‘I Was Not HEARD’: Trauma and Articulation in the Poetry of Geraldine Monk

Linda Kemp

In: E. Kartsaki (ed.) *On Repetition: Writing, performance and art.* Bristol: Intellect, 2016.

Trauma, according to Ann Cvetkovich, ‘can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and dissociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all’ (2003:7). One of the notable characteristics of trauma is its inability to integrate into the usual functions of memory (Bloom 2003: 9–10; Van der Kolk 1994). Unassimilated trauma is continually re-experienced through flashbacks, re-enactments and other physical and emotional symptoms, amounting to an experience of being haunted. According to psychoanalytic and psychiatric discourse, it is only through assimilation of the trauma that these symptoms can be relieved (Ringel 2011: 3). The symptoms of trauma are at once personal and a social necessity. They are part of an evolutionary process designed to signal to the social group that the suffering individual requires help and the repetitive behaviour is an encoded message disclosing something of the original trauma, a symbolic form of history returning (Bloom 2010). It follows that the social group would recognize these signals and intervene to heal the traumatic wound (Bloom 2010: 207). The fragmentation of societies coexistent with the rise of individualism saw the mechanisms for signalling distress break down; behaviours that evolved to elicit social support have become behaviours that are interpreted as deviant and distressing, and as a consequence resulting in the individual becoming further isolated (Bloom 2010: 208–209). This schism in the flow of communication can be understood as symptomatic of mental health in the contemporary moment; communicative failure gradually detaches the individual from the healthful belonging to society, and a fragmented society is less able to function without the full engagement of its citizens. This communication gap between the individual and society

can be bridged, according to Bloom, by the arts. This chapter draws on this contention, taking aspects of Cvetkovich's theoretically informed 'exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions' (2003: 7) as a base from which to investigate the poetics of Geraldine Monk, specifically the representation of victimhood and trauma, focusing on the articulation of abuse and the communicative function of repetition. Repetition is identified through developing close readings of poems drawn from Monk's major collections, *Interregnum* (1994), *Escafeld Hangings* (2005) and *Ghost & Other Sonnets* (2008). These poems reveal Monk as a poet whose work speaks of the affects and effects of abuse and trauma. Identifying thematic and compositional repetition assists in locating a poetics of trauma that scrutinizes the relationship between articulation and agency, baffling a conservative poetics rooted in individual identity by bridging individual articulations of suffering with the agency afforded by connecting with a wider body politic. In these poems, repetition operates simultaneously as a device for generating agency and a barrier to assimilation of trauma.

Geraldine Monk is a British poet whose work primarily focuses on the human predicament as expressed through the lyric, the form of poetry with which most are familiar. Monk often baffles this form through incorporation of compositional methods more often associated with experimental or avant-garde writing. Writing of her 'enduring or preferred theme of wrongful or circumstantial imprisonment' (Monk 2007: 181), Monk situates a reoccurring theme of her work as a concern with being outside of and wronged by other, dominant, structures. This poetics attempts to speak out against perceived and actual abuses experienced by the often incarcerated voices in these poems. Geographical sites of perceived abuses are invoked and Monk's poetics speaks through, into and around abuse. The poetics develops a representation of incarceration within which it seeks an expression of the abuses experienced. In speaking of the abuse, the scenes of victimization are fixed and become a

representation that, in turn, resists the possibility of transformation. By repeatedly re-visiting these sites of abuse and speaking the words of the abused, the poetry enacts what Freud identifies as the compulsion to repeat (Freud 1958, 1991), where a trauma is compulsively re-lived until through some intervention it can be resolved and the subconscious need to re-visit it is closed. Through the representation of trauma, Monk's poetry talks around trauma by adopting the voices of the abused. The repetition inherent in the traumatic compulsion to repeat is enacted through thematic and sonic repetition.

The theme of imprisonment unites *Interregnum* (1994), *Escafeld Hangings* (2005) and *Ghost & Other Sonnets* (2008), three of Monk's major collections of poetry. Each of these uses the theme to structure the subject matter around which a poetics is developed through use of sequences. The structure afforded by the sequence as a form simultaneously offers potential imprisonment; the voices of the poems incarcerated in the structures and strictures of form, and provides the framework for these voices to be created. In *Interregnum* Monk engages with the 1612 trials of the Pendle witches of Lancashire (Kennedy and Kennedy 2013: 71; Tarlo 2007: 31). This book-length poem progresses through three sections, beginning with depictions of the external world and travelling downwards, the recognizable world receding into the fragments of voices and texts of part two. These recede further, revealing a hell in the third and final sequence of poems (Kennedy and Kennedy 2013: 77). *Escafeld Hangings* features the historical figure of Mary Queen of Scots during her fourteen-year imprisonment in Sheffield. Again the collection is divided into three sections, each part focusing on a particular approach to voicing incarceration. Finally, *Ghost & Other Sonnets* takes the form of a sonnet sequence. The sonnet becomes a frame or cage in which the various 'ghosts' and voices of the poems jostle. The containment of the cage is a form of imprisonment; to be caged is to be treated as a prisoner, to be framed or caged is to be trapped. Conversely, the same framework provides a

holding space that creates the security required to explore, evoke and indeed invoke less tangible concerns. These take the form of ghost stories and the familiar trope of the haunted house. The sonnet sequence itself becomes a house haunted by the stories and voices that emerge, in turn echoing the history of the sonnet as a form speaking to and being haunted by its historical predecessors. The inclusion of '& Other' invites a consideration of an 'otherness' beyond ghosts, the sequence becomes kaleidoscopic, haunting, within haunting, within haunting, endlessly repeating.

A sense that the external world is imbued with indefinable threat pervades all three collections. Through Monk's poetics, language is made to create and capture this intangible terror. Different modes of articulation and levels of agency are modelled, developing a poetic of striving amidst the terror of the environments in which the voices in the poems find themselves. These voices, whether presented as the Pendle witches, Mary Queen of Scots, the disembodied voices in *Ghost* or those that probe the gaps in these environments, speak of, to and in their circumstances. Such articulations speak about, towards and outwards from their various imprisonments, simultaneously placing and displacing the certainties of space and time, geography and history, which baffle chronology, comparable with the repetitive and dissociative effects of trauma. Through partially severing language from its representational functions, Monk's poetry challenges the commonplace appeal to repetition and inexpressibility within trauma studies, offering instead a move towards a poetics that probes trauma from within. Rather than externalizing abuse and its associated trauma through the development of representational or confessional narratives, Monk's poetry builds on the sound of language to express the affects of trauma from the inside out. Remaining on the inside, as each of these collections does, refuses and refutes the possibility of these poems as catharsis. Instead they offer language as articulation, which in turn affords various iterations of agency.

Attention to specific examples of voices attempting articulation of their circumstances provides insight into Monk's explorations of intersections between articulation and agency. A particularly pertinent example appears in the final part of *Interregnum* where the short poem 'James Device Replies' encapsulates formal and thematic preoccupations of the collection. Formally 'James Device Replies' continues the poetics developed throughout the poem and is structured through the repetition of words and sounds. The individual words 'was' and 'here'/'hear' form the basis of the poem and within these the sounds of 'w' and 'as' and the shift of here (e-r) to hear (a-r) form the basic units of sounds that travel through the poem. Despite the simplicity of the word 'palette', attempting to read the poem aloud reveals the extreme difficulty of articulating James' words. The poem begins with the speaker (James) articulating his position;

I wasn't here   I was here   I won't
here I wasn't   here I was   here I
wasn't' was

(Monk 2003: 161)

James must articulate the fact of his presence for his presence to be recognized. Stating 'I wasn't here' indicates a presence insofar as James exists and is therefore able to deny that he was 'here' but was in fact 'here' instead. The 'here' remains mysterious; articulating his presence may refer to the present, the 'here and now' of 'here' or the historical record in and from which this account arises. Equally, the process of reading James' articulation enacts the simultaneous existence of both possibilities. 'I won't' suggests the resolute refusal of a child who will not conform to demands imposed upon him. The first two lines echo a phrase in

common parlance, the origins of which seem obscure; 'I was here. Here I was. Was I here? Yes I was'. 'I was here' is also a phrase that often appears in graffiti, itself a practice that stakes a claim to temporal and spatial territories by leaving a mark to signal the artist's presence and altering that place through the act of tagging. Tagging, as the word suggests, signals the importance of having a name and the significance of the relationship between naming and identity (Gottlieb 2008: 34–40). James' statement 'I was here' exercises a psychological need to claim time- and space-bound existence in order to assert the specific presence of an individual life. Echoing a phrase recognizably drawn from common parlance also situates James' reply as emerging from and thus belonging to spoken rather than written English, indicative of the near-certainty that he is functionally illiterate given his socio-economic status. Lacking eloquence and literacy, James' struggle to articulate himself is the struggle to articulate place and presence and reveals the struggle inherent in language as a form of expression. This struggle is manifest in James' attempts at articulation that particularly emphasize language in the process of attempting to work itself out as the poem moves through the different operations of articulation required to reach an endpoint with the word 'HEARD'. The inadequacies of language in the context of extreme circumstances are apparent below the surface of the literal meaning of the words themselves, registering most acutely in the cumulative affective experience of engaging with the poem. The physical process of reading (speaking) and hearing these words and sounds invokes both James and the poem. The oral and aural coalesce into a felt and thus recognized existence. The figure of James becomes a device not only in name but literally a device through which this iteration of articulation proceeds, while the poem is a device that creates James.

The threat of not existing, being forgotten or disappearing is enacted in James' struggle to find and articulate words that sufficiently render him audible and present. Achieving a level

of comprehensible verbal articulation facilitates a degree of agency, enabling James to exert greater influence over what happens in his own life. This is not an easy task, as James stumbles over ordinary words and alternates between dialect (‘I won’t’, ‘I wasn’t’) and non-standard articulation of standard words. This process, which also examines the differences between standard and non-standard language use including a gentle revealing of the power that eloquence can elicit, succeeds in presenting an expression of the struggle to convey feelings through language. Such an expression is sufficient to register James’ presence; he can be recognized. Presence is embodied as well as linguistic. Appearing twice in the poem, the word ‘tongue’ emphasizes the physical aspect of sounds articulated through the human mouth. It appears first in the context of biting where James says ‘bit part/my tongue off on’, a reference to the expression ‘bite one’s tongue’ meaning to hold something back despite the urge to speak out (Room 2002: 133). Biting the tongue is also a form of self-wounding. In both instances damage to the tongue impedes the movement of words from the internal to the external world, inhibiting the transgression of the boundary of the bodily self into the wider, social, environment. The second reference to tongues in the poem is ‘tongue lollery’, summoning images of the tongue ‘lolling’ outside of the mouth, a position of uselessness and inability to form words. ‘Lollery’ alludes to the Lollards, followers of the fourteenth-century theologian, reformer and dissenter John Wycliffe, a reference that points towards the historical material informing the poem and situates the work in the tradition of English poetry that dissents from orthodoxy.

The wider historical context with which *Interregnum* converses lies beyond the scope of the present discussion and has already been treated by Sean Bonney, Christine and David Kennedy and Harriet Tarlo (Thurston 2007); however, the intersection with dissent from Catholicism and intimations of the Protestant Reformation invokes historical schism as a

potentially traumatic wounding fought out across and traceable within historical arguments about language use, focusing particularly on the language of the Bible. Such an intimation gestures beyond trauma as experienced by the individual and towards social history rather than solely psychological history as a site of trauma. In the context of 'James Device Replies', ultimately, despite being 'here' and pleading to be listened to, the poem ends with James stating that '[...] I was not/HEARD'. The poem moves through the 'I was', 'wasn't' and request to 'hear me', to the figurative action of the tongue being snipped off, the lips stitched together, rendered silent. When James' voice is silenced the limited agency arising with his ability to articulate himself is stifled. Ending with James' direct statement, 'I was not/HEARD', the reader returns from the emphasis of HEARD to the start of the poem to question their encounter with the poem. The simplicity of the words used to execute this mechanism contributes to its force and pathos. In *Interregnum* abuse suffered by James is also the abuse suffered by the underclasses evident in the content of the poem who, being unable to sufficiently articulate their traumatic experiences, remain unheard and their collective trauma remains trapped as an affect that the reader experiences in Monk's poetics. Trapped in repetition and echo, the stuttering of a language unheard, a tongue snipped off, there is no release. Trauma is trapped in the poem and repeats throughout *Interregnum*.

Monk's *Escafeld Hangings* was published in 2005, a decade after the appearance of *Interregnum*, the poem that might be considered its predecessor and model. *Escafeld* is an imaginative engagement with voice and like its predecessor uses a historical approach to frame its investigation. Where the geographical basis of *Interregnum* is Pendle Hill, Lancashire, *Escafeld Hangings* focuses on Sheffield (Monk 2005). It is through this geographical connection that Mary Queen of Scots emerges as a key figure in the work; Mary was held captive in Sheffield for fourteen years until her beheading in 1587. Throughout *Escafeld*

Hangings Monk's voice often seems to be speaking through Mary, a strategy that marks a decisive shift from the articulation of *Interregnum* where the movement of the language itself is a voiceprint. The language in *Escafeld* reflects a shift from the earth-and-body-bound preoccupations of *Interregnum* to the mind- and ocular-based considerations pondered throughout *Escafeld*. This follows the movement of social positioning in the poems, shifting from the outsider status of the underclasses of *Interregnum* to the regal position of Mary Queen of Scots. This shift marks a transition from voices outside the structures of power that shape society (the voices in *Interregnum*) to a voice that vies for the ultimate position of power in society, the monarch (Mary Queen of Scots). The attempt to 'voice', to be heard, is ratcheted up; the abused, victimized and persecuted voices of *Interregnum* mutate into the outraged and outrageous railings of Mary Queen of Scots. Voices in *Interregnum* are concerned with the practicalities of articulation, the difficulties of translating sounds from 'common' spoken English to the English of official culture, whereas the voice of *Escafeld* speaks largely as an observer of society, as a voice removed and providing commentary. Voices in *Interregnum* speak of experiencing exclusion, whereas the voice of *Escafeld* generates a narration of the world as it is seen during incarceration, and in this world everything is terrible. The two lines, 'This IS **no** AGE to **be** IN **sane** IN' and 'Madness is all the rage' (Monk 2005: 64), carry a particularly pronounced charge of Mary/Monk's vision of this world. These lines appear at the mid-point of *Escafeld Hangings*, in the fifth poem within the 'Mary Through the Looking Glass' sequence. Appearing in a prominent position within the sequence and the physical book, these striking statements are pivotal to revealing the shape and sense of the collection. An audio recording of the 'Mary Through the Looking Glass' sequence accompanies *Escafeld*, indicating that the sound of voices in this section is particularly significant. Ostensibly, the focus of this sequence is Mary Queen of Scots taking stock of herself as she looks into her mirror. The recording of the sequence allows for a polyphonic vocalizing, an aspect that is less apparent in

the written text. In the recording, Monk vocalizes her poem and an additional voice is provided by the Portuguese actress and singer Ligia Roque. This duel voicing foregrounds the relationship between Mary and the 'other' self she addresses in the mirror. Mirrors are a familiar trope in literature, specifically in fairy tales where they appear in stories about aristocracy, warning of narcissism and its ensuing dangers. Whether Monk is speaking through Mary or Mary speaking through Monk, 'Mary Through the Looking Glass' presents the reader with an extremely angry voice. This anger peaks with 'This IS **no** AGE to **be** IN **sane** IN' and 'Madness is all the rage'. In speaking to her mirror image, this anger is reflected back at Mary/Monk, it is trapped, its energy fails to find release and consequently there is no relief, exposing the tragedy of seeking answers, let alone solace, from a mirror.

The title 'Mary Through the Looking Glass' clearly references Lewis Carroll's novel *Through the Looking Glass*, the sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. By presenting Mary through allusion to Alice, Monk gestures towards a playful voicing of this Mary and intimates that this text is a sequel to a prior text. Monk herself states that *Escafeld* reworks the form of *Interregnum* (2007: 181) and the three-part form of each text suggests that the two might be read in relation to each other as a mirrored pair. Seeking answers from a mirror also alludes to the famous Brothers Grimm fairy tale *Snow White*. Here the Queen asks her mirror, 'Magic Mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?' Each day the mirror replies that the Queen is the fairest until an occasion when the mirror identifies a princess to rival the Queen. This unleashes the Queen's jealousy and resolve to destroy her rival, Snow White. Justice and beauty are juxtaposed. In Monk's poem Mary is trapped in dialogue with her mirror, raging at the world:

Bed heirs

ya sad fries

of carnal feast –

ya looms of misery

to un-wombed

posterity.

Do we not lobotomise worrisome fruit?

Furious life fest

countercultured

life forced to kill.

(Monk 2005: 64)

There is an allusion to possible incestuous acts; the act of 'bedding heirs' in the context of Mary's voicing would indicate the act of taking to bed other heirs to the throne, in other words, family members. 'Ya' indicates a colloquial and a disregard of those she addresses, 'ya' replacing the more formal 'you'. This scene of a 'carnal feast' is reminiscent of Hamlet's disgust at his mother's incestuous relationship with his uncle,

Nay, but to live

In the rank sweat of an enseamèd bed,

Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love

Over the nasty sty –

(Shakespeare 1998, 3.4: 81-84)

Incestuous relations connect intimately with ‘misery’, being ‘un-wombed’ by having sexual desires distorted. ‘Posterity’ speaks to the sense of hopelessness prompted by incest but also the posterity of the speakers’ place in history and by implication also Monk’s poem. A lobotomy is known, in lay terms, as a psychosurgical technique involving the removal of a portion of a person’s brain. This understanding arises from a crude procedure that emerged in the 1940s when ‘lobotomy was used to reduce agitation and aggressive behaviours and to make patients easier to handle’ (Fischbach and Mindes 2011: 358). Rather than removing parts of the brain, connections in the front area of the brain were severed and the process used to treat forms of mental illness that were otherwise considered untreatable. ‘Worrisome’ refers to the tendency to worry and of one who causes concern in others. As ‘fruit’ cannot be lobotomized or worry, the ‘fruit’ must refer to a person, probably the speaker, who may be a ‘low hanging fruit’, a phrase referring to ‘easy pickings’, which may also describe victims of incest. Someone referred to as a ‘fruitcake’ in common English parlance is being referred to as ‘mad’ to some degree, to be ‘fruity’ is also an informal reference to the sexually suggestive. Presenting the speaker as ‘fruit’ also dehumanizes her, making it simpler to consider acts of violence (lobotomy, incest) towards it/her. ‘Furious life fest/countercultured/life forced to kill’ is typical of Monk’s method throughout her work, of selecting contronyms, a strategy that multiplies possible interpretations. This generosity shifts the attempts at agency enacted within the poem across to the reader, inviting her to locate her own understanding. The word ‘furious’ is given a particularly Monkian treatment. The Oxford English Dictionary reveals an etymology from Old French and Latin, with the earliest given English usage appearing in Chaucer c.1374. Four definitions are provided, the first giving the most common associations in English: in reference to a person or animal ‘full of fury or fierce passion […]; raging, frantic’; of the elements ‘Moving with or as if moved by fury […]’; and also ‘fast and furious’ a commonplace term, referring to ‘eager, uproarious, noisy’. It also carries earlier references to being mad or insane,

foolish and absurd. These associations inform a determination within the poem to refute the negativity that the speaker witnesses in the world. This horror is addressed with a raging objection, combined with the 'fast and furious' pace of this raging, the sense of movement that typically travels across Monk's *oeuvre* and finally the allusion to madness that speaks directly into the insane of 'IN **sane** IN' and 'Madness is all the rage'. Incorporating these readings of 'furious' into 'Furious life fest' facilitates a reading of 'fest' as 'festival' where 'life' exhibits a type of Bakhtinian carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984). Rather than delimiting a temporal space during which ideological authority is temporarily suspended, Monk's poem suggests that life itself is the time for celebration. Insanity or madness are re-inscribed as experiences that are simply part of the human experience rather than experiences that mark people as outsiders. As an undercurrent, 'fest' also carries the possibility of 'festering', where the various interpretations of 'furious' may be bubbling beneath the surface of life's festival. This inverted reading of 'fest' is encouraged by 'countercultured', which requires a dominant culture in order to posit the possibility of an alternative culture to 'counter' the mainstream. 'Countercultured' feeds into the holistic approach to 'life' in 'Furious life fest', rather than existing solely on the cultural plane. 'Life forced to kill' offers life that is celebrated through a fast and furious, possibly seemingly 'mad' modus operandi, finding itself in a position that it has to take the ultimate action and 'kill', although the target of this action remains uncertain. The double appearance of the word 'life' combined with 'kill' suggests some form of 'life' is killed, perhaps the way of life perceived as the dominant mode or the death of the particular counterculture. Abutted to the earlier 'Do we not lobotomise worrisome fruit?' and the concern this expresses of being perceived as a potential candidate for lobotomy as well as the association between lobotomy and the mind suggest that the 'worrisome fruit' is part of the counterculture. There is an ongoing tension between the counterculture and the dominant culture, with the possibility that one seeks to kill off the other. The 'worrisome fruit' is a

product of the counterculture but resides in the tension between the two cultures that doubled use of the word 'life' gestures towards. If the 'worrisome fruit' is Mary, and her existence the possibility of a counterculture, a political alternative, overturning the dominant culture, a form of 'lobotomy' may neutralize the threat posed by this royal intruder.

This leads to 'This IS **no** AGE to **be** IN **sane** IN'. This typography, unique within *Escafeld Hangings* for combining standard, capitalized and bold font within one line, acts as a substitute for the mind and voice, denoting emphasis in each. With different options it is impossible for the reader/listener to decide where the emphasis within the sentence lies. The line is riddled with repetition in the form of its alliterative vowels and its alternative typographical patterns. The multiplication of repetitive patterns points both towards an interpretative assumption that this line is laden with meaning and the sense that it is a sort of riddle for which any answer remains elusive. Its emphasis ultimately lies in its sonic sense, which undulates with the movement of voice. Given the reference to insanity, the line may represent a notionally 'insane' mind inhabited by multiple voices. The words also function as a pictorial illustration of the troubled mind, where sense becomes detached from the usual meanings ascribed to words. The earlier reference to counterculture allows a reading where the emphasis on the 'no' 'be' 'sane' operates as an unhidden hidden message pointing towards the insanity of the mainstream culture and the possibility that counterculture can contain a degree of what passes as insanity in mainstream culture. Hidden messages are a reoccurring motif throughout *Escafeld*; the letters Monk devises between Mary and her sister Queen Elizabeth I, the alternative names for birds in the sequence *She Kept Birds*, the messages encoded within tapestries in the *Marian Hangings* sequence, the handwritten typeface in the poem *The Scottish Queen's Cypher Alphabet*, and the notion of synaesthesia as a code that emerges throughout *Escafeld* and receives direct treatment in *Dressed to Die For*. In repeatedly returning to sites

of hidden messages, *Escafeld* signals an urgency in the need to communicate that which cannot be explicitly spoken. Smuggling messages through apparently innocuous sources is a form of attempting agency, through communication, in restricted circumstances. The revelation of trauma itself is also an unhidden hidden message; the repetitive behaviours of the distressed require interpretation before they can be understood and the agency of the individual restored. Poetry too is a type of code that modestly hides its message while simultaneously signalling a desire to be understood.

A literal reading of 'This is no age to be in sane in' interprets as a statement that 'this age', meaning the time frame of the poem that is simultaneously Elizabethan England, the duration of composing the poem or the contemporary environment of the speaker, does not accommodate the 'insane'. Conversely, given the splitting of 'in' and 'sane' it also reads as this time not being accommodating to a person or persons existing 'in' the 'sane', in other words congruent with mainstream culture. 'Insane' speaks back to the threat of lobotomy mentioned previously, the hints at incest, the wildness beneath the 'furious', the hyperbole of 'kill', and points towards the 'Madness' in the following line, the 'soft-brained', 'Prison' and 'harangues'.

'This IS **no** AGE to **be** IN **sane** IN' is followed by the similarly striking line 'Madness is all the rage', which is a statement in its own right and an extension to the previous line, with repercussions throughout this poem and the rest of *Escafeld Hangings*. It is the 'age', the era that Monk/Mary lives in, that is blamed for the 'voice' appearing to be 'mad' rather than the apparent 'madness' (which is, in fact, victimhood) being problematic. In effect this argues that society rather than the individual is sick. 'Rage' reaches into a reading of 'rage' as fashionable, for something to be 'all the rage' in common parlance refers to something being a fleeting

trend. In considering assumed 'madness' in this way, the conflation of 'madness' with poor health is replaced by a madness that can be chosen. This choice may be a lifestyle choice, which drains madness of its power to disrupt, or a mask, which permits the speaker to 'rage' about the madness of the terrible world she sees around her. This type of madness presents as a form of truth telling by exposing lies. These lies are the madness that causes the anger within 'rage.'

'This IS **no** AGE to **be** IN **sane** IN' and 'Madness is all the rage' are linked through 'age' and 'rage', which hark back to the image of the speaker addressing the mirror in *Snow White*, a scenario where old age is usurped by youth and causes rage. The age/rage connection and the texture of Monk's language suggest affiliations to Dylan Thomas' poetry whose poem 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night' features both age and rage (Thomas 2000: 148). The poem's refrain, 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light' posits rage as a force of energy that challenges death. Rage and death are two possible outcomes to the stasis of the earlier address to the mirror. This stasis is crucial to an understanding of *Escafeld Hangings*. Articulation, addressed to the mirror, fails to achieve agency; the trauma arising from incarceration is maintained rather than resolved, relating to the socio-political context where through Mary's beheading the status quo is preserved. Unresolved trauma is intimated throughout the poem through repetition of sound. In the first two stanzas 'fries', 'feast', 'fruit' and 'fest' work together forming a celebratory scene, despite the 'sad', 'carnal', 'misery', 'un-' 'worrisome', 'furious', 'counter-' and 'kill' that accompany them. There is the previously mentioned carnivalesque amidst the horror, where victimhood becomes a cause for celebration because it gives the speaker an identity and a role to play. Her prisoner status enables her incandescent regal railings against the injustices she has suffered; to forgo these through release from her trauma would require surrendering her status as victim to one of privilege. Conversely, it is her comparatively privileged status that has caused her incarceration.

Ghost & Other Sonnets comprises a sequence of 62 sonnets, a form that enables repetition to be appreciated in its own right. Here repetition creates rhythm and patterns of language, generating a sense of safety through familiarity as the sequence progresses, which is undercut through a developing sense of the uncanny. As two sides of the same coin, the frisson between the homeliness of the familiar and the unhomely of the uncanny manifests in the sequence, haunting itself with reoccurring sounds and signs, portents and symbols that refuse resolution into a final revelation. In its ability to simultaneously enact and withhold, as though performing some sort of literary ghostly striptease, the sequence strips away the narrative function of traditionally recognizable ghost stories, to reveal the effects and affects of haunting, in other words, its essence. These teasing glimpses of essence become disorientating as the violence underpinning many of the sonnets repeatedly emerges only to quickly be subsumed once again into the tumult of the play of language across the sequence. In his reading of sonnet number 39, Sheppard (2011) finds,

> A barely human (ape) rape has occurred amidst this ordinary scene against 'stunning' 'beauty' and 'loveliness' (together the words suggest a woman is violated by 'rape-ghosts'), though it might only be sexual stimulation, 'tossing'. 'Mindless kicks' suggests gratuitous sexual play as well as violence, or both. Lamentation is obscured by the intimate but threatening 'shush-love' that both extinguishes love and could also signify the love of an unhealthy secrecy.

Such revealing is typical of the collapsing of the sonority of these sonnets, with the action played out just below the level of direct representation. Sonic repetition does as much work as thematic repetition in the sequence. As in *Interregnum* and *Escafeld Hangings*, sites of victimization are repeatedly re-visited, contained and expressed; 'Inexplicable

encounters/Traduce unknowns with wary/Other' (Monk 2008: 43). The poetics of haunting develops through an engagement with Victorian ghost stories that provide material for the sequence and the various guises in which terror appears, repetitiously but always recognizably. In this sequence voices are not embodied as in the earlier poems, suggesting that the voices as manifest through the development of sound across the sequence are those of ghosts. Ghosts are associated with the historical past, specifically the past returning to haunt the present. In this instance the ghosts are incarcerated in a haunted house that is also the cage of individual sonnets and the sequence. Incarceration in the cage of the sonnet and the haunted house of traditional ghost stories generates an echo chamber, reminiscent of the mirror in *Escafeld*. The agency afforded through articulation is stymied by the haunting repetitive sound of the language, which, in turn, is contained by the framework of the sonnet sequence as a form. The ghost story and the haunted house emerge, in the literary tradition, from past misdemeanours, crimes or repressed desire, re-visiting the present until they can be resolved and lain to rest, mirroring the resolution of trauma through assimilation. Monk's house is haunted with memories of past harms performing a double of the sonnet as a form being haunted by its antecedents. The house and sonnet is a cage, providing containment, entrapment, even entertainment but not the release of trauma through agency.

Trauma is submerged into Geraldine Monk's poetics, generating a body of work that brilliantly expresses the affects of trauma and enacts the persistence of the compulsion to repeat. It presents through the motif of the abused in the form of the Pendle witches, the incarcerated Mary Queen of Scots and the ghosts of past abuses that haunt *Ghost & Other Sonnets.* Attempting to speak of these abuses forms the basis of the articulation in this poetics. Speaking through, into and around abuse generates the affect of trauma and reinstalls the experience of victimhood. Monk's poetics are dependent on the suspension of the assimilation

of trauma; the poems hold open a traumatized space since its recuperation could only be effected outside the poem. When James Device in *Interregnum* announces ‘I was not/HEARD’ that accusation stretches across this poetics and into the surrounding culture.

References

Bakhtin, M. (1984), *Rabelais and His World* (trans. Hélène Iswolsky), Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bloom, S. L. (2003), ‘Understanding the Impact of Sexual Assault: The Nature of Traumatic Experience’, in A. Giardino, E. Datner and J. Asher (eds), *Sexual Assault: Victimisation Across the Lifespan*, Missouri: Medical Publishing, pp. 405–432.

________ (2010), ‘Bridging the Black Hole of Trauma: The Evolutionary Significance of the Arts’, *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 8: 3, pp. 198–212.

Cvetkovich, A. (2003), *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Fischbach, R. and Mindes, J. (2011), ‘Why Neuroethicists Are Needed’, in J. Illes and B. J. Sahakian (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Neuroethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 343–376.

Freud, S. (1958) [1914], ‘Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through’, in J. Strachey, A. Freud, A. Strachey and A. Tryson (eds), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*: *Volume 12*, London: Hogarth Press, pp. 147–156.

_______ (1991) [1920], ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, in J. Strachey, A. Freud, A. Strachey and A. Tyson (eds), *The Essentials of Psychoanalysis*, London: Penguin, pp. 218–268.

Gottlieb, L. (2008), *Graffiti Art Styles: A Classification System and Theoretical Analysis*, North Carolina: McFarland & Co. Inc.

Kennedy, D. and Kennedy, C. (2013), *Women’s Experimental Poetry in Britain 1970–2010*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Monk, G. (1994), *Interregnim*, London: Creation Books, reprinted in G. Monk, *Selected Poems*, Cambridge: Salt.

Monk, G. (2003), *Selected Poems*, Cambridge: Salt.

_______ (2005), *Escafeld Hangings*, Sheffield: West House Books.

_______ (2007), ‘Collaborations with the Dead’, in S. Thurston (ed.), *The Salt Companion to Geraldine Monk*, Cambridge: Salt, pp. 178–187.

_______ (2008), *Ghost & Other Sonnets*, Cambridge: Salt.

Ringel, S. (2011), ‘Overview’, in *Trauma: Contemporary Directions in Theory, Practice, and Research*, London: Sage, pp. 1–12.

Room, A. (ed.) (2002), *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, London: Cassell.

Shakespeare, W. (1998), *Hamlet*, in S. Wells and G. Taylor (eds), *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 653-90.

Sheppard, R. (2011), ‘*Pages: The Innovative Sonnet Sequence: Eleven of 14: Sonnets and Other Ghosts*’, http://robertsheppard.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/innovative-sonnet-sequence-eleven-of-14.html. Accessed 20 June 2014.

Tarlo, H. (2007), ‘“Home-Hills”: Place, Nature and Landscape in the Poetry of Geraldine Monk’, in S. Thurston (ed.), *The Salt Companion to Geraldine Monk*, Cambridge: Salt, pp. 28–61.

Thomas, D. (2000), *Collected Poems 1936–1953*, London: Orion.

Thurston, S. (ed.) (2007), *The Salt Companion to Geraldine Monk*, Cambridge: Salt.

Van der Kolk, B. A. (1994), ‘The Body Keeps the Score: Memory and the Evolving Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress’, *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 1, pp. 253–265.