Elemental Encounters in the Contemporary Irish Novel:

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By

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-4299-8
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-4299-0

For Peter

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is touching, that is the underlying premise of this book. Words can leap out of their beds and pierce flesh just like a knife. They can also pierce your soul. Paradoxically, these piercings offer the foundation for reading as an 'enterprise of health'. It is true to say that we are bombarded with words by new media technologies, most of them fly past in a whirl only to be forgotten almost as soon as read. The words under scrutiny in this study are found in the novel, perhaps one of the longest and most expansive literary forms. The novel and its stories contrast markedly with the snappy popularity of social media chit-chat, one reason why some say the novel is dying. Others argue that it is this capacious generosity of the novel that keeps it alive, offering an oasis of deliberation, depth, and prolonged attention in a sea of cursory, ephemeral kitsch. Of course not all novels touch us deeply, some just visit and move on; but some stories, even if it is just one line of their telling, stay forever engraved in the heart and soul as our companions until we draw our last breath. One thing is for sure, it is not easy to quantify the tactile transformations that reading a novel can provoke.

Melvyn Bragg lists twelve books that changed the world, yet the list does not contain any novels. Howard Jacobson is unhappy with this omission and Bragg responds with:

> Though Middlemarch may have changed the life of Jacobson, and others, it is not as easy to quantify as an electric light or flying to the moon. Where can we weigh the good done by Middlemarch, where quantify the benefit to the world at large, where find a plausible proof that it can have a claim to have changed the world? (Bragg: 2006, 322)

To embark upon a discussion about how novels might exert quantifiable change is a complex task. To deliberate upon the tactile effects of reading novels is an equally complex task, one that includes the protean complexions of emotion, imagination, and touch. Moreover, as Diarmuid MacCulloch puts it:

> at the centre of all our enquiries is that infuriating, engrossing, exhilarating variable, the human race. That is where numerical measurement usually

> gives out, and we are forced back on our own imagination — indeed, on empathy or 'humanity'. (MacCulloch: 2018)

In other words, it is a messy affair. This book explores how reading fiction touches us in ways that we find hard to articulate *easily*. This is not to afford literature such importance so that, as Adam Phillips notes, it begins to 'sound like a life support system' (Phillips: 2017, ii), but to follow Robert Macfarlane's elemental thoughts that:

> perhaps we shouldn't think of books as saving the world, but rather as catalyzing uncountable small unknown acts of good...think about the ways in which small acts can together, cumulatively, grow into change. In this way we might think of writing as like the work of a coral reef, slowly building its structures through many small interventions, rather than like a single thunderclap or silver bullet. You always are threatened by quietism, but I think that to give up for the lack of a silver bullet is wasteful. (Macfarlane and Morris: 2018)

Reading may not be as essential to life as breathing nevertheless, something happens when we read stories, something that is not exclusively bound to some intrinsic happiness produced after the event. For Nietzsche, it is the 'work' that counts; it is the active participation in the reader/writer connection (with all its ups and downs) that really matters. As in life and relationships, the 'downs' can be as transformative as the 'ups'. Gilles Deleuze, drawing insight from Nietzsche, sees literature, reading, and writing, as an 'enterprise of health'. When we read we enter a 'literary clinic', but the notion of 'health' is not as straightforward as it first seems.

Bibliotherapy, used both in adult and child-centred settings as a therapeutic medium, has become increasingly popular. By concentrating upon restoring a sense of homeostasis, bibliotherapy encounters individuals with anxiety, isolation, life challenges, depression, stress disorders, and a variety of mental health issues. Bibliotherapy groups are established within community settings such as lifelong education projects (especially in areas of social and economic deprivation), hospitals, prisons, care homes, and disparate mental health groups. Focusing generally upon wellbeing, mood-boosting, and enhancing self-confidence, some bibliotherapy groups utilize non-fiction self-help manuals to deal with specific issues. Other bibliotherapy groups engage with various types of literature, poetry, novels, short stories, to deliver similar effects.

The Reading Agency website lists a number of recommended mood-boosting books for adults, for example, Wendy Cope's poetry, David

Niven's memoirs, and Iain Banks's novel *Espedair Street*. The book entitled *The Novel Cure* (2013) is promoted as a medical handbook, a companion to a project run by its authors Ella Berthoud, Susan Elderkin, where you can discuss your relationship with books and purchase bibliotherapy sessions for a variety of ailments. The book lists a wide variety of symptoms and suggests novels to offer support. As an example, to aid constipation the novel *Shantaram* by Gregory David Roberts is suggested because it describes a 'lovely list of soft fruits that may loosen your small intestines like a lexical laxative,' coupled with the description of the 'male slum dwellers' morning "motions," which occur en masse off the side of a jetty' (Berthoud and Elderkin: 2013). This idea operates like a literary doctrine of signatures.

The Reader Organisation runs literary reading groups with a bibliotherapeutic approach and its participants note that reading delivers a tactile effect, as when reading 'really hit me; right there [points to the heart], the whole poem', as well as how a literary passage or line 'rocks your inner core' (Davis, P., et al. 2016, 21 and 23). In the context of research into independent reading, one novel contains a passage where a character whispers closely to another, causing the reader to say 'I could hear it and feel it on my neck' (Alderson-Day et al. 2017, 104). The effects of reading begin to deviate from the exclusive involvement in an improvement of wellbeing, to include traces of corporeal disequilibrium where touching and hauntings intermingle. Descriptions of the act of reading can be emphatically tactile, transformative, and spectral. In an article exploring books that changed people's lives, Jacqueline Smith (2017) cites responses from her colleagues at *Business Insider*. Adam Payne says of Thomas Hardy, 'you'll be thinking about *The Woodlanders* long after you're done reading it. It'll haunt you.' Paul Schrodt says Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* 'changed how I saw the world', and Daniel McMahon says James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 'affected me deeply, and I reread it several times'. Áine Cain says Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* is 'beautiful, bleak, angry, funny, disturbing, and strange. It's not for the faint of heart'. Finally, referring to *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, Rich Feloni says '[i]t introduced me to a new way of thinking about the world.' Reading does induce tranquillity and contentment, of course it does, but that is not the whole story. Reading and its ghosts accompany readers long after the initial encounter, leading to some emotionally unsettling places, provoking deep thought, and challenging assumptions. This describes the character of reading within the 'enterprise of health', as Nietzsche and Deleuze see it, mingling with ghosts whilst acknowledging that 'there is

no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence' (de Certeau: 1984, 108).

So, while bibliotherapy promotes a caring, therapeutic approach, the act of reading within the 'enterprise of health' is brimful with provocative aspects of touch, emotion, and imagination, each one breathing its own specific challenges into the encounter. Admittedly, the experience is not always one of mood-lifting or restoring equilibrium, on the contrary, the enterprise initiates *disequilibrium*, in other words, it *disturbs*. Reading becomes a see-saw adventure that fully embraces Franz Kafka's idea that a 'book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us', (Kafka: 2016: 16). Yet within this unsettling encounter, the reader and writer engage in an I-Thou relationship that expresses love and intimacy, slowly becoming 'aware of a breath from the eternal Thou' (Buber: 1937, 6). Paulo Freire is adamant that such love should always underpin the transformative pedagogical philosophy of reading, and Deleuze calls the relationship 'reading with love' (Deleuze: 1995, 8-9). Arnold Berleant conveys the association as one of mutuality and consanguinity, consisting of a 'sense of being in place, of a dissolution of barriers and boundaries, of communion' (Berleant: 2018, 156). The milieu of love is desired not only because of the sense of vulnerability invoked, but the enterprise also encourages readers to expand and 'fear contracts space...while love generates it' (Berleant: 2018, 8).

Freire shares the concept of love as a challenging and transgressive force with writers and philosophers like William Blake and Deleuze. They advocate a radical theology (with traces of pantheism and, in Deleuze especially, traces of the Hindu self-organising model of creation) that recognises spirituality but spurns abstract notions of love. Instead, love materializes within corporeal relationships and our encounters with the elemental world. Freire's love is contextualized within the radical transformation of reading and pedagogy, Blake's love inhabits the radical communication of literature. The philosophy of affirmative elemental life that Deleuze proposes is saturated with love, but its desire is to 'seek out those gaps, events, traumas, shocks, and encounters which upset the smooth continuity of the subject' (Bryant: 2008, 266). Opening up and losing yourself in a book is to encounter a tactile intimacy with 'a person you've never met, maybe even someone long dead. And it's as if a hand has come out and taken yours' (Bennett: 2004, 56). The core of this love both sustains, and is sustained by, flesh, the sensual body, and the swirl of air, fire, earth and water. This is love without narcissism or mawkishness, it is 'dialogical' and involves 'courage'; it is a radical 'act of freedom' that 'must generate other acts of freedom', thus it requires an expansive

outlook. Any resultant transformations are encouraged in this world, not the next, as Freire says '[i]f I do not love the world — if I do not love life — if I do not love people — I cannot enter into dialogue' (Freire: 2005b, 89-90).

In keeping with idea of love as expansive and challenging, Deleuze and Guattari propose the descriptive term 'war-machine'. At first glance, using the concept of a 'war-machine' with love seems oddly contradictory, so why do it? Their reasoning is artful, by taking this object of state power, with all its force culminating in destruction and conflict, they pick it apart and hold the inherent desire and energy to turn it on its head. They turn a negative force that seeks to strangle life, transforming it into a positive force that celebrates life. This intense generative power harnesses the transformative energy of the elemental world, and becomes creative, articulate, charged with love and desire. Yet in this transformative expansiveness there are still provocations and encounters, as John Protevi puts it, this potent radicalizing combination is 'endowed with some strange and somewhat terrifying powers' (Patton and Protevi: 2003, 192). This is love that embraces the enchanting stories and metamorphoses of the elemental and human worlds, connecting deeply with Gianni Vattimo's (2012) idea of 'weak thought'. Weak thinking recognises interpretation, context, and the multiple translations of life experience. Above all, weak thinking allows space for lost voices to be heard, for those that are oppressed and exiled by repressive power structures, enabling creative alternatives that undermine ideas of absolute truth. The novel as literary genre offers an intimate space for those lost voices (both human and elemental) to be heard, which is why Margaret Doody sees all novels, filled as they are with a 'rich, muddy [and human] messiness', as a 'love-story of sorts' (Doody: 1997, 485; 372).

Rather than driving readers inwards to linger in an introspective place, this connective energy 'propels us in the multiple directions of extra-textual experiences' (Braidotti: 2008, 9). Reading becomes an encounter that, as Maxine Greene puts it, 'reaches beyond that which we already know' (Greene: 1995, 134). In her novel *Milkman*, Anna Burns describes an encounter that offers an elemental metaphor for reading literature in an 'enterprise of health'. Burns describes how a French teacher asks her group if they think the sky can only be blue, to which the group respond in the affirmative. Whilst watching the sunset, at least one member of the group begins to see things otherwise and instead of:

> the official blue everyone understood and thought was up there, the truth hit my senses. It became clear as I gazed that there was no blue out there at all. For the first time I saw colours...these colours were blending and mixing, sliding and extending, new colours arriving, all colours combining, colours going on forever, except one which was missing, which was blue. (Burns: 2018, chapter 3)

Experiencing (or 'reading') the world in this way is unsettling as it prompts changes in thinking. It is also rewarding, and the message to the reader is '[y]our unease, even your temporary unhingement...in the face of this sunset is encouraging. It can only mean progress. It can only mean enlightenment' (Burns: 2018, chapter 3). The elemental encounters in literature are like the sunset, they lend breath and fire to the bundles of metamorphoses and stories within multiple colours. Additionally, the elements introduce a haptic quality to reading, one which enhances the idea of reading as a mode of touch. Haptic encounters, or haptologies, involve memories of earlier experiences of people or an acute perception of place, sensations of touch, sound, smell, and so forth. An elemental encounter is, to borrow Jacques Derrida's words, a 'haptology of the heart' (Derrida: 2005, 251), or a portion of time that embraces a sense of the past flowing into an intense awareness of the present, whilst accommodating intentions for the future.

To tease out these ideas the book is organised as follows. Part One is sectioned into four chapters and examines philosophical considerations of the core components of reading within the 'enterprise of health', namely emotion, imagination and touch. Chapter One determines the characteristics of reading as an 'enterprise of health', specifically how it diverges from bibliotherapy. Borrowed from Deleuze and Nietzsche, this mode of reading flies on a tangent away from a recuperative bibliotherapy model, towards one that embraces provocation, reflection, and disequilibrium. Whilst offering many beneficial effects within therapeutic applications, reading becomes unruly in Deleuze's terms with its attendant keywords of challenge and transformation within the 'literary clinic'. The encounter between reader and writer both demands and generates emotion, imagination and a tactile quality. For these reasons Paulo Freire's philosophy and approach towards reading are comparable. Freire's idea of reading is a sensuous, elemental, and corporeal encounter, a space where:

> the *texts, words* and *letters* were incarnated...in the whistle of the wind, the clouds of the sky, the sky's color, its movement, in the color of foliage the shape of leaves, the fragrance of flowers...in tree trunks, in fruit rind (Freire: 1983, 6).

Chapters Two, Three and Four examine philosophical implications of the core concepts of the literary 'enterprise of health' in turn, namely: emotion, imagination, and touch. Whilst acknowledging the sheer complexity of each concept, it is productive to acknowledge their unpredictable roles in reading literature. The term 'stories' is used to express all manifestations, such as poetry, novels, aphorisms, short stories, essays, dramatic performance, as well as the narratives with which we create our world.

Part Two encompasses Chapters Five, Six and Seven which locate and contextualize emotion, imagination, and touch in turn, exploring reading and stories within the emotional engagement of *mística*, in the imaginative act of storied map-making, and the tactile corporeality of metamorphosis. Stories and storytelling in practice are explored beyond the more predictable settings of home, work, travel, or education. The emotional, yet serious, creative 'play' involved in *mística* is explored with reference to Paulo Freire. *Mística* embodies an assemblage of political activism, entwined with art, words (stories, poetry, aphorisms), and the elemental world, where emotion, reason, and thinking inhabit flesh. These affiliations are mirrored within the Irish concept of *dúchas* and the Irish Rambling House, as well as in the imaginative, generative acts of tender mapping, and tactile metamorphosis. A micro-study of the Amazonian Andoque community reveals how emotion and imagination interconnect in a tactile communication, resulting in the metamorphosis of individuals and communities in traumatic times.

The contention that the act of reading and the reader/writer relationship are forms of touch is fermented by concepts of becoming, the space of the literary clinic, words as maps, the notion that readers are also writers, all within a literary 'enterprise of health'. Parallels are created between the sensual philosophies of reading developed by Deleuze and Freire. Chapters Five to Seven will develop these ideas in practical terms by examining Freire's use of generative themes and words in a tender cartography. The emotional aspects of *mística* lend texture to the tenderness of the enterprise. Connections emerge between *mística* and Lorca's *duende*, the formation and dissemination of stories within the Rambling House, in conjunction with the ancient *maloca* of the Andoque community, all weaving into a plexus of elemental encounters.

Tactile implications are explored in light of the premise that touch does *not* require the imperative of immediacy. The concept of haptics is introduced to expand notions of touch and embodied senses (smell, sight,

sound) with the sensory accumulation of memory, merging awareness of the present with alertness to the future. The corporeality of reading connects, as Freire has it, the quotidian experience of the tactile sensory *world* with the written *word*.

To assist with diverse interpretations of this unruly enterprise of reading, philosophers such as Deleuze (at times in collaboration with Felix Guattari), Freire, alongside Martin Buber, Jacques Derrida, Michel Serres, and Jean-Luc Nancy, are productive sources with which to engage. Philosophers who also act as part of the *vigor motrix* of the research are Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hélène Cixous, Gaston Bachelard, Michel de Certeau, Eva Brann, Luce Irigaray, and Ernst Bloch. Other writers have been fruitful, names too many to cite here, and will prove constructive to this, and any future exploration, of reading, touch, and health.

In Part Three, Chapter Eight explores philosophical aspects of elemental encounters in their various guises as 'hormones of the imagination' (Bachelard: 2002, 11). Bachelard interweaves flesh, blood, imagination, and circulatory communication in his description of the elements. They are not envisaged as 'frameworks, dimensions, or intelligible structures' but as 'sensuous realities' and 'free-floating adjectives' (Lingis: 1998, 14). Chapter Nine engages with air, earth, water, and fire individually, examining how they manifest in literature, life, and thought. In the novels the elements appear as driving rain or flowing tears, as the howling wind or breath, as flesh, or dirt and mud, or as the fiery passion of creation, and the warmth of the sun. Earth is explored in the contexts of flesh, stone, and soil, while air is considered as wind, dust, and breath. Water's transformations are as ink, blood, and tears, and the diverse incarnations of fire include the heart, flames, and Nietzschean fire-hounds. Taking on board Alison Phipps's notion that the elements have been exiled from the arts and humanities, especially in higher education, the elements are invoked with their fertile participation in the writerly, readerly, and philosophical imaginations put forward for examination. The vital force of this whole study is Frederick Woodbridge's contention that we are *always* haunted by our elemental companions, air, fire, earth, and water, no matter how advanced we might think we are. The value of Irigaray's idea to revisit and re-invigorate our relationship with the elements is also utilized as she, like Deleuze, contends that 'we are made of them and we live in them, they determine our attractions, our affects, our passion, our limits, our aspirations' (Irigaray: 1993, 57).

In Part Four, Chapter Ten looks at the novel, a rambling literary form that is ideal to accommodate the delicious messiness of the elemental flux and flow. The protean novel, with all its 'plastic possibilities' (Bakhtin: 1996, 4) and 'capacious maw' filled with diverse narratives (Ryan and McIlvanney: 2011, xii), offers a polymorphic space where the breath of marginal voices flourishes, and diverse stories can be heard. The novel is a verb as well as a noun, 'permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions' (Deleuze and Guattari: 2008, 40), a swirling space where the exiled elements have room to breathe. In-keeping with the idea of an 'enterprise of health' the novel is considered as a medicine bundle (after Ursula Le Guin). Medicine bundles, bags or pouches traditionally contain items of all four elements, maybe feathers, stones, ash, or dried leaves to represent water, similarly, novels are bundles 'of all substance — bones, blood, feathers, shit, lost gold coins, and chips of earthenware' (Doody: 1997, 478). By entangling and creating associations just as the elements do, bundles create and articulate assorted relationships. The medicine bag, also known as a Celtic 'crane bag' or 'sacred bundle', cultivates links with shamanic healing practices that use stories, dreams, and elemental forces to touch the body, mind, and spirit. Equally the novel, when viewed as a medicine pouch, is filled with tender buttons that are steeped in emotion, texture, and touch. Gertrude Stein's work *Tender Buttons*, used here as an inspirational idea, is an elemental work that shows how 'a literary artist is someone who can make a stone glow' (Imhof: 1989, 18). The same tactile and tender sensuality emerges in novels, flowing in and around the elements and their intimate manifestations, encouraging and provoking the 'enterprise of health'.

The Irish novel is explored as a productive starting point to examine elemental encounters. Just as the novel has been exiled from a divine muse, and the elements have experienced exile from the arts and humanities in higher education, Ireland has endured its own forms of exile. Colonial experiences have made their mark upon Irish topographical, elemental, and semantic landscapes. Elemental encounters in novels confront 'how ideas of Irish space have been manufactured and how...changing ideologies and circumstances project their peculiar meanings onto it' (Hand: 2010, 6). The raw materials of place can be packaged and manipulated until inhabitants become ecological exiles in their own home. Within an innovative imagination that seeks out the 'alphabets of the elements within every hollow epitaph of memory' (Harris: 1993, 140), the Irish novels I have selected for study listen to the music of the earth, and acknowledge how bodies and places are not passive nouns, but dynamic verbs that breathe.

Part Five examines three novels by two writers. Firstly, John Banville's *Kepler*, first published in 1981 and then re-released in the *Revolutions Trilogy* in 2001 (I will use this edition throughout), and *Ghosts*, first published in 1993 (I will use the 1998 edition). Secondly, Mary Morrissy's *Mother of Pearl*, published in 1997. I own to counting these three novels amongst my favourites, as such they are a good place to start this tactile, elemental exploration.

Kepler utilizes the elements to create swirling fluid maps that express metamorphosis and creation yet also, paradoxically, display geometric confinement. The novel applies the geometric designs of Plato's five polyhedrons, three-dimensional shapes once deemed to be the building blocks of the entire cosmos. Part one exhibits the properties of the six-faced cube (earth) in that it has six chapters. Part two is analogous to the four faces of the tetrahedron or pyramid (fire) thus has four chapters. Part three corresponds to the dodecahedron's twelve faces (aether) containing twelve chapters, and part four contains twenty letters to represent the twenty faces of the icosahedron (water). Finally, part five is comprised of eight chapters representing the eight sides of the octahedron (air). A map of the cosmos lives within the narrative, haunted by the way geometers, philosophers, cosmologists, and theologians like Kepler, Copernicus, and Brahe, (practitioners of what Donne calls a 'new philosophy [that] calls all in doubt') represent the three-dimensional universe. The world whispers its ancient elemental language throughout the novel, and the music of the cosmos permeates its 'inhabited geometry' (Bachelard: 1994, 146).

Ghosts murmurs *Kepler's* cosmic music throughout its narrative. As a tender map, *Ghosts* is plotted by haptic locations that embrace all the possible stories we might tell about the world and life. Banville never disregards the elemental music that haunts us, rendering the story primal, haunting, and heart-felt. The world may be temporarily suspended in the pages of *Ghosts* within the peripheral frame of an island but, by engaging in reading, its spirit becomes a dynamic and fertile elemental ekphrasis. Like the novel as literary form, ekphrasis is a noun as well as a living process. *Ghosts* performs a philosophical choreography, through which the island whispers and sings, operating within a mycorrhizal plexus where memory, time, and place touch in a series of elemental encounters. Rain falls over skin, thunder rolls, and the wind howls through trees that also have their own song. Silence whirrs, the house is alive, the furniture seems to watch everything, and diverse elemental worlds 'bleed into each other' (Banville: 1998, 55). The ghosts of past breaths create a tactile ekphrasis

of place, of sensual elemental encounters, of haptic memories, and intimate corporeal geometry.

Mary Morrissy's *Mother of Pearl* is a novel where origins are a source of exploration, whether they are within social constructs, writing, naming, or life itself. Air and breath are pivotal elemental forces in *Mother of Pearl*, where the dynamics of Irigaray's space of breath create an alternative philosophy that proposes 'woman's breath, is at the origin of human generation' (Irigaray: 2004, 168-9). This relocation of the ancient biblical breath, initially depicted in the Book of Genesis, is utilized by Morrissy to develop a comparably challenging philosophy of breath. The biblical references peppering the novel mean that Morrissy not only draws attention to religious tenets, but also refigures them from a feminist perspective within an Irish context. Morrissy advances her challenge by exploring the imaginative aspects of breath as contagion, thus rewriting the narrative of breath and air in the creation story. She also revises the biblical creation of Eve from a rib, again refiguring the story of flesh and creation in Genesis. While the novel contemplates birth, blood, and 'new life', the reader is taken by the hand towards an encounter with 'the fruit of Eve's ribs' (Morrissy: 1997, 54-55). Morrissy creates a world densely populated by flows of breath, air, wolves, moths, the dark, blood, minerals, shadows and contagion, an invisible telephone, the imund, and 'hectic daffodils' (Morrissy: 1997, 222). Elemental presences are generally catalogued as sacred (breath and blood) or profane (wolves and contagion), but in *Mother of Pearl* the sacred and profane bleed into each other in a contextual transfusion. The elemental texture of the wolf enters the sacred space of motherhood and the act of suckling, charged with an earthy, tactile, and wild corporeality, one that appears blasphemous in proximity to sanitised versions of the Virgin Mary as the holy mother. The aqueous flow of breast milk is haunted by the wolf, so too is air with the refrain of the howling breath. The idea of contagion is never far away in *Mother of Pearl*.

Steeped in social justice, the literary 'enterprise of health' looks us in the eye and asks, '[h]ow can we make progress if we do not enter into regions far from equilibrium?' (Deleuze: 1997, 109)

PART ONE:

PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CORE CONCEPTS

CHAPTER ONE

THE 'ENTERPRISE OF HEALTH' IN THE CONTEXT OF READING LITERATURE

> Moreover, the writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the world. The world is the set of symptoms whose illness merges with man. Literature then appears as an *enterprise of health*... (Deleuze: 1997, 3 my italics)

> Writers are the very sign of the psychic health of a people. They are the barometer of the spirit of a nation...confident enough to diagnose the necessary drastic healing required for its malaise...They embody that sublime sense of fearlessness in the challenging enterprise of civilisation. (Okri: 2011, 15)

Deleuze proffers reading as an 'enterprise of health', but what does he mean by health? Is he alluding to physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual health, or all of these? Wherever the answer lies, reading literature is at the heart. I will explore here the differences between the meanings of health in a bibliotherapy setting, and the implications of a Deleuzian model of health and reading.

A thesis could be written solely on the meaning of health, registering its relationships with cultural, political, social, economic, and biomedical perspectives. Health is local and deeply intimate, yet also global and deeply contested; a Political concept steeped in quotidian micro-politics, shifting in significance and subtext depending upon the economic climate. The significations of health are widely diverging. Marxist views spotlight how social inequality is a primary driver affecting personal health factors. Functionalist thinkers like Talcott Parsons might seek a more random concept, with health as '[t]he state of optimum *capacity* of an individual for the effective performance of the roles and tasks for which he has been socialised' (Parsons: 1970, 274).

Social, behavioural, and biomedical models differ regarding causes and alleviation of health related issues. For example, a combined biopsychosocial

approach considers, amongst other factors, palpable lesions and bacteria, in conjunction with behaviour, stress, and beliefs, Social considerations such as class or ethnicity, isolation and loneliness are incorporated. The biopsychosocial framework is embraced by both the World Health Organisation (WHO), for whom ‘[h]ealth is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’ (WHO: 2014, 1), and the government policies that promote the ‘Five Ways of Wellbeing’. The five routes to health and wellbeing (initially developed by the National Economics Foundation NEF) are achieved by making connections in the community, in the giving of one’s time and skills, by noticing what is happening in the local community and wider world, through keeping physically active and, finally, by continuous learning, (NEF: 2012, 8). These are useful and practical proposals that can have significant impact in the daily life-experiences of many people.

The Reader Organisation, utilizing salaried and volunteer staff, adopts the five ways of wellbeing into its bibliotherapy model by taking literature and reading into the community. The Reader effectively combines health and literature in practical methods of engaging with, and aiming to alleviate, the personal consequences of social issues like pain, depression, loneliness, substance abuse, ageing and imprisonment. The Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) loosely follows a Freirean model of community learning, offering extensive learning opportunities that include literary studies alongside the five ways of wellbeing. Both organisations receive essential government funding to integrate these wellbeing models into their educational provision. Both are in contact with vulnerable individuals.

Philosophers like Deleuze, Bloch, and Freire, whilst not denigrating or dismissing bibliotherapy projects, see reading literature and health from a different perspective. For them, reading literature is a means of instigating change, creativity, and invention. If wellbeing is envisaged as a see-saw that remains stable when individuals are equipped to meet life’s challenges, or as Nic Marks from the NEF puts it, ‘a dynamic dance’ (Marks: 2012) of constant flux, then Deleuze and others see reading as providing a fairly choppy tempo for the choreography. The act of reading veers away from *maintaining* what they see as an inherently unequal status quo, and seeks to disrupt, dislocate and, to initiate an experience of disequilibrium, in other words, to *disturb*.

Intensely vulnerable individuals need nurturing within sites of calm and order, but Deleuze offers alternative health provision for those who are

robust enough for the encounter. Wilson Harris nourishes the idea of disruption as a beneficial activity by advocating the development, not just of literacy and reading, but the imagination (Harris: 1999, 73). Harris sees individuals becoming 'locked into block functions' (Harris: 1999, 73) with their actions determined by a set of behavioural expectations like 'mind forg'd manacles' (Blake: 2002, 76), designed specifically to maintain stable (and often unequal) societies. Stable societies that determine there is only one way the read the world, subtly (or not so subtly) discourage individuals from escaping rigid formations to initiate change. One means of creating new stories to read the world is through 'literacy of the imagination' (Harris: 199, 81). Without this, people might simply acquiesce, or potentially react with violence and 'carry within themselves the very seeds of disaster against which they protest' (Harris: 1999, 81). Hence nothing really changes so, to instigate change, 'a little bit of instability in such a context might have creative consequences' (Harris: 1999, 75). Wilson expresses the heart of a literary 'enterprise of health' (Deleuze: 1997, 3).

Three brief points expand upon Harris's importance of reading literature, and feed directly into reading as an 'enterprise of health'. Firstly, Adam Phillips, a psychoanalyst, cultural and literary critic, notes how 'literature, exposes the limits, and limitations, of psychoanalysis, and its descriptions of what a person is, and can be' (Phillips: 2017, xii). The relationship with writers and literature develops and supplements *self*-knowledge. Secondly, Ben Okri indicates how stories not only communicate with us about ourselves, but also about *other* lives, cultures and societies as:

> Stories are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and nations. Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. (Okri: 1995, 21)

Finally, contemplating the haunting aspects that emerge when dealing with 'the complex social relations in which we live' (those unspoken or unacknowledged ghosts that lurk in the interstices of lived experience), Avery Gordon concludes, 'literary fictions play an important role in these cases...[as] they enable other kinds of sociological information to emerge' (Gordon: 2008, 25). As Stanley Cohen says '[w]ords are real sources of power' (Cohen: 2007, 115).

Deleuze develops the 'enterprise of health' and the writer as cultural clinician from Nietzsche:

> I am still waiting for a philosophical physician...someone who has set himself the task of pursuing the problem of the total health of a people, time, race or of humanity — to summon the courage at last to push my suspicion to its limit and risk the proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all 'truth' but rather something else — let us say health, future, growth, power, life... (Nietzsche: 2008, 6)

Deleuze’s creative thinking emerges from ‘a tradition of philosophy which challenged and disrupted life, such that new concepts and ideas would result in new possibilities for action and practice’ (Colebrook: 2002, xi). His belief that the philosopher should not contribute to the world by interpreting it, but precisely through *reinterpreting* it (Van Tongeren, 2000, 2, my italics), echoes the Marxist premise that ‘philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it’ (Marx: 1845). Freire concurs by emphasising praxis and critical consciousness (conscientization) in his pedagogy.

The prerequisite for the Deleuzian writer is to ‘test’, to ‘challenge’, and to instigate ‘change’ in readers (van Tongeren: 2000, 2) by asking, ‘[h]ow can we make progress if we do not enter into regions far from equilibrium?’ (Deleuze: 1997, 109). John Kelly hints at such reading when, upon undertaking a re-reading of Mike McCormack’s novel *Solar Bones* Kelly says, ‘I’m half looking away, afraid the re-read will permanently commit McCormack’s words to memory. I’m afraid of their apparent accuracy. I’m afraid of what it all means... It’s that good’ (Kelly: 2016). If the ‘activity of reading literature is the same as doing philosophy’ then philosophers and readers undertake similar tasks (Phillips: 2005). The tempero-spatial process of leaving the safety of familiar places (deterritorialization), then returning, re-mapped and transformed (re-territorialization) through words and reading, is pivotal and is revisited in Chapter 6. If the philosopher is also a storyteller, then telling stories ‘is not only part of the philosopher’s repertoire but also an often unstated one’ (Buckingham: 2013, 1). Consequently, the philosopher, reader, and storyteller are associates in this provocative enterprise.

The etymological history of the word ‘enterprise’ reinforces the unsettling aspects of the adventure. An enterprise is ‘a project or undertaking that is especially difficult, complicated, or risky’ or ‘readiness to engage in daring action, showing initiative’ (www.merriamwebster.com). The abstract sense of ‘adventurous disposition, readiness to undertake challenges, spirit of daring’ is from late 15th century (www.etymonline.com). The readerly, healthful enterprise requires a willingness to exert challenge, and also *be challenged*, alongside a dash of

ésprit, from the Latin *spiritus* meaning both spirit and breath. Reading and health embrace communication, life, and spirit, with the corporeality of physical and mental daring, in readiness to face the 'axe for the frozen sea inside us' (Kafka: 2016: 16). Breath and air acknowledge the 'physical power of words', asking tenderly '[i]s not every word an impulse on the air?' (Poe: 1850) that might fly to 'where your sad, sad heart is / and sing to you in the night' (Yeats: 1997, 538). Reading and enterprise are demanding, but they also convey pleasure.

Jane Bennett suggests, rightly in my opinion, that although pure pleasure might in some cases lead (as Horkenheimer and Adorno argue) to 'stupidity, passivity' and potentially, 'moral indifference' (Bennett: 2001, 128), pleasure can also 'enliven, energize, and, under the right circumstances, support ethical generosity' (Bennett: 2001, 128). A pleasurable aesthetic encounter offers a cordial relationship, a space within which a reader might thrive. Without such pleasure Bennett warns, we could conceivably 'lack the impetus to act against the very injustices that...[we] critically discern' (Bennett: 2001, 128). The reading encounter tenders a sense of enchantment that, paradoxically, welcomes pleasure in tandem with a fragment of discomposure. Such moments occur when chancing upon something unexpected whilst reading, pleasure is then accompanied by 'a more *unheimlich* (uncanny) feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one's default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition' (Bennett: 2001, 5). Sometimes these unsettling encounters are accidental, but we also deliberately invoke such reading strategies by engaging with Gothic or Suspense stories. The pleasure/disruption aspect of reading is vital in the 'enterprise of health'.

Reading as aesthetic pleasure is interconnected with all aspects of the quotidian and:

> To see art as a mode of activity and experience of its own... is not to deny its wider connections with other regions of the human universe. Rather it recognizes the claim for the equal legitimacy of the artistic-aesthetic mode with every other. Only in this way can we begin to understand the extended relationships and continuities of aesthetic with other regional experiences (Berleant: 1991, 199)

Deleuze proposes additional concepts of the reading encounter that capitalize upon these wider connections. By exploring potential transformations in the world through reading, systems that endorse oppression are challenged, not maintained. Reading and writing as an 'enterprise of health' is deeply political, recognizing that 'the social context in the creation, appreciation,

and use of the arts is to strengthen their importance and their powers, not weaken them. And grasping the wider scope of the aesthetic makes it all the more important that we understand its workings better,’ (Berleant: 1991, 209-210). Deleuze accommodates the social context within a healthful aesthetics by introducing symptomatology (Deleuze: 1997).

Deleuze anticipates the writer/reader as generating a literary ‘clinic’, and as a reader of symptoms in society. These symptoms perform as 'structures of feeling', being just at the periphery of ‘semantic availability’ (Williams: 1977, 134) awaiting 'new semantic figures' that can articulate untapped knowledge. Writers trawl the periphery of life experiences to articulate new ‘semantic figures’, not only as physicians, but as shamans who ‘have always held the anomalous position, at the edge of the fields or woods. They haunt the fringes. They are at the borderline of the village or between villages’ (Deleuze and Guattari: 2008, 271). Similarly, Nabokov sees the writer as ‘a storyteller, as a teacher, and as an enchanter’ (Nabokov: 1982, 5). Fiction might well lean towards the absurd or the illogical, but ‘[r]eason is always carved out of the irrational...traversed by it and only defined by a particular kind of relationship among irrational factors. Underneath all reason lies delirium, and *drift*’ (Deleuze: 2004, 262, my italics).

Drift introduces the elemental flow of ideas, meanings, and stories. The capacity to drift is ‘an index of one’s svelteness and freedom from ideological commitment...proof that we have developed “metamorphic capacity”’ (Sim: 2011, 62). Reason collaborates with imagination, reverie and aberrant tales, and reading becomes a catalyst towards the ‘dangerous enterprise of thinking at or beyond the limit’ (Hall: 2001, 259). Reading stories, and acknowledging the transformative capacity of embracing diverse ideas, aims ‘to set free...in this creation of a health, in this invention of a people, the possibility of a life’ (Deleuze: 1997, 4).

The protean relationship of reading and health connects with two ideas that underpin this study. The first is Wilson Harris’s ‘literacy of the imagination’ (Harris: 1999, 81); the second is Donna Haraway’s insistence upon the importance of writing as survival. Harris argues for the need, not just for literacy, but also ‘literacy of the imagination’. For Harris people become locked into ‘block functions’, trapped within the fixed space of ‘mind forg’d manacles’, of expected behaviours and actions that serve to maintain stability even in the most oppressed communities. In order to recognise that space is not fixed, but consists of ‘stories so far’, imaginative thinking and reading is vital, especially when seeking to avoid

repeating the same oppression and discontent. Literature is the springboard to imaginative interpretation and transformation of lived experience.

Haraway, citing Freire as her 'ancestor' and 'one of my fathers, one of my brothers' (Haraway, quoted Olson: 1989, 5-6), sees writing as crucial to struggle and survival, a matter of 'seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other' (Haraway: 1991, 175). Imaginative struggles reveal another facet to pleasurable activity, and attempting to take apart dominant paradigms triggers knowledge about 'strange demons from the deep, and that these monsters might come trailing all sorts of subterranean material' (Hall: 1996, 259). The 'enterprise of health' demands that readers undertake the emotional and imaginative challenge to meet these 'demons'.

As a medical doctor reads physical symptoms, the literary symptomatologist will 'palpate a lesion that they cannot see directly, symptomatology gives a voice to this lesion' (Kristensen et al. 2008, 3). The idea of palpation introduces a 'zone of touch' (Kristensen et al.) into the reading enterprise and a tactile relationship emerges between reader and writer. The act of reading, not only requires the reader to become aware of the 'details' within the words, but also to 'fondle' them (Nabokov: 1982, 1). Additionally, Cixous declares that '[w]riting and reading are not separate, reading is part of writing. A real reader is already a writer. A real reader is already on the way to writing,' (Cixous: 1993, 21). Freire tenderly views the reader/writer relationship and the act of reading as 'a composition between the reader and the writer in which the reader 'rewrites' the text making a determined effort not to betray the author's spirit' (Freire: 2005c, 57). When the reader cultivates an encounter brimming with understanding of the meaning the writer tries to convey, then the reader becomes 'co-author of that meaning' (Freire 2005c, 57). For Alberto Manguel, the reader 'rewrites the text with the same words of the original but under another heading, re-creating it, as it were, in the very act of bringing it into being' (Manguel: 1997, 211), furthermore '[f]rom its very start, reading is writing's apotheosis' (Manguel: 1997, 179).

If 'no living being in the world can survive for an instant without touching, which is to say, without being touched' (Derrida: 2005, 140) then the 'enterprise of health' locates itself within the territory of survival. Nowhere does this become more vital than when survival is threatened. The geographer Paul Rodaway notes how 'touch still holds great significance in Western culture' (Rodaway: 2002, 149). While a level of indifference to tactile matters resides in areas of science, aesthetics or everyday experience, touch and haptic encounters become valuable in

terms of ‘intimacy, trust and truth…[and] to affirm contact between people and between people and their environment’ (Rodaway: 2002, 149). Stemming from haptology (from Greek *haptesthai* ‘to touch’ or *haptikos* ‘to come into contact with’ or ‘to lay hold of’), haptic awareness expresses a perception of our environment or location that exceeds visual experience. It expresses ‘haptic knowledges’ where ‘the kind of touch implied extends beyond straightforward skin contact’ (Paterson: 2009, 768), involving memories of earlier experiences of people or an acute perception of place, sensations of touch, sound, smell and so forth. This sensory meld generates experiences that are not easy to articulate but are distinctly *felt*, they invoke emotion and a ‘tactile – spatial imaginary’ (Paterson: 2009, 782), above all, they may *touch* us deeply. If reading stories as an ‘enterprise of health’ inhabits this sensuous, haptic geography, whose lifeblood is emotion, imagination and touch, it becomes crucial to the way we negotiate our very existence.

CHAPTER TWO

EMOTION: 'THIS HUNGER FOR FLESH AND TEARS' (CIXOUS: 2005, 97).

Emotion has classically been deemed disconnected from reason, a mechanism of 'being outside of oneself' (Massumi: 2002, 35). If reason is estimated as critical thinking, sound judgment, clear mental powers, emotion is given an unruly, messy, and slightly murky mantle. The idea that emotion leads to an overflow of expression, like the bursting of a dam, leads Solomon and Rosenwein to envisage the 'hydraulic model' of emotion. Analogous to containing excess fluid ('bursting with joy') the emotions approximate fluidity and flux, with potential to develop an explosive overpowering of reasoned thought. However, this model is inaccurate as 'it does not take into consideration the fact that emotions are about things judged important to us. Emotions overwhelm us only because something has been presented to us or happened to us that *matters to our sense of well being: emotions are the result of our values and our assessments'* (Rosenwein: 2010, 251 my italics). Solomon is in accord with this thinking, whilst recognising that we can be overtaken by the strength of emotion and the hydraulic model (Freud's explanation of the powerful urgency of certain emotions), nevertheless 'its representation of passivity...is something that we should vigorously resist' (Solomon: 2008, 149).

Accordingly, emotion is deemed congruent with judgement, evaluative 'assessments', critical thinking, and an ability to thrive. Not merely acquiescent subordinates of emotions, we *own* them and are largely responsible for their expressions, which differ within diverse communities. If reading stories can 'evoke emotion processes in...the same way as emotional situations in real life' (Robinson: 2005, 108), then reason and imagination are also implicated. However, consensus within theories of emotion is problematic. In his final published work, *On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy*, Jacques Derrida owns to using words like soul, sense, touch, whilst 'not only unsure of their *exact* meaning' but also 'fairly sure that