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Sunderland**

Scott, Natalie (2015) Screams Underwater. Submerging the Authorial Voice: A Polyphonic Approach to Retelling the Known Narrative in Berth - Voices of the Titanic, A Poetry Collection by Natalie Scott. Doctoral thesis, University of Sunderland.

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## **Abstract**

This PhD thesis is comprised of my poetry collection: *Berth - Voices of the Titanic* (Bradshaw Books, 2012) and a critical commentary which discusses the collection both in printed and performed contexts.

*Berth* is a collection of fifty poems taking a range of forms, including dramatic monologue, and found, sound and concrete poems. It was published and performed to coincide with the centenary of the Titanic disaster on April 14th 2012. The collection encourages an audience to see and hear Titanic in a distinctive way, through the poetic voices of actual shipyard workers, passengers, crew, animals, objects, even those of the iceberg and ship herself. Though extensively researched, it is not intended to be a solely factual account of Titanic's life and death but a voiced exploration of the what-ifs, ironies, humour and hearsay, as well as painful truths, presented from the imagined perspective of those directly and indirectly linked to the disaster.

The critical commentary introduces the notion of factional poetic storytelling and, supported by Julia Kristeva's definition of intertextuality, considers the extent to which *Berth* is an intertext. Drawing on both literary works and critical theory, it considers the dominant, objective, authorial voice as a way of closing a text, and contrastingly presents polyphony, with its multiple viewpoints, as a way of opening up a text, in the process of moving towards retelling a well-known story in a distinctive way. I use Plato's concept of *mimēsis* to make connections between polyphony and intertextuality and my creative work is then contextualised in terms of other intertexts published as creative responses to historical events, culminating in the story of the Titanic. I show how *Berth* is distinctive in its *way of telling*.

Supported by reader-response theories, I discuss the reader's role in shaping a text and participating in the process of its reception as an open, dialogic work. Illustrated by examples from canonical poems, the commentary next defines monophony in order to draw out the characteristics of polyphony and its relationship with Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism, addressivity, defamiliarization, collage and the carnival. Exemplified by *Berth*, the ensuing exploration of Bakhtinian thought shows that the concept of dialogism, which he applies exclusively to the novel, is readily applicable both to a narrative poetry collection that is novelistic but also to standalone poems.

The commentary then makes connections between polyphony and performance poetry - specifically the dramatic monologue - and other open forms influenced by British and American modernist poetic techniques. I use examples from British Poetry Revival works to characterise the forms of found, sound and concrete poem. Robert Sheppard's critical notion of the 'saying' and the 'said' (informed by Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism and Umberto Eco's notion of the 'open work') helps me to explore how such forms influenced my own creative practice - in the printed and staged versions of *Berth* - and fulfilled the principal aim of the work: to use polyphonic methods in a way that contributes a voice distinctive from the existing works on the subject of the Titanic. In conclusion, I argue that polyphony is a significant device for poetry that aims to present a fresh perspective on a story which has been told many times before.

## Introduction

Is it possible to say something *new* about such a well-known topic as the Titanic? For a poet, the answer, quite simply, is no. An extensive catalogue of texts documents the fate of the 'unsinkable' liner, which on its maiden voyage struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean en route to New York and sank, resulting in the deaths of over 1500 people. Therefore, perhaps the only people who can really say something new about Titanic are the experts who are still investigating the circumstances of the ship's demise, testing the validity of what have been, for many years, accepted facts. For me as a poet, it is the variety of personal accounts from those involved in Titanic's story which is so fascinating. It is also understandable to see why as a topic it appeals to such a variety of people, regardless of their gender, nationality, race or religion. Over one hundred years since the ship's sinking, it remains fascinating and will undoubtedly continue to fascinate in future centuries.

As a ship, the Titanic was a model to illustrate the typical segregations existing within Edwardian society. Advertisements at the time presented a literal slice of life on board, compartmentalised by class, in reflection of a wider Western society. It was a unique juxtaposition of the haves and have-nots. So, as a window into human behaviour, it is undoubtedly a compelling exhibit. The disaster tested the limits of human behaviour in a life and death situation where segregation by class was still expected. The story of Titanic's sinking is also highly compelling due to the dreadful series of natural coincidences that contributed to her demise, from the rare presence of icebergs for the time of year to the optical illusion of a nearby ship created by the clear sky and calm waters. But ultimately it is the poor decision-making during the tragedy which affirms its place as one of the worst maritime disasters of all time. It is so compelling because it exemplified new levels of human flaw. As it is a story that

reaches out to so many people, perhaps everyone has the right to tell it, and each telling has the potential to offer a different approach. Therefore, though it might not be possible to say much that is *new* about Titanic, it is possible to present a perspective on the story in a *distinctive way*. For a poet, telling it by means of a more 'open', polyphonic form helps to represent the story of the Titanic in a way that acknowledges the complexity of the event and its meaning as opposed to more reductive histories or narratives of individual experience.

My poetry collection: *Berth - Voices of the Titanic* (2012) retells the story of the Titanic through a series of thematically linked poetic voices placed in a loosely chronological order which spans the ship's construction, voyage and sinking. The poems are arranged in a way that deliberately creates narrative gaps, leaving the audience to make connections across poems between speakers, events and details. Some of the speakers include the widely known figures of the ship's Captain, owner of the ship and key crew members, whilst other poems are told from the more unusual perspectives of animals and inanimate objects; indeed, the final poem in the collection is from the perspective of Titanic herself.

In this commentary, I contextualise the collection within literary theory, using thinkers from Plato to Žižek to explain its creation, and in relation to literary history, as a work which participates in one of the oldest human instincts, storytelling. Chapter 1 uses the narrative poem as a vehicle to explore the roles of narrator and author, considering degrees of subjectivity and objectivity which can open or close the process of telling a story in poetic form. The concept of intertextuality, as defined by Julia Kristeva, is introduced and explained in relation to subjectivity, informed by the ideas of Andreas Huyssen with exemplification from texts which retell well-known stories or events. Informed by Kristeva, I make links to polyphony to explain the

effects of poetry which uses more than one voice or perspective, also drawing on Plato's categorisation of 'lexis'. Finally, I contextualise *Berth* amongst other factual and creative works on the topic and explain how it contributes a distinctive voice to the canon of polyphonic poetry emerging in the modern literary scene.

I offer a definition of monophony in relation to the authorial role in chapter 2, as a precursor to defining polyphony. This is contextualised in terms of poetry's history, with a consideration of the Movement, exemplified by Elizabeth Jennings' poem 'In a Garden' (c1950). This leads to a discussion of two polemic relationships: monophony with 'saidness' and polyphony with 'saying'. I argue that *Berth* is distinctive as a 'saying' account of the Titanic. The concepts of the 'saying' and the 'said' are supported by drawing on work by Robert Sheppard, in turn informed by Eco's concept of the 'open work'. I lastly consider the extent to which monophony has its place within *Berth*, exemplified in my poem 'Arrival'.

Chapter 3 defines polyphony and applies its principles to *Berth*. The links between polyphony and dialogism are established and expanded in reference to intertextuality, supported by Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and addressivity. I also present my model of the 'Three-Way Conversation' to illustrate the links between polyphony, dialogism and intertextuality. I examine Bakhtin's theories in relation to post-Movement poetry, and apply Eric Mottram's 'constellatory' method to my process of compiling the poems as a collection for *Berth*.

In chapter 4, I discuss 'open' forms of poetry, suggesting that they are best suited to achieving polyphony. I provide a definition of 'open' forms, supported by Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and addressivity, and the open form is contextualised historically within key British and American poetic movements: Modernism, the British Poetry Revival, The Black Mountain Project and the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E

Poets; here, Charles Olson's concept of the 'open field' is applied to *Berth*. Peter Reading's poetry is used to explain 'heteroglossia', with support from Bakhtin's theory of the 'carnival', which is also applied to *Berth*. The process of 'defamiliarization' is exemplified by Edwin Morgan's poetry and the chapter ends by examining defamiliarization in the poems from *Berth* which present the voices of inanimate objects.

Chapter 5 introduces the dramatic monologue as a 'double-poem', a poem with elements of the poet's voice *and* that of the persona, and offers a range of definitions, supported by Robert Vischer's concept of '*Einfühlung*' and exemplified in Robert Browning's poem 'My Last Duchess'. I consider the evident degrees of openness and polyphony in relation to the form of double-poem, where the poet's voice is embedded within that of the persona. Bakhtinian dialogism is examined in 'Psychopath' by Carol Ann Duffy which is critiqued as a double-poem. I then consider the degrees of my own authorial interjection in my double-poem 'S.S. Titanic', which makes a social comment through the voice of the ship. Finally the collection is explained in terms of 'degrees of polyphony'.

In chapter 6, I discuss selected 'other forms' of poem associated by definition with 'open' works, characteristic of the British Poetry Revival methods of using found, sound and concrete poems. Each of the three forms is defined and exemplified by Revival works, then I apply key characteristics to poems from *Berth* and explain them in terms of their relationship with intertextuality, dialogism and polyphony.

I describe and explore the process of collaborating with a theatre company to take *Berth* to the stage in chapter 7, supported by an appendix of documented evidence of this process. *Berth* is contextualised with other poetic texts that have been staged in recent times and I offer a consideration in regard to dialogism, multimodality and



polyphony. Finally, I critique some of the found, sound and concrete poems discussed in chapter 6 in terms of their success in a performed context. Here, I consider the degrees of polyphony in relation to how using theatrical devices can serve to further open a text, achieve intertextuality and expand the dialogue, or alternatively close a text which in performance becomes the final word. At the end of the chapter, I provide an evaluation of post-performance feedback and celebrate *Berth's* successes as a printed and performed text.

## 1. *Then I'll begin: The Authorial Voice, Intertextuality and Polyphonic Texts*

Human beings are story-telling animals. The need to create narrative texts - whether linguistic, theatrical, pictorial, filmic, or by means of any other sign system, from Morse codes and nautical flags to the whistling language of La Gomera (Canary Islands) - is intrinsic to human existence.  
(Onega, 2006:272)

In this chapter I will consider the role that the author/narrator plays in the process of opening or closing a text, exploring how intertextuality, when associated with subjectivity, and polyphony, can be used to submerge a dominant authorial voice. I place *Berth* in relation to other texts which retell well-known stories, including those also focused on the Titanic.

Storytelling is, of course, a familiar human activity. The need to represent an event using artistic means has been evident since the earliest human communications through image and word. One of the foundational narrative poems in English is *Beowulf*, written by an anonymous poet between the seventh and tenth centuries, which tells the story of the Scandinavian prince using a commixture of imagination and historical fact. Seamus Heaney, in his introduction to *Beowulf: A New Translation*, states that 'its narrative elements may belong to a previous age but as a work of art it lives in its own continuous present, equal to our knowledge of reality in the present time' (Heaney, 1999:ix). This intimates that although aspects of the story have been essentially told before, it is the *way of the telling* that makes this text so iconic as to retain its relevance now: 'the structuring of the tale is as elaborate as the beautiful contrivances of its language' (Heaney, 1999:ix). It is the re-packaging of earlier texts into an unfamiliar version of the story, using innovative poetic structures and language devices, which makes *Beowulf* distinctive in its narration, and in this sense a deeply intertextual poem.

Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality in 1966 'to denote the interdependence of literary texts' (Cuddon, 2013:367), stating that a text is dependent on all those that have gone before it and thus there is an absorptive and transformative process in its creation. Rather than a text simply echoing another, it transposes meaning from another discourse and becomes a 'new articulation' (Cuddon citing Kristeva, 2013:367) or, like *Beowulf*, especially in Heaney's translation, a new way of saying. Given that a discussion of intertextuality considers the change from a 'self-contained text to a text with multiple points of connection to other texts, history and culture' (Taylor and Winquist, 2001:190), *Beowulf* can be defined in these terms. Through the process of revisiting myth, legend and documented historical sources, the epic poem connects with a multitude of other texts to tell its story. According to Roland Barthes, 'a text is [...] a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' (Barthes, 1977:146). In this context, then, originality results from the repositioning and indeed juxtaposition of existing materials to create a new text. In such a text, the arrangement of the materials is as important as the finished product itself. As 'a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue' (Barthes, 1977:148), it is a preconceived idea that the roles of a central author and narrator are less dominant in highly intertextual works, in which the primary voice becomes that of multiple subjects and characters. Barthes also claims that 'to give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing' (Barthes, 1977:147), which suggests that texts which avoid a distinct authorial voice are by nature more open to interpretation. This enables more readerly variety in interpretation, but also creative engagement with

the text itself; without the dominant authorial voice, the story materialises from the range of methods used in its telling.

Though *Beowulf* can be celebrated as an elaborately intertextual poem, it employs the traditionally more closed narrative convention of an omniscient narrator who tells the story, and is fully aware of all events and who is involved, using flashbacks and multiple timeframes to add components to the back-story and explain the characters' thoughts at given moments. Though character speech is presented in the poem, it is framed within an authoritative narrator's voice which tells the story: 'Hrothgar, protector of the Shielding, replied:/'I used to know him when he was a young boy' [...] (Heaney, 1999:14). This raises an interesting debate with regards to the role of the narrator in a text; Susana Onega states that the French Structuralist Gérard Genette's 'most innovative contribution [to narrative theory] [...] is the distinction between mode and voice, that is, the theoretical separation between the question *who sees?* (the focalizer) and *who tells?* (the narrative instance)' (Onega, 2006:276). The omniscient narrator can be both a 'focalizer' and a telling voice; however, the question remains of how convincing or emotive the personal stories of the characters are allowed to be when told from a distanced viewpoint. When the 'focalizer' becomes a character (this could be a character-narrator, of course), s/he then has more potential both to see and to feel, thus in turn the reader can more readily empathise with her/his story.

So, the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity is important when considering authorial voice and intertextuality. Subjectivity has a direct correlation with intertextuality; when there is more interdependence between texts to tell a story, the result is a story that is told in more ways, offering multiple viewpoints, therefore it is more subjective. A singular narrative voice is less predominant in such texts. As

Norman Holland puts it, 'There is, then, a deep question here as to whether literary unities are "subjective" or "objective" or, more exactly, how the subjective and objective parts of a reading for unity interrelate' (Holland, 1975:813-22). The role of the narrator is crucial when discussing reader-response, because it is possible for a text to contain both subjective and objective parts, as determined by the function of the narrative voice. This is problematic by definition because objectivity, and its associated omniscience, is associated intrinsically with lack of bias, but a narrator can be objective and also biased in that the story is only told from her/his viewpoint. In an omniscient text, there can also be assumed to be a greater presence of the author's own voice but this can lead to the problematic question of how can we ever actually know what is the author's own voice or indeed how much of that voice is present in a text? Subjectivity is related to the 'subject' of the story and its characters, and by definition is more obviously open to bias. However, a story which is told through multiple characters and from many points of view acknowledges the influence of subjective factors on the narrative and in this sense can be seen as more reliable than one told through a single, supposedly authoritative, narrative viewpoint. In this context then, it is useful to disassociate narrative bias from the closed text, and instead to see it as a device which foregrounds the subjective viewpoint. Because more viewpoints are exposed and, in turn, more versions of the story are available to the reader, what emerges is a more credible overall narrative.

In her seminal study *Semeiotiké: Recherches pour une Sémanalyse* (1969), Julia Kristeva draws a parallel between intertextuality and polyphony in her notion of the former as an 'intersection of utterances taken from other texts; transposition in speech communicative of previous or synchronic utterances; polyphonic texts [...]' (Kristeva, 1969:316). So a text that is polyphonic, employing more than one voice in

its telling (rather than an authorial, monophonic narrator), has affinities with intertextuality in its heterogeneity. This idea has its origin in Plato's account of *mimēsis*:

Plato distinguished between *logos* (what is said) and *lexis* (the way of saying it), and then divided *lexis* into three types: *diēgesis*, or "simple narrating" (when the poet speaks in his own voice, as, for example, in lyric poetry); *mimēsis*, or "imitation" (when the poet speaks through the voice of a character, as happens in drama); and the "combination of both" (as happens in epic and in several other styles of poetry), when the poet alternates his narration with the direct speech of a given character (Onega, 2006:273).

By this definition, *Beowulf* would be a "combination of both" and as a result is less polyphonic and more closed than a text which is entirely mimetic, in which instead of a narrator speaking, it is the voices of the characters only, the subjects, that an audience hears. In this respect, there are degrees of polyphony within texts, as well as degrees of intertextuality. The use of multiple perspectives binds texts together historically, but also heightens their intertextuality because it draws attention to not only *what the characters say* but also to the *way in which they say it*, inviting readers to actively seek relationships between the language of the texts.

There have been many highly intertextual responses to climactic historical events. One example is *Maus* (1986) by Art Spiegelman, a graphic novelisation of the Holocaust as told through a mixed-genre approach which assimilates memoir, fiction, biography and history using the mode of an interview between Spiegelman and his Polish father, who was a Jewish survivor. It is described by Andreas Huyssen as 'a project of mimetically approximating historical and personal trauma in which the various temporal levels are knotted together in such a way that any talk about a past that refuses to pass away or that should not be permitted to pass [...] seems beside the point' (Huyssen, 2003:127). Like Heaney's comment on *Beowulf*, Huyssen is evidently saying that *Maus* has immortalised the Holocaust in a way different to its

previous documenters, thus contributes to the longevity of that memory. Huyssen adds that 'it is actually another kind of mimetic approximation: getting past the cipher at the people and their experience' (Huyssen, 2003:129). This suggests that the text moves beyond the established representation of the Holocaust to present the subject through those involved in it. Spiegelman uses a form which employs speech as a defining aspect to tell the story through voices other than that of an omniscient narrator. Thus, the important meaning is less to do with the Holocaust as an objective historical event, and more to do with the many subjective experiences which comprise it. Therefore Spiegelman adopts a polyphonic, multiple-voiced approach in his creation of this text, an approach I also adopted to write *Berth*, to open out the subject matter and explore the public loss and memory-making processes involved in the representation of the Titanic.

The sinking of the Titanic likewise fascinates many writers on a personal and social level. In its impact as a human disaster it has often been compared to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 as a 'defining catastrophe' in the sheer scale of loss. As Slavoj Žižek argues in relation to the latter, 'the space for it had already been prepared in ideological fantasizing, since the Titanic was the symbol of the might of nineteenth-century industrial civilization' (Žižek, 2012:18). In this sense, the Titanic was also a disaster waiting to happen. An unsettlingly prophetic novel called *Futility or The Wreck of the Titan* by Morgan Robertson (1898) had been published fourteen years prior to Titanic's sinking, telling the story of an ill-fated ocean liner called the Titan which was also doomed to sink after striking an iceberg in the Atlantic Ocean, and also had too few lifeboats for the passengers on board. Thus when the Titanic disaster struck, the collective imagination had already been prepared.

Western man's desire to outdo all rivals in the industrial race for speed and size at the turn of the century reached a peak at the time of Titanic's construction, journey and demise, and is symbolised by the event. Like other prodigious historical events of the twentieth century, the Titanic disaster is comprised of myriad texts: personal stories, factual information, fictional accounts, myths and misinterpretations, largely documented and some of which can be accessed easily by the public. As a narrative that has circulated prolifically throughout popular culture for over a hundred years, any subsequent retelling of Titanic's story, such as my own, is inevitably an intertextual construction. It is perhaps problematical to attempt to tell its story from only one viewpoint, that of an authorial narrator. For a story which involves real people, memories and loss of life, a polyphonic approach presents the multiple viewpoints without a hierarchy, so that it becomes a more subjective and conciliatory portrayal, facilitated by a self-conscious intertextuality drawing on historical and personal texts.

A multitude of non-fiction books exist on the subject of the Titanic, ranging from scientific accounts of how the disaster occurred to the documentation and transcriptions of eye-witness statements taken in the immediate aftermath and during the official inquiry. A seminal work in this genre is *Titanic - Triumph and Tragedy* by John Eaton and Charles Haas (1986), which is one of the first comprehensively accurate recordings of the sinking written just after the discovery of the wreck by Professor Robert Ballard. Survivor accounts were written by Col. Archibald Gracie and Lawrence Beesley (first and second class passengers respectively) and swiftly published. Such publications take a primarily factual approach to their telling of Titanic's story as personal accounts, while other narratives weave fiction into fact to create stories around the disaster. There have



been many novelisations of the story, including Dan James' *Unsinkable* (2012) and a recent novel, *The Girl who Came Home* by Hazel Gaynor (2014). However, though such texts present some of the voices from real people on board Titanic in actual speech, they are framed within a narrative structure with either an extra-diegetic or diegetic narrator, so are not purely mimetic. There have been dramatic presentations using music and sound: one such example is Gavin Bryars' *The Sinking of the Titanic* (1969), which is an audio recording inspired by the idea that the band continued to play after the ship began to sink, so is an experimental collage of music and underwater sounds. It is undoubtedly intertextual and polyphonic because it transposes other texts, notably wireless operator Harold Bride's first-hand account of the disaster, to tell the story through a range of sounds. However, by focussing only on the band's experience it offers a more narrow view of the disaster than a text which retells the story using a range of voices as a wider representation of the ship: its crew, passengers, animals and objects.

There are a number of Titanic retellings using poetry and blending poetry with other literary forms, yet most of these works adopt a monophonic, authorial viewpoint. One of the most notable single poems on the Titanic is Thomas Hardy's 'The Convergence of the Twain' (1915), which uses a third person omniscient narrator to describe the historical inevitability of the collision between ship and iceberg. This is a deliberate choice perhaps led by poetic convention of the time but also by its proximity to the disaster in being composed only three years subsequent; therefore, a more distanced, reverent perspective may have been deemed to be more appropriate than presenting voices of the recently deceased. However, there have been more polyphonic responses, including 'After the Titanic' by Derek Mahon (1985), which is a powerful dramatic monologue from the perspective of an unnamed

passenger, suggested to be J. Bruce Ismay, who survived the disaster and is dealing with his own survivor's guilt. While as a standalone poem this represents only one 'heard' voice, it foregrounds the perspective of an actual survivor and evokes such pathos for the speaker through his words uttered, the dramatic monologue seems to merge the narrator and the poet's own sympathetic voice. Thus, it is a form of 'double-poem' - a characteristic of the dramatic monologue form (which will be defined and explored further in chapter 5) - and is therefore polyphonic.

*The Wreck of the Titanic* by Edwin Drew (1912) is a full-length collection by a single poet which provides a factual introduction then eulogises key personnel on board ship: 'They came to him, good Father Byles/Death in the hours of health'. Drew appropriates a distanced and uniform third person narrative style throughout, and the overall effect is a piously didactic memorial to Titanic's crew and passengers. Nearly all of the poems represented in *Titanica: The Disaster of the Century in Poetry, Song and Prose* (1998) are third person, authorial narratives, with occasional exceptions: *Titanic Toast*, recorded in 1965, is an interesting presentation of a minority colloquial African-American voice, with its demotic and clipped lexis: 'he said, "I left the big motherfucker sinkin' about thirty minutes/ago"' but is still framed in a third person narrative - what would be defined in Platonic terms as a 'combination of both' character and narrator voice. Anthony Cronin's epic poem *R.M.S. Titanic* (1981) which was performed to music at the Kilkenny Arts Festival for the centenary in 2012, undoubtedly offers multimodality in its presentation using music and performance, but again it is largely framed by an authorial narrator in its written form, so is less polyphonic by definition than a work which presents a range of voices in its printed and performed contexts. Nevertheless, polyphony, in its degrees, is undoubtedly a characteristic of poetry about the Titanic; it is to this wider artistic

conversation between literary texts that *Berth* aims to contribute, both supporting and departing from existing techniques to produce a text that is polyphonic on the page and in its performed interpretation.

Most of the fifty poems in my collection are written in the form of dramatic monologue, using various voices (with the exception of some of the found poems), thus are written as first person narratives with a persona, while one is written from my own perspective as poet/author. *Berth* offers a polyphony of voices with no single dominant authorial voice. It has both written and spoken forms. As performance poetry is 'reading or declaiming poetry in a way that acknowledges the presence of an audience' ([www.applesandsnakes.org](http://www.applesandsnakes.org)), the collection could be categorised as such, but the poems are not intended only for vocal performance. Given the experimental, open forms of some of them, it is a collection written for potential presentation in a range of contexts encompassing oral recitation, performance and screen-projection, thus is always situated in specific sites of performance (Middleton, 2005). Therefore, *Berth* intends to engage both the reader in its printed form and an audience in its performance.

*Berth's* distinctiveness is also in the way it contributes to the canon of polyphonic texts in the British contemporary writing scene by offering a less familiar way of narrating the story of the Titanic. The collection bridges the audience gap between Titanic enthusiasts and poetry readers, using multimodal forms of film-poem, word-image collage and screen projection/voice-over, to make poetic language more accessible to a wider audience, reaching more people than the printed form alone would achieve. *Berth* has received awards including Runner-up for the Cork Literary Review Manuscript Competition 2011 and Arts Council funding for the staged version. Laudatory reviews (appendix W) have been received from literary critics as

well as Titanic experts, praising its contribution to creative knowledge through form *and* content. *Berth's* polyphony and multimodal approach on the page and in performance facilitate a wider audience for poetry and an alternative way to experience the story of the Titanic.

## **2. *I speak, you listen*: Monophony and Closed Poetic Forms**

I will now define the term monophony, contextualise it in poetry's recent history and illustrate it with a poem from the British poetic group the Movement, to exemplify poetry characterised by a dominant, authorial voice. Associating monophony with closed, *said* texts paves the path for explaining polyphony and, although degrees of monophony are used in *Berth*, the collection as a whole is distinctly a *saying* text.

To gain an overview of polyphony it is first necessary to explore more closed, traditional approaches to poetry that prompted its development in reaction to them. If a monophonic approach in poetry embraces a single voice, ostensibly that of the poet, observing from a distanced, omniscient and authorial viewpoint, then there are plenty of examples of this in the poetry of the Movement. Born partly in reaction to Modernism and its plethora of forms, styles and narrative perspectives, Movement poets such as Phillip Larkin, Elizabeth Jennings and Kingsley Amis frequently focused on the 'authoritative self' (Crozier, 1983:229). John Wain (editor for the BBC radio series *First Reading*) characterises the period after Modernism 'as one of retrenchment: a period of expansion has to be followed by a period of consolidation' (Morrison, 1980:144). Wain's view encouraged a narrowing of poetic form, a closing of the window which had previously been left open to welcome in a variety of forms. The Movement is characterised by what the British Poetry Revival poet and critic Eric Mottram described as a 'narrow Nationalism' (Mottram et al, 1993:23), which may be reflected in a more definite range of poetic forms and structures, using conventional, familiar methods in its construction of verse. This is nationalistic in its resistance to the innovative methods being explored by contemporaries in America, informed by The Black Mountain Project (1930s - 50s) and the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poets (explored further in chapter 4). Naturally, Mottram's account is partisan and he

sets up the Movement poets as a monolithic entity against which to promote the British Poetry Revival as a liberating and varied poetic movement. Nevertheless, with this qualification in mind, his contrast of the Revival poets to more staid and monophonic poetic traditions informs my account of *Berth*.

Movement poetry often adopted traditional poetic structures on the page, favouring uniform line lengths, stanzas and clearly identifiable schemes of rhyme and rhythm: 'Poetic form has come to have a strong association - in classroom and colloquium reference - with poetic metre and rhyme. Although metre is a powerful constituent, form in poetry is deeper, richer, and more complex than that' (Strand and Boland, 2001:165). Many of Elizabeth Jennings' poems, which are described by Blake Morrison as 'urban and contemporary in their imagery, tightly controlled in their handling of rhyme and metre' (Morrison, 1980:23), exemplify these criteria, as can be seen in this extract from 'In a Garden' (c1950):

When the gardener has gone this garden  
Looks wistful and seems waiting an event.  
It is so spruce, a metaphor of Eden  
And even more so since the gardener went.

Jennings presents clearly demarcated stanzas throughout and uses a regular *abab* rhyme scheme. It is characteristically a traditional poem on the page using an uncomplicated idiom. The structure of this and many poems by other Movement poets, including Amis and Larkin, is generally rigid and compact, with its word choice being guided by rhythm and rhyme, rather than topicality and meaning. The poem's form and structure act as a kind of vessel into which its content is poured. In not being formally guided by content the poem is more *closed* than an *open*, malleable form that can adapt to and show its topicality and meaning through the structures it uses. Such a poem's tone is often declarative rather than interrogative, thus is a *said*

form which makes a statement on the topic to a listening but silent audience, rather than a *saying* form which asks for an audience to respond, take part in the process and create a dialogue. There is of course no question as to the poem's merits as a creative text, but its voice is monophonic, featuring an authoritative poet's voice, rather than polyphonic, including other voices and viewpoints. Jennings' own reflections on her work support this: 'Perhaps after all one's poems do represent what one would like to be or become - hence my search for peace and reconciliation.' (Jennings, 'Letter to Michael Hamburger', 3 August, 1953). This indicates that, for her, poetic process is an individual, personal pursuit, one centred on the exploration of the self rather than others.

*Berth* is less concerned with the individual, personal pursuit of the poet than with the separate and collective pursuits of its subject matter and speakers. It is in this way that the collection is a *saying*, polyphonic text rather than a *said*, monophonic text, with an overarching aim to be a part of a dialogic conversational process. It aims to open up discussion with other texts and interpretations rather than to offer the final word on Titanic.

Robert Sheppard, a leading scholar of the British Poetry Revival (which began in the 1960s in reaction to the Movement) explains dialogism in terms of the *saying* and the *said*, informed by Eco's ideas in 'Opera Aperta'. Sheppard finds correlation between the openness and freedom of the process, the *saying*, and innovative methods (Eco uses the term plurivocal), whilst the closed, restricted nature of the product, the *said*, is more akin to conventional methods. In his 'analysis of poetic language' Eco states that a plurivocal work is concerned 'not just in what it communicates but also in how it communicates it' (Eco, 1989:42). So the form of the poem - the way it is presented on the page, its line spacing, its appearance - is as

important as conveying meaning: 'plurivocality is so much a characteristic of the forms that give it substance that their aesthetic value can no longer be appreciated and explained apart from it' (Eco, 1989:42). His assertion suggests that poetic form is central to achieving plurivocality and indeed that the two aspects are co-dependent on the poem's success: 'this alone can endow it with the fundamental openness proper to all successful artistic forms' (Eco, 1989:42). In contrast to the above example of a Movement poem which seems to pour meaning into a mould of rhythm and rhyme, open, polyphonic poems rather shape a form that is deemed most suitable to successfully convey the subject matter. Polyphony and monophony can be applied accordingly to Sheppard's concept of the 'saying' and the 'said' when the openness of form is considered and defined in accordance with intertextuality. If polyphony is achieved by opening up the poem to other forms and texts, encouraging a reader to respond more than to a closed monophonic text, then by this definition it is a *saying* medium. However, there are *degrees of saying* within *Berth* and these will be explored later in the commentary.

For Movement poets, and indeed for many poets still, poetry is a large slice of their own identity as human beings and this is what helps them to develop a voice that is unique in comparison to others. The Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin finds a relationship between 'the unity of the language system and the unity (an uniqueness) of the poet's individuality as reflected in his language and speech' (Bakhtin, 1981:264). Thus, realism is a defining characteristic of the Movement and can be acknowledged in *Berth*, as one of my aims was to believably voice actual historical figures to establish a relationship between text and reader. This is supported by Wolfgang Iser's concepts of the reading process whereby one of the 'important aspects that form the basis of the relationship between reader and text' is 'the



resultant impression of lifelikeness' (Iser, 1974:288). But this realism is largely achieved through a speaker other than me as poet and thus is distorted. It is a realism guided by the story of Titanic thus is dependent on other documented views of the story which are questionable as to their actuality. Also the voices presented are essentially my interpretation, based on my research of the subject, of how the individuals might speak, so inevitably the voices presented carry degrees of my own voice as a poet. This then raises the question of whether, in polyphonic collections, it is actually possible to entirely submerge the poet's own individual voice when writing using a form such as dramatic monologue, which by definition principally presents a voice not of the poet but of a character/persona.

In the case of *Berth*, however, this is not to say that traditional first person idioms are entirely absent. The penultimate poem 'Arrival' (70) is written in my own voice as a poet. Rather than using a deliberate persona or mouthpiece, I articulate the experience of watching a modern ocean liner leave Southampton docks and, in its wake, imagining Titanic returning to berth in its place. In writing this poem I found myself more conscious of expressing a direct opinion, perhaps because I did not adopt a persona behind whom I could mask these opinions. My view of the modern cruiser is monophonic and biased as the liner 'parties past, music blasting'; here the assonance echoes scorn at the ship as a symbol of crass inelegance. When compared to how Titanic is depicted as 'a determined slice of bow with lines/casting geometrical shapes across the murk', there is a notable contrast; the polysyllabic diction suggests sophistication, so casts a glow of reverence on the ship. It is again a tendentious perspective on the scene. I chose not to articulate the voice of any other onlooker - they are mentioned only in passing as 'faces' that 'turn back to their cars then leave' - mainly because I did not feel that any other voice could best convey the

feelings of sadness I had towards Titanic's loss. The voice is my own and this is the most monophonic poem in *Berth*.

That said, if the entire collection had been written from this viewpoint it would not have worked so effectively, given that the topic is not one over which I feel I can claim authorial ownership. So many people have a right to express their views about the Titanic; as a story that touches so many, I felt it inappropriate to make my voice dominate this project. I believed it to be far more democratic to use polyphony to tell the story as a whole. But juxtaposing 'Arrival' prior to 'S.S. Titanic' (73) enabled me to include echoes of my own voice in that of the ship, making it a double-poem as a result. This contributes to the poem's effectiveness, because the reader can experience Titanic's version of the story not through a sentimental, clichéd mouthpiece but rather a fresh, modern-day female voice, which is perhaps more recognisable to a contemporary audience.

### **3. *What did you say?* The Three-way Conversation between Polyphony, Dialogism and Intertextuality**

Now that monophony has been introduced and discussed, I will go on to provide a definition of polyphony and establish its links with dialogism and intertextuality, presenting my model of the 'Three-Way Conversation'. This chapter also explores the 'constellatory' collation of poems in *Berth*.

Polyphony is defined by Sue Vice as 'the construction of the voices of characters and narrator in the novel, as its etymology - the Greek for "many voices" - suggests' (Vice, 1997:112). Though this definition applies to the novel rather than poetry, it refers specifically to multiple voices including those of narrator and characters. Bakhtin's definition also includes 'the co-presence of independent but interconnected voices' (Bakhtin, 1984:114). It is this interconnection of voices which makes the term polyphony applicable to a collection of poems or a long narrative poem. I would argue that a themed poetry collection can display similar characteristics to those of the novel. In such a work, the author or narrator acts as a 'participant in the dialogue without retaining for himself the final word' (Bakhtin, 1984:72), and thus is present either as a framing device (as would be more common in the novel) or as a second voice - the voice of the poet - in the 'double-poem' form of dramatic monologue. As stated earlier, polyphony is entwined with subjectivity and openness, a view supported by Hans Robert Jauss, who makes links between the openness of a text and the omission of a single narrator to have multiple (polyphonic) viewpoints: 'to incorporate the open horizon of the future into the story of the past, to replace the omniscient narrator by localized perspectives, and to destroy the illusion of completeness through unexpected and unexplained details' (Jauss, 1982:61). This would suggest that a polyphonic approach represents many perspectives rather than

one omniscient viewpoint but also adopts formal strategies which help to open out a seemingly 'closed' story from the past to enliven it for present audiences and stimulate future discussion and commemoration of the event. This was one of my aims for *Berth*. In my collection I present a range of voices and perspectives which all contribute to a larger narrative of the disaster, but with no authoritative narrator's voice interspersed between the poems, deliberate gaps are left for the reader to make connections between them. This is what Genette categorises as 'tense [...] which deals with all temporal relations between narrative and story' (Onega, 2006:275). This is the case for 'The Sage Family' (64) which is presented as a monologic list, citing, by name and age, all eleven members of a family travelling in steerage that perished in the disaster. Because no other information is presented, and no narrator is there to explain, the gaps as to each person's story invite readers to interpret the list and to imagine the different family members. Rather than voicing one member of the Sage family, I wanted to create more impact by contrasting the lost lives with a bare, brutal list. In this instance I feel that the statistics speak for themselves.

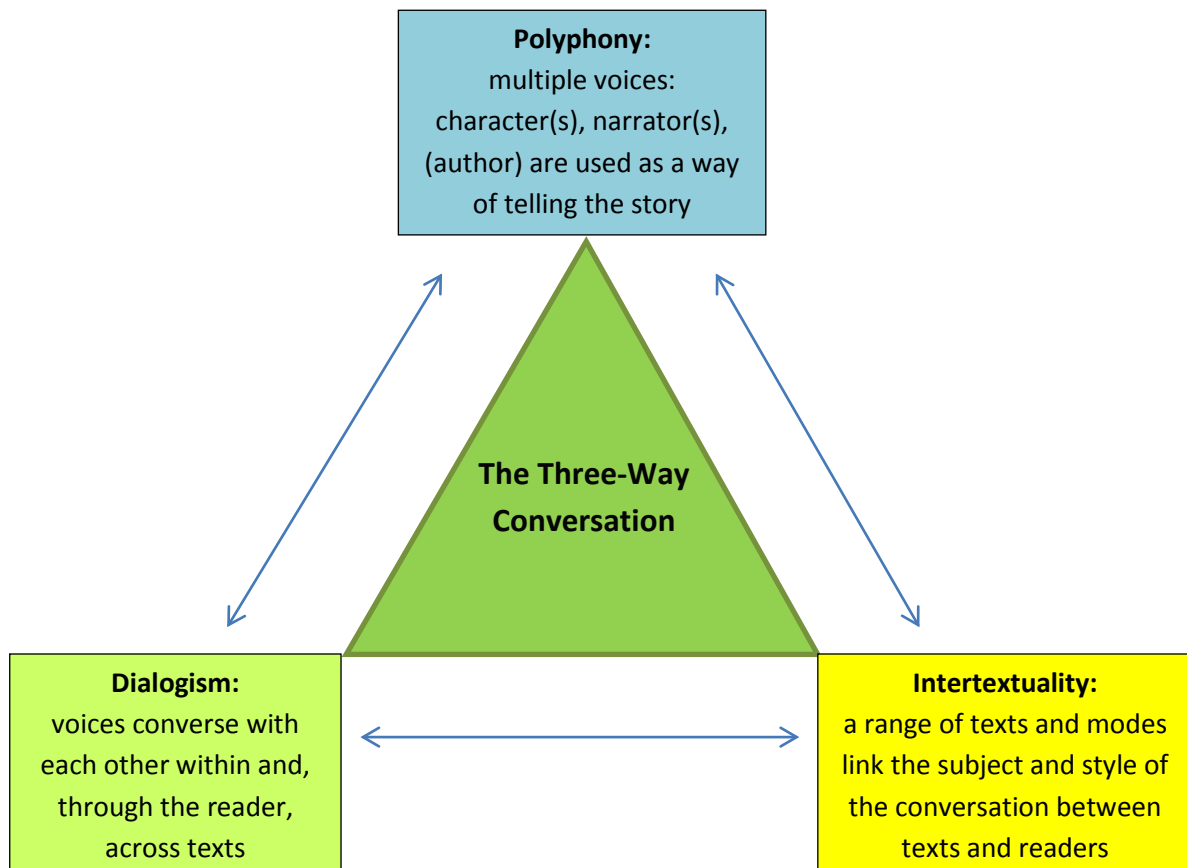
Vice notes that many scholars agree that Bakhtin's dialogism excludes poetry in order to distinguish it from the novel: 'Bakhtin is notorious for arguing that poetry cannot be dialogic, and that poetic language runs the risk of becoming 'authoritarian, dogmatic and conservative', cutting itself off from the influence of extraliterary social dialects' (Vice, 1997:74/Bakhtin, 1981:287). Bakhtin's tricolon of labels here could readily be applied to Mottram's account of the Movement, where the focus on the subject is diminished by the authorial voice of the poet. However, Bakhtin seems to focus particularly on epic and Romantic poetry, rather than a poetry that has the ability to present a variety of characters and dialogues as effectively as the novel. In

other words, more modern poetry includes other aspects of form and style. This 'excessive emphasis on the individual genius [...] of the poet' is a component that is less apparent in works which utilise polyphony to open up the possibility of achieving a 'loss of self in the imagined world that is a condition of narrative' (Roberts, 1999:1).

While the Irish critic Edna Longley, among others, believes that 'Bakhtin's dialogism was, in fact, expressly designed to elevate the novel over poetry' (Longley, 1996:5-7), it seems to me that he used dialogism to make distinctions between forms of poetry, namely the lyric and the narrative. In terms of voice, the lyric poem, 'which usually expresses the thoughts and emotions of a single speaker' (Brownjohn, 2002:62), is distinguished from the narrative poem with its use of multiple voices, those of narrator and character/s. So, whilst he may be accused of adopting a narrow view towards the lyric, in regard to narrative poetry he elevates it by placing it with the novel. In fact Bakhtin even uses a poem to exemplify dialogism: 'one of Bakhtin's prime examples of 'novelistic' language is Pushkin's *Evgeny Onegin*, a narrative poem' (Roberts, 1999:1). A narrative poem, or a collection of poems, can be explained in these terms because it shares characteristics with the novel: 'contemporary poetry has undergone what Bakhtin calls 'novelisation' [...] it is a hybrid form that cross-fertilises diverse languages' (Gregson, 1996:7). It could be argued that long narrative poems have always been 'novelised', as I suggested in relation to *Beowulf*, but Bakhtin's model is also a useful construct with which to explore polyphony within other forms of poem.

It is then possible to apply the dialogic principle to poetry: 'Acknowledging that there may be two voices in a poem, the represented and the representing, as there are in a work of fiction, would allow poetry to be dialogic' (Vice, 1997:76). So, dialogism offers a valid framework for considering levels of polyphony within

individual poems as well as an interrelated collection of poems. Nevertheless, it is evident that polyphony is at the crux of both dialogism and intertextuality. In fact the three concepts can be linked by their similarities whilst each is defined separately, as shown in my model of the ‘Three-Way Conversation’:



Intertextuality is a key feature of the polyphonic poem, because ‘there is a contrary tendency in the dialogic poets towards a promiscuous mingling of materials, an enjoyment of hybrid forms and images, a conflating of voices and perspectives’ (Gregson, 1996:10). Transposing texts in varying concentrations, I would argue, is a characteristic of such work.

I now want to move on to examine some of the models which influenced the composition of *Berth*. To illustrate the ‘conflating of voices and perspectives’, and further show dialogism’s relevance to poetry, T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) is a

relevant example: '[David] Lodge [1990] suggests that Browning, who uses double-voiced discourse in his poetic monologues, and T.S. Eliot, whose *The Waste Land* (1922) is constructed polyglottically, seem to be counter-examples to Bakhtin's distinction of the novel's polyglossia and poetry's monoglossia' (Vice, 1997:74). Eliot's representation of more than one language in *The Waste Land* also contributes to a heteroglossia present in the text, which means 'other tongues' or having a 'plurality of voices' (Murfin and Ray, 2003:200). It is intentionally unclear as to who exactly is speaking (and when) in Eliot's defining modernist work:

'Do  
You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember  
Nothing?"  
I remember  
    Those are pearls that were his eyes.  
"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?' (121-126)

The multiple perspectives each have a distinctive voice, making this a polyphonic text. In this extract, a dominant voice is interrogative in style, repeating many questions, some of which are answered by a softer, more reflective respondent. The form of the poem is vitally important to the simultaneous nature of the dialogue, as the lines are deliberately ragged using enjambement to vary the level of indentation, quickening the suggested pace of the reading and giving the poem a frenetic appearance on the page to convey urgent speaking. In such a work, the level of reader involvement is higher than a more closed, monophonic work which speaks to a listening but not participating, audience. However, although there is undeniably more audience participation, this prompts the question as to how accessible the text is and thus whether a wider audience would fully understand and take part in the conversation. I was aware of this factor when writing the poems for *Berth* because, whilst I intended to use polyphonic methods to encourage and widen audience

participation, it was not my intention to make the voices too inaccessible to be appreciated only by an elite audience, such as that of high modernist works.

Nevertheless, in *The Waste Land*, the reader is encouraged to take part in the process of the dialogue due to the way the narrative speaks both to itself and to its reader, using first and second person address. Bakhtin's theory of 'addressivity' can be applied here: '*word is a two-sided act. It is determined by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*' (Voloshinov, 1973:82). A polyphonic text such as Eliot's explores the many facets of this idea, by creating not only a relationship between addresser and addressee within the confines of the poem and its characters, their dialogue, but also between the characters and the reader who, in being directly addressed, is invited to participate in the conversation.

Contrastingly, in his discussion of the Movement, Neil Roberts states that 'In Larkin's case the issue of addressivity extends outside the poetry to his letters' (Roberts, 1999:3). It can be inferred from this that there is less addressivity in Larkin's poetry than his letter-writing, where he clearly addresses a recipient. He goes on: 'Larkin [...] would, I imagine, regard Bakhtinian thought with suspicion' (Roberts, 1999:4). This reinforces the link between poems that are more monophonic and closed, with an authorial voice of the poet, and lack of addressivity; there is less of an inclination to speak to the reader and expect a response but more of a tendency to deliver the message and self-reflect on the topic within the poem.

The concepts of dialogism and addressivity can be related to 'the extraordinary range of new poetries that came on the scene between 1965 and 1975' (Rowe, 2004: 8), named by Eric Mottram as the British Poetry Revival and described by him as a counter-reaction to the Movement which re-embraced modernist



methodologies, inspired by American schools of thought such as The Black Mountain College championed by Charles Olson. Rowe describes Mottram's view of Revival poetry as having a 'constellatory method' (Rowe, 2004:9): 'The making of the constellation is part of the art of discovering relations.' (Mottram, 1977:17). For Revival works, process – to use Mottram's metaphor, identifying patterns of stars – is as important as the finished product: the constellation itself. The reader plays a crucial role in the overall shaping and presentation of the work, and thus contributes to its complete success. The ethos of the British Poetry Revival, and subsequent innovative poets it inspired, is more akin to polyphony than that of the Movement, and *Berth* is influenced by the Revival ethos.

The 'constellatory method' as describing a text coming together in an amalgamation of forms and styles, with the emphasis on process rather than product, exploits intertextual links between individual texts and informed the collation of the poems in *Berth*. One of the original aims for the collection was to present a widely known narrative in a distinctive way, using polyphonic methods of form and style to provide a contemporary perspective on the story of the Titanic. Throughout the process of writing, drafting and performing *Berth*, Mottram's constellatory method informed the creation of individual works, their drafting and collation into a thematic collection and adaptation for performance using other art forms and hybrid modes such as dance and film-poem (explored in chapter 7). The collection then 'came together' as a thematic whole in multiple associated contexts, incorporating the printed form on the page and the performed version. A key factor in establishing the authenticity of the printed form was to consider the white space as well as the black (Glyn Maxwell, 2012), thinking carefully about how the poems 'breathed' in their printed form and were appealing to the eye as well as the ear. As nearly all of the

poems in *Berth* take the form of dramatic monologue, many poems in the collection are intended to be performance poems and experienced through a dramatic presentation, but some are intended to be seen in the printed form in addition to or in isolation from performance, so their visual placing was important. This is a methodology informed by British Poetry Revival works which use aspects of visual and performance poetry in found, sound and concrete poems to open up the dialogic process and to create polyphony. It is in the collection's compilation of voices that the reader is able to make connections between individual speakers: 'It marks those points at which the reader is able to "climb aboard" the text. [S/he] has to accept certain given perspectives, but in doing so [s/he] inevitably causes them to interact' (Iser, 1974:277). Thus, a conversation is established between all of the poems in *Berth* but the success of its communication depends upon how effectively a reader can make connections between the poems, and this in turn is partly dependent on her/his own existing knowledge and understanding of Titanic.

#### **4. *Say that again: Open Forms, Voice and Heteroglossia***

Having discussed intertextuality, dialogism and polyphony, I will now explore the relevance of these concepts in shaping the characteristics of 'open' forms of poetry, by defining such forms and exemplifying them in key works. The characteristics of open forms will then be applied to poems from *Berth*.

As Mark Strand and Eavan Boland argue, 'The powerful fractures of form and convention that the modernist poets initiated in the second decade of the twentieth century were not wilful abandonments of what had gone before. They were in fact a passionate dialogue with it' (Strand and Boland, 2001:259). This advocates a more holistic approach to determining the origins of the open form. It is more appropriate to approach its evolution as an enduring process that has been occurring in the most part since the birth of Modernism and even before it: 'Poets have been redefining the characteristics of an open form since Coleridge first proposed a "form as proceeding" as an alternative to a "form as superimposed"' (Conte, 1991:15).

The open form is one concerned with process and procedure, so is continual by nature, as opposed to the closed form which is a finished product, superimposed in terms of being a readymade shape which imposes itself on the subject matter and meaning of the poem. Indeed the use of collage is characteristic of open forms but is always determined by its subject matter: 'An open form poem may have its structure dictated by the nature of its subject and may include collage-like references that do not automatically seem to follow each other in terms of consecutive appropriateness' (Brinton, 2009:26). There are ostensible degrees of openness, which makes it problematic to define in concrete terms; however, the open form's structural gapping, which encourages a deeper level of reader interpretation to convey meaning, is a key defining characteristic.

This can be explained in terms of dialogism and addressivity, because if dialogism focuses on the subject of the poem rather than presenting an objective view, and addressivity considers the role of the reader and her/his participation in the poem's process, then both are applicable to open forms of poetry: 'More importantly, it is these forms - more than the closed metrical ones - that allow us to re-enter the public role of poetry in history and society' (Strand and Boland, 2001:165). This is a compelling point: that the open form encourages poetry to take to the platform in new guises. In embracing a more diverse range of accepted forms, poetry's identity is encouraged to change, diversify and ultimately evolve.

The influence of the New American Poets (1960s) on the British Poetry Revival must not be underestimated, with the works of the Beat generation and the Black Mountain Project, led by Charles Olson, acting as a precursor to the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poets, who viewed the poem as a language construction which required the reader to expose meaning: 'Black Mountainous principles offered a complete escape from the formal restraints of Movement writing: a thoroughgoing alternative to its empirical conviction that significance could be readily derived from an observed world, and a stable identity assumed for the observer' (Stevenson, 2005). The implication here is that Black Mountain poetry, using open forms, aimed to steer away from observational, realist poetry that 'tells' through a fixed, authorial voice, and move towards a poetry that 'sees' using many different identities to present its subject matter. This corresponds with polyphony which favours a subjective view over the objective. Many poems written during this period could be defined as highly polyphonic and 'raw' in style: '[According to Claude Lévi-Strauss (1964)] [t]he 'raw' evokes Whitman's barbaric yawp and Ginsberg's plaintive howl, Dionysian impulse and romantic spontaneity, progressive politics and projective

verse. The ‘cooked’ evokes the civilised yawn and what Olson calls the ‘verse which print bred” (Conte, 1991:14/Olson, 1967,51).

Olson became renowned for a type of poetry called ‘Open Field’ (or ‘Composition by Field’), which: ‘explores the world of different viewpoints, competing discourses, fragmented perceptions and memories. It becomes a type of collage which goes beyond offering the single viewpoint of an observer’ (Brinton, 2009:29). The concept of the ‘Open Field’ can be applied to *Berth*; though individual poems are placed chronologically to correspond with Titanic’s timeline, there are exceptions to this rule as some characters, for example ‘William McMaster Murdoch’ (21), speak post-death in the modern-day present: ‘Hard over, I say ... hard over!/Those orders choke out/in a dull sob to the depths’. This results in the collection as a whole having a fragmented, collage-like structure requiring more reader involvement to make connections between poems.

‘Competing discourses’ can be exemplified in the juxtaposition of two poems placed early into the collection at the time of boarding the ship. Both ‘Mrs Alma Pålsson’ (8) and ‘Mrs Hudson J C Allison’ (9) are written from the perspective of married women with children but the former is travelling third class and the latter first class. The two poems are structured almost identically in terms of their mise-en-page with alternating quatrains and tercets, but the order of the alternation for stanzas two to five is inverted between the poems, to present a subtle visual difference in the poems and in turn their subjects, the women. Their stories compete when placed side by side because the reader is encouraged to see two starkly conflicting experiences of embarkation. They do not compete in terms of believability: both are based on researched, factual experiences, but rather in terms of the levels of empathy evoked in the reader, who is invited to consider who evokes the most

sympathy. Their individual, described experiences are vividly different to show the level of treatment of passengers by class: Mrs Pälsson: 'We were basically left to amble around', versus Mrs Allison: 'he escorted us over a plush blue carpet'. This would naturally lead the reader to sympathise more with Mrs Pälsson. However, it is the visual and sequential juxtaposition of the poems which draws attention to the fact that both women share a sense of homesickness, so their apparent class divide is narrowed by these basic responses and emotions and their mutual humanity displayed, making Mrs Allison a more sympathetic character than initially expected. This device encourages the reader to 'think something that [s/he] has not experienced before' (Iser, 1974:292) to understand it, and imagine the situation from each woman's point of view, thus a 'deciphering capacity' (Iser, 1974:292) is required when reading these poems. Ultimately another kind of retelling is used to engage the reader here.

A noted characteristic of post-Movement poetry is its aim to present a diverse range of voices, representing the 'cultural polyphony' (Gregson, 1996:5) present in modern-day society. As a result, many poets show diversity of class, and ethnicity in the accent and dialect of their speakers, termed by Bakhtin as a 'dialogised heteroglossia' (Bakhtin, 1981:336) and defined by Roberts as the 'creation of meaning by the interaction of the social varieties of language' (Roberts, 1999:4). Heteroglossia supports the open form of collage in works which move away from the authorial voice to use multiple viewpoints and in turn multiple voices and ways of speaking. Roberts acknowledges this in the poems of Peter Reading, where 'the submersion of the authorial voice [is replaced by] a polyphony of characters, dialects, social registers, specialised and technical languages,' (Roberts, 1999:167). Indeed, this is true of *Ukulele Music* (1985) which consists of part-found forms taken

from newspaper headlines, manipulated or treated by Reading to deride them. A range of voices are represented in the snippets used which at times are less easily discernible as to whether it is the poet himself or the poet speaking through a mouthpiece. Actual speech is presented: “[This] is an appalling offence” Bowering is told by the judge’, to present a slant on some of the horrific real-life events depicted, but also Reading adopts other voices, such as colloquial African-American to add diversity to the opinions expressed: ‘He don’t *invent* it, you know’. Anthony Thwaite, writing for *The Independent*, states that ‘increasingly he produced unified sequences, often weaving together narratives, bits of “found” material (some of which he must have invented), [and] different voices.’ Reading’s methodology celebrates polyphony and champions the open forms of poetry that use collage and heteroglossia to make a social or political comment about the society in which we live.

Reading’s work, and the concept of heteroglossia, can be explored using Bakhtin’s theory of carnival: ‘Carnival brings together, unifies, weds and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid’ (Bakhtin, 1984:123). This was an influencing factor when writing *Berth*, as the collection of voices deliberately represents the multifarious range of people aboard Titanic. Using the device of collage, I was able to place ‘the lofty’ and ‘the low’ side by side as was the case with the aforementioned two female passengers, to show diversity in terms of status through accent and dialect. This can be demonstrated in the juxtaposition of ‘Bertram Slade’ (11), a prospective Engineer who did not sail on Titanic, with ‘Mr John Pierpont Morgan’ (12), Titanic’s owner who also did not sail. Slade speaks in a part-colloquial dialect using words and phrases such as ‘blimey’, ‘tanked up’, ‘the bosses’ and ‘load of toffs’. His tone is playfully angry whereas Morgan’s tone is one of pure self-assuredness: ‘Titanic is just a

rather/sweet/aperitif for what will follow'. Morgan's speech is written in standard-formal English with an affected tenor of sophistication whereas Slade's is in part non-standard and is unassuming. Their individual ways of speaking support the depiction of their characters and, though both are unified in the fact that they did not sail (so did not suffer the tragedy in the way the 'real' victims did), their individual tragic relationships with the ship are nevertheless depicted. They are thus wedded, in the carnivalesque sense, by tragedy.

According to Gregson, the post-Movement poets also 'arbitrate between strangeness and familiarity' (Gregson, 1996:9), which is characteristic of open forms that aim to defamiliarize their readers from the subject matter so that they, perhaps paradoxically, begin to understand it better. One poet to use this technique is the Scots poet Edwin Morgan, a writer who epitomises the open, polyphonic forms of poetry using an array of subject matter and forms, including those of concrete, found and sound: 'individual poems can be seen as variant shapes and unique patterns which are the product of a defamiliarizing vision that transforms conventional modes of perception and expression' (Gregson, 1996:135). This sentiment can best be exemplified in an extract from 'The Loch Ness Monster's Song' (which appears in *From Glasgow to Saturn*, 1973) which is a *tour de force* in its levels of linguistic innovation:

Zgra kra gka fok!  
Grof grawff gahf?  
Gombl mbl bl -  
blm plm,  
blm plm,  
blm plm,  
blp.

A surface reading might mistakenly dismiss this as nonsense verse. However, a dialogic approach will reveal that it speaks on many levels. Morgan successfully



creates the challenging voice of not only a mythical being but a non-human entity in this poem, which voices the creature through a series of non-verbal utterances. The poem's form and shape support the communication of meaning and topic, with ragged lines spilling into one another through enjambment, growing longer as the monster raises its head out of the water, and shorter as it sinks back underneath. He uses patterns of sound, intermingling clusters of plosive, nasal and fricative phonemes and reduplicating key sounds to vocalise the monster emerging from the water and then submerging at the end. The graphophonic presentation of morphemes leads a reader to assign meaning to these patterns, especially when they are punctuated, to reveal the emotions of the monster: 'fok!'. Here, Morgan characteristically presents a Scots dialect in the suggested expletive to achieve entertaining results, whilst also contributing to the presentation of a Scottish cultural voice as achieved by contemporary political poets such as Hugh MacDiarmid: 'to specify alternatives to Anglo-American twentieth-century forms then being produced' (Nicholson, 2009:65).

This, and many of Morgan's other poems (in a series of theatrically-themed poems, he also voiced an actor's codpiece!) both involve the reader in the process of the conversation and encourage us to see a familiar, iconic symbol in a new way - everyone has an idea of what the Loch Ness monster looks like but not everyone has considered in such explicit detail the way s/he might sound. Part of the humour is in the attempt to read the poem aloud. It begs to be performed. Morgan performs it wonderfully but acknowledges that he 'would not want to say that there is only one way of reading it. Anyone can have a go - and enjoy it', so he endorses a polyphonic approach. This is achieved in voicing a non-human entity which speaks in both recognisable and unrecognisable patterns of sound intended to be performed by

many different readers. In defamiliarizing the subject - the monster is presented in a way other than what we might expect - the reader is invited to understand it, and in turn human beings, better. The monster's suggested tone of impatience is humanly accessible and the reader might imagine her/him being disturbed from a sense of peace: 'It is not all that difficult to deduce that the monster [...] has simply lost all patience, or, given the hordes of visitors who descend upon Loch Ness each year, to imagine to whom his splutterings are addressed' (Byron, 2003:125).

Some critics are sceptical about Morgan's poetry: 'there is a sense that many of Morgan's poems are about something, conscious attempts to accept a challenge of subject matter or form and, willy-nilly, to forge a poem out of it' (Schmidt, 1979:317). This trenchant summary suggests that the process of creating a form to support and enhance the subject matter, is one that for Morgan does not require precision and care. Schmidt seems to be implying that Morgan finds a challenging subject and crudely cobbles together a poem from it; this attempts to undermine the complexity of Morgan's poetic craft. Morgan is more eloquent, when discussing his motivations: 'I am made conscious of this strange communicative gap ... between poetry and life. Our poetry needs greater humanity' (Morgan, 1975:15). This would support the notion that Morgan's non-human subjects are voiced in a way that says more about humanity than the world of beasts, as is substantiated by Glennis Byron: 'These dramatic monologues often function to introduce unfamiliar perspectives on human experience or to problematise questions of communication' (Byron, 2003:125).

My own poetic practice for *Berth* was informed by such defamiliarization techniques. There are of course copious interesting mouthpieces through which to retell the story of the Titanic, and I included voices from animals and inanimate objects in the collection, using the process of defamiliarization. One such poem is

'Rigel' (24) which voices one of the dogs on board Titanic (some claim that Rigel is in fact a myth but there are accounts which vouch for his actuality). The dog's speech is written in clearly recognisable English; however it is presented using non-standard grammar, to show how the dog might 'see' the world around him. Through Rigel, I describe the scene using alternative metaphorical language choices to depict objects, such as 'big float' instead of ship. Similarly, I aimed to encourage a re-evaluation of what Titanic was by such a description, which strips the grandiosity of a luxury liner down to it being merely something that floats on the water. The dog's perspective encourages an alternative way of seeing Titanic as an engineered object entirely removed from her associations with wealth, class and prestige, inviting the simple conclusion that anything which floats could be made to sink.

Defamiliarization is also used in 'Second Class Plate' (55) which voices one of the unused items of crockery that went down with the ship. The decision to voice a representative of the middle classes came from a need to deliberately comment on the perception of usefulness of 'those/in the middle' when compared to the more distinctly defined upper and working classes of Edwardian times. Though the object speaks, the voice is intentionally female and the poem explores the theme of virginity linked to usefulness: 'Each luncheon I would prepare/myself to be taken [...] up on a plinth/to be wowed at/but never used'. Thus a very human dilemma is considered in the poem. By using the plate as a speaker it serves to distance the reader from the object itself and instead projects another wider philosophy onto it; that of women's ownership and objectification in a man-made, Edwardian world. It is thus polyphonic in representing more than one voice on the subject, using the double-poem form of dramatic monologue to facilitate the process.

## 5. *Speak through me: The Dramatic Monologue and Polyphony*

In this chapter I will introduce the dramatic monologue and contextualise *Berth's* use of it against that of Robert Browning and other poets associated with the form. With exemplification, I will present the dramatic monologue as an open, polyphonic poetic form. Noting its potential to be a double-poem, I will then explore this duality within *Berth* to determine whether it is actually possible to fully submerge the authorial voice when adopting a persona.

The dual aspect to the dramatic monologue is perhaps what made it so appealing to Edwin Morgan: 'dramatic monologue [was] a favourite form for Morgan and he has used it to suggest over-lapping voices that half substantiate and half subvert each other, providing a picture that is fuller but at the same time more questionable' (Gregson, 1996:146). The dramatic monologue opens up a dual-faceted world in which contradictions of character, the mind and human nature itself can be explored. Consequently, it has been difficult to define due to it being 'a category that embraces a wide and diverse variety of forms' (Byron, 2003:2). Nevertheless, as Herbert Tucker states, its 'practical usefulness does not seem to have been impaired by the failure of literary historians and taxonomists to achieve consensus in its definition' (Tucker, 1974:121-2). The dramatic monologue is a highly useful poem in its functions as 'a poem cast as a speech by a particular (historical or imaginary) person, usually to a specific auditor' (Lennard, 2005:367), but a considerable part of its identity is in it not being easy to determine its formal structure. So, innovative, experimental forms such as the concrete poem, found poem or sound poem (if meeting the criteria of using a persona and having an implied audience) could all be classed as dramatic monologues: 'The dramatic monologue is, in fact, a rich and flexible form; it may borrow largely from other literary types and even other arts'

(Carleton, 1977:3). Its classification is then in part determined by its *way of speaking*, its use of the subject to tell the story, so it is a dialogic as well as a polyphonic form. However, it is also an open form: 'to set up firm boundaries would, I believe, intrude upon "its way of meaning"' (Carleton, 1977:4). For the dramatic monologue, the way in which it communicates meaning is vitally important to its success as a poetic form.

Robert Browning's canonical dramatic monologues suitably exemplify the dual aspect to the form, as he uses a 'double-voiced discourse' (Byron, 2003:16) which combines the voice of the character or persona and that of the poet. The latter is embedded in the former which in turn acts as a mouthpiece to make a personal comment on the topic. It is a mask behind which a writer's personal views, when speaking through a character can, to an extent, be obfuscated. For Browning, writing during a Victorian era of burgeoning industrialisation and societal segregation proved to be a useful tool for enabling a degree of free speech. It also permitted him to explore the sub-terrain of the human psyche. Resultantly, there is frequent presence of dramatic irony in Browning's monologues which 'indicate[s] the presence of a double-voiced discourse, two differently oriented speech acts within the same words', where the reader, and implied author, is placed into the position of knowing more than the speaker: 'This has occasionally led critics to see the dramatic monologue as anticipating the principles of dialogism [...] For Bakhtin, language is not singular and monolithic but plural and multiple, always containing many voices' (Byron, 2003:16). This can be elucidated in Browning's canonical monologue 'My Last Duchess' (1842), in which an Italian Duke presents a portrait of his late, (and latest), wife to the envoi of his prospective father-in-law:

Sir, 'twas not  
Her husband's presence only, called that spot  
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek.

By a process of *Einfühlung*, a German term coined by Robert Vischer in 1873 meaning 'feeling-into', the reader is more likely to empathise with the speaker of the poem. Indeed he does evoke such feelings when we see how his obsessive jealousy manifests in the way he speaks, which becomes increasingly fragmented, interspersed with dashes and caesurae, as the poem develops. However, the double-poem enables the reader to see how limited the Duke's view is, as his speech is juxtaposed with images of the Duchess' alleged infidelities with various members of the household. From the way Browning guides the Duke's speech, we know that the 'spot of joy' on the Duchess' cheek is most likely to be one created by her youth and innocence alone, and so as a result the reader is placed in a higher position of knowledge than the impressionable Duke. Through the persona's voice Browning comments on the position of women as objectified beings, ones of beauty that are desirable for ownership and control by men, like pieces in an art collection (in death this is literally the case for the Duchess) - only the Duke has the authority to unveil her portrait as and when he pleases: 'the double-poem [allows] the poet to explore expressive [subject-centred] psychological forms [and] the phenomenology [analytical reading] of a culture ... such a reading relates consciousness to the external forms of the culture in which it exists' (Armstrong, 1993:13). 'My Last Duchess' is polyphonic in presenting a dominant speaker who, through the language used by the poet, reveals whispers of another perspective, which could be the voice of the poet or perhaps that of an implied reader. This can be explained in terms of reader-response theory, as '[t]he dramatic monologue, with its absence of any clear guiding authorial voice, seems particularly designed to provoke reader-response, and almost from the start the reader has been considered to have a significant role to play' (Byron, 2003:21). Browning presents a series of images regarding the

Duchess' behaviour, which are all from the Duke's perspective and likely to be prejudiced. It is from these images, sequentially presented like pieces of evidence in a crime scene, that the reader is invited to decide whether the Duchess is guilty of her crimes and consider the extent to which the Duke's mode of condemnation of her is justified: 'these are both central blanks which the reader is made to fill in by [her/]his own (text-guided) mental images in order to constitute the meaning of the work' (Iser, 1978:172), 'the reader must grasp them through empathy' (Ingarden, 1980:265). *Einfühlung* is deliberately used to unsettle the reader into naturally acquiescing with the Duke - who is also notably a persuasive and charismatic speaker, his monologue being floured with rhetoric - a man who is undoubtedly a misogynistic, murderous tyrant.

According to Roberts, when writing of the poets Tony Harrison and Carol Ann Duffy, 'no writer could less conform to Bakhtin's notion of 'the unity (an uniqueness) of the poet's individuality as reflected in his language and speech' than these' (Roberts, 1999:4). Expressly, Harrison and Duffy's poetry exemplifies the removal of the poet's authorial voice and employs a dialogism akin to Bakhtin's ideologies: 'The juxtapositions, for example, in 'Psychopath' - sex, gratuitous cruelty, excrement - suggest that what is being evoked is well beyond the literary pale' (Gregson, 1996:97). Similarly to Browning, Duffy scrutinises the depths of the human psyche within a range of deviant speakers; a poem such as 'Psychopath' (1994) epitomises her use of dramatic monologue as a double-poem:

My shoes scud sparks against the night.

In response to this line from the poem, Ian Gregson claims that 'the language of Duffy's suggests the poet's voice as much as the psychopath's [...] sounds like something that would be more comfortable in the third person rather than the first'

(Gregson, 1996:97). Indeed, this is the double-poem at work. It is less likely that the persona, an individual motivated by rape and murder, would describe a mundane action using such vivid imagery as this. When paired with another line: 'My breath wipes me from the looking glass', there is clearly a poetic voice emanating through that of the psychopath: it is the poet's view of the world. So the resulting voice is an amalgamation of Duffy as poet and the persona, and in using this form, Gregson continues to state, 'she manages to [...] depict and to condemn, through the deployment of the dialogic tactics which are available to novelised poets. These tactics enable her to suggest both how overpoweringly right and reasonable sexist attitudes can appear to those who hold them, and how wrong and oppressive their consequences are for their victims' (Gregson, 1996:106/7). This, as a functioning device, corresponds with Browning's methodology. It is however problematic when applying degrees of polyphony to such poems, with *mimēsis* being applicable to a poem written in a voice distinctly not that of the poet, because it is so difficult to judge the extent to which the poet's own voice and opinions are present in the poem. It could be that in Duffy's case it was a deliberate device to show the psychopath as an artistic observer as well as a violent killer and thus dispel the assumption that violent crime is associated with lack of intellect. This aspect will always be open to reader interpretation. However, it is through the self-reflection of my own poetic practice for *Berth* that I am able to consider this problematic aspect to polyphony and also to gauge how much of my own voice is present in my own dramatic monologues.

*Berth*, as a 'novelised' collection, thematically voices a series of speakers all connected by a dominant subject matter. A feminist debate is initiated through the use of a double-voice in the final poem, which adopts the perspective of 'S.S.Titanic'



(73) herself. Most people would acknowledge the use of female pronouns towards engineered objects, especially ships, and those well-versed in Titanic would know that Titanic's official title was R.M.S (Royal Mail Steamer) - this is referenced in another poem in the collection: 'John R. Jago Smith', the postal worker. I decided to present the ship's title as S.S (Steam Ship) to echo the multiple titles assigned to women based on their marital status, which are essentially determined by their relationships with men. In being just a Steamer Ship, Titanic is presented as the equivalent to a Ms. and as a consequence doesn't display a title defined by her relationship to an 'owner'. The dramatic monologue's dual aspect 'allows the poet to have an ancient speaker in a poem with a contemporary setting and in contemporary idiom' (Langbaum, 1974:89). This is supported by her way of speaking which is confident, sassy and humorous, thus represents the modern woman:

anchors weighed,  
double-bottom constructed  
(‘does my bum look big in this?’)

This poem deliberately plays on some of the stereotypes associated with women and appearance, juxtaposing them with actual facts about the ship's construction. The clichéd interrogative in the example (above) is separated from the speaking voice of Titanic to add a sense of universality and humour to the question, showing that it is one which supposedly many women ask. Lexical choices are carefully placed to create the semantic field of masculine sexual ownership and conditioning of women: 'guided', 'insertion', 'defining', 'primed', 'touched-up', and the use of phrases such as 'fast and loose' and 'like any good woman', intentionally presents the polemic notions of womanhood: those of promiscuity and obligation. The ship, as a symbol of masculine industrial power, is reduced to the three stages of woman,

'the virgin, the fallen, the crone', to reflect the ways in which an Edwardian society viewed women. But she herself defies any such ownership in the way she rebuffs these labels in a mirroring tricolon of: 'unattainable, unsinkable, (unlikely!)' and then goes on to blame her makers for their pride and arrogance. She plays the stereotype card in places, 'I am beyond your wildest dreams', to flirt with an implied male audience, and deconstructs it elsewhere, proving her a contradictory voice and one which supports Byron's view of the dramatic monologue depicting a 'dual-faceted world in which [there are] contradictions of character'. The contradictions here are intertextual as they create a dialogue between historical periods, attitudes to women and industrialisation as a masculine force; all of which are ideas posited in other texts.

So it can robustly be argued that by having a double-voice, the dramatic monologue as a standalone poem is polyphonic by nature. It is concerned with a subjective viewpoint and views the scene through a character's eyes to encourage a reader to respond to what s/he has to say. At times the reader is invited by default to judge the speaker and thus questions her/his position in society and in turn the nature of society itself. As a form which is specifically defined only in terms of its persona and listening audience, its appearance *mise-en-page* and its structure are open to interpretation. In being open to a range of other poetic forms, including innovative or experimental forms with their origins in Modernism, the dramatic monologue is a potentially hybrid form and one suited to voicing those whom we would perhaps not normally expect to hear. When the concept of polyphony is opened up to include the collection as a whole, the justification of it alters as there are degrees of polyphony, or degrees of *saying*, within the standalone poem that are widened when it is placed contextually within a collection. The individual personas in

*Berth* all speak to an implied audience but create a dialogue between each other when juxtaposed in the constellatory way which highlights their differences, ironies and contradictions.

## **6. *Say it louder: Other Open Poetic Forms Exemplified by the British Poetry Revival Poets: Found, Sound and Concrete Poems***

I will now introduce and explore the characteristics of found, sound and concrete poems as exemplified by works from the British Revival poets, illustrating the ways in which they have informed my own poetic practice in *Berth*. Their arguable degrees of openness enable a discussion as to their relationship with intertextuality, dialogism and polyphony.

The British Revival poets were distinguished by their use of open forms, including found, sound and concrete poems, in a way that best presented their subject matter. In discussing the works of Revival poets (including Bob Cobbing, Edwin Morgan and Ian Hamilton Finlay), Nicholas Zurbrugg, in *Stereo Headphones*, defines found poetry as 'works composed of isolated, juxtaposed, superimposed and annotated fragments' (Zurbrugg, 1974). So, found works by this definition are intertexts, transposing real-life documents in a way which articulates something new about their subject matter: 'The resulting poem can be defined as either treated: changed in a profound and systematic manner; or untreated: virtually unchanged from the order, syntax and meaning of the original' (Hollander, 1975:215), so an untreated form might be presented verbatim from a source whereas a treated form would adapt the original source. Finlay, in relation to his own found work featured in the magazine, adds, 'I always try to [...] deal affectionately with my subject matter, (as opposed to those poets who use 'real' material in order to deride it)'. This ethos supports my approach to the handling of materials for *Berth*. Given the sensitive nature of my subject matter, I took great care with how I represented the 'real' material used in the collection. A challenge I faced was in ensuring the found elements were respectfully presented to make a comment on the nature of the Titanic disaster without becoming

sentimental, which is a risk when writing what would be considered by many as a commemorative collection. I also felt a moral imperative not to impose forcefully my authorial intentions on a subject matter which involved real people and real loss of life. So ethically a subjective, polyphonic approach was more appropriate than an authoritative 'final word' approach.

As part of his collection of *Newspoems* (1965-71), Edwin Morgan uses the found form to make a social comment and create irony. In his own words, Morgan states his process and intentions for these works, in that he 'began looking deliberately for such hidden messages and picking out those that had some sort of arresting quality' (Morgan, 1996:118). His poems are formed from real newspaper cuttings taken out of their original context as photoquotations and pasted onto plain paper to explore the identifiable process of 'taking a message from it quite different from the intended one' (Morgan, 1996:118). His poem 'Notice in Heaven' is printed as:

**You can**  
**SING**  
**here**

In this example, the treated process is in removing the phrase from its original context, and news story, and attaching a title that helps the reader to take meaning from the poem. Semantic connections can be made between the archetypal 'Heaven' and the verb 'sing' to create an image of angels singing, but in it being presented as a directive in second person, there is perhaps a comment that singing, and with it the associated contentment, is only possible after death. Thus Morgan's placing of the text in this way adds new layers of meaning.

Many readers will be aware of the widely documented facts about Titanic but fewer will have seen them presented using the ‘found’ method of juxtaposition which *Berth* employs. Part of my task was to use found material in a way that would highlight the dreadful ironies of the disaster; for some of the pieces I used both reliable factual evidence taken from eye-witness accounts (some of which are conflicting, however) and unreliable evidence taken from subsequent publications based on hearsay. For example, one of the first publications to be printed after the disaster was the *New York Times* edition of April 16<sup>th</sup> 1912, which stated that all passengers were safe and Titanic was being towed towards New York. Another edition printed a supposed photograph of the actual iceberg responsible for the sinking, pointing out the red (dark grey in printed form of course) smear of anti-moulding paint from Titanic’s hull.

From these documents I was able to treat the found materials and create vignettes to tell the story through an unlikely voice or from an unusual perspective, such as the ‘Iceberg’ (67). Through personification of an inanimate object, I was able to use the found elements to create a relationship between the ‘characters’ of Iceberg and Titanic:

They printed my frigid image  
in *The Times*, pointing out a ‘red smear’ of paint on my  
surface - a frantic smudge of lipstick (we left our  
mark on each other!)

I imagined the iceberg as male and Titanic as female, the latter fitting in with the gender specific associations historically used for ships. In voicing the iceberg, I presented the story between these two characters as a brief but passionate love affair, instigated by the ship, who leaves her mark of paint/lipstick on the iceberg. Instead of being the villain, as was represented in the newspapers of the time, the iceberg, in a matter-of-fact tone, is presented as the victim of a brutal relationship:

She took a piece  
of me and her passengers played football  
with it on the deck!

In this example, the iceberg is the 'affected' element, being the object part of the SVO sentence structure, with Titanic being the 'actor' (Wales, 1994:126) and the most powerful character. My intention was to challenge gender stereotypes by presenting an anachronistically modern voice, adding a further layer to the polyphony of the text. The found element here is in the documented evidence of passengers kicking lumps of ice on deck just after the collision which in its untreated form makes a compelling story. Undoubtedly this poem is also concrete in its form, taking the shape of the subject matter, but, rather than making 'an unbalanced sensuous appeal' directed 'more to the eye than to the ear' (Fussell, 1979:170), its appearance is intended to support the communication of the speaker; the visual reminder of 'his' combination of strength and fragility makes the iceberg a more believable 'character', thus invites more empathy. It is in treating the original material, by moving from an omniscient account to a subjective viewpoint, that *Einfühlung* is achieved, as the reader is encouraged to participate in feeling empathy for the personified iceberg. Additionally, a lasting irony is achieved through the iceberg being given a voice to state that the ship was to blame for the collision, because, along with the Captain, *it* was the main scapegoat for blame due to the fact that neither could defend themselves at the inquiry.

Other poems from *Berth* were informed by Morgan's found method, using actual documented evidence. In the two 'Marconigram' (27/29) poems, the information about how much it costs to send them was taken verbatim from an original source. I used a simple concrete title in keeping with the overall format of the collection as voices and to enable the reader to make a contextual connection with the subject

matter. I treated the text by adding a time of transmission, to show when it was sent in relation to the sinking of the ship, and composing the telegram in my own words to suggest a story. In the first example the sender uses the maximum word limit before having to pay extra. The subject of the message is a business transaction, the sender being a representative of the many powerful men on board ship who were more frugal with their words and the message is 'received' by the recipient so is successful in its intent. The second 'Marconigram' is positioned later in the collection, nearer to the sinking and is a personal message communicated from wife (whom it is implied is pregnant) to her husband. The sender spends an extra 9d to add 'Love you' at the end, so as a result it is a more emotionally driven message. The positive message of 'may arrive early' is taken from found materials stating that the captain increased speed to make front page news by potentially arriving in New York a day earlier. This speed increase was arguably one of the factors that contributed to the collision with the iceberg and subsequent disaster, so an irony is presented when the more deserving message is consequentially 'Lost in Transit'. The 'treated' form of juxtaposing the two messages presents the painful fact that the commercially driven Marconigram is successfully received whereas the personal missive, at extra cost, is lost along with so many others. The reader of these poems is invited to use the untreated information and literally count the words, to make the connection of significance between the Marconigrams. As Iser states, 'These connections are the product of the reader's mind working on the raw material of the text' (Iser, 1974:278) which advocates the importance of the reader's role in the process of creating the poems' effect but also infers that the strength of these connections will depend on the response of the individual and her/his level of engagement with the text.



In order to show the imbalance between losses of life in second and third classes compared to the rich and influential members of society in first class, juxtaposition of found materials was similarly used. 'Store-Room' (4) is a found poem in which I juxtaposed real statistics of the quantities of groceries stocked on board ship with real statistics for the loss of life categorised by class and men, women and children. I treated the original text by categorising what was simply a list of food/drink types into groupings by stanza for first, second, third class and children. I then added refrains which listed the loss of life for men and women of each class and finally ended the poem with children by class:

<i>First Class children lost</i>	<i>1 soul</i>
<i>Second Class children lost</i>	<i>0 souls</i>
<i>Third Class children lost</i>	<i>53 souls</i>

The process of ordering the list was crucial to the overall effect of the poem, as I wanted the reader to be shocked by the statistics as well as amused by the frivolous nature of some of the ingredients, especially for first class, and thus participate in the poem's dialogic communication. Again, I intended to show the imbalance between the privileged and underprivileged passengers by including items which presented a picture of extravagance for first class and basic survival for third class, to foreshadow the way they were handled during the sinking of the ship. The final statistic is so shocking because it relates to the children, the archetypal innocents, and there is a huge discrepancy between first and third class. By juxtaposing the grocery items with losses of life I aimed to make the effects of shock and bathos more profound for the reader.

Through the process of treating found texts, it is possible to defamiliarize the reader with the original material, for example in the case of 'Store-Room', which was

originally presented in a textbook as a table of items and quantities. This poetic process enabled the topic to become less familiar within an artistic medium, so that the reader could see it in an unfamiliar way. As intertextuality states that a text is 'a node within a larger nexus of social, historical, cultural and textual forces' (Taylor and Winquist, 2001:190), *Berth's* found poems support this idea. Instead of representing only one strand of the webbed network that is Titanic's story, it presents a range of interconnected aspects which ultimately creates a more multifaceted and compelling narrative. My aim was to make a socio-political comment on the nature of the people on board, and the disaster itself, through the passengers being symbolised as commodities when their loss of life is placed next to what they are, by class, entitled to eat. The reader is not merely presented with a finished poem to read, s/he must make the connections between what is found and real and what is added by the poet, thus takes part in the dialogue of the poem and ultimately contributes to its overall effectiveness.

In considering the sound poem, it is important to note Robert Sheppard's view that the Movement's orthodoxy could be characterised by its 'insistence upon tone, and the speaking voice,' which 'strives to maintain the effect of a stable ego, present in the discourse as the validating source of the utterance'. This would imply that a more closed, monophonic poem attempts to contain the 'voice' by fitting it into a strict form and structure, regardless of whether this is a true representation of the person/character it belongs to. An accepted idea is that iambic pentameter, a metre deemed to be most akin to the natural rhythms of speech, is used in such poems 'to level the tone' and control what results in 'a coherent 'voice'' (Sheppard, 2005:2). Based on this judgement, a monophonic poem will use the same form and structure to present both the voice of the poet and the voice of a character, so in a sense the

reader never hears the real voice and thus never gets to know the real character, with all its idiosyncrasies, behind this accepted structural norm. Arguably the 'speaking voice' is essential to polyphony but only when variations of voice are represented alongside that of the poet, rather than one dominating 'stable ego'. When applied to a collection of poems, polyphony is less concerned with maintaining the 'stable ego' and in turn is successively more receptive of other voices and viewpoints. This was a primary aim for *Berth*.

The sound poem challenges a reader's assumptions about what is believed to be a coherent voice by using devices such as rhythm and line breaks to present a specific voice at a particular moment in time. Like the found form, the poem's construction aims to support the processes involved in communicating the art form to the audience but the sound poem has an inclination towards music: 'But when looked at closely our 'speech' and 'music' boxes can be seen to have elastic sides and to have a lust to couple with each other' (Duke, 1992:7). The rhythm of the sound poem is selected for its suitability to show an aspect of character or theme, however disjointed or unfinished this may appear to the conditioned eye. The sound poem defamiliarizes the reader from the accepted norm of poetic voice and brings her/him closer to the character or subject matter it is attempting to show.

In his collection *Glasgow Beasts* (1961), subtitled 'a wee buik fir big weans', Ian Hamilton Finlay uses aspects of form and structure to represent the Glaswegian accent and dialect. He presents a strong sense of national identity, characteristic of many of his works, for the array of animals that are voiced in the form of dramatic monologue. Each poem is a blend of both visual form and sound poem to create a form of text-image cohesion that solidifies meaning between words and picture: 'Various mock heraldic beasts of the city, such as the Zebra Crossing, speak a few

words in tough Glasgow street-talk, each one illustrated with a 'paper-cut' design. It had caused a big row when first separately published - so Finlay was happy' (Barry, 2007:8). This view, coupled with the fact that Finlay self-published this collection originally, suggests that it was not well received at the time by the Establishment, likely due to its unconventional form and structure not fitting the accepted prestige dialect and accent of Standard English and Received Pronunciation:

**an wance  
ah wis a zebra  
heh heh  
crossin**

The form of the poem does not fit any established poetic mould other than being identifiable as a left-justified text (ekthesis) and a dramatic monologue by definition, in its use of persona and awareness of audience. But, as was explored earlier in the commentary, such a form embraces many characteristics of the open work so is adaptable by design. In this sound poem Finlay uses the placing of the line breaks to act as pauses for breath at the end of each line, rather than conforming to iambic pentameter or another regular metre. The representation of dialect serves to create social humour in the poem, as the reader 'hears' a broad Glaswegian accent from the mouth of an animal originating from the African plains. Finlay perhaps is using the zebra as a symbol of an increasingly multicultural society, in which, just like a non-indigenous species can be bred in a Scottish zoo, those of non-Scot heritage, but born in Scotland, are still Scottish in their hearts and minds.

Finlay uses non-standard lexical choices both to show the Glaswegian accent and guide the performer in its oral reading, by clipping the endings of 'an(d)' and 'crossin(g)' and substituting the standard auxiliary verb 'was' for 'wis', such devices as cues to how it should sound. The zebra's laughter, 'hey hey', being a spondee,

breaks the rhythm of the first two lines, and the poem's lack of exclamation here, or any other punctuation, leaves the poem open to the interpretation of the performer. There is a degree of *saidness* to the pun on 'crossin', with it being the punch line and ending to the poem, but another reading could suggest that the poem's four lines and deliberate blank space underneath the text, make it sound and appear more like an extract from a longer dialogue, or comedy routine, and that this is in fact just the start of the zebra's story. It is a 'dialogised heteroglossia' (Bakhtin, 1981:336) which uses the social varieties of language to communicate within the text and outside of the text.

Finlay's dialectical style of colloquial and non-standard language informed the creation of 'Charles John Joughin' (56), who was Chief Baker on Titanic and, by part miracle and part biology, was saved from the freezing waters, being intoxicated at the time. Subsequent verdicts claimed that the alcohol in his blood kept him warm enough to survive the potentially fatal effects of hypothermia. The poem is a modern-day bucolic, a 'poem (primary classical) of well-lubricated cheer, or outright drunkenness' (Lennard, 2005:363), but it was my intention to show the gradual process of his inebriation through his speech, using a mixture of standard grammar to tell the story and non-standard grammar to show his drunkenness, and thus create humour. As a visual cue to the performer of this poem, I italicised the sections intended to be sung: '*One more for the road*', using an idiomatic expression coined during the 1930s (anachronistically used in *Berth*) meaning to have another drink before going on a long journey. My aim was to use aspects of form to show the gradual disintegration of both the speaker, in his inebriation, and Titanic as she sinks, and create an irony in Joughin thinking at this point that it is likely he will die,

so would be going on a very long journey indeed - to the bottom of the North Atlantic Ocean.

With each stanza his speech becomes more slurred; this is shown using phonetic spellings and elision: '*Wone more an' none maw!*'. Although the poem is more of a closed form in having six stanzas all with this structure, the final stanza leaves the poem open for reader completion, as it uses the polyphonic, *saying* devices of ellipsis, to create gaps for response, and broken line lengths, to show the character's disintegration:

Jush a' wone maw fuzee rowd  
... wone maw ...  
... jussun ... ahhhh.

The poem's final lines hint at more to follow and encourage the reader to imagine the character at this point in his story, given that the rest of the poem is told in retrospect of what actually happens to him subsequent to his inebriation. In using a multi-linear structure, the poem's polyphony is informed by Revival methods, as it doesn't follow a wholly coherent route in the telling of the story. It is about showing what happens to the character through the way he speaks rather than merely presenting his story in a neat, iambic, omniscient voice. Thus it results in a new articulation of what happened which engages intertextually with previous documented and largely factual versions of the story. The resulting social comment, present in the irony of Joughin flouting the rules of his post in getting drunk then consequently surviving the sinking, is therefore *embedded* in the way he tells his story, hence supports the concept of the dialogic rather than the monologic.

Similarly, when writing the sound poem 'Wallace Hartley' (62), form and structure were used to aid the communication of voice. Charles Olson states that '[i]t is by their syllables that words juxtapose in beauty, by these particles of sound as clearly

as by the sense of the words which they compose' (Olson, 1950). In my poem a syllabic structure was used throughout the main stanzas to emulate the rhythm of a waltz, established in the opening line which acts as a cue for the rhythm: 'one, two three; one, two three', which follows in stanza one: 'I'm now at rest with my'. As there are six syllables in each line, the poem can be read to the rhythm of a waltz, which was a deliberate intention, given that some historical evidence of the disaster suggests Wallace Hartley (Titanic's Bandmaster) directed the band to play on as the ship sank. A tune named 'Songe d'Automne' (Autumn Waltz) was reported as one of the last heard by some of the passengers. My intention was to show, through his voice, that the rhythm of the music, his life's passion, remained with him in death. The waltz's rhythm marks the last piece he played, so creates a resonance of its significance lasting beyond the poem on the page: 'A syllable is held together by letters, but it also makes active relationships with other syllables to form words. And in a poem it reaches out to and echoes syllables in other words to suggest connections and meanings' (Padel, 2007). The rhythm intends to stay with the reader long after the poem has ended, thus s/he participates in the poem's completion, if it ever ends at all. The reader hears the story of Hartley, well-known as the Bandmaster who continued to play a waltz as the ship was sinking, distinctively through the rhythm of the poem. His narrative might appeal to music lovers, as well as Titanic and poetry enthusiasts, and so reaches a wider audience in its delivery. It is in this way that the poem's structure is designed to support the dialogic process rather than act merely as a rigid edifice into which words should be poured with no correlation of communication between meaning and structure.

David Kozubei's 'Tragedian's Speech' from the *Children of Albion* anthology (1969) uses identifiable verbal and non-verbal sounds to present the topic of death:

Death, death, death, alas;  
Death, death, death, alas;  
Ooooooooooooooooooooooh  
Woe, woe, woe, woe;  
Death.

This sound poem acts as both a commentary on and experience of grieving death, represented in the verbal and non-verbal utterances in the poem. It is closed in its use of punctuation to neatly end-stop the verbal lines, however the line of non-verbal lamentation forms an enjambment with the following line, so is more open in its communication of perhaps the most abstract emotion to put into words: pure grief. There is however a double meaning created by the correlation between title and main body of text. In it being a 'Tragedian's Speech', the poem adopts a satirical stance, as instead of the monologue actually being a speech, it is a melodramatic commentary on what such a speech is really communicating on a fundamental level. Its openness is perhaps less in its form and more in its deliberate irreverence towards the kinds of canonical text, such as Greek Tragedies and Shakespearean plays, which feature such speeches and soliloquies. Thus, intertextuality is used to serve the purpose of humour in this case.

The structural aspects to this poem informed the creation of 'Mr Emil Richard' (58), a French passenger of whom very little is known other than, like many, he died in the water. It was my aim to show both his real voice, using a polyglossia of French and English as he tries to communicate with a potential rescuer, and the moment of his drowning, represented by the breakdown of his speech into fragments of words. In its visual form, this poem explores Veronica Forrest-Thomson's theory of naturalization, as the reader is invited to experience more and less recognisable poetic forms in the telling of the speaker's story and thus s/he is destabilised in the



process of the poem's meaning-making, dwelling on the 'non-meaningful levels of poetic language' such as 'spatial organization' (Forrest-Thomson, 1978:11). The typographical use of capital letters in the opening lines when juxtaposed with the lower case, unfinished words at the end, helps to show his deterioration of strength as he loses his battle with the water: 'HELP! AIDEZ-MOI! HELP ME! [...] seule/seu .../s ...', thus supports Mottram's view, when discussing the characteristics of Revival works, that 'Discourse includes silence, applause, and incompleteness' (Mottram, 1977:43). The poem, literally ending with the speaker's death, is intended to be dramatic, as events unfold in the present and the audience is invited to witness the horror, as awful as that may be. It aims to show the futility of the dying man's pleas, through the dramatic irony created in the audience knowing that help will not come. The sound poem intends to present a believable voice but this voice is once again informed by the event happening at that moment. In his last word literally being drowned out by the water and thus incomplete, it creates a gap for the audience to fill as the sound of his dying stays with them after the poem has finished. This is reminiscent of the eye-witness accounts from Titanic of those few who were rescued, claiming that the sounds of the people in the water haunted them for the rest of their lives. The subject matter guided and informed the structure of the poem as it was presented on the page, not the other way round, which would be to fit the content into a pre-existing mould of form and structure, rhythm and rhyme, regardless of any correlation between the two, and would be considered by Forrest-Thomson as 'bad naturalization'.

Mottram states that 'the experimental poet is a language-designer; he escribes rather than describes' (Mottram, 1977:38). This suggests that Revival works are more concerned with showing the process of the subject by using language and

structure, than merely telling the audience what happened. I believe that the discussed sound poems in *Berth* achieve this, as they all show polyphonically, through a range of sound devices, a given moment in time, rather than simply narrating what happened through an omniscient voice. Veronica Forrest-Thomson's definition of 'good naturalization' can also be applied to these sound poems which focus on 'the non-meaningful levels of poetic language, such as phonetic and prosodic patterning and spatial organisation, and tries to state their relationship to other levels of organization rather than setting them aside in an attempt to produce a statement about the world' (Forrest-Thomson, 1978:11). If good naturalization is about using form and structure to help convey meaning rather than fitting meaning into a fixed pattern of form and structure, then it can be argued that, in being led by subject matter, my sound poems support Forrest-Thomson's ideas.

On the form of concrete poetry, Zurbrugg states that it 'emphasises the polysemantic potential of an extra-linear writing between poetry and painting' (Zurbrugg, 1974), suggesting that poetry as a mode has the potential to say more by generating further levels of meaning when the boundaries of its genre are extended to include other media. The visual elements to the poem on the page could be deemed to be as important in communicating meaning as the words themselves and, when combined with intent, the blend of words and visual elements into a concrete form can be powerful in the poem's overall effect. Such elements would be what Iser refers to as the 'component parts' (Iser, 1974:276) requiring reader-response to determine the connections and identify areas of meaning between image and text. This multimodal characteristic helps to establish dialogic works as innovatively different from monologic works since their form and structure invites a dialogue to

take place between text and receiver; the reader responds to and makes links between the visual appearance of the poem and its meaning.

In retelling the story of Titanic, the combination of words and visual elements into concrete forms enabled the presentation of an alternative perspective on events, encouraging the reader to see the disaster in a distinctive way through the appearance of the poems on the page. It also allowed for some exciting interpretations of the visual material in the performance and mise-en-écran of such works in the theatre auditorium (explored in chapter 7). Ultimately the inclusion of visual elements aimed for a varied, multimodal telling (or rather showing) of the story, such as shaping the text on the page, using forms of epistle and litany, varied typography, symbols, punctuation and line breaks.

'The End Bit' (1969) by Jim Burns, included in the *Children of Albion* anthology, is a concrete poem which presents the topic of male orgasm using the structure of one long stanza broken into short lines each of which has no more than four syllables. The appearance of the poem is column-like, suggestive of the phallus, and spans over twenty-one lines:

Each man has  
his own way  
of doing it.

The effect of having short lines not only supports the topic of the poem but also adds weight and emphasis to the words in each line, as the speaker contemplates the different methods of climaxing, in a discourse that uses enjambment to show his chain of thought. There is also playfulness, given the topic, in using a concrete form to present the poem accompanied by the male orgasm semantic field of 'man', 'jerk' and 'climax', which creates humour and, using shock tactics, openly invites reader-response. It is important to note the use of white space on the page created by the

positioning of the black text: 'a caesura or an enjambment or a stanza-break are literally nothing. They are silence; they are white space. However, the words we use for them - a cut, a leap, a room-divide, are already all metaphorical. A silence can be made to signify almost anything, depending on what's around it' (Robinson, 2006). In this case, the white space of the poem enhances the subject matter because it emphasises the powerful image of the black-shaped text, and its masculine motif.

This method informed the writing of 'Bad Omen Stoker' (25), which presents the voice in the shape of the fourth funnel which, other than for ventilation, was a dummy funnel used to make the ship appear more aesthetically pleasing. There are eye-witness accounts that claim the sighting of a stoker's head appearing out of the top of this funnel when Titanic was transferring mail at Queenstown (Cobh). The more superstitious onlookers claimed that it was a bad omen for the ship's foundering, as the man's face was blackened with soot and seemed to be rising up out of the furnaces like the Devil:

They said I was a bad omen;  
a member of the 'black gang'  
with face of soot, rising up  
like a devil fresh out of hell.

The structure of the line breaks not only supports the creation of the funnel shape but also adds gravity to the topic of the poem when the reader notes from the subheading that the speaker was '*LOST*'; irony is presented in the bad omen actually coming true. The poem intends to be haunting, as the stoker speaks from the bottom of the ocean, his face 'washed clean', but humour is also evident in the visual presentation of the poem which supports the reader's visualisation of his story's setting (the funnel) and highlights the potentially damaging nature of superstition, a very dominant belief-system in Edwardian society. In this way the concrete form acts

as an illustration for events in the poem, enhancing meaning by helping the reader to make the connection between the speaker's role on Titanic and also show how significant the funnel was in the story of the ship's fate. Its shape enhances meaning rather than being a fixed structure into which meaning is forced. Similarly the white space on the page enhances the black text of the funnel, again a phallic symbol to represent a traditionally male attitude towards size and power at the time of Titanic's sailing. However, the voice of the stoker is contrastingly rather sensitive in places to contradict the stereotypical associations with someone of his position, thus creates a striking disparity between the visual image and the subject matter.

'Captain E J Smith' (48) is presented as a litany of 'what if' questions which use the facts and hearsay surrounding the disaster in a treated form to represent his thoughts at the moment it is determined that Titanic will sink. The 'What if' complement is repeated at the start of each line and acts as an anaphora throughout the poem as he contemplates each factor contributing to the ship's (and his own) fate. The questions intend to be like a catechism with no answers, to show that at this point he is entirely alone, with not even God there to answer him. The interrogatives intentionally range from serious to ridiculous: 'What if we had been equipped with more lifeboats?' [...] 'What if I had chosen roast duckling instead of fillet mignon for dinner?' This shows the human brain's tendency in a time of crisis to focus on what could have been done differently to avoid the disaster; the 'what if' playing on a common clichéd idea. The poem's visual form on the page emphasises the increasing desperation of the Captain as he repeatedly asks himself the question. Seeing the words gives them added weight beyond merely hearing them when read aloud, as the reader sees their shape on the page and makes the semiotic connection to the ideas of possibility and choice in relation to fate. The final

two lines are the same question repeated, 'What if I was not Captain?' but the last is italicised and declarative to direct the intonation of desperation and resignation as he admits defeat. For such a well-known figure associated with Titanic, the degrees of polyphony are inevitably more limited due to there being many existing authorial voices already telling his story, but in this example the form enables an alternative voice to emerge, one that speaks candidly at the moment just before his death. The repeated visual of the interrogatives helps to illuminate how he may have been feeling at that point in the disaster and thus is more open to reader-response, through the process of '*Einfühlung*', in its communication.

For 'John George Phillips' (41), one of the two Marconi wireless operators on board Titanic, the visual qualities are as important as the words themselves. Each line is interspersed with one of the two distress calls used during Titanic's lifetime, presented with a key at the end: '— . — . — — . — — . . CQD (International distress call) . . . — — — . . . SOS (newly recognised distress call during Titanic's life)'. The poem's success is largely dependent on the reader being able to see the shape of these codes, with the SOS call likely being the most recognisable signal to non-Titanic experts. It is intended that on seeing the dots and dashes of the distress calls, that the reader will imagine their sound and so take part in the communication of the poem. They act both as visual signs on the page to show distress and as cues for the pitch and rhythm of the message being transmitted, thus an aim of the concrete form, where 'pictorial and verbal representation fuse' (Lennard, 2005:90) is achieved. The distress calls support the subject of the poem structurally by decreasing in size towards the end of the poem, to show the message being lost in the airwaves as the realisation dawns that help is not coming. The poem ends with a

barely visible SOS distress call: ..... (in size 3 font) to represent the message and the ship herself slipping beneath the waves.

'Mr Thomas Leonard Theobald' (43) uses a blend of conventional and concrete forms to explore the journey of the speaker and other steerage passengers through the ship as they sought their way out to the boat deck. The main reason for blending the two forms was to show on the page a distinction between moments of calm and moments of panic, the shaped forms being used to visualise the latter:

We sniffed out our way like the rats  
they wanted us to be:

wound  
our way  
a l stairs, slid  
on i  
g of n  
c o r r i d o r s , up a set t  
o water - w  
r  
o  
n  
back again, !y a w g  
electricity f i k r n  
l c e i g,  
our voices clamouring  
through the dying ship.

Here, a range of font sizes and directions are used to show the actual movement of the speaker through the ship as he relates his story. It intends to invoke a feeling of claustrophobia by demonstrating the size of the ship with her many narrow, long and disorienting corridors, so that physically the reader sees the multi-directional path taken and is encouraged to empathise with the speaker's feelings as he undertakes this journey. The concrete section of the poem ends visually in the

bowels of the ship, to convey the feeling of being trapped, before normality returns in the recognisable stanzas that follow, depicting the speaker's eventual escape.

A concrete poem such as this intends both to orientate and disorientate the reader, mimicking the motion of the ship and her passengers during the final stages of Titanic's sinking as they struggle to find rescue and return to their own normality. It is in this way that the use of concrete forms 'is largely a matter of the poet inviting us to an immediately visual participation and reception of [her] events or experiences' (Mottram, 1977:9), but in *Berth* it is the speaker's voice that is supported by visual elements to enhance their telling of the story. The multimodality of the concrete form is a characteristic that enables these poems to work so well in the collection, 'elucidated from a simultaneity of elements - visually inclined, produced in sound or some other behaviour' (Mottram, 1977:11), as the combinations of mode allow for a layering of meaning in a subject which by nature has many layers to uncover. The form and structure of such a mode can be used to show disorder and disintegration as well as the complete 'whole'. In telling the story of the most famous maritime disaster in peacetime history, this method liberated my poetic range of exploration as I was able to show moments of devastation in the subject by changing the structure and shape of the poem. Form was guided by meaning to open up the poems and subject matter in a new way for the reader, one which encouraged them to empathise with Titanic's passengers by visualising their experience of the ship's journey and demise.



## **7. *Project it from the platform: Polyphony, Multimodality and Performance***

In this final chapter I extend the characteristics of dialogism and polyphony to include the process of collaborating with a theatre company and using multimodality to take *Berth* to the stage. Additionally, I contextualise *Berth* with other contemporary multimodal and performed poetry projects, then consider the degrees of polyphony evident in moving the printed form into performance.

As Peter Middleton argues in *Distant Reading* (2005), traditional poetry readings can be ‘ragged affairs’ typically held in a ‘venue temporarily liberated from other activities’ (Middleton, 2005:30), often a quiet place such as a library or bookshop. They are less accessible to the majority, and often feature a poet standing at the front delivering her/his poems: ‘Readers are rarely as proficient at articulating the words, and are often surprised by their tongue and larynx into false starts, repetitions, and sinusoidal amplitude’ (Middleton, 2005:30). The audience is unsure when or whether to applaud so there is inevitably just silence in between poems. It is very much a ‘fourth wall’ (Denis Diderot’s eighteenth-century concept which imagines a wall at the front of the stage separating performers and audience) style of delivery, with little audience interaction until the end when questions may be invited. The context of the venue is often not taken into account, as Middleton continues, ‘most readings only faintly acknowledge the location as any more than a vehicle for the generation of spoken language’ (Middleton, 2005:30), which would suggest that other than using a microphone and speaker-system and facing the audience, most poets do not consider the space in which they are performing their work. In allowing the work to be performed by other artists who will utilise the space of the venue in a way the poet can do less readily, the delivery is expanded beyond that of merely the

poet, to become a collaborative process that ultimately strives to increase the degree of audience reach.

To fulfil the aim of communicating *Berth* to a wider audience, I felt that it was more appropriate to collaborate with a reputable theatre company who could adapt the collection for the stage, using a range of actors and theatrical devices, rather than performing the poems myself in the form of a dramatic reading, which has its limitations in terms of presenting different voices. My own readings from *Berth* take the form of a poetic presentation of selected poems: dramatic readings interspersed with historical narrative and projected images. Whilst this is multimodal in its approach, having less experience of performance, there are some voices I find uncomfortable to perform, for example those written in non-standard English, such as 'Lorraine Allison' and 'Rigel'. The result in my readings is a more narrow presentation for an audience of mostly those who would normally attend poetry readings. By collaborating with an established theatre company, Vivid Theatre, it was my intention that through multimodal interventions, the polyphonic approach I had used for writing the poems could be expanded in the performance, and, rather than necessarily completing the product, engage the audience in another kind of retelling.

*Berth* can be closely contextualised in terms of other multimodal poetry projects. In April 2014 Maggie Sawkins was awarded the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry, which recognises excellence and innovation, and has been running for five years. Her collection *Zones of Avoidance*, which presents the voices of addicts going through recovery, is a multi-media live literature production involving collaboration with a director to visualise the staging of her work, with an accompanying printed form (Cinnamon Press, 2015). In gaining international recognition, this stands as a testimony to the widening canon of polyphonic poetry currently in practice.

Additionally there is Molly Naylor's *Whenever I Get Blown Up I Think of You* (2011), written as a narrative poem to be performed on stage accompanied by images, Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (1999), published as a collection of dramatic monologues, adapted and performed in 2009, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) adapted for the stage as a one-woman show in 1996 and Angela Readman's *After the Robins* (2010), a film-poem by Alastair Cook combining moving image, voice-over and projected words. All of these works utilise multimodality in their presentation and contribute to a shared or polyphonic, rather than a linear, monophonic experience. *Berth* as another kind of retelling, using collaboration as a vital part of the conversation process, is also akin to the methods encouraged by many contemporary performance poets including Lemn Sissay, Hollie McNish and Benjamin Zephaniah. For example, McNish's organisation Page to Performance advocates the practice of poets, lyricists and rappers to work as a talented collective. However, a link is less apparent with performances that are written and performed only by the poet and even less so in poems written only to be performed and not to be presented on the page at all. For *Berth*, I wanted the collection to reach an audience in both printed and performed contexts as both a visual and aural representation of Titanic's story. It is in this way that the collection deserves its place amongst other British multimodal, innovative poetry projects.

In taking *Berth* to the stage, a key aim was to add layers to the existing signification in the printed form and widen the community of readership: 'The meaning of textuality is plural and covers the multiple processes and contexts in which the work is situated, read, transferred from one historical to the next, and from one community of readers to another' (Taylor and Winquist, 2001:394). I viewed this ethos as being an important part of the process. Robert Sheppard's discussion of the

*saying* and the *said* informed my exploration of the relationship between process and product, aiming to discover whether taking the collection to the stage resulted in the finalised, monophonic *said* or whether it offered more scope for polyphonic *saying* in its range of methods used.

The success of the performance was dependent on how effectively the collaborative process worked, and was determined by audience response, so feedback materials, including video footage of rehearsals, excerpts of the final performance and cast interviews were used to support an exploration of the process of the adaptation and the success of the final performance. The following issues were considered: working with a creative director to present the poems using multimodal interventions such as music, choreography, sound effects, voice-over, projected words and images, interactive audience participation and other aspects of set/staging: 'A process called the "convergence of modes" is blurring the lines between media [...] a service that was provided in the past by any one medium [...] can now be provided in several different physical ways. So the one-to-one relationship that used to exist between a medium and its use is eroding' (Pool, 1983:23). Such boundary-blurring is a key aspect of *Berth*.

Vivid Theatre had already agreed to collaborate for the staged version but in February 2012 *Berth* received a full Arts Council grant (appendix A) which enabled a more ambitious production to include the hiring of professional actors, advanced theatrical technologies and extensive marketing of the show. Taking costing into account, the budget allowed for a two-night showing of the production to take place on April 14th and 15th 2012, to coincide with the centenary of Titanic's sinking at 2.20 am on April 15th 1912. Co-ordinated by David Edwards, Director of Vivid Theatre, rehearsals began on April 2nd 2012 at Stockton ARC theatre. Prior to final

casting and rehearsals, a Scratch Night performance took place in the Studio of ARC, where an introduction to *Berth* was provided and an extract of the performance in progress was shown to a small audience who were invited to offer feedback on a post-production comments sheet (appendices B and C). The feedback received enabled David and myself to plan how the production would be staged for a live audience. Within the collaboration, I had input to the process of assigning the role of assistant-director, casting two of the four actors (appendix D) and offering guidance during rehearsals, as the cast were researching their parts and getting into character (appendix E).

Rehearsals took place during a concentrated period of two weeks prior to the performance week, a practice which according to David is preferable when working on an emotively intense production with a range of voices, as it enables the actors to fully embrace their roles and produce a convincing performance. I attended some of the rehearsal sessions by prior agreement between myself and David, which for the actors and directors ran for 7 hours per day (appendices F and G); this allowed me to see the work developing very quickly over a short time period. I found it very illuminating to observe how other artists interpreted my work and thus added their contributions to the ongoing dialogue present within the project. This process was documented in a series of 'Webisodes' which includes interviews with cast, crew and director (appendices P and Q).

The process of collaborating with Vivid Theatre can be supported by Umberto Eco's concept of the 'open work': one that is 'literally "unfinished": the author seems to hand them to the performer more or less like the components of a construction kit' (Eco, 1981:19). As the printed form of my work is poetry - albeit dramatic poetry - rather than drama, there are no stage directions acting as cues for the paralinguistic

forms of acting, so the most rewarding aspect for me was to evaluate how I had voiced my characters on the page in terms of dialect, accent, tone and tenor, to enable an actor to convey the character. At the same time, I had accepted that their interpretation might be different to what was originally intended (as was the case with 'Iceberg') and deemed this to be part of the dialogic process of taking the works to the stage and continuing the conversation of the text. Interestingly, no suggestion was made to change my original words, they were just interpreted in a range of ways through performance, thus contributed to the process of *saying*. As Middleton states, 'Authorship and liminal commentary coalesce in a repertoire of asseverational gestures common to all performances of writing as speech, allowing a wide range of nuances of intensity, direction, and quality of assertion to be indicated' (Middleton, 2009:36). This would imply that all texts written to be performed are open to a range of dramatic interpretations as to their delivery to an audience. Thus a collaborative process can lead to some interesting results. This was indeed the case for *Berth*.

In adapting some of the found works for the stage, multimodal interventions were utilised to present the works as they would be seen on the page, supported by theatrical devices such as props and screen projections. The 'Marconigram' poems, rather than being performed in spoken mode, were presented as film poems, with each letter visually being printed onto the screen, one by one to form the message, accompanied by the anachronistic sound of a 1960s typewriter keys being tapped (appendix H). This enabled the audience to have time to read the message and reflect on its meaning once they had processed the untreated information about the costing of the Marconigram. In having to read the message themselves, audience members were encouraged both to take part in the performance and continue the dialogue, so, according to Eco, the audience was 'bound to supply its own existential

credentials' (Eco, 1981:49) on the performance, as, in the limited amount of time the poem was projected, not every viewer would have made the link between the untreated and treated parts of the text.

'Iceberg' was presented as a voiced performance but was adapted in a different way to the one initially intended. Actor Samantha Morris played the role I had envisioned as working-class male, as a sophisticated femme fatale, projecting a slow, seductive tone of voice to the character, exuding an air of confidence and defiance in her performance (appendix I). This added a new dimension to the original intention of the 'Iceberg' having a destructive love affair with the ship. The performance worked because it challenged the stereotypical view of the male/female archetypal love affair and from a feminist angle, gave female presence to a male-dominated story. With most crew members and the majority of powerful passengers being male, the collection, in its found form, had to represent this, albeit on a reduced scale, so it was an intuitive notion to present a gender-neutral voice as female. This was an idea I welcomed, in the spirit of my democratic credential and faith in contingency, as part of the collaborative process.

To present 'Store-Room', a bespoke cardboard screen was used as a backdrop on which to project selected lines of the poem one by one, each fading out as the next appeared, in silence. With the lines relating to loss of lives, each of the four actors approached the screen and tore a section of it away, then discarded it onto the floor in a gesture of indifference (appendix I); this was to represent the general ignorance of first class passengers to the horrendous loss of life in steerage. As each section was torn away, the corresponding line of poetry disappeared, leaving the audience time to reflect on this loss. Ending on the last statistic, relating to the third class children, produced powerful results from the audience as some viewers audibly

gasped at this point in both of the performances. This was proof for me that the juxtaposition of found elements in the performance had been successful. The tearing of the screen added to the shock factor due to it being in itself a defamiliarization technique: 'Art now becomes the means of disrupting the automatization of everyday perception through "estrangement" or "defamiliarization" [...] demands the differentiation of form, and the recognition of the operation' (Jauss, 2013:16). It presented a unique, unrepeatable event with an immediate reception from the audience, so demanded a response as part of the dialogic process. The audience witnessed what they thought to be a real projector screen, and an expensive piece of equipment, being destroyed; an act which encouraged them to question the reliability of the theatrical space and thus destabilised them in this moment. When combined with the hard facts of the found poem it resulted in an emotive experience and one which carried resonance long after the performance had ended.

According to Sheppard, when discussing the sound and visual works of Bob Cobbing and Maggie O'Sullivan, 'the transformation of materials plays upon their instability in order to produce new meanings' (Sheppard, 2005:4). In the case of *Berth's* performance, the found materials were unstable enough to allow degrees of interpretation by the director and actors, presenting new juxtapositions of the material to, in turn, create instability in the audience. Although there is a *saidness* to the performance, which is by its nature the last word: a finished product which is the end result of many rehearsals and fine-tuning, the range of interpretations open to the performers through found works enabled the *saying* to be explored in the process of the collaboration. In the case of 'Store-Room', by selecting only parts of the original poem to be projected, it encouraged the audience to participate in a dialogue which would continue after the performance had ended, an idea which



supports Bakhtin's dialogic principle. Being controversial, the statistics prompt conversation, which might take place after the performance has ended or encourage audience members to do their own reading into the disaster. This in turn contributes to the degrees of intertextuality involved in the process as links are established with other historical texts post-performance. In fact, some audience members commented that there were many details about Titanic that they hadn't known previously, beyond the widely published lists of facts. Although they knew approximately how many people died in the disaster, they didn't know the figures for children by class and were shocked deeply by the last statistics. This is supported by Iser's view that 'whatever we have read sinks into our memory and is foreshortened. It may later be evoked again and set against a different background with the result that the reader is enabled to develop hitherto unforeseeable connections' (Iser, 1974:278). By process of extrapolation and re-presentation, these details were shown in a way that made them more shocking and memorable. It is in this way that the process of communication, the *saying*, continues beyond page and performance and this driving force is what contributes to *Berth's* distinctiveness as an innovative creative project.

In the adaptation process of taking the sound poems into performance, multimodal interventions were used, such as actor/audience interaction, voice-over, music and other sound effects, which all acted as a catalyst for the defamiliarization process intended by the written form of the text. Actor David Kirkbride's portrayal of 'Charles Joughin' aimed to break down the 'fourth wall' of the theatre and interact with audience members (appendix J). In stark contrast to the melancholy of Samantha Morris' preceding performance of 'Violet Jessop', he entered the auditorium from the back upper rows, creating commotion as he made his way down to the lower rows. Still remaining in character, he selected a seat in the middle of one row so that he

had to ask people to stand up and move along to let him in. This had the effect of making the audience (certainly those closest to the character) a little uncomfortable in the unpredictability of the situation. Using the title of the poem, Kirkbride introduced himself by character name and profession to those audience members sitting next to him, then proceeded to deliver his monologue using the cues from the dialectically produced printed form to show the gradual inebriation of the speaker. A prop of a whisky bottle was used to add validity to the character's developing inebriation, and, at the end of his monologue, the character drifted into an impenetrable sleep, his head lolling back onto the headrest whilst still clutching the bottle in one hand. The entire performance was comedic and interactive, with Kirkbride addressing specific members of the audience and meeting their eyes at moments in the performance, encouraging them to respond. His falling asleep at the end was a director's contribution to the original text, to enable more humour to be present in the performance and also enable the character to stay seated throughout the following performance in which he was not needed. The bathos created was powerful as it allowed audience members to experience the release of laughter after a previously tense and sad moment in the production.

'Wallace Hartley' was performed using all four actors, each delivering a stanza of the poem but presented as a voice-over, accompanied by the sound of a waltz playing in the background (appendix K). The style of the music was sombre rather than upbeat and the tone muffled to give it an air of instability and unease. In using multiple voices rather than one steady character voice, it enhanced the process of the *saying* because it defamiliarized the audience from their natural responses to a character speaking as a coherent 'whole' performance. It worked so well due to the fact that it used the artifice of the presentation to provoke the audience into thinking

beyond the simple reality of the character and see the voice as representative of all the musicians who perished on board Titanic. Thus the performance added to the polyphonic process of *saying* rather than creating a more monophonic *saidness*.

'Mr Emil Richard' was performed by Samantha Morris as a recorded voice-over accompanied by the simulated sounds of drowning (appendix L). It could be argued that hearing the sounds of the drowning made the audience members more familiar with the subject matter, rather than wholly destabilising them, however, hearing rather than seeing the character made the performance destabilising in itself, as the sense of the audience's hearing was heightened to the drama of the moment more than if a visual stimulus had been provided. The sheer terror of the moment was powerfully conveyed by the actor, thus provided the shock element required. The gaps provided on the page, seen as ellipses and blank spaces, were filled with the sounds of moving water and the speaker's gasps for breath in the performance, a device which made the overall effect more immediate and harrowing when presented in a darkened theatre auditorium with surround-sound. Instability in the audience was created at this point in the performance by there being present the feeling of no escape.

The process of preparing the printed form of the text for performance has enabled other nuances of sound to develop and ultimately enhance the original form of the text. Such sounds have developed through the individual actor's portrayal of that character and in doing so, especially in the cases of 'Charles Joughin' and 'Mr Emil Richard', the gasps, stutters and any other added irregularities to speech all form part of the communicative process, thus contribute to the polyphonic nature of the poem. Just as Edwin Morgan welcomed different readings of his 'Loch Ness Monster's Song', so did I with my poems for *Berth*, as it added new layers to my

characterisation of real people involved in the disaster. As the author I exercised no right in claiming my subject matter as my own; it is open to interpretation by others. The actors' interpretations of my poems exist as evidence of this and demonstrate how successful such an approach can be for voicing a well-known narrative, with real people and real losses of life.

In breaking down the 'fourth wall' and having an actor in character sitting amongst audience members, the nature of the performance is dependent on audience participation and/or reaction, and the shaping of the presentation will always be slightly different each time it is performed. By nature, an extraverted audience member would react very differently to having an actor sat next to her/him in the auditorium to an introverted one, so the end result is always going to be different. Ultimately the process is a dialogue between the poem's words and the audience's reaction to those words: 'Even thinking or inner speech is conceived as a dialogue with the world' (Sheppard, 2005:7). On this level, it can be stated that in each individual audience member's response to a sound poem performance, there is nuance of reaction, so the process always remains dialogic rather than monologic: 'The potentiality of response is more important than the actual response which cannot be forced and cannot be predicted' (Sheppard, 2005:8). The unpredictability of the audience response is that which opens up what could be left as a closed form on the page into a more organic and malleable medium.

Communicating the concrete poems from *Berth* on the stage proved to be an enlightening intervention, as in some cases the poem was projected verbatim onto the backdrop screen but in others the visual aspect was replaced by movement, choreography and sound to create a different presentation of the poem on the page. As was the case for found and sound forms, a multimodal approach enabled the

poems on the page to be expanded and developed to encompass new forms in their staged presentation. Choreography was used to good effect in selected works to translate those visual aspects of the poem which were present on the page and less effectively replicable in a theatrical context. This assisted in continuing the *saying* process because, though fully planned and rehearsed, pieces could always be presented slightly differently with another performance. As the poem consisted of a large body of text, it would have been inappropriate to project 'Bad Omen Stoker' for the audience to see, so instead the poem's delivery was choreographed into a piece of movement using all four actors (appendix M). The main actor for this piece, Kelly Roberts, voiced the stoker, with the other actors supporting her movements to show the character climbing up the funnel. The visual image on stage of the actor being held upright at a height created the shape of the funnel and thus recreated the intentions of the poem on the page, giving weight to the content of the poem and illustrating the story.

Similarly, 'Captain E J Smith' was not projected to be seen but was presented using the ensemble of actors and degrees of proxemics, each taking it in turns to ask a question. The four actors stood at equally spaced points downstage, facing the audience, motionless as a voice-over delivered the litany, speaking in unison with the final line: 'What if I was not Captain'. This presentation effectively transferred the concrete element into sound without losing the intended effect of the repeated phrase throughout. Using alternating voices for the same character helped to show the universal quality of how we all ask ourselves such questions after a moment of crisis, so adds to the intended accessibility of the text, whilst defamiliarizing the audience with the character, to explore the isolated nature of the dilemma itself.

However, 'John George Phillips' was presented as a film-poem using the backdrop screen with supporting lighting/sound effects (appendix N - note, spelling errors are due to this being the technician's work in progress and did not appear in the final performance). Each distress call was sounded out using the characteristically high-pitched signal of Morse code, rather than being shown on the screen, accompanied by a flashing black and white background to match the rhythm of the signal. Only the verbal elements of the poem were projected line-by-line in the chronological order of the poem, fading into view without any accompanying sound, then disappearing suddenly into a black screen and momentary silence. The projection ended with a lingering note from the final distress call, mimicking the sound of a life support machine flat-lining, so simulated loss of life. This provided a dramatically moving ending to the piece, leaving the audience with a period of silence to contemplate what they had witnessed. The silence was intended to invite a conversation to continue, even if this only occurred in the minds of individual audience members.

Also presented as a film-poem was 'Mr Thomas Leonard Theobald', but the method of voice-over, (with Kelly Roberts voicing the role) was used to accompany the visual stimuli of words on the screen (appendix O). Projected onto a black background were key words taken from the initial stanzas of the poem and displayed using modifying effects, such as 'flooded' presented in blue, 'engines' shown to be throbbing by movement of the lettering and 'fresh white' appearing with shine patterns around the lettering. The concrete section of the poem was presented as a close replica of its appearance on the page but for the performance each letter/word appeared in order, thus creating the shape as the actor spoke the words. This encouraged the audience to focus its attention on each separate word, a device not possible in the printed text, so made a powerful interpretation of the original. The

latter 'regular' stanzas of the poem again reverted to the process of revealing key words, with the black background slowly brightening to white, coinciding with the finale of the poem. This simple lighting technique was so effective because it created ambiguity as to whether it represented the speaker approaching the light in terms of rescue or alternatively his death. This contributed to a resonance of emotion lasting after the film had ended, thus continued the dialogic process initiated by the printed poem on the page and expanded in the performance and audience reaction.

Communicating *Berth's* concrete poems through performance was a valuable way to show the growth process from a poem in the printed form to a staged version and in turn explore the process of poetry making itself. It also ensured that, by the idea supported by the open works philosophy: 'poetic form is a continuum, and not a finished product' (Strand and Boland, 2001:260). A poem is rarely a complete product; it is continually being shaped by its presentation and reception. So the collection had the opportunity to develop further with more readings, performances, collaborations and interactions. In allowing the theatrical experts to stage the collection, I encouraged an openness in how the poems would be performed, and the end result was successful in using multimodal interventions to communicate poetry to a wider audience than that of only the printed and bound form. Indeed, both the printed collection and its subsequent performance attracted local media attention around the time of the centenary, with articles featuring in the *Middlesborough Evening Gazette* and *Northern Echo* newspapers, acknowledging the scale of the project and its potential impact (appendix R).

Audience feedback from the performance was invited to a commemorative dedication book provided by the Titanic Heritage Trust; many comments placed here demonstrated an appreciation and enjoyment of the show, whilst being suitably

respectful to the topic and context in their quiet expressions of enthusiasm. In my official evaluation of the project for the Arts Council, I revisited audience feedback from the Scratch Night in determining its success: 'Good that it's a quick paced new, contemporary way of telling a story about Titanic': 'written well': 'loved the poetic writing' (appendix S). Again, this feedback supports the originality of the *saying* process in offering a distinctive perspective on a well-known narrative, and celebrates the calibre of the writing itself.

Many letters of support were received from international Titanic organisations and poetry professionals (appendix T), with Norm Lewis, President of the Canadian Titanic Society claiming that he had 'never seen or heard of a poetry book that has such a wide range of poems on different subjects and ALL connecting with TITANIC', and poet Anna Woodford describing *Berth* as 'a beautifully executed series of poems'. These comments support both the originality of the idea and the quality of its presentation. Even though there were some rejections from over-subscribed publishers, their responses were accompanied by encouraging feedback, for example Neil Astley, Editor for Bloodaxe Books, described the collection as 'Excellent', which was very heartening when considering Bloodaxe's wide regard as a leading UK poetry publisher. The time constraints on the collection, in having to publish it for the centenary then prepare it for the stage, meant that the publishing and marketing processes had to be conducted swiftly. However, my success with Irish publisher Bradshaw Books' 'Cork *Literary Review* Manuscript Competition', and the Irish interest in the subject matter, led to this publisher being keen and able to publish the collection in time for April 2012.

Since publication, *Berth* has attracted interest from other notable organisations. The Titanic Heritage Trust charity, chaired by Howard Nelson, is in the process of



recording a CD of selected voices, using a theatre company local to the Coventry-based registered charity. A demo has already been recorded (appendix U) and, once finalised, the CD will be mass-produced and sold via the Heritage Trust as well as other Titanic organisation websites. In printed form, several individual poems from the collection have been published in anthologies, including a celebratory edition of the Cork *Literary Review* (vol. 15), where 'Mr and Mrs Marvin' and 'Frederick Fleet' feature humbly alongside works by celebrated Irish poets including Séamus Heaney, Bernard O'Donoghue and Matthew Sweeney (appendix V).

I have received strong recommendations in reviews by enthusiastic readers and educational professionals: 'it would make a brilliant addition to the KS3 English classroom', Helena Pielichaty - Children's author (appendix W), suggesting *Berth's* potentiality for a contribution to syllabuses of History or English. Indeed, royalties have been received from educational photocopying sources in the EU and overseas, confirming that the collection is being used as inspiration in the classroom internationally, having universal appeal and relevance. Notably, 'Rigel' currently features in an anthology of poems used in The University of Sunderland's undergraduate English Literature programme. As publicity of *Berth* continues, I have been invited to read and run workshops at local Literary festivals, as well as at a number of private readings (appendix X and also see my website: [www.nataliescott.co.uk](http://www.nataliescott.co.uk)); thus *Berth – Voices of the Titanic* continues to reach an even wider audience than was originally intended and this is testament to the creative work's success.

## Evaluative Summary and Concluding Comments

‘Any utterance ... is only a moment in the continuous process of verbal communication’ (Pierre Bourdieu, 1973:95).

The principal aim of this study was to use polyphonic methods to present a creative work which added a distinctive voice to the existing works on the subject of the Titanic. In selecting such a well-known narrative, the challenge was to engage the reader in another kind of retelling from those used in existing published poetic works on the topic. Choosing not to use a dominant, authorial, omniscient narrator, enabled a more subjective, empathetic handling of the subject matter, an important consideration when dealing with such a globally sensitive topic as the Titanic. Polyphony has been the catalyst throughout and has facilitated the success of the creative project and fulfilment of this original aim. I have established critical interconnections between polyphony, dialogism and intertextuality, acknowledging the importance of the reader, with each being explained distinctly, and I have argued for the relevance of the concept of dialogism to poetry. Polyphony’s intrinsic link to the dramatic monologue and other open forms of poetry, means that *Berth* as a creative work readily exemplifies it in its *mise-en-page* – the appearance of the poems on the page – their form and structure, and its cohesion as a full collection. Likewise, its constellatory methods produce a gapped narrative retelling of Titanic, enhancing its potential for interpretation through performance in the dramatic enactment by Vivid Theatre. Thus, a large part of its success as a project is in it working innovatively in both printed and performed contexts. This sets it apart from other poetry projects which are polyphonic only in their performed contexts as they are not represented on the page.

In its performed context, the creative work proves that a polyphonic approach has the potential to widen the field of reception, making it accessible to more people than only the usual readership for printed poetry. The forms of found, sound and concrete poem used in *Berth* structurally reinforce the subject matter of the poems, in most cases the speaker. This not only makes the poem visually pleasing on the page but actually enhances the signs and signifiers of its communication. Poems such as 'Store-Room' have demonstrated that a simple, encyclopaedic list of factual information about the contents of Titanic's store-room can be re-positioned in the treated form, so that its message becomes more powerfully emotive, personal and ultimately human, in its juxtaposition of lines on the page and the literal tearing away of them through performance. Through the process of defamiliarization, the audience is encouraged to reconsider the significance of simple grocery items and reconceive them as a wider comment on the human need to classify, discriminate and ultimately condemn each other to death. As an intertext, *Berth* transposes information gained from historical and personal records of the disaster and creates a distinctive articulation of the story for a new audience.

Polyphonic methods are becoming more accepted in contemporary poetry culture and are receiving the accolades from literary organisations that they deserve, with the annual Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry and the Live Canon Poetry Competition being prime examples which celebrate innovative projects with a performative potential. Perhaps this reflects the lack of an established mode of practice in a field that now embraces many forms, as more writers make their poetry available to read using routes to publication other than the traditional presses. Changes in technology have played a role in this, providing electronic platforms on which virtually anyone can perform. Now poets can promote their work with uploaded

recordings to social media websites, providing the kind of exposure that could lead to publication; YouTube is a notable example of this, with Jess Green's performance poem 'Dear Mr Gove' receiving over three hundred thousand views and leading to her performing a full-length show at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2014. However, it does not necessarily guarantee the right kind of exposure and therein lies a pitfall with this mode of communicating poetry; it can on occasion become lost in a barrage of words that are listened to but not really heard. *Berth* was carefully handled to prevent this, maintaining a focus on subject matter - a characteristic of polyphony - and that polyphonic approach guided the forms the poems took. As a result, the poems perhaps sit together as a collection because of their variety in style and presentation, allowing the subject of Titanic to come alive in a distinctive and original way.

In relation to polyphonic approaches to poetry, it is worth noting another poem from the collection not previously mentioned in this commentary which suggests a direction for future poetry projects. 'John R Jago Smith' (42) is written using the epistolary form. It voices the last words of one of the postal workers on Titanic, written to his wife prior to his death, and represents one of the many letters that never reached their intended recipients. With the dominant force of the internet, many accepted written forms are gradually becoming obscured or obsolete. One such form is the personal letter, increasingly supplanted by the mediums of text message, email and social networking. The letter can be seen as a closed, monophonic, *said* form, with an established structure and layout, and a primary authorial voice, although more playful letters might involve polyphonic effects. By communicating through performance and audience involvement, Smith's letter is adapted into an open, *saying* form. In the collaboration, we decided that the letter-

poem was to be handwritten onto a piece of paper which was then photo-copied, folded and placed under each audience member's seat (appendix Y). When the time came for it to be read, David Kirkbride led the performance, standing alone on stage with his own copy of the letter, gesturing with a gentle nod for the audience to open theirs. The audience read in silence, each at her/his own pace, with the papers softly rustling, each perhaps imagining what the sound of Smith's voice might be like. After a generous period of time, the actor ignited his copy and it (being on fire-paper) burst into flames for an instant. This moment was talked about by the actors and director in subsequent interviews, as it was such a success in terms of audience participation and interaction (appendices I and R). They were encouraged to delve into the written words of the letter and think about what their response might be, promoting a dialogue that continued beyond the performance.

The epistolary form is experiencing something of a revival, with recent publications such as Shaun Usher's *Letters of Note* (2013) presenting a collection of most famous letters. Methods used during the production of *Berth* have informed plans for a future project which will be written as letter-poems using many styles, spanning from elaborate courtly whisperings to modern day clipped emails using a range of voices. I aim to show, through polyphonic poetry, how the art of letter writing has changed over time, to both its benefit and detriment. Again, there is scope to collaborate on this project and use multimodal methods of performance, as the poems would be presented both visually and audibly. The successful methods of *Berth* could be applied and adapted to such a project to achieve original results, continuing the dialogue between texts and poetic methods.

Theoretically this study partly concurs with Robert Sheppard's distinction between poetry that is *said* or *saying*. There are undoubtedly degrees of saying, or degrees of

polyphony in all of the poems in *Berth*, with poems such as ‘Mr Emil Richard’ – about a man of whom very little information is known other than he was French and his body was never recovered from the ocean – providing more space for poetic licence, for the audience to imagine the details and create an open, interpretive presentation of his voice. This is a more *saying* form than the voices of those figures for whom supplementary factual information exists, whereby the historical records draws them closer to a final word and consequently more of a *said* form. I also acknowledge the monophonic aspects to *Berth*, where my own voice as poet takes over the narrative but conclude that when incorporated within a collection of different voices the overall result is that of polyphony. To an extent it could also be argued that the performance of the poems is a *said* form in itself, as it is a planned, staged, timed performance.

The success of a polyphonic, multimodal project such as *Berth - Voices of the Titanic* is highly dependent on the reader to make connections between parts of the text and fully ‘climb aboard’ it. Such connections are more readily established in the performed context where visual and aural signifiers can be placed strategically for an audience. However, unlike the printed form which allows a reader the luxury of as much time as s/he likes to read, reflect and respond, the audience of the staged performance has to react more immediately to what unfolds. Part of this was what made the performance exciting to watch; however, on reflection, I would like to have spoken to more audience members after the final performance to hear their reactions to it and the continuing conversation that ensued. Nevertheless, *Berth* distinctively retells a known narrative from a fresh perspective and successfully repackages and defamiliarises earlier variants of the story.

The future of poetry lies in its ability to adapt, absorb, or reject other forms of discourse, which can be blended with or imposed upon it, whilst still retaining its

identity as poetry: an artistic form which uses words to help readers to see and feel the world differently. There is no better way to 'feel' a story than through the eyes of other people, empathising with their viewpoint and sharing a mutual, subjective experience. However, in order to do this, poets perhaps must be prepared to relinquish the objective, authorial voice and give way to their poems' subject matter, constructing a platform from which it can speak in as many forms as are deemed necessary to show polyphony and ways of speaking. For this, an openness of form is a valuable tool for any willing poet. This is essential to the new canon of polyphonic poetry which is emerging in contemporary poetry today, and long may it be encouraged.

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### **Topic-led Research**

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## Appendices

1. Full text of *Berth - Voices of the Titanic* by Natalie Scott published by Bradshaw Books 2012 (printer's version formatted by the publisher).
2. Flash Drive:
  - A. Arts Council Documentation
  - B. Berth Scratch Night
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