends “rim” and “unfold.”

The poems in *The Tree House* combine a structure that seems resolved, highly ordered and complete, with a quiet (although often intricate) music that mostly avoids emotive, rhetorical techniques such as anaphora. And yet the poems attempt a bold and expansive move: They attempt to articulate an inarticulate, pre-historic, perpetually unfolding and unfinished world. In the intensely language-centric form of poetry, Jamie’s poems suggest the decentering of humanity from the great unfolding of nature. This decentering reveals our transience, and the contingent nature of our being. The poems look beyond the human-made boundaries to ask questions about a different sort of belonging.

One way she does so is through the repetend “rim.” The word “rim” appears in four poems in *The Tree House* and in each poem the word engages with an exploration of edges, thresholds and border places. The word first appears in “The Fountain of the Lions.” The grammatical structure of the title with its defining articles “*The Fountain of the Lions*” suggests received stories or mythologies of place; the “learned, literate and conscious” experience of place that Heaney discusses in his 1977 essay, “The Sense of Place” (Heaney “The Sense of Place” 131). The poem opens with the image of a praise-poem written around the rim of the fountain’s basin. It is written in Arabic – a language both ancient and very much “alive” in the contemporary world:

The Fountain of the Lions

Gilded in Arabic

round its damp rim,

a praise-poem hymns

the *difficult, perfect*

system of hydraulics

by which rising water

branches into twelve,

each the tongue of a lion.

The marble dish

they bear on their backs

brims over, replenishes

and overbrims, as they stare

to every sorrowful
quarter of the world,
streams coursing endless
from their jaws.

The arrangement of an ultimately un-arrangeable element – water – into twelve branches deepens an exploration in the book of attempts to ‘contain’ nature. It also draws on the Biblical story of the twelve tribes of Israel and the vision of gathering in exiles from “the four corners of the earth” (Isaiah 11:10-12) or as Jamie has it “every sorrowful / quarter of the world” to live together in “one nation upon the land” (Ezekiel 37:15-24). “[R]im” sits at the end of the second line, to rhyme with “hymns” at the end of the third. Jamie writes that the praise poem “hymns” as though it were singing itself, as the running water seems to sing itself. However, a word that seems strangely mechanical in this context, “hydraulics,” suggests the human orchestration of these “divine” sounds. The etymology of hydraulic is from the Greek “water organ,” which is a musical instrument where the sound is achieved by pushing air through the organ’s pipes by the pumping of water. The undivided world of human imagining, in Jamie’s poem, suggests a manipulation of nature that is alluded to by the heavy “marble dish” the lions must “bear on their backs.”

While Jamie’s poem itself clearly evokes Rainer Maria Rilke’s “Roman Fountain,” which in turn draws on Milton’s “On His Blindness,” her poem deals with both a more global and a more earthly earth. Here are the first few lines of Rilke’s poem – translated by Len Krisak:

Two basins, one above the other, from
within an ancient rounded marble rand.
And from the top one, waters softly come,
spilling to waters under them that stand

and wait and meet their whispers, playing dumb.(1-5)

While listening and attentiveness are shared characteristics of the work of all three poets, water in Jamie's poem does not "softly come," it noisily, repeatedly "brims over" and "overbrims." The way the water "speaks itself" or "hymns," evokes the alliterative interweave of sounds that "speak themselves" in Gerard Manley Hopkins' "When Kingfishers Catch Fire" with a stone that, "tumbled over rim in roundy wells," rings and "finds tongue to fling out broad its name" (1/4). The rim of Jamie's fountain with its poem in Arabic, is breached by the "endless" stream of water, just as "rim," nesting inside "brim" and "overbrim," fails in its attempt to contain. In Jamie's poem the natural "fall" of water is the dominant action or process, rather than the orchestrated rise of water. "Rim" in this poem, although arranged to rhyme with "hymn," ultimately finds its strongest articulation in its interweave into "brim" and "overbrim," suggesting an experience of place that is "illiterate" rather than Heaney's "learned, literate and conscious" experience of place.

A little further into the collection "The Swallow's Nest" opens with a line that presents a broken structure, "Shutters, broken" and goes on to describe the accumulated odds and ends of the "lumber room." The line breaks and hyphenated words suggest much that is broken and reassembled in the poem: "wrought- / iron" "torch-lit" "lumber-room" "home- / made" (2-3/6-7). Inside the lumber room is

one bird tucked in a home-
made bracket of spittle
and earth, while its mate slept
perched on the rim” (6-9)

The fragile nest is tucked inside the human “nest” of the “lumber-room” and seems to be another iteration of the “lumber room” with its broken, rough stuff gathered together. This is a more delicately wrought rim than the marble rim of the fountain in the previous poem. It suggests an interweave of local elements, and then itself as part of other interwoven and interdependent contexts (lumber room, garden, earth). The poem is dedicated to Jamie’s husband, the bracketed (for P.B.). The use of brackets around her husband’s name recalls the description of the nest as a bracket. Nest and bird and poem and person seem encapsulated by the delicate “home- / made bracket of spittle / and earth.” This scene of delicate domestic coexistence presents a more organic order than the formality of the fountain of the lions with the strangely brute final image of water gushing from the lion’s jaws.

The next repetition of “rim” appears towards the centre of the collection in “Gloaming” and presents a rim that is dependent on perspective:

We are flying, this summer’s night, toward a brink, a wire-thin
rim of light. It swells as we descend, then illuminates the land
enough to let us name, by hill or river mouth, each township below. (1-3)

In these opening lines the rim, once more, “overbrims,” and in its spilling over allows light to illuminate place so the passengers can recite (re-make, re-member) the landscape and township they know. As “rim” moves through the different poems it suggests an overbrimming of boundaries that is engendered by process: the movement of water across a fountain’s marble rim, an arrangement of fragments, a flight, the turn of day to night, and dark to light. Gloaming is a border place, between night and day, where both parts of the process are still in negotiation: “It’s not day, this light we’ve entered, / but day is present at the negotiation” (7-8).

“Rim” appears for the last time in “The Puddle,” the penultimate poem in the book. The subtle repetition of “low” in “pools in hollow / low-lying fields” (3-4) in stanza one invites the reader into an unusual orientation, level with the ground. The rim in this poem marks the edge of a pond and appears as a division, or demarcation:

by a pond’s rim,

ever forbidding

the setting winter sun

to scald us beautifully (23-26)

But this demarcation alters if the point of view changes as one imagines lying down “level with the world” (10). What happens, the speaker asks, when we get level with the world (an undivided world) and allow “the setting winter sun/ to scald us beautifully / ruby and carnelian?” (25-27). The repeated breaching, or overbrimming, of “rim” in the poems provokes the question of why obedience to arbitrary divisions should continue to

set us apart from the natural world where we might be “beautifully scalded,” and “flush in the world’s light / as though with sudden love” (30-31).

Each “rim” in the four poems above is breached or contained by another element or aspect: the rim of the fountain by water, the rim of the bird’s nest by the lumber room, the rim of light by light, and the rim of the puddle by greater “fields” of water. Each iteration of “rim” connects with the other, creating a link between these poems that focus on interactive liminal places. That the repetitions constantly overbrim demonstrates the interactivity of language and context and suggests the interactivity of nature and place. The slightly awkwardly phrased last six lines of “The Puddle” conclude with a question that also presents as a statement, or perhaps an answer that masquerades as a question:

Flooded fields, all pulling

the same lustrous trick,

that flush in the world’s light

as though with sudden love –

how should we live? (28-32)

This sentence suggests that the human form is also a “flooded field,” an “overbrim” of one element into another, and that interdependence is, in fact, how we live. Robert Crawford writes in his essay “Kathleen’s Scots” about Jamie’s decision not to include place names in *The Tree House*: “I remember being shocked when she explained that she had deliberately combed these out of *The Tree House*: she wanted to let the poems speak for the earth without the interference of imposed nomenclature.” (Crawford 38-

39). Crawford goes on to give the coordinates for the flooded field Jamie writes about in “The Puddle” – coordinates Jamie is pointing the reader away from by asking the question about lying “level with the earth.” Far from embedding a sense of home, the poems keep asking what lies outside of our constructions of home, beyond our borders and “fields” – our named places.

But it is a second repetition, “unfold,” that most questions the contingent nature of human constructions in light of the long unfolding of the earth. Having established in the repetition of “rim” that, in terms both of language and of nature, borders are breached and fields are flooded, Jamie pushes the negotiation of “literate” and “illiterate” experiences of the land still further by drawing on both the poetic tradition and the evolution of the earth in the repetitions of “unfold” in *The Tree House*.

While “unfold” seems to have a singular meaning – to open out or to release from a fold – “fold” has several variations of meaning, all of which Jamie draws on in to inform her iterations of “unfold.” To fold can mean to bend or plait. It can mean to turn material back against itself. Or it can mean to yield to pressure. To be in the fold is to be gathered within a physical or religious enclosure. When we read a book and turn its pages we fold back the read page at the same time as unfolding and revealing the unread page. Versions of “unfold” are repeated throughout *The Tree House* and they all provoke questions about our belief systems or folds.

The use of “fold” in the opening poem, “The Wishing Tree,” addresses the impact of certain belief systems (including systems of economics) on the environment, while also drawing attention to the overlay between a physical and a mythical landscape; an overlay that is required for a sense of place:

The Wishing Tree

I stand neither in the wilderness
nor fairyland

but in the fold
of a green hill

the tilt from one parish
into another.

To look at me
through a smirr of rain

is to taste the iron
in your own blood

because I hoard
the common currency

of longing: each wish
each secret assignation.

My limbs lift, scabbed
with greenish coins

I draw into my slow wood
fleur-de-lys, the enthroned Britannia.

Behind me, the land
reaches towards the Atlantic.

And though I'm poisoned
choking on the small change

of human hope,
daily beaten into me

look: I am still alive –
in fact, in bud.

Wishing trees can be found in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England (and in other mythologies world-wide) and represent an ancient belief system wherein certain trees are said to have spiritual values and the ability to grant wishes. Traditionally believers make votive offerings – in the case of the tree in this poem, by hammering coins through the bark into its wood. Each coin, if you are a believer, buys a wish. In Jamie's poem, this particular wishing tree has a voice and opens the poem (and the book) by giving its coordinates or rather the negative of that, declaring instead where it does not stand: "I stand neither in the wilderness / nor fairyland" (1-2). The idea of wilderness with its implications of an un-known un-peopled land, and fairyland with its elfin beings in magical places is called to account by the wishing tree who has suffered for

both conceits. The poem also uses another such conceit: in providing the tree with the poem's voice, it uses the pathetic fallacy. But it does so to reveal the impulses behind such anthropomorphism. The tree uses its "voice" to reflect back the projection onto it of human longing and wishing.

The wishing tree who first defines its place by where it is not, declares its place to be in the fold of a green hill that sits between – not in – any parish whose language and ethos is built around a single belief system; the tree sits instead in the natural fold of the land, emphasising that, independent of human conception, it is a tree. From that position, it explains what the human imposition onto it means for both the tree and those who imposed the conceit. The "tree" tells those who look at it and hope for relief that they are looking at their own projections. Jamie is not positing theories or attempting to "speak" for nature in *The Tree House*, neither is she attempting to give nature a voice. "The Wishing Tree" references a specific culture and its tensions (the enthroned Britannia) and, more generally, the implications of human longing: "poisoned/ choking on the small change//of human hope, daily beaten into me" (23-24). If there is a way to see nature that is other than human-centric (a tree rather than a wishing tree) it may lie, the poem reveals, in being attentive to the simple details of nature itself. It concludes, then, with a small and natural regeneration: "look: I am still alive –/ in fact in bud" (25-26). Just as nature renews and revises itself on the back of nature, Jamie uses the conceit of the pathetic fallacy to speak back to some ancient stories of longing and belonging. By using this technique the poem is able to consider how points of view are linked to systems of belief, or "folds."

All through *The Tree House* the reader's attention is drawn to points of view in terms of what context you look at the natural world from and how you interpret what you see. For example, the reward of being attentive to the natural world is shown in

“Frogs,” where the frogs “became, // as you looked, almost // beautiful” (5-7); the mirroring of the human and non-human world in “The Swallows Nest” when the husband shows his wife a swallows nest inside a shed (both nest and shed formed of broken and salvaged local material) – “you showing me // one bird” (5-6) “while its mate slept / perched on the rim” (8-9); in “The Glass-hulled Boat” when jellyfish seen through the glass hull of a tourist boat are compared with “lost internal organs” (3); in “White-sided Dolphins,” where we are presented with dolphins who “careen and appraise us / with a speculative eye” (15-16); in “The Whale-watcher” where the speaker, in distress at how we treat nature as entertainment, wants to watch the whales “till my eyes evaporate” (9); “The Falcon” on his “native familiar” (19) rock ledge in a disused quarry who “closes / his constant eyes” (23-24); in “The Tree House” (that place between the domestic world and the natural world) where the speaker describes herself as “unseeable”; and in the collection’s final poem, “The Dipper,” when the speaker “walked through a forest of firs” (2) in a freezing winter and “saw issue out of the waterfall / a solitary bird.” (3-4). Such exploration of looking and seeing in *The Tree House* begins with this call at the end of “The Wishing Tree” to look at the coin-damaged tree from another perspective; to see that it has a bud – the emergence of a new form, from a process that has nothing to do with human conceptions. The “fold of a green hill” at the start of the poem represents a place in the poem that is between human constructions – suggesting a natural variant of the land rather than the meaning of fold as enclosure. It is from this “natural” fold that the new bud can emerge.

Engaging with human constructions and containments of time (geographical eras for example), the next “unfold” appears in “Alder.” This “unfolding” has a particular resonance with Hölderlin’s “long unfolding of the soul” in that it transcends human

construction of time. In the Hölderlin quote the long unfolding is a spiritual one, but in Jamie's poem the long unfolding is of the earth:

Alder

Are you weary, alder tree,
in this, the age of rain?

From your branches
droop clots of lichen

like fairy lungs. All week,
squalls, tattered mists:

alder, who unfolded
before the receding glaciers

first one leaf then another,
won't you teach me

a way to live
on this damp ambiguous earth?

The rain showers
release from you a broken tune

but when the sun blinks, as it must,

how you'll sparkle –

like a fountain in a wood

of untold fountains.

The speaker in the poem addresses a tree, asking it questions, most particularly the question of how to live. For a moment it seems that the speaker has already answered that question, in that one could live according to the sequential laws of nature “first one leaf then another” (9) accepting without question the innate cycle of death and regeneration. But *The Tree House* suggests there are no easy solutions or consolations for humankind, not with all our stories and mythologies and our longings to belong. “[U]nfolded” in this poem sits between the otherworldly-sounding “fairy lungs” (5) and the geographical history of the world with its ice ages, “receding glaciers” (8) and current interglacial “age of rain” (2). As opposed to the wishing tree’s statement that it stands “neither in the wilderness / nor fairyland” (1-2) the alder is positioned in the wilderness. I use the contentious term “wilderness” with Jamie’s definition of the word in mind; in my 2013 interview with her she said that “processes that predate us, they have to be wild don’t they” (Jamie). The “fairy lungs” mentioned in the poem also create an echo with the magic of the wishing tree, but may also refer to a type of lichen that is called lungwort for its likeness to the shape and texture of lungs. There are many fanciful names for lichen that include the word “fairy” and the alder is a significant host for lichens, but for all this the poem leaves the possibilities open as to whether it draws on a scientific or magical-literary source as influence for the description or perhaps makes a case for a connection between the two. This ambiguity of meaning is central to

the construction of *The Tree House* as interactive and in process. In some ways, like a treehouse, “meaning” is inside and outside of certain folds.

Unlike “The Wishing Tree,” this poem imagines the alder in the context of its evolution, as a species of tree that predates, or “unfolded / before” (7-8), the glaciers receded. However the fact of the alder’s long unfolding is little consolation or help to a human speaker who finds the earth “ambiguous” (12) and one week a long time when the weather is bad. Towards the end of the poem the speaker makes a shift from imagining the long past to imagining the near future, when the rain and the sun will make the tree sparkle “like a fountain in a wood / of untold fountains” (17-18). This simile likens the tree to something human scale, human-made and artful. However the word “untold” begins to evoke the strange, to us, concept of nature without the imprint of human presence. “[U]ntold” (18) in the last line of the poem, makes an echoic link to “unfolded,” and with this link the poem’s attempt to imagine the earth’s unfolding falters. “Untold” emphasises the ancient untold unfolding of the earth before humankind existed and “telling” had begun. While the poem may be attempting to contextualise the human span on earth within the long unfolding of the earth, aside from using the past tense “unfolded” (7) to encapsulate what has gone before, the attempt to imagine a pre-literate, un-storied earth falters. Untold draws something chill and “glacial” out of unfolded in this poem with its echoic connection to the long unfolding of the earth. It also suggests that the tree will not give an answer to the question of how to live. In contrast to the wishing tree which speaks words we may not want to hear, the alder does not speak at all. Both poems explore the making of place. “The Wishing Tree” looks at spiritual and also economic systems – or folds – that impose meaning on nature for human purposes while “Alder” attempts to imagine a time before these human folds to the “unfolding” of place and time. Both poems place nature beyond human longings:

Just as “The Wishing Tree” speaks back to human projections, refusing them, here the Alder’s silence in the face of the speaker’s questions suggests to her that its long natural history refuses human-scale consolation. In both poems, fold is a fulcrum: The wishing tree sits in a fold between human habitations – apart from them; and the alder “unfolded” from pre-human natural history.

Through “Alder” there are words that suggest age and destruction: “weary” (1) “age” (2), “droop” (4) “tattered” (6) “receding” (8) and “broken” (14), words that sit mortality within the unmeasurable unfolding of eternity. The chill fact of the alder’s innate and prehistoric unfolding to an extent explains the impulse behind our mythologies such as wishing trees and parishes with their boundaries and belief systems that imagine a world organised geographically and spiritually for us. By putting pressure on the potential meanings of the words “fold” and “unfold” (and the echo in “untold”) in these particular contextual environments the poems pose questions, complex and entangled ones, around humankind’s need to create human-scale structures of time and human-scale versions of eternity where human lives and actions are at the centre of the universe and where spiritual or magical rewards and punishments reflect this centrality.

The conceptual freight of the word ‘unfolded’ is different in “Alder” than in the other examples of the word through *The Tree House*. The prefix ‘un’ – does not signal a negation. Unfold suggests both connection to certain folds (ways to be) and the movement (being) enabled by these connections. Here “unfolded” suggests a state of being, in a human sense, contextless – of being utterly outside of the “fold” of human context. Even as the addressee attempts to bring the reflection in the poem back to something human-scale, the word “untold” in the final line unravels the attempt and the “unfolded” suggests a process of disconnecting (un-folding) humankind from the stories

and belief systems, the folds, that make them human. The two poems develop the relationship between the making of place (and inherent in the making of place, the making of meaning), and the earth's long and mostly pre-human evolution. The tension between these two perspectives echoes Hölderlin's observation about the long, ongoing unfolding of the soul and "our short lives" wherein we try to make sense of that long unfolding.

"Alder" asks "won't you teach me // a way to live" (10-11) on the earth. This question, which appears in various forms throughout *The Tree House*, links Jamie to a group of writers referred to collectively as "New Nature writers." New Nature writing departs from the Romantic lyrical pastoral tradition in its concern with non-traditional natural landscapes (often disregarded or hidden in suburban and urban areas) and the claim that humankind are part of, not separate from, nature. New Nature writing, which includes essay, travel writing and memoir and interweaves disciplines such as science and literature has a focus on narrative, particularly using personal stories as an aid to reconnecting with nature. Lydia Peele makes this point in the New Nature issue of *Granta*:

The new nature writing . . . rather than being pastoral or descriptive or simply a natural history essay, has got to be couched in stories – whether fiction or non-fiction – where we as humans are present. Not only as observers, but as intrinsic elements. I feel this is important, because we've got to reconnect ourselves to our environment and fellow species in every way we can, every chance we have.

(12)

Jamie's work also engages with sciences such as biology, ecology, pathology and archaeology to approach the question of how to live. It recognises our alienation from the land and the damage this alienation enables. Again, as with New Nature writing, her poems and essays pay close attention not to a romanticised and Romantic "wilderness" but to nature underfoot, at hand and within. She makes the point several times that "We are "nature," in our anatomy and mortality" (qtd. in McGuire 146).

However Jamie departs from New Nature writing in some important ways. One way is in her wariness of the transitory and sometimes clamorous nature of our stories (even ecocritically oriented stories), our belief systems and our points of view. If humans are to connect to nature through "personal stories" – or from what Hölderlin refers to as "our short lives" – then the resonance of an untold unfolding may be shut down and with it the unfolding of "soul" (and its cohering, echoic link with "untold" "fold" and "unfold"). Jamie is often described as a poet who *attends* and who listens. She talks about listening "[not] just ... with the ear."⁸ The drive that Peele articulates to bring personal stories to enable a reconnection with nature seems to be at odds with the silence and stillness Jamie's attentiveness would require. In my interview with Jamie, she discussed reading the evolutionary psychologist and linguist Steven Pinker and her interest in the idea that language is instinctual: "language is as instinctual to us as web-making is to spiders. It's our way of being in the world. As humans we have our nature in language." She went on to say that "as a person who watches language I find that a very attractive idea" and that it relieved her from the idea that "language got in the way, that we stumbled around it. It clears the way to be in language, that's fine" (Jamie). That Jamie considers language to be "natural" and instinctual seems to release it, and her as a

⁸Jamie in Kirsty Scott, "In the nature of things: an interview with Kathleen Jamie," *The Guardian*. 18 June. 2005.

poet, from complicity in the alienation of humans from nature. Jamie suggests that language is part of experience, rather than something to be “stumbled around” to “get to” authentic experience. Jamie’s description in “Alder” of the earth as “ambiguous,” so shifting and multiple and unclear, reveals her uneasiness with the idea of concepts of place as the primary way to approach nature. While language might be the way we enter and process experience, concepts of place, with their particular and inevitably limited points of view, could not accommodate the multiplicity, process and interactivity of nature. My interview with Jamie took place in Manchester during the third British and Irish Contemporary Poetry Conference, and during the interview Jamie mentioned Matthew Campbell’s keynote speech “Poetry and Geophany.” The speech takes its title from a phrase coined in Tim Robinson’s essay “Listening to the Landscape” from *Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara* (1998). Jamie expressed particular interest in using naming to call up an emanation of the land. Robinson writes:

In composing each of the placename instances I have given you into a brief epiphany, a showing forth of the nature of the place, I am suggesting that what is hidden from us is not something rare and occult, or even augustly sacred, but, too often, the Earth we stand on. I present to you a new word: ‘geophany’. A theophany is the showing forth, the manifestation, of God, or of a god; geophany therefore must be the showing forth of the earth. (164)

However, Jamie seems to find linking the language of divinity to the secular business of the earth problematic in her poem “The Buddleia.” After examining that poem, I will suggest that this difficulty finds a resolution in “Water Lilies,” where the poem “attends”

first to the earth (through silence and listening) and then to the elevated and meaningful language that brings it forth on the page.

“The Buddleia” asks questions about nature as performance for humans. If in “Alder” the use of “unfolded” (7) suggests the tree’s early origins, long before our human story, “The Buddleia” looks at a contemporary “unfolding” (2). The buddleia is a bush with fragrant flowers and is a native of Asia, Africa and the Americas. It is also known as a butterfly bush because its nectar attracts butterflies. The poem is set in a domestic garden as the speaker searches for spiritual solace or guidance in the midst of domestic roles and duties. Each of the poems discussed so far engage with the idea of mythology in different ways: “The Wishing Tree” with the mythologies of a wilderness and fairyland and parishes, “Alder” with the human creation and containments of time (a “week” or an “age”) against an “untold” unfolding. “The Buddleia” engages with the mythologies of earth’s creation:

The Buddleia

When I pause to consider
a god, or creation unfolding
in front of my eyes –
is this my lot? Always
brought back to the same
grove of statues in ill-
fitting clothes: my suddenly
elderly parents, their broken-down
Hoover; or my quarrelling kids?

Come evening, it's almost too late
to walk in the garden, and try,
once again, to retire the masculine
God of my youth
by evoking instead the divine
in the lupins, or foxgloves, or self-
seeded buddleia,
whose heavy horns flush as they
open to flower, and draw
these bumbling, well-meaning bees
which remind me again,
of my father ... whom, Christ,
I've forgotten to call.

The first line evokes John Milton's sonnet "On His Blindness" which begins, "When I consider how my light is spent" (Milton 318). The poem laments his blindness and the perceived loss of means to write his poems and concludes with the consoling realisation that he does not need sight to do his most important work, which he describes as serving God. Significantly, it is after writing this sonnet that Milton goes on to write his masterpieces, including *Paradise Lost* (1667). His line "God doth not need / Either mans' work or his own gifts" (9-10) implies that God is complete in himself and does not require human help to exist. The reflection in Milton's poem that sight is not needed to serve God is echoed in "The Buddleia" in terms of serving the natural divine. The revelation that evokes the divine happens in the evening when the light is fading and it

is “almost too late / to walk in the garden.” Impending blindness in Milton’s sonnet and impending night in Jamie’s poem both open up possibilities for attending to the “divine.”

In the opening lines the word “unfolding” (2) takes on gravity due to the echo of Milton’s famous poem, and by its placement after the words “god” and “creation.” The serious, reflective tenor is somewhat destabilised by the modification of “God” to “a god” and in line four there is a sudden register change to a colloquial and slightly exasperated “is this my lot?” The poem goes on to detail the domestic issues of the middle-aged concerned with growing children and elderly parents” (9). The unfolding in this poem is general in that it refers to the unfolding of *a* god *or* creation. The possibility of finding *a* god, with its indefinite article, seems a contemporary phraseology and a contemporary quest in that it suggests a global-village context where all possibilities are potentially available yet (or perhaps *so*) all are somehow out of reach. The word “Always” suggests a predictable return to something, a situation or mythology perhaps, that is not quite “fitting” anymore; that constant return to “the same / grove of statues in ill- / fitting clothes” (5-7) suggesting a mythology (with its iconography), perhaps Christianity, that does not seem believable any more. The poem’s direction seems to falter in line four, changing both diction and direction, to become bogged down in the fracturing demands of family life. However, when it asks “is this my lot?” its uncertainty and sense of loss also recalls “On His Blindness” in its momentary despair and inability to find a way towards the divine.

In the second stanza it seems that what is lost in looking for “a god, or creation” (2) is found via an evocation of nature, “by evoking instead the divine / in the lupins, or foxgloves.” However, the divinity that is found in the quotidian – the bees and the flowers in one’s own garden rather than a distanced and supernatural divinity – is saved from simplistic resolution by drawing attention to the buddleia, a plant that is self-

seeded and not native to the garden. Until that moment there is a perceived impasse in the poem between an unresponsive version of the divine and the duties of domestic life. It seems “almost too late” (10) to “retire” (12) one god and evoke another contemporary, less patriarchal divine. However, this impasse is released by an act of attention to a new form in the garden. This new form begins to be articulated at line fifteen with the word “self” (15). Positioned at the end of the line and preceding “seeded” it suggests a self separate from domestic concern and, as the following line suggests, being defined by a single “native” origin. The emphasis on the self-seeded plant also suggests the possibility of an individual sense of the divine, a divine that is other than the patriarchal “grove of statues” (6). In this moment of attentiveness to the way the “heavy horns flush as they/ open to flower”(17-18), space is made for the infusion of new elements into the garden and the “new divine,” which is, the poem suggests, the act of individual attention to nature and its regeneration – what Robinson described as a “showing forth” of the earth (164). The buddleia is a new form in the poem’s inclusive, fluid “making up” of the garden. Subtly, in this act of attention to the current configuration of the garden, the language in the poem achieves fluency. The colons, semi colons and line breaks that suggest the fracturing irritations and disappointments in the first stanza “...in ill- / fitting clothes: my suddenly / elderly parents, their broken-down / Hoover; or my quarrelling kids?” (6-9) give way to images of regeneration underscored by an alliterative music, “these bumbling, well-meaning bee s/ which remind me again” (19-20). Like the buds on the wishing tree the small, unscripted, unarranged unfolding of the buddleia persists, indicating the “materialist” sublime that Paterson speaks of that brings one into reunion with the earth. The articulated and hoped for grand unfolding of creation that the speaker implies should play out like a performance, “in front of my eyes” (3) can only actually be experienced in part, by these small performances, these

changing forms within their greater context (both the poem's greater context and the garden's greater context). In the context of this poem, "unfolding" offers a kind of solace and connection to the land that is independent of human conceptions yet within the ordinary, domestic human world. "The Buddleia," foregrounds the process of nature and suggest a natural divine that can only "self-seed" – that is, can only be accessed through stillness and attentiveness, per Milton's, "They also serve who only stand and wait" ("On His Blindness" 14). The solace isn't in locating a better "more fitting" mythology, but in reimagining a context for the unfolding 'performance' of divinity. The performance includes repetitions and, as with the non-native buddleia, adjustments to a changed environment. If "fold" in "The Wishing Tree" suggests a natural fold that is outside of human conceptions, and "unfolded" (with its past tense) in "Alder" suggests an unfolding of nature that is before human "time," "unfolding" in "The Buddleia" suggests a natural divine that is tangible and observable – an unfolding of the earth within a domestic garden in the present moment. It is divine in that it is a greater being, a greater context that includes humankind within its fold.

However "The Buddleia" doesn't finish on a tidy revelation of the natural divine. By personifying the bees and describing them as "bumbling" and "well-meaning" (19) the poem circles back to human consciousness, human projections onto nature and our tradition of calling on or calling up particular divinities. The repetition of sound with the alliterative "foxglove" and "self," "heavy horns" "flush" and "flower" and the tumble of "m" and "b" repetitions in "bumbling, well-meaning bees/ which remind me again" (19-20) suggest incantation and the oral tradition of calling up divinities and spirits with rhythmical, gathering repetitions. The bees remind the speaker of her "father . . . whom, Christ/ I've forgotten to call" (21-22). The conflation of the words "father" and "Christ" in the context of this poem overlays the human "story" of divinity

(the stories of “our short lives”) over the natural divine once more. This conflation suggests it might not be that easy to shake free of either our tendency to project human concerns onto nature and therefore always get caught up in human affairs rather than transcend them (the “well-meaning” of the bees leads her thoughts inexorably back to the domestic in the form of her duties as a daughter) or of the cultural consciousness embedded in the language (she returns from a sort of natural theology to a Christian one – and of course this paradigm is embedded in the poem from Milton that acts as a touchstone here).

Jamie is very aware that she works with a language washed through with cultural identity and memory. Peter Mackay suggests in a 2014 publication that the “listening” in Jamie’s poetry is not “a straightforward, or entirely successful, form of mediation” (137) noting “The Buddleia” “makes use of a mundane everyday setting to break any notion of communication” (137) between humans and the natural world. I would agree with Mackay to a point: The poems in *The Tree House* explicate the limits and circularities inherent in our language. But I argue that the “everyday” setting is what the poem (its language and the speaker) most fully “attend” to and where it finds a glimpse of the divine that enables a (momentary) transcendence of what Mackay sees as Jamie’s “explicit images of stunted communication” (137). Another way in which the poems transcend their “stunted communications” is with repetitions such as the repetends which emphasise site-specific influences on meaning and connotation and thus the possibility for language to accommodate more than one point of view, more than one story and more than one voice.

In “The Wishing Tree,” “Alder,” and “The Buddleia,” place is considered through the lens of mythology, geographical unfolding and representations of the divine, and in each poem Jamie then asks questions about what we are seeing and how we are

seeing it. In “Pipistrelles” Jamie applies a “rationalising” lens to nature. After the anxious search through concepts of divinity in “The Buddleia,” the next “unfold” is employed in the attempt to imagine a new natural form. The unfolding in this poem happens in daylight rather than in the impending dark in “The Buddleia.” However, the “new form” is created by bats (pipistrelles are a type of bat) who would normally only fly at night. After a glimpse of the natural divine in the “The Buddleia,” this poem foregrounds a dis-order in nature that may be the result of human impositions on the land and throws a disturbing light on the idea of turning to nature for a sense of the divine.

Pipistrelles

In the centre of the sheep-field
a stand of Douglas firs
hold between them, tenderly,
a tall enclosure like a vase.

How could we have missed it
before today – never have seen
this clear, translucent vessel
tinted like citrine?

What we noticed were pipistrelles:
cinder-like, friable, flickering
the place hained by trees
till the air seemed to quicken

and the bats were a single
edgy intelligence, testing their idea
for a new form
which unfolded and cohered

before our eyes. The world's
mind is such interstices;
cells charging with light of day –
is that what they were telling us?

But they vanished, suddenly,
before we'd understood,
and the trees grew in a circle,
elegant and mute.

The poem "Pipistrelles" is a ballad with the traditional rhyming end-words in the second and fourth lines but without the regular ballad metre. The Scottish ballads were originally an oral form, and in the introduction to *Border Ballads* (1965) William Beattie wrote that in comparison to the English ballads:

the Scottish [ballads] have come down to us much more exclusively by popular tradition; their corruptions are the easy, unconscious results of travel from ear to ear (Beattie 15)

It is interesting, then, to consider that the ballad is the form Jamie chooses for a poem that attempts to rationalise the dis-order of nature as a new form. However, and as ever with Jamie, there is more than one potential conclusion one can reach from the juxtaposition of form and content. Beattie goes on to describe Scottish poets as having “taken the ballads in their stride” (23), an interesting description of an almost organic and rhythmical osmosis of this form. In similar imagery, Jamie describes writing in the ballad form as a way of bringing the traditional border ballads with her. In “Pipistrelles” the ballad – the old, traditional form – carries the idea “for a new form / which unfolded and cohered // before our eyes” (15-17). The idea of forms within forms is present within the description of the pipistrelles themselves. Pipistrelles are a type of bat, and bats are normally nocturnal. However the bats in this poem emerge from a light space enfolded by Douglas firs. They are lively and quick: “cinder-like friable, flickering” (10). The comparison of bats to “cinders” draws the reader’s attention to the life inside the form. A cinder is burnt on the outside but contains combustible matter within – the fire that made the cinder is also within the cinder. “Friable” means crumbling and broken and “flickering” means a wavering, unsteady light, so the reader is drawn to consider the loss or fracturing of form. But “flickering” also accurately describes the way bats fly, in large groups with their wings making a particular flickering motion. Both of these potential “meanings” are underscored by an alliterative flickering of sound. The imagery implies that the bats’ “new form” is also a natural shift from one state to another.

The “stand of Douglas firs” (2) in the middle of “the sheep field” (1) sets the poem in a domestic and familiar place which is newly perceived by the speaker in the poem: “How could we have missed it” (9). In being so specific about the name of the trees and their locality, Jamie may be referencing the discovery of the Douglas fir by the

Scottish botanist David Douglas. She may also be referencing the famous ballad *The Ballad of the Douglas Tragedy*, that Sir Walter Scott in *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1803) describes as “one of the few, to which popular tradition has ascribed complete locality” (243). Within this “stand” of Douglas firs simile and metaphor begin to suggest new ways to “see” the space. The enclosure is “like a vase” (4) and a vessel “tinted like citrine” (7-8). It is almost as though the vessel is giving birth to the bats, the air “quicken” (12) before they arrive and cohere into “a single edgy intelligence, testing their idea / for a new form” (13/14). The poem attempts to present this strange daylight flying as a natural process rather than an unnatural response to a distressed natural world. In the light of this implication, the “how could we have missed it” earlier in the poem seems a disingenuous act of surprise, as though the strange flight were a natural process that had been “overlooked” rather than a demonstration of disorder. Unlike the revelation of divinity in Milton’s “On His Blindness” and in “The Buddleia,” this form emerges, unnaturally, from the light. The new form reveals human complicity in, and an intentional “blindness” to, the earth’s distress.

If, as “The Buddleia” suggests, the contemporary human mind is unable to fully submit to a natural divine, this poem asks whether there can be a coming together of minds – the human mind and the earth’s mind: “The world’s / mind is such interstices” (17-18). The bats are described as “testing their idea / for a new form” (14-15) as though they had human consciousness and were testing a theory. The question the poem raises of a shared intelligence is quickly subverted by the very human desire to have nature reflect *our* lives. The phrase “in front of my eyes” (3) from “The Buddleia” is echoed in “Pipistrelles” – the new form is described in stanza five as unfolding “before our eyes” (17). The perceived performance of nature for humankind – including the mythology that trees might grant wishes or talk or listen or answer our questions – is

implied in the question, “is that what they were telling us?” (20). The new form “vanished suddenly” (21) at the moment of that question. The trees, which in stanza one were particular, named and interactive are reduced to generic “trees” (23), unable, of course, to answer the speaker’s question. Yet despite this “silence” in the face of her question, the speaker persists in describing the trees in human terms. In the final line she describes them as “elegant and mute.” Elegance seems a cultivated characteristic, and “mute” suggests the trees have human language but cannot, or will not, speak. Unlike the alder, the Douglas fir is a non-native tree, introduced to Scotland in 1827. It is not a timeless inhabitant of that particular land. It does not have the “magic” of the wishing tree – the “circle” the poem describes is more likely an agricultural shelter belt than a sacred grove. However, for all its associations with a relatively “modern” Scotland, it does not “recognise” human concerns and human language. It remains a tree, and cannot, from its “fold” or enclosure (the Scots word “hained” means enfolded or enclosed) give birth to a new form that both humans and nonhumans can “understand.”

The alder “unfolded / before the receding glaciers” (7-8) in “Alder,” creation failed to “perform” in terms of “unfolding / in front of my eyes” (2-3) in “The Buddleia” and in “Pipistrelles” the new form “which unfolded and cohered // before our eyes” (17-18) abruptly disappeared as the speaker failed to move beyond either traditional human concepts of nature or to accept human complicity in the damage done to it. Each “unfold” in these poems is infused with the scope and limitations of its context or by the “fold” that it “unfolds” into. The wishing tree sets up significant human folds or systems of belief; spiritual, national and economic, and one natural fold, in the space between human concepts and constructions. The alder unfolds into a prehistoric “untold” time; the buddleia unfolds into an anxious space “between” beliefs and pipistrelles into a “new form” that the speaker attempts (and fails) to rationalise as a shared intelligence.

The “I” in the opening stanza of “The Buddleia” struggles with not being able to “see” the “unfolding” of “Creation” – “I” finding an echo in “eyes” and “my” – and fretful complaints about nature, appliances and her family not “performing” as they should. The natural divine that unfolds in “The Buddleia” and the “new” form, currently “unfolding” in “Pipistrelles” suggest a series of contextually bound “unfolds” that do not, and cannot, cohere or reveal their non-human secrets. In contrast, what can be known about the unfolding of nature in “Water Lilies” is drawn up to the surface of the poem through meticulous observation and the naming of process in this “late summer” iteration of the plant:

Water Lilies

Late summer: the white

flowers are blown,

but furled leaf-cones

persist in rising

through the peat-stained

lochan’s shallows

till they reach the open

border where water

becomes air, and there

unfold: pale green

almost heart shapes,

almost upturned hands.

In this poem, quoted in full, the native water lily unfurls its leaves in a lochan (small loch). This is a natural unfolding. The lily unfolds from the almost-dark “peat-stained” water into a late summer light, with winter on the horizon and with it the drawing in of light. “Late summer” evokes “The Buddleia” with its “Come evening” (10) which in turn evokes Milton’s “On His Blindness” and the observations about serving God through attentiveness. The “unfold” takes place in the last stanza of the poem and only after the articulation of the elements and processes required for its unfolding. The unfolding happens in a place of natural transformation where one element infuses or becomes another. It is observed, but does not strain towards its revelation as in “The Buddleia” or in “Pipistrelles.” That is, in the first three stanzas the facts are presented largely without the transformative work of simile and metaphor. The leaves are furled, accurately describing their coiled, or folded away aspect. The water is “peat-stained” (5) and shallow – which describes the nutrient rich environment that sustains the lilies. There is a clarity and exactness to the lines “the open/ border where water/ becomes air” (7-9). The first three stanzas present the “thing itself,” but of course not just the thing itself, because you cannot have white water lilies with water that is “stained” (5) and leaves that are “rising” (4) and then have a transformation of elements with an image of “almost upturned hands” (12) without noting the language and imagery of Christianity. The lily is an important symbol in many religions and mythologies, for example in the fable that the lily came from the milk of Hera, the mythological queen of heaven. The lily is mentioned in the Bible many times, including the observation that it grows anywhere – in valleys, fields and gardens. The lily is also sometimes used as a description for Jesus and it is often connected with Mary. A second century legend says that three days after the death of Mary nothing was found in her tomb except large bunches of roses and lilies (Krymow). It is probable, but of course nowhere provable in

the poem, that this symbolic freight informed the image of the lily flowers being “blown.” The blown flowers suggest mortality and decay, an aspect of nature that Jamie does not flinch from, and perhaps they also suggest a strained mythology that is past its best. Having mentioned the decaying flowers, Jamie goes on to detail other aspects of the plant. She describes its “furled leaf-cones” (3) and its ability to live between elements in the continual, present tense, “unfold” (10) of its leaves. In describing the leaves as “almost heart shapes” (11) and “almost upturned hands” (12) she evokes, again, a natural divine that transcends human mythologies *and* draws from them for its images and concepts.

This poem enacts the Biblical urging to “consider the lilies” and in the poem’s consideration of the lily, restarts a conversation about finding the divine in the natural world. In the *King James Bible*, Matthew 6:28 is this question, “And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin.” “Taking thought for raiment” connects back to the anxiety articulated in “The Buddleia” about the “grove of statues in ill-/ fitting clothes” (6-7), suggesting the iconography of “old” belief systems and mythologies that don’t “fit” in the contemporary world. The quote from Matthew asks why you would consider ideas to be garments, something to wear (or display). He uses the lily as an example of a way of being that is beyond “thinking.”

If “The Buddleia” makes an anxious prod at concepts of divinity, “Water Lilies” grows the language of faith organically from the poem’s enactment of a shared and constantly becoming world. The repetition of “unfold” in this poem is embedded in the repetition of form both in nature and in a poetic tradition. Only after a close observation of process does the opening out happen, and then a figurative interpretation is made or, more precisely, overlaid: the leaves are “almost” like hearts and “upturned hands” (11-

12). Earlier in the chapter I noted Jamie described the poet as “shaman like” and moving between worlds. My claim is that the movement between worlds is in part enabled by the poet’s use of repetends that move through and between poems. In each new placement the previous iteration resonates within the new as does the fire inside the cinders in “Pipistrelles” and the bud within the tree in “The Wishing Tree,” both expanding and questioning meaning and resonance that individual “folds” or contexts may limit or shut down. The repetition of the “same” word in a variety of contexts to an extent releases the word from contextual limitations. The speaker in these poems may still only be able to see creation through the lens of human experience, but the repetends demonstrate a process (multiple ways) of thinking and knowing. Repetends in *The Tree House* also link these different ways of thinking and being (ancient, old, and new) and gesture to future ways of thinking and knowing. They enable the layering of narratives of place across historical and social eras and, by the action of repetition within and across poems, foreground the multiplicity of these narratives and, their evolving and contingent form. The contained and concise poems of *The Tree House* reveal the radical potential of the lyric in that they foreground, through repetition, the fluidity of their boundaries. Brewster claims that the lyric “I” is able to represent any person or mode of thinking. Jamie’s very lyrical poems invite the lyric “I” (the writer and the reader) to lie down “level with the world” (“The Puddle” 10) so they might be “flooded” with the ecosystem (natural and poetic) that makes and unmakes meaning, voice, self and world. This point of view suggests a release (albeit momentary) from the constraints of self, or selves, and the anxiety of how to be in the world.

Specifically, in *The Tree House*, the use of the repetend “unfold” explores iterations of place, with its foundational mythology, while speculating on new ways to understand or imagine the environment in its material unfolding. *The Tree House*

situates the human need for place (and the stories that anchor place in individual and communal memory) within the earth's long and on-going evolution and suggests a sense of belonging that is fluid, contingent and subjective because, like the earth, it is necessarily evolving. In *The Tree House* neither the land nor the people are "still." The "fold" in "The Wishing Tree" negotiates between the wilderness, fairyland and tilting parishes; the alder "unfolds" between fairy lungs and receding glaciers; the self-seeded buddleia "unfolds" quietly as humans search out creation; pipistrelles unfold, strangely, in daylight; and finally, water lilies "unfold" in two places of transformation – within the natural world, acutely observed and presented in the poem, and within the more uncertain (perhaps importantly uncertain) figurative language of the poem. There is a focus on process in the poems – both the human process of conceptualization and the natural world's process of regeneration. Both types of process are emphasised by the repetitions' resonance within and across poems. The repetitions connect back to previous iterations while at the same time revealing change, suggesting greater processes, including the "long unfolding" of the earth, of which we are a part, but that our place-making, concept-making human minds find difficult, if not impossible, to imagine. However, just as the earth is described as "ambiguous" in "Alder," *The Tree House* can also be described as ambiguous in its effect. The reader who follows "rim" as it "overbrims" into "flooded fields," and "unfold" as it reveals aspects of nature from different points of view and "almost" takes human shape ("almost heart shapes / almost upturned hands"), may be left with several possibilities for "meaning." One possible meaning is that there is no "human" way to know nature. It does not speak our language or unfold in recognisable ways within our (limited) folds. Alternatively (or simultaneously), you could read *The Tree House* as evoking the sense that, to put it simply, all things (contexts, bodies, language, ways of knowing) are connected and all

are in process. The repeated “rim” that is consistently breached and “overbrimmed,” and the repeated use of the word “unfold,” which finds different shapes in different contexts, foreground this interconnectivity, which *The Tree House* suggests, is central to an attentive engagement with our natural world.

Conclusion

Poets work with the mutability of words, arranging them with techniques such as line breaks and juxtaposition to enhance, fracture, or in some ways complicate meaning. I began this project with a set of questions about how forms of repetition destabilise or open out meaning, eventually focusing specifically on how anaphora, parallelism and repetends in particular complicate meaning. I approached these questions through a creative project – a collection of poetry that uses anaphora, parallelism and repetends – and a critical analysis of anaphora and parallelism in Jackie Kay’s *Fiere* and repetends in Kathleen Jamie’s *The Tree House*. I chose the Scottish poets Kay and Jamie because, while the content of their books address issues of nation, place and belonging (issues at the forefront of Scottish consciousness right now), the response to these issues is most powerfully articulated by techniques of repetition. In both books repetition enables multiple and mobile responses to the issues, including versions of country, versions of place, ways of belonging and ways of “seeing” or experiencing nature. Kay and Jamie have different styles of writing and use different techniques of repetition; however, both books emphasise the process of repetition to reflect the process of revising received ideas.

I found that anaphora, parallelism and repetends connect words to previous iterations at the same time as emphasising change, and that this focus on connection *and* change has the effect of releasing words from some entanglements with context. The repeated word has a particular interchange with the line or the poem it enters, yet without compromising that interchange, it can, by its resonance with other iterations, allow the reader to “pan out” and see the many ways in which the same word integrates differently in different contexts. This broadening of meaning is most powerful when the “panning out” reveals an orchestration of nuance and connotation towards a particular

theme or concept. In the case of *Fiere*, *The Tree House* and *Crane* these concepts include identity, place and the natural world. The orchestration of multiple nuances and connotations may be consciously noted by the reader, or it may intensify meaning in a way the reader can understand and yet cannot articulate. Either way, repetition's ultimate effect is of aligning meaning with process rather than with resolution. So a theme or concept makes "sense" of repetitions in that they create a platform where repetitions can enhance, subvert, layer and complicate each other and each other's "loyalty" to a particular context. This focus on process does not, in the case of *Fiere*, *The Tree House* or *Crane*, indicate a lack of commitment to ideas or ideals; rather it foregrounds the conversations that construct and revise ideas and ideals. Repetition engages with the story, the story's provenance, and its possible evolution.

When I examined anaphora and parallelism in *Fiere* and in *Crane*, I saw that they could both deconstruct narrative (stories of how one belongs or doesn't belong to a place for example), and open up new narratives. For example when Kay uses anaphora and parallelism to "unmake" a story – that of a singular family of origin – "I am not a daughter to one father. / I am not a sister to one brother" (7-8); similarly she uses those techniques to construct a narrative of multiple origins in "By Lake Oguta": "I have travelled the roads and the miles; / I've crossed the rivers and lakes; // I have landed on African soil" (15-17). My poem "The Age of Machinery" from "The Old Machines," uses parallelism to shift the temporal moment of the poem to enhance meaning. When the words that describe a crane lifting and pouring water are arranged into parallel repetitions the words are "lifted" by connotations from its traditional use in devotional writing: "pour water into water / pronounce the valid, valid / the blessed, blessed" (8-10). For the reader, some memory of the Eucharist (or Anaphoric) prayer may draw to the surface, or the memory of some other prayer or chant or song that uses parallelism

and mentions the element of water. The “old machinery” of anaphora and parallelism can contrast with, enhance, assimilate into, or shift, the temporal moment of the poem.

If repetition was only “going back” or resonating with a past form or denotation, it might reflect nostalgia and an inability to move forward. But I would argue that repetition can resonate and “draw up” the past (and *its* past as a central device in terms of conserving information) contemporaneously with revealing change.

Anaphora and parallelism bring connotations of cohesion and unity, even when they appear in the less resolved and certain, fractured narratives of contemporary poetry. In *Fiere*, anaphora and parallelism can call up a collective memory that does not depend on physical coordinates and linear time. They can gesture beyond the linear narratives of nation and diaspora to offer an alternative engagement with community.

The point in *The Tree House* is not to argue the merits of nation or theories of place but, by using repetition, to construct a broader context (the natural world) which serves to emphasise the fluidity and contingency (the “brief lives”) of those theories. In *The Tree House* the repetitions demonstrate the mutable nature of words, and this mutability is used as a parallel for the mutable nature of self, place and world. Each iteration of “rim” in *The Tree House* is both breached *and* enabled by other elements: the fountain by water (“rim” into “brim”); the nest by the lumber room; a rim of light by light; and a puddle’s rim by “fields” of water. This interdependent process demonstrates the contingent and mutable nature of world and of language. “Unfold” invites the reader to notice the presence of the natural (uncontainable) world in our places of being – our gardens and parishes and nations. *The Tree House* suggests that forms such as socio-political forms, poetic forms and natural forms are never complete and finished – each unfold or rim is overlapped or contained by another. Jamie uses repetition to transcend the limitations of human “folds” and forms, not to deny them or argue with

them, but so that we, the readers, might imagine (or notice) an undivided world. The “panning out” effect of the repetends in *The Tree House* reveals our human “folds” and their location within the natural world. This broader context for place/s suggests a sense of belonging that is more to do with belonging to world than belonging to place.

Having examined how repetends in *The Tree House* both engage with, and look beyond, place, I experimented with using a repetend in *Crane*. I hoped my repetition of “compose” in *Crane* would create a narrative across the poems of the composition and decomposition required for world, and body, and art. The word “compose” appears in “The Poet Composes His World,” a “perfectly composed” universe in “Back to Front,” the composition of empty rooms in “On Going,” the composition of songs and a steeple in “The Old Machines” sequence, a drawing in “Southern Lights,” and the composition of a painting in “Man Dressed as Bat.” More generally, the “decomposition” of place (or re-composition of elements) in “Kapiti Island Sonnets” towards the beginning of the sequence is necessary for the revised “making” of place at its end. As part of the narrative of creative composition I wanted to show how the drawing of the kakapo feather, the bird tattoo, the reference to – and evocation of – works by Alison Watt, Tony Fomison, Peter Doig and Francisco de Zurbarán are interdependent works that emerge from, and from which emerge, bodies, place, world and art. Each iteration of “compose” negotiates between the content of the individual poem, and the mutability of meaning inherent in its previous (and future) iterations. Repetends cross the formal and conceptual boundaries of individual poems to create another narrative that may destabilise or cohere or in some way complicate meaning and theme in individual poems.

I found that repetition in its structure of echoic return to a past iteration and its implied move towards the next – foregrounds a refusal of closure that can be used to

explore and progress observations and ideas. I also saw how these many iterations create a deepening of meaning in the same way that figurative language deepens meaning, by showing what it is (or the many things it is) through what it is not (or the many things it is not): a black river is and isn't blood, is and isn't a river, is and isn't consolation, is and isn't a lover, is and isn't the memory of ancestors. A rim is and isn't the edge of a basin, a slither of light, or the shape of a puddle. Repetition engages with both "making" and "unmaking" meaning. The making is to do with a shared resonance and tradition, the "unmaking" with the movement into a new context. There is a third move in the possible effects of repetition which I refer to as transcendence. Initially, when I talked about transcendence in the thesis I was working on a hunch. I knew that repetition had something to do with a release from some constrictions of context, but I couldn't pin it down. As I kept thinking about the resonance between repetition and release I realised that the "transcendence" is in the process of repetition, the way it connects to and alters previous iterations. The release of a word or phrase from some narrative and contextual entanglements could be seen in its process (within poems and across collections) rather than in its landing places.

Fiere has a focus on multiple lives and histories and versions of language. In "Holy Island" Kay describes discovering a "new vocabulary" while walking past a Benedictine monastery in England:

Holy Island

All winter I was waiting
for something to give
and today I felt it,
a small crack,

the sun on the sandy dunes
by the Causeway,
the feeling of the land
so close to the sea.
Nick and me and the dog
striding along
by the old Benedictine monastery
till we walked into
a new vocabulary –
hope, benevolence, benediction
after the long wintering
of false starts,
the same day over and over,
the spring at last here –
I said a small prayer,
the wind in my hair.

The “old Benedictine monastery” is a structure that “calls up” the language of community, hope and faith. Kay and her friend walk “by” the monastery, not into it. It is an “old” structure, or context. However, its language of faith and hope are newly “realised” in the poem. It is in this way that repetition transcends the constraints of the old structures and infuses the new context with a newly revised “*hope, benevolence, benediction.*”

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