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English

'I Think I Feel My Thinking-Self and How It | Stands':

Self and Cognitive Identity in the Poetry of Jorie Graham

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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This work aims to reconsider how we think about identity in the poetry of Jorie Graham by employing neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's theory of the cognitively structured 'autobiographical self'. Damasio's specialised usage of the 'autobiographical self' refers to a multi-levelled and ever-changing mental process whose emergence in the brain simultaneously generates conscious awareness of oneself in the present moment that is linked to the past and future. Employing the cognitive model of identity formation is not meant to be an alternative to Graham's gendered and social identities. Instead, Damasio's theory serves to explicate the poet's view of herself as a cognitively shifting and embodied self who is moulded by embodiment and environmental situatedness. The cognitive literary approach utilised in this thesis intervenes in the discursive shift between an essential, centred self proposed by Romantic epistemology and the post-structuralist model, which emphasises the fragmented, decentred nature of the subject.

The thesis traces the chronological evolution of Graham's sense of self in a selection of poems from 12 volumes to reveal her progression away from an expression of a hidden, impersonal self to a fully-developed autobiographical self. Chapter 1 introduces Graham's poetic oeuvre and offers an account of Damasio and his cognitive theory. Chapter 2 details the politics and poetics manifested in Graham's forty-year career. Chapter 3 investigates the poet's attentiveness to cognition commencing with meditations on a detached mind in *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* (1980), *Erosion* (1983), *The End of Beauty* (1987), and *Region of Unlikeness* (1991). Chapter 4 inspects the poet's deeply introspective meditations in *Materialism* (1993), *The Errancy* (1997), *Swarm* (2000) and *Never* (2002). Chapter 5 interrogates the poems in *Overlord* (2005) and *Sea Change* (2008) which incorporate embodied interpretations of the political and ecological climate of the United States in the 21st century into Graham's expressions of identity. Chapter 6 probes the autobiographical self and Graham's shifts of identity impacted by individual experiences and personal loss in *Place* (2012) and *Fast* (2017).

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name:	Mariam Ahmad M. Alghamdi

Title of thesis:	'I Think I Feel My Thinking-Self and How It | Stands': Self and Cognitive Identity in the Poetry of Jorie Graham

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
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6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

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Chapter 1 Jorie Graham, Antonio Damasio, and Cognitive Identity

1.1 Introduction

This work aims to reconsider how we think about identity in the poetry of Jorie Graham by employing neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's theory of the cognitive structuring of self. Identity has long been theorised through the lenses of gender, race, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. This work explores how Damasio's discoveries about the workings of the human mind might change our understanding of the lyric 'I' in Graham's poetry.

The cognitive model of identity proposes that identity is the result of multi-levelled and ever-changing mental processes rather than the ascription of membership to a particular gender or ethnicity. Here, mental processes of identity formation are not meant to be alternatives for gendered and social identities but explicators of how our selves are created and how our awareness of ourselves is moulded by external factors. This work investigates Graham's attentiveness to identity formation as dependent on the conscious mind's singular ability to relate its mental mechanisms to both embodiment and environmental situatedness. The chapters explore the mechanisms of a cognitive construction of self. Therefore, the focus is on those poems in which the poet's perception of self is conveyed through images of the mind, brain and memory as integral parts of the self-construction process; it is also on Graham's constantly evolving perspective on these components as part of her identity. The reading that is presented here acknowledges the profound influence of the social, political and natural environment on the emergent self.

Like Damasio, Graham asserts both the complexity and the distinctiveness of the mind and body and their experiences. The reading of her poetic meditations presented here suggests that Graham's knowledge of her identity results from her study of her mind's behaviour with rigorous attention and is at least in that way far beyond the normal state. In Damasio's terms, this means that Graham's knowledge of her identity arises from her contemplation of her 'autobiographical self'. The neuroscientist's idiosyncratic use of the term 'autobiographical self' is employed in a special way to refer to an idealised model of

how every adult mind normally works. According to Damasio, the autobiographical self is a process that is generated through a series of neural operations when 'a substantial part of one's life comes into play and both the lived past and the anticipated future dominate the proceedings'.[1] Damasio's specialised usage of the 'autobiographical' to incorporate the neurological dimension of the self that has a relation to an extended sense of the past/future is what differentiates the term from the confessional, anecdotal self of the contemporary lyric tradition.

The reading of the self as an illustration of Damasio's cognitively constructed self reveals that Graham's lyric resists conformity to the ideas of self offered either by the Romantic epistemology of an essential, centred self or by the current post-structuralist model, which emphasises the fragmented, decentred nature of the subject. This thesis therefore intervenes in this discursive shift in the understanding of the self and offers an alternative categorisation to these two conflicting epistemologies. Thus, this thesis responds to critics' claims that Graham's poetry is non-categorical.

The present chapter consists of five sections. The following section, an introduction to Jorie Graham and her poetic oeuvre, summarises the expressions of self and identity in her poems and their stylistic characteristics. The chapter's third section offers an account of Antonio Damasio and his theory of a cognitive structuring of self; it also considers the relevance of his ideas to literary studies in general and to Graham in particular. The section discusses how 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (4) exemplifies direct influence by Damasio.[2] The fourth section briefly introduces the field of cognitive literary studies and presents the contribution of the thesis to cognitive literary studies and to the new lyric studies. The chapter concludes with an outline of the remainder of the chapters of this manuscript.

[1] Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), p. 169.

[2] Jorie Graham, *Materialism* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1993), p. 59. The (4) following the 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' is my own. There are 5 poems in *Materialism* with the title, 'Notes on the Reality of the Self', and the numbering distinguishes between them. The poems appear in *Materialism* on pages 3, 10, 12, 59 and 128.

1.2 Jorie Graham's Lyric Poetry: From Self to Identity

Jorie Graham is a contemporary American poet and the first woman to be appointed to the position of Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University – a post previously held by Seamus Heaney. Born in New York, raised in Rome, fluent in three languages, and educated in philosophy, filmmaking, and the art of poetry, Graham has published twelve volumes of poetry since 1980.

In a recent interview, Sarah Howe asked Graham about the pressures that influenced her writing of *Fast* (2017). Graham's answer here is significant because it summarizes her view of the powers shaping both her poems and her sense of self. Graham identifies the relevant pressures as follows:

> My increasingly desperate sense of myself as a member of a species—a species deeply implemented in the extinction of other species. *Extinction*—grappling with that. My illness and the feeling of an artificial me being gradually built by my ministering, oftentimes non-human, angels. […] My increasingly thin sense of my 'singular individuality' just as deeply singular things were happening to me—my diagnoses and treatments, my father's death, my mother's illness—which were overwhelmed by the much larger diseases—cultural, creatural, planetary. They just are incommensurate, cannot be held in mind at once. And, yet must be.[3]

Graham's individual uniqueness and common humanity are two components of her identity and are necessary to each other. Graham asserts that her sense of identity as a human being and as a member of the human species have been shaped by the feelings of distress and devastation inflicted on her by personal, cultural and environmental pressures. Graham's 'singular individuality' – i.e., the basic assumption she has about herself as a human being which distinguishes her from other people – is informed by her unique personal trials. Unsettling changes to her life have propelled her to question previously held convictions about her sense of self. As a result, Graham's perception of her sense of self and identity has been subject to continuous evolution and has been moulded by relocation, marriage, motherhood, remarriage, ageing, loss of loved ones and

[3] Sarah Howe, 'Interview', *Practical Criticism* (January 2017) <http://www.praccrit.com/poems/cryo/> [accessed 08 August 2018] (parapgraph 4 of 78).

illness. In addition to these unique experiences, which are particular to Graham's life, are other shared human characteristics and experiences that constitute her sense of self as a member of the human race. Graham sees herself as an ethically responsible member of the human species and not of any specific social or political category. Graham's witnessing of the Earth's transformation as a result of pollution, climate change, wars and conflict compels her to question her ethical responsibility and by extension humanity's culpability for the destruction of the Earth.

Of all of the personal experiences that have influenced Graham's sense of self, the most influential is her move back to the United States from Europe, which left her feeling like an outsider in America. Brought up in Italy and France, Graham confesses, 'I've always felt a bit of a voyeur in America'.[4] Looking from the outside in, it seems that Graham's feelings of exclusion result from constant moves, which started from the time she was six months old until she moved back to New York at the age of 19 in 1969. This feeling impacted her representations of the lyric self as an impersonal 'I' in the volumes of poetry published in the 1980s and 1990s, which, unsurprisingly were coloured by a European sensibility.

In her first essay, Graham argued for poetry's power 'to wrench a uniqueness, an identity, from the all-consuming whole'. The poet here proposed a particular function for the composition of poetry; namely that poetry is a tool for recognizing those distinct and recognisable characteristics which establish a feeling of distinctiveness. For Graham, poetry illustrates the ways she marks herself as different from others. Poetry therefore enables her to exercise some control of who she is. This reasoning seems to have emerged from her desire to overcome feelings of exclusion.[5] Graham's stance in the essay may be traced to her childhood years in Italy, where she saw her existence as a form of 'ghosting […] where I was yet another human soul added to the massive pile of soul-

[4] Graham, *Jorie Graham: 'I Am Living in the Late Season, but It Has Its Songs, Too'*, (interviewed by Aida Edemariam for *The Guardian*) (London: *Guardian*, 1 December 2017) <*http://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/dec/01/jorie-graham-interview-fast-poetry*> [accessed 10 January 2018] (paragraph 10 of 17).

[5] Graham, 'Some Notes on Silence', in *19 New American Poets of the Golden Gate,* ed. by Philip Dow (NY: Harcourt, 1984), pp. 414-20 (p. 418).

debris'.[6] Moving to a country that was completely new to her certainly did not make her feel distinguishable in any way. Written in 1984, the essay focuses on poetry's importance as a means of drawing out an individual identity that distinguishes one from a collective humanity or the 'communal sum of beings'.

In the intervening years up to 2017, Graham's understanding of identity changed to reflect that of an ethical human responsible for present global conditions. Her poems both seek 'a uniqueness, an identity' and explore how personal ordeals and broader global issues have impacted her. Her poems tap into cultural issues such as the disconnection from reality caused by drug and technological addiction. World War II, the Normandy attacks and Nazi occupation, among other conflicts, have formed part of her thematic interests. Furthermore, Graham meditates on the extinctions of entire species of animals and plants, whose disappearance unbalances the scales of the ecosystem, as well as on climate change, global warming and toxic dumping. Although personal and public conditions may not bear equally on her fate and that of the Earth, they are and must be, in Graham's view, 'held in mind at once'. In her poems, the lyric self imaginatively encapsulates the overlap of singular and communal, personal and historical memories and that of individual and group emotional responses. Graham interrogates the position of the lyric self to reflect on herself and on collective human behaviour.

A close look at the poems from Graham's first seven books of poetry—*Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* (1980), *Erosion* (1983), *The End of Beauty* (1987), *Region of Unlikeness* (1991), *Materialism* (1993), *The Errancy* (1997), and *Swarm* (2000)—reveals a persistent interest in meditations on an impersonal self but not yet on identity.[7] Examples of such meditations can be seen in numerous poems. In *Hybrids*, Graham wonders whether a mirror is successful in 'trying to | capture the true likeness of its subject' before she loses interest in the reflection and shifts her focus to the 'face | inhabited by self'.[8] Elsewhere, in a poem interestingly entitled 'The Veil', Graham displays uncertainty regarding the

[6] Thomas Gardner, 'Jorie Graham, the Art of Poetry No. 85', *The Paris Review,* 165 (2003), <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/263/jorie-graham-the-art-of-poetry-no-85-jorie-graham>, [accessed 16 July 2014], (paragraph 69 of 173).
[7] Graham, *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980); *Erosion* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1983); *The End of Beauty* (New York: Ecco Press, 1987); *Region of Unlikeness* (New York: Ecco Press, 1991); *Materialism* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1993); *The Errancy* (Hopewell, N.J.: Ecco Press, 1997); *Swarm* (New York: Ecco Press, 2000).
[8] Graham, 'My Face in the Mirror Tells a Story of Delicate Ambitions', in *Hybrids,* p. 50.

hidden self and asks, in the language of twentieth-century psychoanalysis, 'the first person is where'?[9] When she attempts to look closely at herself in *Swarm*, instead of seeing herself, Graham reports, 'I see someone else becoming me | A shadow becoming me'.[10] In *Materialism*, she declares, in a fashion reminiscent of Descartes, 'I think I feel my thinking self and how it | stands'.[11] Although the poems offer no answers to these inquiries and concerns, they do express Graham's inability to articulate a clear sense of self and her ethical position. The investigation into a selection of poems from these seven volumes reveals the epistemological nature of Graham's meditations on the impersonal self, which are conducted by way of broader thematic occupations. Respectively, the poems in these volumes contemplate the self through the themes of nature, mythology, painting, autobiography, matter, the idea of erring and conformity.

A focus on closure and strict formality marks the modernist tendencies of *Hybrids* and *Erosion*. *The End of Beauty* heralds the beginning of Graham's move away from formalist closure towards openness. The stylistic change is made possible through an implementation of various stylistic innovations, which include elaborate descriptions that run across the page. In the meditations of *The End of Beauty,* Graham abruptly shifts the focus from one object, thought or passage to another. This leaves the reader puzzled, as the descriptions render the images difficult to follow and/or visualize. Furthermore, these stray thoughts are written in lines that no longer correspond to single sentences, with enjambed lines spanning the page via prolonged syntax, extended analogies and extensive descriptions. Graham employs specific line breaks at certain parts of a word or after a prefix to introduce the opposite meaning of a word and to facilitate an alternation of long and short lines. Such extended and disrupted descriptions have led critics to call Graham a difficult poet. In fact, Graham is listed alongside Wallace Stevens under the entry 'difficulty' in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* as one of 'the two Eng.-lang. poets whose work has most provoked continued disputation regarding difficulty in the second half of the 20th c. and since'.[12]

[9] Graham, 'The Veil', in *The End of Beauty*, pp. 45-47 (p. 45).
[10] Graham, 'Fuse', in *Swarm*, pp. 80-84 (p.83).
[11] Graham, 'Existence and Presence', in *Materialism*, p. 142.
[12] A. L. Osborn, 'Difficulty', in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,* ed. by Roland Greene and others, 4th edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 364-66 (p. 366).

The change in the expression of her identity coincides with another shift in thematic preoccupations that is accompanied by further stylistic innovations in the five volumes of poetry composed after the beginning of the twenty-first century: *Never* (2002), *Overlord* (2005), *Sea Change* (2008), *Place* (2012) and *Fast* (2017). The start of the twenty-first century witnessed a personal and professional transformation in Graham. The mature poet is now at a time in her life, personally and professionally, when she is confident enough to employ her own voice as that of the lyric 'I' so as to express her own questionings of her identity. She no longer hides behind the mask of fictional characters. Now a Harvard professor, Graham's interpretation of identity has also altered and is no longer focused on her American nationality. Instead, it has extended to incorporate a global citizenship. Her poems of the new millennium bear witness to natural disasters and political conflicts that occur beyond the geographical boundaries of her country. Mention of global issues overlaps with citations of personal elements from Graham's life, such as her experience of motherhood and her cancer diagnosis. Graham's worries stem from a fear that the Earth will no longer be the provenance of human well-being and that the fast pace of modern life and technological immersion have blinded us to the consequences of our ongoing environmental destruction. In *Never*, a frustrated Graham admits that 'the speaking subject in | me wants' to find a way 'to rip the veil' covering the self and body.[13] Then, in *Overlord*, she asserts that, 'Certain things have to be "undergone", yes. | To come to a greater state of consciousness, yes' of self and world.[14] Otherwise, the poet would be unable to express her ethical self except as a 'plagiarized | humanity'.[15] In exploring the themes of ecology and death, Graham continues to ask, in *Sea Change*, 'Who is one when one calls oneself | one?'[16] In *Place*, the poet, whose sensibility is influenced by her situation on the planet, admits that, despite all her reading, researching and writing, she is 'still in the very beginning of being human'.[17] In *Fast*, as she mourns her father's death, Graham asks 'the plants to give me my small identity. No, the planets'. The power of these poems is in their promotion of stimulating ways of

[13] Graham, 'The Taken-Down God', in *Never,* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2002), pp. 93-99 (p. 94).
[14] Graham, 'Little Exercise', in *Overlord,* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), p. 23.
[15] Graham, 'The Violinist at the Window, 1918', in *Sea Change,* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), pp. 32-34 (p. 33).
[16] Graham, 'Positive Feedback Loop', in *Sea Change*, pp. 42-44 (p. 42).
[17] Graham, 'Lapse', in *Place,* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), pp. 71-74 (p. 71).

thinking about the self and the environment. They contrast with the poems of previous volumes in which the environment had no such bearing.

Graham's work resists alignment with a specific school of thought. This indicates its distinctiveness and opens the door to studies of her work, such as the present one, which adopt novel perspectives. Seeing that Graham 'has developed a poetic that explores philosophy, history, art, and the mystery of individual cognition in a detached almost disembodied style', Deborah Phelps noted in 2004 that 'Vendler and others have praised Graham's refusal to write the sort of lyric, postconfessional poem that has become the standard in contemporary American poetry'.[18] Graham's lyric shares commonalities with the confessional and post-structuralist styles of writing, but it does not fit neatly into either mode. Thomas Gardner, in his introduction to *Jorie Graham: Essays on the Poetry*, claims that the recognition Graham has received as a writer stems from the 'increasing openness' of her poems 'to larger questions and experimental complexity'. Gardner states further that Graham's 'work demonstrates the value of refusing to align oneself with a too narrowly drawn set of pressures or predecessors or expectations.'[19] Charles Molesworth shares this sentiment and remarks that 'Graham's poetry cannot be easily categorized as purely postmodern or confessional, feminist or faddish'.[20] Graham, who is eager to engage with grand questions of ontology, philosophy and science while incorporating methods from the modernists and fellow contemporary writers, does not limit herself to adhering to one poetic movement. James Longenbach argues that Graham's poetry is difficult to place in a category because she shares a manner of thinking with a broad range of modernist and contemporary poets. Longenbach argues that 'Graham exemplifies what is best about contemporary American poetry; her distinctiveness is based on acts of inclusion, a hunger to align herself with a wide array of contemporaries and precursors'.[21]

Graham has repeatedly dismissed postmodernist constructs of self; for example, she states that 'You can call your subject position a construct all you want; […] but is it

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[18] Deborah Phelps, 'Jorie Graham (1950-)', in *Multicultural Writers since 1945: An A-to-Z Guide,* ed. by Alba Amoia and Bettina L. Knapp (Greenwood, 2004), pp. 248-51 (pp. 250-51).
[19] Thomas Gardner, 'Introduction', in *Jorie Graham: Essays on the Poetry*, ed.by Thomas Gardner (Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 2005), pp. 3-12 (p. 4).
[20] Charles Molesworth, 'Jorie Graham: Living in the World', *Salmagundi* (1998), 276-83 (p. 277).
[21] James Longenbach, 'Jorie Graham's Big Hunger', in *Essays e*d. by Gardner*,* pp. 82-101 (p. 84).

sufficiently demanding, are the pressures it generates enough for a wakeful life?' She continues to clarify her position as follows: 'For me, it feels like too much self-accountability is lifted. The problematic self is heavy, it is there on one's shoulders, on one's soul—it is no illusion'.[22] A cognitive perspective on Graham's poems accounts for the 'wakeful' self which Graham aims to portray, since awareness and accountability both register as feelings in the mind and consequently shape and change the lyric self.

Graham's resistance to categorization stems from the position the lyric self occupies in her poems, which she sees as a challenging one for her and for contemporary poets to approach. For Graham, the issue of the poetic expression of the lyric subject is rooted in the clash of two primary modes of thought: The Romantic notion of an essential self and the post-structuralist notion of a fragmented subject constructed by language. Graham explains as follows:

> I think the issues regarding the problem of subjectivity—the still operative inheritance of the desire for Romantic fulfillment, or presence, as it comes into conflict with the distrust of such a desire (the distrust not only of the validity of personal experience but of the very notion of an essential self who might claim to have such an experience)—are at the core of what we see happening today. Somewhere between the "I" that takes its authority from an apparent act of confessional "sincerity," and the "I" that takes its authority from seeing through to its own socially constructed nature, there is still the "I" that falls in love, falls out of love, gives birth, loses loved ones, inhales when passing by a fragrant rosebush—the "I" that has no choice but mortality. That "I" (Eliot would say personal yet collective) is emerging from the great philosophical fray of the last decade with a new respect for the mystery of personhood, and a more sophisticated understanding of its simultaneously illusory and essential nature.[23]

Graham's comment may be interpreted as a rejection of rigid categorization, as it is restrictive and reduces the nature of 'the "I" that has no choice but mortality'. The poet here does not consider the lyric 'I' to be the transcendental self that philosophers have

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[22] Katia Grubisic, 'Jorie Graham: Instructions for Building the Ark', *Fiddlehead* (2010), 146-54, < https://www.joriegraham.com/interview_grubisic>, [accessed 01 August 2018], (paragraph 16 of 18).
[23] Graham, *The Glorious Thing: Jorie Graham and Mark Wunderlich in Conversation* (Poets.org: The Journal of the Academy of American Poets, 1996) <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/glorious-thing-jorie-graham-and-mark-wunderlich-conversation> [accessed 20 February 2018] (para. 7 of 32).

felt was beyond the knowledge of humans. Instead, she is concerned with the embodied self that is in process and its place amongst larger philosophical, political and environmental issues. Kirsten Hotelling Zona identifies Graham's lyric position as 'the conventional agent of moral law' that 'locates agency in the act of tracing one's contingency'.[24] Zona's moral agent comes close to the lyric self stipulated by this work; however, she overlooks Graham's insistence on knowing 'what goes into the construction' of the self and how to make the poems in service of creating the lyric self.[25]

Damasio's model is helpful for its theoretical framework that incorporates a cognitive structure for the autobiographical self. While Damasio's special notion of the lyric self is explored in the chapters of the thesis, the employment of the notion does not imply that Graham's poetry is autobiographical. In fact, her poems are not private memoirs, nor are they confessional, since they do not feature psychological outbursts of guilt; nor do the poems delve into quotidian details. A significant point to make here is that Graham's accounts of her personal experiences are not meant as acts of confession but as shapers of the lyric self and its processes of perception. Graham herself acknowledges the complex link between her life and her work, stating that 'my poems always reflect what is actually going on in my life at a level as profound as that—rather than, say, at an autobiographical level'.[26] Graham dismisses the mode of autobiographical, confessional lyric because she is 'not interested in the psychology' or in 're-telling a story filled with narrative'.[27]

The cognitive literary study of Graham's poetry is advantageous for a number of reasons. Graham has remarked that the work of poets, philosophers and neuroscientists attempt to work out the construction of the self:

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[24] Kirstin Hotelling Zona, 'Jorie Graham and American Poetry', *Contemporary Literature,* 46 (2005), 667-87 (pp. 668, 669).
[25] Graham, Antonio Damasio, and Thomas Metzinger, 'The Passionate Mind: Emotion, Cognition, and the Construction of the Self', in *Talk of the Nation/Science Friday,* ed. by Ira Flatow (National Public Radio, October 10, 2003), <http://www.npr.org/programs/talk-of-the-nation/archive?date=10-31-2003> accessed [5 January 2017].
[26] Smartish Pace, 'Q&A with Jorie Graham'*, Smartish Pace* (2008), <http://www.smartishpace.com/pqa/jorie_graham/> [accessed 20 Januray 2018] (para. 9 of 71).
[27] Hobart Student Association, and others, 'A Conversation About *Materialism*', in *Seneca Review*, 24 (1994), 5-19 (p. 6).

> What we're trying to do is figure out […] what goes into the construction, whether it's a poem, a work of art, a work of philosophy or […] a neurological undertaking that exhibits the characteristics that momentarily coalesce into a self, and then whether that momentary coalescence can last long enough to love or do good or to do harm.[28]

However, little research has been conducted into this claim. Thus, this work aims to demonstrate that Graham's poems, viewed through Damasio's theory, enact a cognitively constructed self. Moreover, the thesis reveals, through the close reading of the poems, that the emergence of an autobiographical self facilitates the expression of identity. Graham is not able to effectively express her identity and contemplate the planetary conditions impacting her selfhood while speaking through the mask of impersonal speakers. Only in the volumes of poetry written by the mature poet in her autobiographical voice can she confidently convey her assumptions regarding her identity and reflect upon them. Damasio claims that, whenever the self emerges, consciousness is also produced, thereby allowing the conscious self to 'witness its own mind'. Applying the latter assumption facilitates an interpretation of Graham's poems in which the self meditates on its own mind and thoughts.

This thesis is not the first scholarly work to suggest a cognitive criticism of Graham's poetry. Nikki Skillman's *The Lyric in the Age of the Brain* offers an insightful examination of Graham's resistance to materialist conceptions of the mind and the self.[29] Both Skillman's book and the present work maintain that Graham's knowledge of consciousness, emotions and imagination are portrayed in her poetics. However, Skillman interprets Graham's poetics as a response to and resistance of cognitive materialism. This work goes beyond suggesting mere resistance to materialist philosophy to a tracing of the evolution of the lyric self and its relationship to embodiment and environmental situatedness. And where Skillman commences her cognitivist-materialist critique mid-way through Graham's career, beginning with the poems of *Materialism* (1993) with only passing references to poems from the first decade of Graham's career. This work, in

[28] Graham, Damasio, and Metzinger, 'The Passionate Mind'.
[29] Nikki Skillman, *The Lyric in the Age of the Brain* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).

contrast, encompasses poems from all of Graham's oeuvre, starting with *Hybrids* (1980) and ending with *Fast* (2017).

Other responses to Graham's shifting self have varied. For the most part, their investigations concentrate on the acknowledgement of a self in process; they have not devoted in-depth analytical consideration to the nature of the self. Cynthia Hogue, Stephen Burt and Sven Birkerts have in various ways identified aspects of Graham's lyric poems that can be appreciated from a cognitive perspective—specifically one that employs ideas from neuroscience which ground the oscillating aspects of the self in biology. Hogue investigates Graham's gendered constructs of self and identifies the 'divided' or 'different' subject as 'one that is in process'. Attributing Graham's portrayal of the feminine to 'an ethical consciousness arrived at through embodied experience as with disembodied philosophical enquiry and aesthetics', Hogue does not explore how or why the ethically conscious self is in process.[30]

Birkerts views Graham as a 'participial poet' whose work portrays some form of continuous action or series of actions that typically occur during 'the naked encounter of self and world'. Commenting on Graham's oeuvre up to *Never*, Birkerts asserts that, 'In this work all is process, motion, becoming'. The poems describe the self's unremitting thoughts during its meditation on its surroundings or in its descriptions of the unfolding of nature. Birkerts remarks that, in her fixation on the observations of the encounter, Graham fails to assign meaning to the poem and instead 'presents the reader with the challenge of reconciling the sprawl of her perceptions and exhalations to some more focused idea of meaning'. The critic sees no benefit in such depictions, believing them to lack artistic value and interest for the reader. Birkerts argues further that, 'the disappearance of the perceived thing or the felt experience into the inconclusive enactments of process points to a dead end in Graham's art' and that the 'documentation of every twitch and buffet of self-greeting-world presupposes a reader's boundless interest in that self'.[31] Yet, what Birkerts overlooks and what a cognitive reading has to offer is the function of the 'self-greeting-world' in generating images and emotions

[30] Cynthia Hogue, 'The Speaking Subject in/Me: Gender and Ethical Subjectivity in the Poetry of Jorie Graham', in *Essays e*d. by Gardner, pp. 238-56 (pp. 245, 247, 240).
[31] Sven Birkerts, 'States of "Be" + "-ing" (Review of *Never*)', *New York Times,* 19 May 2002, <*http://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/19/books/states-of-be-ing.html*> [accessed 09 February 2018].

registered in the brain. This registering of images and emotions leads to the emergence of a reflective self that is able to perceive the impact of such an encounter on the self and self-making.

Stephen Burt is one of the critics who views Graham's portrayal of the self as a process. He states that 'Graham's versions of lyric have always portrayed the self as a process, as something one has to discover or become'.[32] Elsewhere, Burt identifies the trope of portability, in which the lyric self is imaginatively moved between locations and timeframes whilst retaining its coherence. He clarifies that readers of poetry generally 'assume or pretend that an object's function and meaning, an utterance's force and effect, and consciousness itself can travel from one place to another—that they retain at least some of their sense and force apart from their founding contexts'. Burt mentions Graham in passing as a poet whose work portrays a portable self. He states that her poetry of the last twenty years of the twentieth century 'brings a differing sense of what an ideally portable self would look like and of what kind of structural or contextual dependency competes with it'. Burt does not examine her poetry's portrayal of the portable uses of the self and only asserts that Graham 'consider[s] the self as some aspect of a shifting, and far larger, cognitive or linguistic system'.[33] His comment on Graham's lyric self as a portable subjectivity that is part of a cognitive system invites the present study of the poems.[34] The next section introduces Antonio Damasio, his neurological theory and its place in literary studies and the bearing of Damasio's ideas on Graham's poems.

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[32] Stephen Burt, '"Tell Them No": Jorie Graham's Poems of Adolescence', in *Essays e*d. by Gardner, pp. 257-74 (p. 257).

[33] Stephen Burt, 'Portability; Or, the Traveling Uses of a Poetic Idea', *Modern Philology,* 100 (2002), 24-49 (pp. 25, 43). Burt discusses Walt Whitman, Elizabeth Bishop, Paul Muldoon, Lyn Hejinian, and Adrienne Rich and mentions Graham in passing reference and points the reader to Gardner's *Region of Unlikeness* and Longenbach's *Modern Poetry after Modernism*.

[34] Although Burt does acknowledge Thomas Gardner and James Longenbach's treatments of the self, what he missed was that their investigations into the self were not as part of a cognitive system. In 'Jorie Graham and Emily Dickinson: Singing to Use the Waiting', Gardner explores the influence Dickinson has on Graham's early meditations while Longenbach traces Graham's shifts of style from *Erosion* to *Materialism* in 'Jorie Graham's Big Hunger', both treatments leave a gap for an investigation from a cognitive outlook. This is where the present research gains its value, as it employs Damasio's theory to provide insight into the self as arising from a more complicated cognitive structure. Such a treatment responds to Birkerts' dismissal of Graham's poems of a shifting self.

1.3 Antonio Damasio, Graham, and the Cognitive Self

Antonio Damasio is a professor of neuroscience and director of the Brain and Creativity Institute at the University of Southern California (USC).[35] Whereas biologists had long dismissed the relevance of emotions and feelings, Damasio's clinical studies of the brain have provided new insights into the significance of emotions and feelings for the emergence of consciousness and life-regulating processes. Damasio asserts that his multi-level model of the self differs from other cognitive interpretations of the self because it emphasizes, in opposition to earlier conceptions of the conscious self, that the regulation of human life is the reason for the emergence of the self and consciousness. Damasio explains, 'I am reversing the narrative sequence of the traditional account of consciousness by having covert knowledge of life management precede the conscious experience of any such knowledge'.[36] Over the years, he has collaborated with his wife, Hanna, a neurologist whose work with cognitively impaired patients has afforded Damasio the advantage of working in close contact with real patients rather than being limited to laboratory experimentation. This has put him in a position to be able to profess that the self 'undeniably exists in our minds, and nothing is gained by dismissing it as an illusion' (p. 24). Damasio's insistence on the presence of the self contrasts with neuroscientific theories which acknowledge only biological functions and simultaneously reject the notion of a self. In his books, Damasio offers a generalised description of the embodied mind and its functions that appeals both to the wider public and to literary critics. He has received numerous awards and international recognition for his contributions to the understanding of emotions and consciousness.

Damasio's descriptions of the embodied mind and its functions were initially based on a rejection of a Cartesian separation of mind and body. In his first book, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994), Damasio claims that Descartes' mistake was in suggesting that the mind and body, and therefore thought and behaviour, are separate.[37] Damasio's scepticism towards Descartes' proposition guided him to study the

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[35] Antonio Damasio (Faculty Profile). In *USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences* [online]. University of Southern California (2018) < https://dornsife.usc.edu/cf/faculty-and-staff/faculty.cfm?pid=1008328> [accessed 09 August 2018].
[36] Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, p. 36. References to Damasio's work in the thesis are from *Self Comes to Mind* unless otherwise stated. Further references to *Self* are given after quotations in the text.
[37] Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994)

role emotions play in human behaviour. He subsequently advanced 'the somatic marker' hypothesis, which suggests that emotional processes are responsible for steering behaviour, specifically decision making. The concept of embodiment as the foundation of consciousness and identity is further developed in *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (1999). [38] Damasio refers to scientific experiments and observations in *The Feeling of What Happens* to explain why he considers consciousness a feeling. It is in this book that Damasio first suggests the cognitive layering that generates the self.

Later, in *Self Comes to Mind*: *Constructing the Conscious Brain* (2010), upon which this work draws, Damasio expands on the neurological basis of the self. He offers an accessible account of the human brain's ability to generate a mind and how that mind in turn becomes conscious and produces a sense of self. Damasio suggests that identity arises from the self through mental operations and activities. Furthermore, he stresses the importance of rationality, awareness and reflection for the generation of a conscious self and an ensuing sense of identity. Damasio suggests that consciousness is how one comes to know of the mind and its functions and that it arises from a 'knowledge of one's own existence and the existence of surroundings' (p. 157). In conscious awareness, there is something that perceives the functions of the mind. This perceiver is the self.

Damasio defines the self as a 'process, not a thing, and the process is present at all times when we are presumed to be conscious' (p. 8). Having a conscious mind endowed with personhood and identity regulates the internal bodily environment or 'homoeostasis' and enables humans to live, grow, prosper, reproduce and ultimately die. Furthermore, conscious selves have enabled humans to gradually move beyond mere adaptation and survival in the world to a more intentionally planned and designed life and to exploring various ways of achieving and sustaining welfare.

To understand Damasio's theory, it is important to remember that self and mind are two distinct brain processes that work simultaneously at any given moment and are pertinent

[38] In *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (London: W. Heinemann, 2000), Damasio explores the neural and mental components of identity. Damasio authored two other books. In *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain* (2003), Damasio continues to focus on the crucial role emotions play in consciousness, arguing that without feelings there would be no entry into the realm of consciousness. His most recent book is *The Strange Order of Things: Life, Feeling and the Making of Cultures* (2018).

to the generation of consciousness. For Damasio, a conscious self starts at the basic level of brain cells that are predisposed to generate continuously fluctuating networks of neural 'maps' (p. 18).[39] The brain's capacity to create maps engenders a mind which, at this stage, is still non-conscious. For the mind to be conscious, a self process needs to be added. The self, which has no designated location in the brain, emerges from the continuous interaction of mental activities and registers as 'a feeling of knowing' the body's response to its own internal states and 'a feeling of knowing' its experiences with its social and physical surroundings (p. 203). Moreover, the self, Damasio asserts, is generated gradually: first the protoself, then the core self and finally the more complex autobiographical self. The process of self begins with the protoself: a neural map of the body in the brain. Neural maps function to create representational images of the body, bodily states of emotions, feelings and external objects. The neural maps do not limit their representations to concrete objects but can also represent visual, abstract and concrete entities as well as the memories and consequences of the interaction with an object from the social or environmental situation. During an interaction, the brain recognizes the object in the outer world, stores a memory of it and relates it to the protoself. Modifications of the protoself occur when the image of the external object is adjusted in the mind and results in 'a feeling of knowing the [specific] object' and differentiates it from the self (p. 203). The feeling of knowing an object produces feelings of ownership.

The string of images generated in the mind from interaction with an object repeatedly registers the body's homeostasis and produces a wordless narrative of events, which consists of an image of the external object, an image of the emotional response and an image of the altered protoself. The nonverbal narrative produces a subtle neural process known as the core self, also referred to as the self-as-object or material 'me'. 'The self comes to mind' in this part of the self process, explains Damasio, 'in the form of images, relentlessly telling a story of such engagements' (p. 203). Moreover, the narrative of images emerges in the core self which, as a result, gains a first-person perspective.

[39] Explaining the difference between maps and images, Damasio says, 'when brains make maps, they are also creating images' (p. 63). Elsewhere, he notes, 'Throughout this book, I use the terms *image*, *map*, and *neural pattern* almost interchangeably' (p. 55). Damasio differentiates between emotions and feelings. Emotions are public bodily responses to environmental situations such as happiness, fear, and anger while feelings are inward, private awareness of emotions and experience (pp. 108-29).

Damasio associates the core self with a simple or core consciousness, which he defines as 'the sense of the here and now, unencumbered by much past and by little or no future. It revolves around a core self and is about personhood but not necessarily identity' (pp. 168-69). Core consciousness provides a simple sense of self and conveys a constantly renewing perception of the present moment. It cannot offer a glimpse into the future, and the only past it recalls is what has just occurred. When the core consciousness is endowed with language and heightened faculties of memory and reasoning, it extends to become an autobiographical consciousness that recognises the present moment within a longer temporal horizon. In addition, the 'extended' or autobiographical consciousness advantageously utilises memories in the present to 'simulate' behaving in a certain manner in the future (p. 102). Damasio proposes that in the normal human adult state the extended consciousness

> manifests itself most powerfully when a substantial part of one's life comes into play and both the lived past and the anticipated future dominate the proceedings. It is about both personhood and identity. It is presided over by an autobiographical self. (pp. 168-69)

The final layer required for the emergence of a conscious self is the autobiographical self, also known as the self-as-knower, the self-as-subject, the reflective self, the protagonist or the 'I'. The autobiographical self is a neural process that is generated from a contemplation of one's past biography and an imagination of one's responses to future situations in a way that is necessary for survival and wellbeing. The perception of the autobiographical self with respect to the objects of the outside world produces emotions and feelings; these feelings distinguish between what is a part of the self and that which is not. Moreover, the autobiographical self projects feelings of agency, ownership and first-person perspective and generates operations that survey the mind.

In brief, Damasio argues that the brain, through an intricate set of neural maps, images and continuous processes, simultaneously produces consciousness and generates a self-process. The self process is introduced to the non-conscious mind to create meaning from its perceived interactions with objects. 'Consciousness offers a direct experience of the mind,' explains Damasio, 'but the broker of the experience is a self, which is an internal and imperfectly constructed informer rather than an external, reliable observer' (p. 177).

In the neurobiology of the self, Damasio notes the interconnectedness of the 'dual notions of self', the autobiographical self/self-as-knower/'I' and the core self/self-as-object/'me' (p. 8). There is a thin line between the two, and yet it remains part of the same self. The self-as-knower has its origin in the self-as-object; it is also a neural process, but the process is spread in the mind. Yet the self-as-knower is more prominent than the self-as-object and is about personhood and identity.

The autobiographical self includes components of identity, i.e., memory records of the recent past and the anticipated future. The memory records of the autobiographical self shape identity into a specific yet continuously changing image or idea based on the essential data such as one's name, family, friends and places lived at. Damasio defines identity as 'The idea each of us constructs of ourself, the image we gradually build of who we are physically and mentally, of where we fit socially'. As for the factors that shape one's image of oneself, Damasio suggests that they are 'based on autobiographical memory over years of experience and [are] constantly subject to remodeling'.[40] Identity is relatively stable and yet is consciously and unconsciously being refashioned contingent on renewed perspectives of personal history and ever-changing future aims, aspirations and commitments. A person with the same name since birth may also be recognized differently at various life stages depending on the function of the mind, behaviour, biography and experiences with the social, physical, spiritual and mental surroundings.

One's identity is placed in the centre of the conscious mind, and the memory records that constitute identity are always active and accessible. Damasio also refers to the significant role 'dispositional records' have in constructing identity. They are memory records of genetically transmitted personal traits, traits moulded by education and environment, and personal behaviour shaped by engagement with the environment. These dispositional records are stored in the brain, and once the brain is influenced by external stimuli it can suggest a variety of responses depending on the situation.

The conscious self ensures wellbeing by maintaining the body's internal environment and by prompting suitable behavioural responses when necessary. The same neurological mechanisms that oversee the maintenance of life processes also regulate ideal living

[40] Damasio, *Feeling*, p. 224.

conditions at the level of the social environment. This is also known as 'social homeostasis' and is fundamental to the welfare of individuals and societies. It is a direct cause of the emergence of laws and political and economic systems. Historical documents reveal that reflective thought has overseen social conduct. The conscious self is capable of reflection and contemplation and therefore reacts to itself and its surroundings, as is evidenced in painting, music and sculpture and in artistic, religious, and mythical texts.

Literary scholars increasingly apply the biological models of consciousness and identity provided by neuroscience to literary texts. Cognitive literary critic Alan Richardson notes that the beginnings of 'the prospects of a cognitive approach to literary theory and criticism' in the 1990s were occurring 'when cognitive scientists and theorists such as Daniel Dennett, Antonio Damasio, and Stephen Pinker were publishing their first widely popular works […] and the officially proclaimed Decade of the Brain had already more than lived up to its name'.[41] A quick measure of Damasio's relevance to the field of cognitive literary studies can be found in the growing number of studies that adopt concepts from his work.[42]

Damasio's detailed account of the self as a complex and shifting process offers a useful explication of the subjectivity of Graham's poems. His distinction between the two parts of the self—the self-as-knower and the self-as-object—provides access to Graham's meditations on her thoughts and feelings of being an embodied mind. Unlike many neuroscientists who deem literature too unscientific to provide any clear insights into the workings of the human brain, Damasio is interested in the relationship of neurology and

[41] Alan Richardson, 'Once Upon a Mind: Literary and Narrative Studies in the Age of Cognitive Science', *Modern Fiction Studies,* 61 (2015), 359-69 (p. 359).

[42] Articles that employ Damasio's concept of an autobiographical self have been written by Anne M. Genzale, Todd O. Williams, and Marilyn C. Wesley. The application of the notion of the autobiographical self in the studies enables a conscious awareness of self in the separate narratives, which consequently promotes cultural or religious understanding. Genzale finds similarities between Tim O'Brien's depiction of memory, imagination, and storytelling in the short-story collection *The Things They Carried* and Damasio's theory that emotions control behaviour and life choices. 'Taken together,' writes Genzale, 'O'Brien and Damasio's work demonstrates how narrative facilitates cultural learning and is therefore essential to survival and well-being' (p. 495). In 'The Autobiographical Self and Embodied Knowledge of God in Christina Rossetti's Time Flies', Williams traces Christina Rossetti's construction of her Christian identity, which he finds to be grounded in the assimilation of mind, body, and environment. Williams suggests that Rossetti's awareness of herself in cognitive terms creates an 'ethical view of nature in which she finds evidence of God's love' (p. 322). In 'The Remembered Future: Neuro-Cognitive Identity in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*' Marilyn Wesley incorporates Damasio's model for a consideration of the self in the novella. Wesley views autobiographical memory to be the foundation of self and narrative, arguing that the cognitively constructed self assimilates information for use in the world.

the body to literature. Damasio's position as the head of the Brain and Creativity Institute highlights his curiosity in the intersection of art and mental creativity. Damasio finds poetry to be useful for explaining cognitive processes because poetry and neuroscience share a similar approach to understanding, explaining and describing the wonders of the self. In fact, Damasio himself quotes parts of Graham's poem, 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (4), in the promotional blurb of *The Feeling of What Happens*, for its demonstration of poetry's capacity to capture the self attempting to act as a witness to its mind.[43]

'Notes' follows Graham's thoughts as she compares her capacity as a poet to that of a professional actor portraying someone else's character onstage. In the poem, Graham is brought a morning coat for her role. As she contemplates the implications of wearing the coat, she realises 'from that moment I existed' as another character 'but I was not I'. Graham's dissatisfaction with the artistic representation lies in its failure to depict her individuality. Graham takes her lead from the theory of method acting proposed by the Russian theatre director, Constantin Stanislavski, to whom the poem is dedicated. To facilitate creative development, Stanislavski urged actors to use their personal lives to express authentic emotions.[44] He also asserted the importance of clothing in facilitating an actor's identification with a role. Graham borrows from Stanislavski the descriptions of the morning coat and speculates in her poem about his questioning, 'what was the personality I should put on when I dressed myself in that decayed old morning coat?'[45] Graham is at odds with Stanislavski's insistence on what she perceives to be a veiling of the actor's sense of self. As she is supposed to step into the life of the character and assume a completely different identity, the question that Graham struggles with is who she was before. Ironically, the moment she is asked to dress up as someone else is also the moment that ignites in Graham the desire to know who the person under the coat really is:

[43] Damasio, *Feeling,* p. vii. The first edition of the book came out in 1999 and it included Graham's praise of the book in the promotional blurb to be explored in the pages to come. However, Graham's promotion of Damasio is removed in the 2000 edition whereas his quotation of her poem remains.
[44] Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, 4 edn (London: Max Reinhardt, 1969).
[45] Ibid., p. 12.

> The question of who I was consumed me.
>
> I became convinced I should not find the image
> of the person that I
> was: Seconds passed. What rose to the surface in me
> plunged out of sight again. And yet I felt
> the moment of my first investiture
> was the moment I began to represent myself—
> the moment I began to live—by degrees—second by
> second—unrelentingly— Oh mind what you're doing! —
>
> do you want to be *covered* or do you want to be *seen*? —
>
> And the garment—how it becomes you!—starry
> with the eyes of
> others,
>
> weeping—[46]

Graham unequivocally admits to the grip that the question of identity has on her. It is a grip that also applies to Damasio; hence, his citation of the lines above in *Feeling*. 'The question of who [she] was consumed [her]' from the inside. She is left with no answers, only emptiness, which is portrayed in the page's whiteness in the double space after she admits she has succumbed to the mystery of identity. She then ventures to a first-person introspection of her mind for answers to who she was before. Despite her scepticism regarding the inward search for 'the image | of the person' that represented her, she still comes close enough to catch a brief glimpse of the mental image of who she once was as it 'rose to the surface in [her]' before it 'plunged out of sight again', leaving her once more discontent.

The descriptions in the lines following the gap deserve attention for their relation to neuroscience. 'What rose' from the biological location in the brain to the 'surface' of her mind is the neural representation of a recollected image of Graham from some time in the past. According to Damasio, the representation continuously generated by neural maps in the brain for the recreation of the self is a part of core consciousness, generated continuously by the brain and pertinent to the autobiographical self's perception of itself.

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[46] Graham, 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (4), in *Materialism*, pp. 59-61 (pp. 60-61).

In fact, Damasio suggests that 'The mere presence of organized images flowing in a mental stream produces a mind' (p. 10). Although the neural image may not be held in the mind for long enough, its significance, signified by the conjunction *yet*, is in its brief existence. Graham could not glimpse the person she once was, 'And yet' the feeling of her individual sense of self was 'felt' and registered in the brain the instant she envisioned wearing the coat to represent another. As a result, Graham declares paradoxically that 'the moment of my first investiture | was the moment I began to represent myself,' not the moment of putting on the garment. The contradiction is resolved when the act of dressing up to assume someone else's identity is viewed as a trigger allowing Graham to question her identity. With this questioning, an awareness of self emerges. It is in this moment that Damasio believes consciousness emerges—when there is knowledge of one's identity—as if, for Graham, it was non-existent before. Accordingly, 'the moment of [Graham's] first investiture' was not when she tried on the coat but when she was formally invested with a sense of conscious self—an instant fit for a ceremonial occasion.

Furthermore, Graham feels that the emergence of her self-consciousness was also 'the moment' she 'began to live—', insistently and meaningfully, 'by degrees—second by | second—unrelentingly—.' The self-awareness generated by witnessing the transitory flash of an image awakens Graham to the presence of her mental operations. In view of this, she decides to live her life and take in it slowly 'by degrees—second by | second'. The dashes reflect and emphasise this deceleration, so she may take more time to look inward to her mental life. Intriguingly, amidst the introspection of the self, Graham not only acts as a witness to her mind but also invokes her poetic license to address the site of rationality in astonishment—'Oh mind what you're doing!'—thereby enabling Graham to attain self-awareness. On the other hand, the line could be read as an apostrophe for the assignment of blame—'Oh mind what you're doing!' —deceiving her into thinking she was someone else while dressed in the coat. In frustration, Graham continues to ask the mind, 'do you want to be *covered* or do you want to be *seen*?—' for its individuality and uniqueness. A mind covered is hidden, sheltered or enclosed.[47] The mind covered and enclosed hinders Graham's meditation on her individuality, as the covered mind obstructs

[47] 'Cover, n.1', in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2018) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/43347?rskey=n9JXtx&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> [accessed 09 March 2018].

her from observing it. Whether the cover is an abstract set of beliefs or, as in this case, a physical 'garment', is of no consequence. As long as some object hinders the self from viewing the mind and its mental processes, the emergence of a conscious awareness of self is prevented.

Damasio proves to be relevant in interpreting the latter line. He advocates for 'the notions of witness and protagonist' because of their capacity to

> illustrate the range of roles that the self assumes in the mind. For one thing, the metaphors can help us see the situation we face when we attempt to understand mental processes. A mind unwitnessed by a self protagonist is still a mind. However, given that the self is our only natural means to know the mind, we are entirely dependent on the self's presence, capabilities, and limits. And given this systematic dependence, it is extremely difficult to imagine the nature of the mind process independently of the self, although from an evolutionary perspective, it is apparent that plain mind processes preceded self processes. The self permits a view of the mind, but the view is clouded. (p. 12)

Damasio asserts that a self able to reflect on its own mental processes is a conscious self. Without this act of witness, the mind still exists, but the view is unclear. In 'Notes', Graham's view of her mind is obstructed by the role imposed on her: Only an autobiographical self is capable of viewing its mind. With no clear view of her mind, she is left unable to feel and express a fully developed sense of an autobiographical self.

The dash after the question, 'do you want to be *covered* or do you want to be *seen*?—', signals the ensuing silence; naturally, the mind can offer no answer. Instead, the double space following the question indicates the passage of time, and the poem jumps to the next scene. Graham has put on the costume that clothes her body and simultaneously 'covers' and muffles her mind, thereby hindering the mind from creating a true sense of the person.

'And the garment—how it becomes you!— ' offers two interpretations of the mind's response to being shrouded. On the one hand, the line compliments Graham, as the coat appears attractive on her. It is pertinent to point out here that clothes are crucial in the presentation of the self, as they reveal information about the person wearing them. However, for Graham to be praised for wearing a man's morning coat reveals more about

the role she occupies than about herself as a unique individual.[48] She appears attractive wearing the 'sand-colored, ruddy, grayish stuff, | covered with spots, dust, mixed in with ash' in a moving performance that brings the character to life on stage. By the end of the performance, the coat seems 'starry | with the eyes of' the 'weeping' audience.

On the other hand, the line, 'And the garment—how it becomes you!', may also be interpreted to mean that the garment comes into existence as Graham. This is another indication of Graham's outstanding portrayal of the role, as there is no identity other than that of the character for the garment to portray. This may be the result of her inability to glimpse an image of herself. Rather than feeling comfortable expressing herself without prior expectations, she feels like an actor compelled to perform onstage for an audience from a written script. The poem reflects Graham's resistance of identity acquired from outside, such as the identity the coat bestows upon her. She prefers to acquire a sense of self from the inside—specifically from the mind—if only she were able to get a glimpse of that image, if only her mind were uncovered. Initially, Graham seemed to disagree with Stanislavski's philosophy of identifying with the character, but until she was able to discern her own sense of self and distinguish it from the character's, she was able to play the role expertly. The moment she discerned her own sense of self was also the moment she 'began to live.'

A consideration of Graham's poems before 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (4) clarifies why the poet was unable to uncover an image of her past self. In previous poems, Graham explores her sense of self through alternative identities, portraying herself through the characters of Eve, Luca Signorelli and a lover from classical times standing on the edge of the cliff, as the discussion in the following chapters will reveal. It is only in this poem that Graham unequivocally questions and wonders about what her identity was up to the point of composing these 'notes on the reality of the self'. Graham's employment of the past tense in 'the question of who I was' confirms her view that these representations are no longer sufficient.

[48] I would like to indicate an implication of Graham's choice of the costume here. Being dressed in the grey morning coat forges for Graham a masculine identity as a poet writing in the footsteps of Keats and Stevenson. Graham reflectively asks if she wants her mind/poems to be '*covered*' and hidden under the work of great male writers or would she rather her mind/poems be 'seen' and appreciated by readers as a female artist? The questioning also signals Graham's need to represent herself without intermediaries.

Jennifer Ashton subtly argues that 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (4) is not a portrayal of Damasio's theory, despite the similarities between the poet and scientist's depictions of the self. One of the points Ashton makes is that cognitive science bears on Graham's elimination of the lyric subject. Through close readings of two poems from *Materialism*, Ashton argues that Graham portrays the self and poetic agency as the result of 'non-intentional material causes'.[49] Instead, she argues for a lyric self that is generated from movements of the wind, rivers and leaves; one that is simultaneously indiscernible from material causes. Graham's praise of Damasio in the blurb of *The Feeling of What Happens*, 'There is no simpler way to say this: read this book to learn who you are,' does not go unnoticed, as Ashton understands Graham's commendation of Damasio's book as a promotion of her own poetry. Before teaching at USC, Damasio was a professor at the University of Iowa (IU) from 1980 to 1985. Here, he was a colleague of Graham's, who started her teaching post at the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1983. The significance of their two-year professional relationship is apparent in their shared perspectives on the self. Ashton tries to diminish the significance of Damasio and Graham's professional relationship and the possible influence of the scientist on Graham's theorization of the self by pointing out that Damasio's *Feeling* was published six years after Graham's *Materialism*. Ashton argues that Graham's lyric self is therefore not based on Damasio's ideas, stating the following:

> Graham's blurb is clearly an allusion to her own work even as it *ostensibly* refers to Damasio's (emphasis added), but while Graham's book appeared in 1993 and Damasio's in 1999, the answer *Materialism* gives to "the question of who I was" is essentially Damasio's account of the brain in *The Feeling of What Happens.* (p. 161)

This is the only sentence attesting to Damasio's impact on Graham. Yet Ashton's effort to indirectly disregard *Materialism* as a depiction of Damasio's cognitively generated self is

[49] Jennifer Ashton, 'Authorial Inattention: Donald Davidson's Literalism, Jorie Graham's *Materialism*, and Cognitive Science's Embodied Minds', in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 146-197. Ashton argues that indeterminacy and the expectation that the reader will participate in constructing meaning distinguish postmodern poetry from modernist poetry (see pp. 146-47). Ashton bases her claim on the differentiation between the author's intended meaning for a text and its effect on the reader. This is a difference, Ashton argues, that twentieth-century poetic theorization has continuously confused. See pages 162-69 where Ashton discusses the first 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' and 'The Surface' from *Materialism*. Further references to Ashton's 'Authorial Inattention' are given after quotations in the text.

seen in the claim Ashton makes directly following the above quote, in which she uses two other poems from *Materialism* to contrast Graham's portrayal of the self with Damasio's. Ashton offers no clarification for her choice to bypass 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (4), which is central to explicating Graham's ideas about the self (pp. 162-69). According to Ashton, Graham, unlike Damasio, 'portrays the self as something that is at once an *effect* of nonintentional material causes and indistinguishable from them. And in the course of the portrayal, poetic agency as such becomes in *Materialism* one more nonintentional material cause' (p. 161). An examination of Ashton's argument reveals that the lyric self portrayed in the 'Notes' cited by Damasio does not fit neatly into her argument of an eliminated self as 'an *effect* of nonmaterial causes and indistinguishable from them'. Ashton's attempt to avoid being seen as contradicting herself is indicated in the footnote to her discussion, where she claims, 'I don't mean to suggest that Graham couldn't have known about Damasio's work at the time she was writing the poems of *Materialism*. […] Graham also overlapped with Damasio during her tenure at the University of Iowa from 1983-1999' (p. 196). It would have been an illuminating discussion if Ashton had discussed the implications of cognitive materialism for the eradication of lyric subjectivity in Graham's poem as an illustration of Damasio's idea of the brain's projection of a self. This could have been accompanied by a demonstration of the differences between Ashton's reading and that of Damasio's. The preceding discussion of the poem picks up where Ashton left off.

An examination of the dates of Graham and Damasio's time at IU and the dates of their book publications reveals that, in *Materialism* (1993), Graham anticipates Damasio's ideas of the autobiographical self that first appeared in *The Feeling of What Happens* (1999). A curious observation regarding Graham's professional relationship with Damasio is that it coincides with the shift in her poetry that occurred after the modernist poems of *Hybrids* (1980) and *Erosion* (1983), which is apparent in *The End of Beauty* (1987). Whether Damasio had an active influence on Graham's changing conceptions of self cannot be established. However, the timing of the shift in Graham's poetry does hint at some influence. The shift suggests Graham's openness to a neurological approach to investigations of the self alongside traditional literary approaches.

The citations between the colleagues signal the interconnectedness between neuroscience and poetry. Smart professionals seek good connections with their peers,

and one excellent way to achieve this in academic circles is to cite each other favourably. This being noted, it is pertinent to clarify that the thesis is not about a dialogue between the scientist and the poet. This work illustrates the lyric self according to Damasio's model. Nevertheless, the question of what Graham has to offer cognitive science can be responded to briefly. Poets put into language the realities that scientists are not privileged to seeing first hand. Long before the emergence of neuroscience and MRI scans, the arts, including literature, philosophy, and music, have offered insights into the mind and the self. Graham herself believes there is a need for language to speak of and about these silent mental experiences of thoughts, feelings and emotions. She comments as follows:

> Just because emotion—or thought—sometimes grows wordless does not imply that words fail that emotion or thought. It implies that certain textures of experience are by their nature silent. This is an issue that interests and perhaps confuses much contemporary poetry. […] There are, of course, some things whose nature is not linguistic (thoughts that dwell "too deep for tears"). One of the interesting things about poetic art is that it attempts to include those in its body as well. […] The astonishments of poetry, for me, reside most vividly in its capacity to make a reader receive utterable and unutterable realities at once.[50]

In asserting that art can articulate the 'unutterable realities' that science cannot always easily convey, Graham goes beyond Damasio's theories that explain the 'utterable' neurological basis of selfhood. Literature represents psychological and emotional states, while cognitive science tries to explain the biological and operational bases of these mental states. Since cognitive science has benefited the understanding of literature, we find that literary scholars and researchers are increasingly applying the biological models of consciousness and identity provided by cognitive science to literary texts. Accordingly, the cognitive approach of this work proves to be useful, as it provides a language for the investigation of Graham's poems, which critics such as Birkerts have acknowledged but

[50] Graham, 'Poetic Statement: At the Border', in *American Women Poets in the 21st Century: Where Lyric Meets Language,* ed. by Claudia Rankine and Juliana Spahr (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), pp. 146-48 (pp. 147-48).

failed to expand upon. Neuroscience, more than everyday language, is equipped to describe the domain of the mind and its mental experiences that poetry conveys.

This work's idea to link poetry to neuroscience was inspired by the NPR Science Friday Broadcast interview, 'The Passionate Mind: Emotion, Cognition, and the Construction of the Self', which brought together Damasio, Graham and the philosopher Thomas Metzinger as part of the University of Utah's second annual symposium in science and literature in 2003. This interview revealed surprising commonalities in the conceptions of self held by the neuroscientist, poet and philosopher. The three academics shared their views of self and consciousness in a discussion that attempted to connect philosophy and science. In the interview, Damasio discussed the 'monitoring ability,' of humans, observing that 'We are conscious and have a self as a by-product of this enormous ability of the brain to monitor the very different functions of our bodies.' Graham agrees with Damasio:

> There is a way in which the imagination is an instrument for trawling through an experience in the world with a sort of charged emotional, intellectual openness […] It does seem crucial in a poem—and the best poems exhibit this [….]—that what is being monitored is not only a phenomenon in the outside world, but what one's own heart is feeling, what one's own muscles are doing,[…] it is very moving to hear Dr Damasio's descriptions because it's not fair to say poets knew it all along, although one would have to say that from Shakespeare to Dickinson to Keats, there's no doubt, these people knew how to access consciousness and to create very complicated constructed selves.[51]

Graham's poems describe and enact a self that functions as a monitor of its mind. In this sense, the 'very complicated constructed' self that Graham mentions here can also be interpreted as denoting the self's cognitive structure and not a given social or linguistic construct.

While 'Notes' illustrates parallelism with Damasio's cognitively structured self, other poems discussed from a cognitive perspective in the ensuing chapters do not illustrate such similarities. However, reading the poems in light of Damasio's conceptualisation offers a viable framework for a comparison of Graham's lyric self with Damasio's

[51] Graham, Damasio, and Metzinger, 'The Passionate Mind'.

conceptualisation. It is also plausible that Graham has continued to develop an implicit model of the mind which may, at certain points, diverge from Damasio's. Graham herself may also have contributed to Damasio's thinking on the mind. Addressing Ira Flatow, Thomas Metzinger and Damasio, Graham explains her stance on the lyric self:

> The solid self is no one's operative illusion, and I think that we're not combating that here. What we're trying to do is figure out, you know, what goes into the construction, whether it's a poem, a work of art, a work of philosophy or, you know, a neurological undertaking that exhibits the characteristics that momentarily coalesce into a self, and then whether that momentary coalescence can last long enough to love or do good or to do harm.[52]

Graham observes the mind-body relation in her poetics: 'A new idea makes you physically afraid, your body changes. Hope is lodged in your skin, in your cellwork. I cannot even begin to understand the division commonly drawn (and honestly experienced by many people) between thought and emotion.'[53]

1.3 Cognitive Literary Studies and New Lyric Studies

Critics Mary Crane and Alan Richardson have done much to shape the scattered work conducted by researchers and academics in the domain of cognitive literary studies into a field with a common focus. Although they may not have been the first critics to engage in cognitive literary criticism, Crane and Richardson are two of a small number of scholars to acknowledge the intersection of cognitive science and literature in a developing interdisciplinary field with a steadily growing body of pioneering criticism in 'Literary Studies and Cognitive Science: Toward a New Interdisciplinarity' (1999).[54] In this key essay, Crane and Richardson establish the foundation of cognitive literary studies by tracing its development from the 1970s, mapping the steadily growing body of criticism and compiling a list of the possible benefits of the cognitive approach to literary studies.

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Graham, 'Pleasure', in *Singular Voices: American Poetry Today,* ed. by Stephen Berg (New York: Avon Books, 1985), pp. 89-94 (p. 90).
[54] Mary Thomas Crane and Alan Richardson, 'Literary Studies and Cognitive Science: Toward a New Interdisciplinarity', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal,* 32 (1999), 123-40.

However, the new field of study lacked a defining description until 2004, when Richardson first proposed a definition that has been highly cited ever since.

In 'Studies in Literature and Cognition: A Field Map' (2004), Richardson suggests that the field of cognitive literary studies encompasses 'the work of literary critics and theorists vitally interested in cognitive science and neuroscience, and therefore with a good deal to say to one another, whatever their differences'.[55] A cognitive reading of literary texts, suggests Richardson, provides new interpretive potentials and theoretical orientations based on what cognitive science, neuroscience, and literature have 'to say to one another'.[56] Richardson emphasises the dialogic nature of the discipline over its theories or methodologies, as the field is broad and incorporates too diverse a variety of approaches to be encompassed by one uniting theory or methodology. Isabel Jaén and Julien J. Simon suggest a similar description of cognitive literary studies as 'an interdisciplinary initiative that integrates humanistic and scientific approaches and methodologies into a powerful tool to explore the complex dynamics between cognition and literature.' They agree with Richardson that it is 'a field that is based on a dialogue among a variety of disciplines'.[57] Lisa Zunshine, in the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* (2015), which commences with Richardson's 2004 definition, notes that 'This dialogic, decentralized view has shaped the trajectory of cognitive approaches to literature over the last decade'.[58] Zunshine stresses 'openness' as a central aspect of the cognitive literary field of study because, she asserts, 'the entry point into the field can be as individualized as one wishes'.[59] Although the field of cognitive literary studies has been

[55] Alan Richardson, 'Studies in Literature and Cognition: A Field Map', in *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture, and Complexity,* ed. by Alan Richardson and Ellen Spolsky (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 1-29 (p. 2).
[56] Ibid.
[57] Isabel Jaén and Julien J. Simon, 'An Overview of Recent Developments in Cognitive Literary Studies', in *Cognitive Literary Studies: Current Themes and New Direction* ed. by Isabel Jaén and Julien Jacques Simon (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), pp. 13-32 (p. 13).
[58] Lisa Zunshine, 'Introduction to Cognitive Literary Studies', in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies,* ed. by Lisa Zunshine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 1-9 (p. 1).
[59] Ibid., p. 4. Zunshine asserts that cognitive literary studies resists a unified theory of cognition and literature for a number of reasons. A primary reason is that the knowledge we currently possess about the mind is still limited. Moreover, the field's range of interests and strategies makes it difficult to unify. Because cognitive literary studies take their ideas from various disciplines, such as psychology, neuroscience, philosophy of mind, artificial intelligence, and computer science, the result is a broad range of interests and applications. That is not to say that no shared approaches and commonalities exist within the field. For one thing, many of the studies present the mind as embodied, located not only in the brain

attacked for its lack of a unifying theory and methodology, it is precisely this absence of a uniting theory and practise that has allowed critics and researchers to investigate new connections and directions stemming from the nexus of science—in particular, neuroscience—and literature.[60]

Richardson, Jaen, Simon and Zunshine, in their examinations, reveal that the encounter between cognitive science and literature is a conversational, dialogic one. Building on the varying approaches to cognition and literature, I suggest that an interpretation of identity in Graham's poetry utilising Damasio's framework of the conscious self fits into the dialogic aspect of this interdisciplinary field.

Critics have also varied in their interpretation of the goals of cognitive literary studies.[61] Richardson and Francis F. Steen contend that 'the approach aims more to supplement than to supplant the current approaches and methodologies' to literary texts.[62] They explain that cognitive literary critics have gained authority because their efforts to interpret literary texts and identities complement existing culturalist and historicist approaches. According to Richardson and Steen, the widespread cultural and historicist methods of interpretation have failed to address the ways in which concepts such as self, identity, and ethics function and the reasons behind such functions, whereas cognitive literary studies posit answers to these queries. They explain that

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and nervous system but also determined by the sensory organs. The various approaches also share the view that the mind extends beyond the body, hence the term 'extended mind'.

[60] Some of the critics who have offered informative surveys of the field and its variations of theory and methodologies are Alan Richardson, 'Once Upon a Mind: Literary and Narrative Studies in the Age of Cognitive Science', *Modern Fiction Studies,* 61 (2015), 359-69; Richardson, 'Cognitive Literary Criticism', in *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. by Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 544-556; Richardson, 'Studies in Literature and Cognition: A Field Map', in *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture, and Complexity*, ed. by Alan Richardson and Ellen Spolsky (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 1-29; Richardson and Francis F. Steen, 'Literature and the Cognitive Revolution: An Introduction', *Poetics Today,* 23 (2002), 1-8; Elizabeth F. Hart, 'The Epistemology of Cognitive Literary Studies', *Philosophy and Literature*, 25.2 (2001), 314-334; Richardson, 'Cognitive Science and the Future of Literary Studies', *Philosophy and Literature*, 23.1 (1999), 157-173; Mary Thomas Crane and Alan Richardson, 'Literary Studies and Cognitive Science: Toward a New Interdisciplinary', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal,* 32 (1999), 123-40; and Joseph M., and Eugene R. Kintgen, 'The Cognitive Paradigm in Literary Studies', *College English*, 55.8 (1993), 841–857.

[61] Furthermore, the emerging field has been attacked for other limitations, one of which is critics not agreeing to a title. It's been referred to as 'cognitive literary studies', 'cognitive literary science', 'cognitive literary theory', and 'cognitive literary criticism'. The title variation depends mostly on the larger focus and whether the cognitive science is in service of literature or vice versa.

[62] Richardson and Steen, pp. 2-3.

> Contemporary theories of literature and culture, in our view, have made remarkable progress in demystifying traditional humanist and religious concepts of supposedly timeless categories, such as self, identity, and morality, to posit instead historically contingent and culturally constructed entities. What the discipline has been significantly less successful in addressing, on the other hand, is why and how this rhetoric works. The relative failure on these counts is linked to the intense reluctance of literary and cultural studies to engage with the natural as a category that has its own history, forming the conditions of possibility for the cultural.[63]

Given Richardson and Steen's views, this work proposes a cognitive 'supplement' to charting the construction of self and identity. The reading of Graham's poems through Damasio's theory illustrates an innovative conception of the self that is cognitively structured and embodied and that stands in complex relations to history, culture and science.

The idea of the interdisciplinary research has been the topic of discussion by scholars outside the cognitive literary field. Marjorie Perloff, in the presidential lecture to the 2006 MLA convention, 'It Must Change', stated that literary studies have become 'other-disciplinary rather than interdisciplinary', with poetry secondary to other fields, such as history and anthropology.[64] Perloff's call for a re-evaluation of the course of lyric studies sparked a response in a cluster of essays known as the *New Lyric Studies*.[65] In these essays, scholars advanced ideas for making the study of poetry distinct again as a discipline. For instance, Oren Izenberg asserts that 'poetry is an extraordinary kind of thinking' and calls for literary studies to be approached from an interdisciplinary perspective—precisely, from scientific 'disciplines that give accounts of how the mind works. […] [and] that deal with the nature of mental phenomena and their relation not so much as the determinations of culture as to the causal structure of reality'.[66] Izenberg believes in new readings of poetry that have the potential to clarify how reality is experienced in the mind and what more qualified a field than that of cognitive literary studies exists in which to elucidate the mental domain?

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[63] Ibid, p. 3.
[64] Marjorie Perloff, 'Presidential Address 2006: It Must Change', *PMLA,* 122 (2007), 652-62 (p. 655).
[65] The *New Lyric Studies* appeared in the January 2008 issue of the *PMLA*.
[66] Oren Izenberg, 'Poems Out of Our Heads', *PMLA,* 123 (2008), 216-22 (p. 217).

1.4. Thesis outline

This study aims to investigate the chronological evolution of Graham's meditations on her sense of self and identity by incorporating Damasio's notion of the self as a witness to its mind. This study also explores the stylistic changes that correspond to the evolution of Graham's views of the self. In Chapter 2, this manuscript outlines the politics and poetics of Graham's forty-year career and the biographical context out of which it emerged. Graham's body of poetry is then divided into two main stages, each covered in two chapters, yielding four chapters in total. The first stage examines Graham's early volumes of philosophical and modernist poems in the first seven volumes of poetry published in the 1980s and 1990s. Damasio's ideas function as a comparison point for the poems. The contrast reveals what exactly the lyric self lacks that prevents it from portraying a well-defined autobiographical self.

Chapter 3 focuses on poems from *Hybrids*, *Erosion*, *The End of Beauty*, and *Region of Unlikeness*. I argue that the object of the meditations in the poems is an impersonal mind to which Graham has only indirect access through reflection on what these poems make happen. The common thread linking the first four volumes is a self which is hidden behind objects and mythological figures. Graham is the author of the poems, yet her voice remains concealed. Chapter 4 investigates poems from *Materialism*, *The Errancy*, *Swarm* and *Never.* The quest to investigate identity leads her to deeply introspective meditations that represent Graham in contemplation of her thoughts in poems from these four volumes. These introspective meditations, although they acknowledge the existence of the body and the outside world, rarely seem to influence the self or identity.

The second stage of Graham's poetry witnesses a focal shift to an autobiographical self that, in Graham's words, has a 'more sophisticated understanding of its simultaneously illusory and essential nature'.[67] This shift is the focus of chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 explores the final section of *Never* followed by meditations from *Overlord* and *Sea Change*. In these poems, the impact of the external world and the fear of the anticipated future is portrayed as physiological pain. The meditations are now situated in the present, and they acknowledge the body and the outside world and their influence on identity

[67] Graham, *The Glorious Thing,* (para. 7).

formation. In Chapter 6, which focuses on *Place* and *Fast*, Graham constructs her identity as an ethical human being, mother and poet based on her meditations on past events from her life and an apocalyptic vision towards the recent future. Through the analysis of a selection of poems, I suggest that the lyric self of these poems extends and complicates Damasio's autobiographical self, which is aware of its identity and contemplates a personal and collective future. The poems chosen for this work reveal the self evolution of a hidden, impersonal self to a developed autobiographical self.

Chapter 2 Graham and the Politics and Poetics of the Self

In a 1997 profile for *The New Yorker*, Mark Strand finds Graham's poetry to be 'dense and so crowded with thinking.' Comparing her early poems to that of her contemporaries, Strand remarks that, 'Too many poets write a kind of chatter, and after you've finished the poem you feel you know everything this person is going to say for the next ten years'. Strand further remarks that, 'American poetry is full of "Oh, poor me"' but 'Jorie doesn't do that. I think she's carved out such a powerful oeuvre that it's unignorable'.[1] Graham's remarkable body of poetry has extended to include many more volumes of poetry since Strand's remark. Her oeuvre displays Graham's view of the purpose of lyric poetry in the foregrounding of selfhood and identity as changing and in-process. The position of the lyric self is shaped by Graham's technique of inhabiting the present moment and by the personal events in her life. This chapter offers a timeline of the significant events and achievements in Graham's life to provide a biographical context for the poems. Moreover, the chapter introduces a broad view of the critical reception of Graham's body of work.

Graham's preoccupation with selfhood stems from her personal experience with constant relocation throughout her childhood, teens and early adulthood. As a result, her sense of self naturally altered with the change of place, culture and language. Born Jorie Pepper on the 9th of May 1950 in New York to American parents Bell and Beverly Pepper, Graham moved to France at three months of age, followed by another move at the age of two to Italy, where Graham remained until the end of her childhood years. Graham started her education at the private Montessori School and then was taught in French at the Lycée Chateaubriand secondary school of Rome.[2] In the French school, Graham, who says she began to read philosophy before she had started to read novels, chose to major in philosophy. Reading Stendhal and Marx shaped her way of thinking early on:

[1] Mark Strand is quoted in Stephen Schiff, 'Big Poetry', *New Yorker,* 14 July 1997, p. 62.
[2] My summary of Graham's biography is collected from a number of sources: biography by the Poetry Foundation, < https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/jorie-graham.>, *The New Yorker* interview with Stephen Schiff, and the interview with Thomas Gardner in the *Paris Review*.

> at age 13—before I knew I *had* a body! –I was reading Marleau-Ponty and being asked to write papers on the difference between *reason* and *passion*! […] By the time I was a bit older, I no longer felt like "reading philosophy" […] and was astonished to find that novels obliterated the "categories" with great passion and complexity. Then, when I finally came to poetry, it really seemed like a ground situated effortlessly between those fields, those different descriptions of the world.[3]

Graham's learning in the French education system explains what might be described as an obsession with the grand questions of 'who I am' and 'what it all means' in her poetry. Understanding Graham's thought pattern may clarify the lyric poetry's density of representing the self—a complexity that benefits from a cognitive reading. No wonder readers and critics have dubbed her work arduous, for it is this philosophical expression of self that readers find inaccessible.

The occupations of the Peppers were diverse and influential. Graham's late Irish Catholic father—Curtis 'Bill' Pepper—was the Mediterranean war correspondent for *Newsweek*, and her Jewish mother, Beverly Pepper, is an internationally known painter and sculptor. Her mother's sculptures of the natural world have shaped and given rise to the domination of nature in Graham's poems, whether as a setting or as the theme.[4] Her father's career in journalism instilled in her a love for language and brought her in contact with influential people. The Peppers held parties attended by journalists, artists, painters, photographers and filmmakers. The expatriate life exposed Graham to European culture and languages.

Graham's first-hand immersion in European arts, and her exuberant knowledge of mythology and history stem from these years spent playing inside the churches of Rome and the Roman forum.[5] Luca Signorelli, Gustav Klimt and Jackson Pollock, among other

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[3] Hobart Student Association, and others, 'A Conversation About *Materialism*', p. 5.
[4] Graham has also collaborated with painters and artists. *To a Friend Going Blind* (2002) is a specially designed book in which 'To a Friend Going Blind' is written on pattern pieces bound by measuring tape to complement the poem's words and central metaphor. The poem—which employs stitching as a metaphor—originally appeared in *Erosion* and later was published in the inventive book carrying the poem's title and designed by Susan Angebranndt. Each of the 50 books that were printed had a different pattern piece. Graham later collaborated with her mother Beverly Pepper in the artistic book *In the Pasture* (2001) designed with bronze casing written to accompany the elegiac poem with the same title. In *Photographs and Poems* (1998), Graham wrote poems for Jeannette Montgomery Barron's still life photos.
[5] Gardner, 'Jorie Graham, the Art of Poetry No. 85', (paragraphs 55, 76).

painters, are the subject of her ekphrasis poems, while replications of paintings adorn the covers of many of her books. Her book covers reflect her European sensibilities and her attraction to the arts, for many of them use reproductions of famous paintings. The artistic covers have much to inform. For one, the reproduction of art on the books' covers communicates the idea that the publishers, and perhaps Graham herself, think of her poetry as appealing to an audience interested in the arts in general – opera, painting, music, and great literature. Maybe the art also marks a certain nervousness that her poetry is hard to categorise and therefore needs additional signification to indicate its high seriousness. The reproductions may be a way of questioning her work among other artists' representations. Spiegelman notes '[Graham's] poems, like the covers of her books, assay figural description and landscape painting but refuse completion'.[6]

When Graham was seventeen, she pursued her studies in philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris; but she left after the student strikes of 1968. Taking part in the student strikes, Graham was among the students expelled by the French government for being part of the demonstrations.[7] At this point in her life, Graham decided to return to the United States for the first time since her parents' move to Rome. Graham decided to attend New York University to study filmmaking. There is a well-known story from Graham's interviews about listening—for the first time, by coincidence as she walked down the corridors of NYU—to a reading by M.L. Rosenthal of T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. She instantly fell in love with poetry. This is how she remembers the event:

> One day, I was looking for some new editing room and I ended up in the wrong hallway and I heard these lines of Eliot's flowing out of this doorway— 'I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. / I do not think that they will sing to me.' And I just went into this huge, long classroom and sat and listened. I had

[6] Willard Spiegelman, 'Jorie Graham's *"New Way of Looking" '*, in *How Poets See the World: The Art of Description in Contemporary Poetry,* ed. by Willard Spiegelman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 173-200 (p. 175).

[7] Talking to Thomas Gardner, Graham recounted the expulsion: 'a student rebellion began which, as workers and union joined the student movement, caused the city of Paris to shut down for almost a month, and, eventually caused the government to fall. The authorities, after a while, grew rather irritated, and all foreign students – especially those who were repeatedly being rounded up and arrested – most especially Americans and Germans – were asked to leave. They believed – Berkeley, Columbia were just exploding – that the foment came from outside dissident movements. At any rate, I came to the U.S.' See Gardner, 'Jorie Graham, the Art of Poetry No. 85' (paragraphs 78, 82).

> never heard poetry in English before. It was like something being played in the key my soul recognized.[8]

However, Graham did not pursue her newly initiated interest in poetry at the time; she graduated with a BA in filmmaking in 1973. That same year, she married her childhood friend, William Graham, son of Katherine and Philip Graham, the owners of *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post*.[9] Her wedding was attended by Ted Kennedy and Robert McNamara. The couple moved to Washington DC to live with the Graham family, where typical family dinner talk was about the Watergate scandal. 'Every night around the dinner table there were these incredible moral discussions that could have been straight out of Sophocles', Graham recalls, 'about what is the duty of an individual, what is the duty of an institution to its country'.[10] The Graham family dinner talks can be seen in Graham's affiliation of poetry with the role of individual and collective accountability, which permeates the majority of the life work. The couple then moved again to Los Angeles, where Bill worked as a public defender.

In 1976, unhappy in her marriage and looking for purpose in life, Graham decided to take her passion in poetry more seriously. She accordingly enrolled at the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop. At first, Graham commuted between LA and Iowa, but she settled down in Iowa after her divorce from Bill Graham in 1977. From the start of her time at the Writers' Workshop, Graham started to compose poetry which was published in key literary journals and won her the Academy of American Poets Prize in 1977. During her time at the writing school, Graham met and married poet and essayist James Galvin, a fellow student at the time. Graham received a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in poetry in 1978; this was followed by Discovery/The Nation award and a MacArthur grant and Fellowship in 1979. After her graduation from Iowa, Graham held a few short-term positions at various universities in Kentucky, California and New York.

The eighties witnessed the rise of Graham's reputation with the publication of her first volume, *Hybrids* (1980). It was published by Princeton University Press two years after her

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[8] Schiff, p. 64.
[9] Graham, who was married briefly to first husband Martin Flusser in 1973, assumes her second husband's surname from a marriage that lasted from 1973-77. The poet remains in good terms with the Graham family. The Ecco Press, the main publisher of her poetry volumes, is part owned by Steve Graham, Bill Graham's younger brother. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/07/14/big-poetry>.
[10] Schiff, p. 64.

graduation from the Writers' Workshop, while she was living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. That same year, Graham was awarded the Pushcart Prize for the poem 'I Was Taught Three'. She also received the young poetry prize from *Poetry Northwest* and a grant from the Ingram-Merrill Foundation in 1981. *Hybrids* received favourable reviews, including one by Margaret Gibson, who acknowledged the beauty and difficulty of its poems. 'Weighted towards mind and observation,' notes Gibson, 'these [are] distanced poems, whose difficult language catches and moves us with its beauty'.[11]

Hybrids is thematically preoccupied with questions of epistemology, i.e., with questions of knowing and understanding the guiding principles of life for the spirit and for the material. While Graham may refer to a few incidents from her personal life, the detached voice relaying the poems and the distance between the events of the poems and the speaker render them modernist. Modernists felt that the personal life of the poet and the public themes that poetry conveys are from two irreconcilable worlds which must be kept separate. The reference to personal incidents turns into a meditation on larger events from deep history.

In 'I Was Taught Three', Graham meditates on the tree outside her window and wonders, 'What is the idea | that governs blossoming?' Watching her father untangle some water hoses in 'Netting', and contemplating human connections, Graham understands humanity to be 'a shadow map, a future kept alive by | met commitments'. Graham looks at the 'Framing' of a photograph of her four-year old self and considers the photo: From 'Within, it would have been a mere event,' but as she considers it part of history, her perspective shifts and the events of the photo become 'destructive as the past remains, | becomes, by knowing more than we do'. In the future, Graham believes we will know more about the consequences of our present times on the course of history, as they will be past actions by then. In a poem written 'For Mark Rothko', Graham watches a Persian-red bird and contemplates the limits of human knowledge: We possess knowledge, 'but then how far | have we come?'[12]

[11] Margaret Gibson, 'Review of *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts*', *Library Journal* (1980), p. 1170.
[12] Graham, 'I Was Taught Three', in *Hybrids*, p. 4; 'Netting', in *Hybrids*, p. 23; 'Framing', in *Hybrids*, p. 35; 'For Mark Rothko', in *Hybrids*, pp. 36-37 (p. 36).

In the first poem of her first book, Graham presents readers with a declaration regarding how the world works based on the function of physical, material objects, as if her approach to enact the abstract self cannot be undertaken other than through the material.

The Way Things Work

is by admitting
or opening away.
[…]
The way things work
is by solution,
resistance lessened or
increased and taken
advantage of.
The way things work
is that we finally believe
they are there,
common and able,
to illustrate themselves.
[…]
The way things work
is that eventually
something catches.

The poem is an invitation to readers to question how meaning is generated and an expression of belief in the readers' ability to take part in the poem. The poem communicates the idea that understanding how the world works entails understanding process. Graham asks the reader to be in the mindset of approaching natural and material objects of the world in terms of their function. As if set in a laboratory, the poem offers scientific insight into four ways in which the material and immaterial objects of the world function. The first and third are similar: We know of these objects because we may witness them either as they expand before the eyes or as they illustrate themselves to us. Electricity is unseen, yet we trust that it exists, and it is crucial to everyday life. Other things function for the advantage of humanity. Scientists and inventors involve themselves in finding solutions to how these objects may work best, with no resistance, for the benefit of all. Finally, objects can hold on to other things for them to work and they can seize our attention; they can catch things and us.

'The Way Things Work' relies on the line to control the flow of the poem and to create closure. The poem visually appears to be a single-spaced stanza written in short lines. 'The Way Things Work' also appears as the first poem in Graham's first book of selected poems: *The Dream of the Unified Field* (1995).[13] However, only 10 of the original 45 poems of *Hybrids* make their way into *The Dream of the Unified Field*, and they do not appear in the order in which they were originally arranged. Graham may have shifted this smaller group around in relation to each other to create a special effect for the reader. Nevertheless, the fact that 'The Way Things Work' retained its original place as the opening poem to the volume and the collection speaks to its value in representing Graham's belief regarding objects' function.

However, a striking change takes place in Graham's second book of selected poems, *From the New World* (2015), in which Graham repositions 'The Way Things Work' from first in the volume to fifth.[14] The change indicates that, in the 35 years separating the appearance of *Hybrids* (1980) and *From the New World* (2015), a change has occurred in Graham's sensibility with respect to 'the way things work' in the world and in poetry. *From the New World* shares only four poems from *Hybrid*s with the *Dream of the Unified Field*: 'Tennessee June', 'Strangers', 'The Geese' and 'Mind'. The latter three poems have much to tell us about Graham's stance with respect to the self, mind and the world, and it will be accordingly discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. 'Tennessee June', the opening poem of the second collection of poems, exemplifies Graham's vision of the mind and the self:

Tennessee June

This is the heat that seeks the flaw in everything
and loves the flaw.
Nothing is heavier than its spirit,
nothing more landlocked than the body within it.
Its daylilies grow overnight, our lawns
bare, then falsely gay, then bare again. Imagine
your mind wandering without its logic,
your body the sides of a riverbed giving in . . .

[13] Graham, *The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems 1974-1994* (Hopewell, New Jersey: Ecco Press, 1995), p. 3.
[14] Graham, *From the New World: Poems 1976-2014* (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 2015), pp. 10-11.

The poem proposes that the human desire to know is like a summer heat that 'seeks the flaw in everything | and loves the flaw'. Asking the reader to 'Imagine | the mind wandering without its logic' is an invitation to envision the power and limits of the phenomenon felt as the mind, which we know so little about. A survey of her first four volumes—*Hybrids, Erosion*, *The End of Beauty* and *Region of Unlikeness*—reveals that Graham is intrigued by the mind as a component of the human self. The poet, in these early poems, observes 'a' mind but has not yet assumed the role of an a self-conscious protagonist witnessing her own mind. Instead, the poems portray an imaginary boundary between the speaker and the world of the poem, which is a signal of the distance between the poetry's public themes and Graham's personal life—a distance which gradually diminishes in her later work. The significance of these poems is that they portray the origin of Graham's interest in the self through the workings of its mind. These poems ask deeply philosophical and epistemological questions about the self's existence and its relation to the objects of the world.

In her first essay 'Some Notes on Silence', which was written to precede a group of poems from *Hybrids* that were anthologized in *19 New American Poets of the Golden Gate,* Graham points to Wallace Stevens's notion of the poem as an act of the mind: 'the poet using the […] poem—the process of writing the poem—in order to find what will, for now, suffice, moves me much more deeply. It changes me'.[15] Graham was alluding to the poem 'Of Modern Poetry' in which Stevens writes, 'The poem of the mind in the act of finding | What will suffice'.[16] For Graham, a poem is the place where she works through her thoughts to find an adequate sense of self; for this reason, she subscribes to Stevens' description. A poem, Graham asserts, works to establish an identification with others or to establish a unique individuality. 'Almost every poem illustrates one of the two impulses we experience', Graham remarks: 'to be united with the unknown, to break out of this separateness, or to wrench a uniqueness, an identity, from the all-consuming whole'.[17]

[15] Graham, 'Some Notes on Silence', in *19 New American Poets of the Golden Gate*, ed. by Philip Dow (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), pp. 414-20 (p. 419). 'The Way Things Work', 'Drawing Wildflowers', 'Netting', 'An Artichoke for Montesquieu', and 'How Morning Glories Could Bloom at Dusk' are poems from *Hybrids* that appeared in Dow's anthology.
[16] Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), p. 239.
[17] Graham, 'Some Notes on Silence', p. 418.

The two roles poetry Graham sees to befit poetry for a fashioning of identity foresee her response to Sarah Howe about the sense of self informing her poems. Her view that poems 'wrench a uniqueness' is essentially a pursuit of individuality, while poems' power to establish 'unit[y] with the unknown' is to be a member of the human community. The essay illustrates the poet's consistency in her view of the dual function of poetry toward the lyric self from early on.

Other than 'Some Notes on Silence', Graham has written only two essays, 'Pleasure' and 'Poetic Statement: At the Border'. In addition, Graham has written three introductions; two when she was an editor for anthologies and one as the guest editor of the journal *Ploughshares* for the winter 2001-2002 edition.[18] Graham's resistance to prose writing is noticeable. Poets compose essays to complement their poetry, to reflect on their work, to justify their poetic composition, and to create an audience. For Graham not to write such essays is to leave the questioning to the poetry; the poet's primary production. However, Graham has given numerous interviews, that can be found in print and online, giving insight into her poetics and principles.

Following the publication of *Hybrids* 1980, Graham was a Bunting Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1982-83. There she first met the famous critic and scholar Helen Vendler when she attended one of her classes. Vendler has long championed Graham's poetry, and her positive reviews did a great deal to start off Graham's career. When Vendler was attacked for her promotion of Graham's poems, she asserted that '[Graham] has won many prizes with which I had nothing to do'. She added, 'All of these poets who like her work, whether it's John Ashbery or Charles Wright or James Tate—they were liking it because it was good work.'[19] Graham's poems were also published in *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* over the years, which also helped her reputation as a contemporary poet.

Despite the early recognition of her talent and skill, Graham felt unconnected to her home country for many years following the move to New York in 1969. 'I've always felt a

[18] Graham, 'Introduction', in *The Best American Poetry 1990,* ed. by David Lehman and Jorie Graham (Collier Books, 1990); 'Introduction', in *Earth Took of Earth: A Golden Ecco Anthology*, ed. by Jorie Graham (Hopewell, N.J.: Ecco Press, 1996), pp. ix-xviii; 'Introduction: Something of Moment', *Ploughshares,* 27 (2001-2002), 7-9.
[19] Schiff, pp. 65-66.

bit of a voyeur in America', a mature Graham confesses looking back at her younger self.[20] The constant relocation between New York, Washington DC, California and Iowa is reflected in the detached lyric speaker of Graham's books of the eighties and nineties. Moreover, because she felt like an outsider in America, Graham's early poems were painted with a European sensibility in the names of places, European artists and mythological allusions. Deborah Phelps acknowledges the effect of living in both Europe and America on Graham's sense of self. Graham 'defines herself through the [three] nations […]: Italy represents her heart, her childhood family home; France, her teenage years […]; and America, the region of her adult career as a poet—a new self forged through hard work.'[21] The beginning of Graham's artistic representations of a unique sense of self 'forged through hard work' is seen in the impersonal speaker of *Hybrids*.

Erosion, Graham's second volume of poems, appeared in 1983 and is a continuation of the impersonal lyric established in *Hybrids*. The poems of *Erosion* display a fascination with the body's relations to the mind and the spirit as seen in such titles as 'In What Manner the Body is United with the Soule' and 'At the Exhumed Body of Santa Chiara, Assisi'. *Erosion* reflects Graham's upbringing in Italy and her exposure to great works of paintings in ekphrastic poems on a number of famous artworks by Piero della Francesca ('San Sepolcro'), Luca Signorelli ('At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body'), Massaccio ('Masaccio's Expulsion') and Gustav Klimt ('Two Paintings by Kustav Klimt').[22] The paintings by these artists portray the ekphrastic subjects' dilemmas that inspire Graham's poems. Graham narrates her poems in *Erosion* from the perspective of a spectator looking at a framed painting. The distinguishing visual appearance of the poems' formal stanzas is altered by the introduction of consecutively indented lines.

For *Erosion,* Graham was again awarded the Pushcart Prize for 'My Garden, My Daylight' and the *American Poetry Review* Prize for 'The Age of Reason' and other poems in 1982. 'Two Paintings by Gustav Klimt' was anthologized in *Singular Voices,* a 1985 collection of

[20] Graham, *Jorie Graham: 'I Am Living in the Late Season, but It Has Its Songs, Too'*, (para. 10).
[21] Phelps, p. 249.
[22] Graham, 'In What Manner the Body is United with the Soule' in *Erosion*, p. 12; 'At the Exhumed Body of Santa Chiara, Assisi' in *Erosion*, p. 21; 'San Sepolcro' in *Erosion*, p. 2; 'At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body' in *Erosion*, p. 74; 'Masaccio's Expulsion' in *Erosion*, p. 66; 'Two Paintings by Kustav Klimt' in *Erosion*, p. 61.

poems by living American poets edited by Stephen Berg.[23] In the essay 'Pleasure', written to accompany 'Two Paintings by Gustav Klimt' and to clarify how it was written, Graham lays out her poetics and further advocates Stevens's notion of a 'poem as an act of the mind'. She explains what she believes to be the role of a poem:

> those poems that move me are enactments of discovery, not retellings. In those poems that change me the speaker is most often the protagonist, not the narrator […] the poem itself becomes the act of survival, the act of flailing and probing, an open desire for grace or change. I think this is what Stevens meant when he said the poem is the *act* of the mind in the process of finding what will suffice.[24]

This quote delves into Graham's belief that poems should engage in disclosure, analysis and 'discovery'. What most appeals to her is not the storyteller, whose role is limited to a narration of events, but the protagonist who takes part in the poetic event, or what Graham calls the 'occasion', and who subsequently experiences some form of transformation in the course of discovery. It is in enabling the protagonist to undergo a change and become aware of the transformation that the poem becomes a location of importance. For Graham, the poem is where the poet/protagonist/self can endure, explore and investigate. The difference between the roles of protagonist and narrator is that a protagonist takes part in the poetic 'occasion' and is transformed as a result, while a narrator, who may not necessarily be a participant, recounts the event to the reader.[25]

The method Graham describes here, the imaginative inhabiting of event, dominates her writing across a 40-year career. Poetic inhabitation, for Graham, conveys insight into the human state of existence. She sees that a poet has

> To be willing to inhabit that scene, in willing uncertainty, to be able to describe it, to linger, to use everything that we consider *technique* in poetry to inhabit it until the scene cracks open and you know what it is about the *human condition* that

[23] Stephen Berg, *Singular Voices: American Poetry Today* (New York, N.Y.: Avon Books, 1985).
[24] Graham, 'Pleasure', p. 93.
[25] Graham, 'Introduction: Something of Moment', p. 7.

> the scene is revealing: that's a philosophical bent of mind—yet depends utterly on your senses, on your emotions, on everything you've lived *personally*.[26]

Graham attributes her poetics of inhabiting a poem to the Romantic poet John Keats, from whom she learns that a *negative capability* is necessary for a philosophical mode of expression of the world. *Negative capability* is a phrase used 'to describe his conception of the receptivity necessary to the process of poetic creativity'.[27] Graham defines negative capability, as she perceives it to be a monitoring of the body's feelings and functions:

> It's a matter of a kind of delay in the act of cognition that allows for other kinds of information and a more complex understanding of the reality that one is in to filter in. It's not that eventually you don't reach for fact or reason; the poem is a machine or an act that moves from the body up through the emotions, into thought and then into action. But it's about lingering for a much longer duration in the state of receptive sensation. It allows for the world to thicken and become more real and, as I said before, more complex.[28]

For the poetic inhabitation of a time of an event to occur, Graham states that she must have experienced a similar happening. Poems are not merely for description *per se*; they are written to convey knowledge about the world and about oneself via the protagonist's perceptual perspective. Graham's previous comment also provides insight into Graham's attitude toward the lyric self: The poem enables the poet to imaginatively occupy the position of the ethically accountable lyric 'I'. Although Graham proposes that, by inhabiting the occasion, the lyric poem becomes the site of ethical responsibility towards fellow human beings, the poems of *Hybrids* and *Erosion* do not offer any enactment of ethicality; this is a step that will be taken much later starting with the poems of *Overlord* (2005). Graham's stance with respect to the ethical role of the poem appears from early on in her career, but it will require time and experimentation before it is reflected in her poems.

After *Erosion* appeared in 1983, Graham was appointed professor of poetry at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she would teach emerging poets and writers for the next

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[26] Hobart Student Association, and others, 'A Conversation About *Materialism*', p. 7.
[27] Dinah Birch and Katy Hooper, 'Negative Capability', in *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 495-496 (p. 495).
[28] Graham, Damasio, and Metzinger, 'The Passionate Mind'.

fifteen years. That same year, Graham gave birth to her daughter Emily. The newly acquired roles—teacher and mother—instilled in her a sense of responsibility for her students and her daughter. It is during this time, as noted previously, that Graham met Damasio at the University of Iowa. It could be argued that Graham's discussions with Damasio on the self and its construction can be seen implicitly in the shift that her poetry takes in the volumes after *Erosion* and materializes in the poems of her third volume, *The End of Beauty*, but that it appears more clearly in *Materialism*. Whereas Graham portrayed the mind as a disembodied, mysterious phenomenon in *Hybrids* and *Erosion,* it appears embedded in and impacted by the body in *The End of Beauty* and *Region of Unlikeness*.

After *Erosion*, Graham decided to experiment with form and theme in *The End of Beauty* (1987), an apparent success that was published by the renowned publishing firm, The Ecco Press and HarperCollins. The company has since published all of Graham's books in the United States.[29] The poems of *The End of Beauty* incorporate stories from ancient mythology to reflect on concepts such as beauty, description, difficulty, love and prayer. Notably, 5 of the 26 poems are poems of self-portrait, which ideally would be reflections of the poet. However, Graham continues to maintain a distance between her voice as the real Graham and that of the created persona. By exploring the characteristics of a pair of characters, such as Adam and Eve or Orpheus and Eurydice, Graham's meditations on the self are explored through the perceptions of the alternative identities of mythological figures.

Many of the self-portrait poems of *The End of Beauty* were written when Graham was expecting. As Graham has described the poems, they were 'written out of literally being "double" while pregnant – being a person housing another, truly other, person – another soul than one's own, another body, another destiny, a different heart'.[30] Graham's experience of motherhood affected her deeply, as she was haunted by the idea that she could no longer be a poet, that she had to decide between motherhood and her career. In 'Self-Portrait as Demeter and Persephone', Graham saw her maternal identity through the eyes of Demeter, the Greek goddess of harvest and agriculture. Shocked by the

[29] Carcanet publishes Graham's volumes in the United Kingdom.
[30] Gardner, 'Jorie Graham, the Art of Poetry No. 85', (paragraph 59).

abduction of her only daughter, Persephone, the grief-stricken Demeter ceased the movement of seasons. Graham documents Demeter's maternal feelings as she witnesses the daughter's re-emergence: 'Where she surfaced it's all the same it's always been so why try | she felt her mother in her body it was easy not to worry'.[31]

In the poems of *The End of Beauty,* Graham begins to experiment with form and narrative in an attempt to 'end' the conformity to fixity and closure. In doing so, she resorts to several techniques that later become hallmarks of her poetry. The logical flow of the narrative is broken down in preference for associative links between characters and events. In addition, shifting point of view is incorporated. Through use of this technique, the voice of the poem becomes ambiguous, and it is unclear whether the authorial voice or one of the other characters presented or alluded to is speaking. This type of shift of perspective and voice is one reason why Graham has been described as a difficult poet.

Stylistically, *The End of Beauty* moves away from the rigid formality of *Hybrids* and *Erosion* towards an openness and expansion in form as the long line is incorporated in the poems for the first time. Graham admits that the symmetry between sentence and line rendered her uneasy: 'for me, there's insufficient tension between the line and the sentence in that book [*Hybrids*], because the lines are too long to be felt as measured'.[32] Dashes are introduced to elongate the lyric line and ellipses to mark the place of missing words at midline and at line breaks, while her parentheses contain thoughts or questions she wishes not to delete. An assortment of punctuation, especially the comma, is employed extensively in the lines to avoid stops. Stylistic experimentation includes innovation in form by introducing numbers between lines. Many of the poems consist of multiple, short, numbered stanzas in open-ended, free verse. Combined with the use of enjambment, these lyric lines are longer and take up more pages than the poems of her first two books. In the shift away from the modernist controlled form, Graham controls both the right and left margins of her poems. These techniques move away from the short lines and controlled form of *Hybrids* and *Erosion* toward an openness in narrative and form.

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[31] Graham, 'Self-Portrait as Demeter and Persephone', in *The End of Beauty*, pp. 59-63 (p. 62).
[32] Gardner, 'An Interview with Jorie Graham'*,* in *Regions of Unlikeness: Explaining Contemporary Poetry*, ed. by Thomas Gardner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), pp. 214-37 (p. 218).

Reviews of *The End of Beauty* were favourable. Thomas Gardner calls *The End of Beauty* a 'breakthrough book' and describes Graham's 'interest in the moment, in that volume, in the moment when the mind realizes it's not yet able to shape, and is thus forcibly awakened to, the larger world surrounding it'.[33] Gardner's comment here is significant, as he views the mind of the poems to have become aware and alert to the external world; at the same time, however, the mind is unable to influence this world in any way. The shaping Gardner refers to is a process Graham works towards in the volumes following *The End of Beauty*. James Longenbach viewed Graham's constant experimentation with style to be motivated by her 'quest (a lesser word will not do) for new ways to dramatize the mind in motion.' He tracks the progression of Graham's work from *Hybrids* and *Erosion*, noting that 'This dramatic development was due mostly to a poet's passage from apprenticeship to an early mastery of her own language'.[34] The book's success landed Graham her first interview that year with Thomas Gardner in his book *Regions of Unlikeness: Explaining Contemporary Poetry* and was later awarded the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Award in 1990.

During Graham's marriage to Galvin, their family spent the summer, from May to August, on a farm in rural Wyoming to give Galvin the peace and quiet needed for writing his novel on life in the country: 'The Meadow'.[35] The isolation of the farm, with no running water, electricity or telephone provided Graham with a chance to connect with herself and with the Earth. In *Region of Unlikeness* (1991), Graham meditates on her attachment to the U.S. and the ensuing feeling of citizenship. Graham told Gardner about the ways parenthood changed her:

> I was now the mother of a child starting school and so becoming more of a societal creature, going to school-board meetings, fighting for advanced math programs, for the teaching of foreign languages – trying hard to think through others' reasons against those things as well. It was an amazing introduction to

[33] Gardner, 'Jorie Graham's *The End of Beauty* and a Fresh Look at Modernism', *Southwest Review,* 88 (2003), 335-49 (p. 335).
[34] Longenbach, 'Jorie Graham's Big Hunger', p. 85.
[35] Schiff, p. 63.

> America. All of a sudden, I felt I was a "citizen" for the first time. I'm not sure I had felt like a citizen of anything, really, until then.[36]

In the volume, and for the first time, Graham introduces elements of autobiography into her poems. Graham had felt that, in her capacity as a parent, she was obligated to talk about her personal history relative to her daughter. To avoid too much sentimentality, Graham combined and at times juxtaposed personal life events with larger historical incidents. The result is a book of poems that meditates on contemporary life, philosophy, religion and history. The book's 'foreword'—made up of ten quotations taken from the Christian theologian St. Augustine, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, the American novelist Herman Melville and the Bible—sets the scene for a narrative exploration of human experience in contemporary life. Contemplating humanity's role in the present and past helps Graham consider poetic self-making, as can be seen in some of the poems from *Region of Unlikeness*. 'From the New World' combines a personal incident—Graham's grandmother in a nursing home—with the contemporary trial of a former Nazi guard for the rape of a young girl in a concentration camp. The combination of an historical incident with a contemporary scene and a personal incident is meant to juxtapose the dead with the living. In 'Picnic', Graham weaves memories of a childhood family picnic with profound questions of existence.[37]

In *Region of Unlikeness*, Graham continues to experiment with the long line by making even more frequent use of the second indented line. Openness of form is further achieved by means of the omission of words and by their replacement with visible gaps and ellipses, thereby resulting in a fractured syntax. Moreover, parenthetical remarks and the recurrent use of punctuation such as commas work to elongate the poetic line. As a result of these inclusions and omissions, the poems become longer and more diverse. In this book, in a move that speaks as a justification of the poems' difficulty, Graham includes annotations to her poems for the first time to clarify textual obscurities and to provide references for allusions and quotes. The practice continues in the next five books but is abandoned from *Sea Change* (2008) onwards.[38] Graham's tendency to adopt then

[36] Gardner, 'Jorie Graham: The Art of Poetry No. 85', (para 127).
[37] Graham, 'From the New World', in *Region of Unlikeness,* pp. 12-16; 'Picnic', in *Region of Unlikeness*, pp. 41-45.
[38] Graham includes notes in *Region of Unlikeness*, *Materialism, Swarm, The Errancy, Never,* and *Overlord.*

abandon practices in her poetry is in line with the mode of reinvention she aims for in her body of poetry. Although the poems of *Region of Unlikeness* resort to autobiography, they do not project an autobiographical self as Graham's voice is obscured behind the voices of mythological figures in the book.

Graham's contemplations of maternity and citizenship are the driving forces for her consideration of responsibilities as a citizen and poet. In 'Friendly Fire', the introductory remarks to the poetry reading at the University of Iowa's eight annual presidential lecture of 1991, Graham attacks the deterioration of language that has led to the lack of empathy towards the effect of war.[39] In the lecture, Graham stated that respect for political leaders among the public has declined because of their failure to act responsibly. The nineties witnessed the Gulf War during President George Bush's administration. She warned poets against falling into the same trap. For poets to make language accountable, Graham suggested that they give power back to words so as not to undermine the role of language and deprive words of their meanings and connotations. The wearing down of language is responsible for the destruction of self.

The early nineties were a steady period for Graham, who was busy attending to her school-aged daughter and workshop students. Graham continued composing poems spoken by a personal 'I' in *Materialism* (1993), *The Errancy* (1997) and *Swarm* (2000) after she had introduced the personal speaker for the first time in *Region of Unlikeness* (1991). By the 1990s, Graham no longer hid herself behind the mask of impersonal mythological and artistic figures. These four books mark a transition from the impersonal to a personal lyric speaker. The search for an artistic expression of her selfhood has moved towards an employment of introspection to reflect on her cognitive processes of thought and perception as components of her sense of self. At that time, Graham's academic relationship with Damasio may have very well inspired this turn inwards in her poems, as the inspection of 'Notes of the Reality of the Self' (4) from *Materialism* in the introductory chapter has revealed.

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[39] Graham, 'Friendly Fire', in *University of Iowa Presidential Lectures: A Poetry Reading,* (Iowa Research Online: University of Iowa, 1991), 1-21. <http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1024&context=presidential-lecture-series>. The presidential lectures are an annual series of lectures that offer a chance for eminent faculty members to present significant aspects of their work to other university members and to the public.

Graham's fifth book*, Materialism* (1993), is a collage-like volume of questions and contemplations of a metaphysical presence of self in the material world. Graham experiments with a variety of meanings for the notion of materialism: It points to a preoccupation with material wealth and consumerism, to the philosophy of cognitive materialism and to the physical world in which we exist. Graham quotes fourteen pieces of poetry and prose by twelve diverse landmark thinkers, including English scientist Sir Francis Bacon, the Austrian British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, American author and teacher William Holmes McGuffey and Italian Renaissance painter and thinker Leonardo De Vinci. There are in total six adaptations, eight unaltered excerpts and twenty-two original poems that either endorse or critique some form of materialism.

Of interest to this thesis is Graham's experiments with materialism as a philosophical concept in five poems scattered across *Materialism*; all entitled, 'Notes on the Reality of the Self'. I suggest that Graham contends in these poems with the concept of human reality consisting of physical objects, processes and qualities, functioning according to the same basic physical laws and thereby susceptible to explanation via physical science.[40] Adalaide Morris shares in the interpretation of materialism as 'the theory that physical matter is the only reality and everything, including thought, feeling, mind, and will, can be explained in terms of physical phenomena'.[41] In these poems, Graham meditates on different scenarios to investigate the lyric self's relationship to the material. In the thesis's introductory chapter, 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (4) portrays Graham as an actor contemplating the influence of clothes on her perception of herself and the role she was dramatizing for a theatre audience. In 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (2), a group of bushes are unresponsive to and unmoved by the rhythm of the music of a nearby marching band. The poem reveals the self's tendency to disengage from its surroundings. 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (3) depicts a woodchopper, who has finished his work, sitting down to eat as a figure conveniently invented to question the acts of vision and perception. 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (5), written as a haiku, presents a study of misinterpretations of selfhood: A sleeping child is rendered non-existent while a scarecrow is meant to epitomize life. Out of the five 'Notes on the Reality of the Self', the

[40] Edward Feser, *Philosophy of Mind* (London: Oneworld, 2006), p. 51.
[41] Adalaide Morris, 'The Acts of Mind: Thought Experiments in the Poetry of Jorie Graham and Leslie Scalapino', in *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science,* ed. by Robert Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 146-64 (p. 152).

poem to most clearly depict Graham's disembodied philosophical enquiry into the self is 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (1).[42] The poem is approached in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Materialism has been described as the most philosophical of her books. When asked if her poems were attempts at depicting philosophical concepts, Graham had to explain that thought, description and philosophy were one and the same for her and could not be separated. 'A "philosophical" bent of mind' explains Graham, 'approaches the world with the desire to know and to grasp and to outline and to seize and to detach and to correlate and to control, and having to contend with that apparatus is, I think, really useful for a writer'.[43] Graham believes that sustaining a philosophical view of thought is valuable for the poet.

Materialism takes the physical to be a vehicle for the examination of the self. We notice that the poems become very meditative. In the poems, we are lost in the extensive descriptions of the speaker's thoughts as she questions the role of the environment to her sense of self. The poems are portrayed from the perspective of the lyric 'I', and yet we know nothing about the mysterious protagonist. Helen Vendler labels the poetry of *Materialism* as an impersonal lyric. The voice we hear in the poems, notes Vendler, is the poet's consciousness: 'The twentieth-century self inquired into by means of Graham's poems is not primarily defined by personal or social detail.' Vendler explains that 'The personal lyric represents the socially marked self; but the impersonal lyric represents what used to be called the soul, but might better, in Graham, be called consciousness.' Vendler's account of the impersonal lyric self of *Materialism* is quite accurate. Graham does introduce her voice into the poetry; however, the lyric self retains a level of impersonality at this stage of her career. She does not resort to autobiography nor to social circumstances to contemplate the nature of the self. Moreover, she favours an incorporation of a philosophical perspective of inquiry that distances the poems from the personal dimension. The observation of a mundane object or action is used to trigger Graham's chain of thought, which consequently turns into poems.[44] 'Personal

[42] Graham, *Materialism*, pp. 3. 10, 12, 59, 128.
[43] Hobart Student Association, and others, 'A Conversation About *Materialism*', p. 6.
[44] Graham's personal observation that initiates the meditations vary. In the first 'Notes on the Reality of the Self', it is the movement of leaves on a river, in the second of the 'Notes on the Reality of the Self', it is the

circumstance is acknowledged to underlie the awakening of consciousness,' notes Vendler, 'and Graham's poems often begin in individual autobiographical circumstance'.[45] The poet's personal or autobiographical events, according to Vendler, alert the impersonal consciousness to its surroundings and ignite the process of thought. It is my belief that Graham was experiencing with forms of investigations of the self but was not ready to plunge into the personal dimension just yet. This is why Vendler speaks of an impersonal consciousness: one that has not extended beyond the here and now of the present moment. While I agree with Vendler that the lyric self of Graham's poems is not a socially structured self, I also believe that the poems are in fact spoken by Graham.

In 1995, Graham was appointed the head of the poetry division of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, a position she held until 2000. Being head of the division is an incredibly influential position given how many significant writers have been through this school. The Writers' Workshop was established in 1937 and is the first creative writing institution in the U.S. Some of its graduates are Flannery O'Conner, John Irving, Mark Strand, James Tate, and Philip Roth. Former students of Graham include Joshua Clover, Mark Levine, Geoffrey Nutter, Frank Conroy, and the former U.S. poet laureate Juan Felipe Herrera. Working at the famous writing school was both an honor and a testimony to Graham's artistic talent. She was committed to her students and the teaching of the next generation of poets was very demanding. At the same time, the position of head of department must have been onerous managerially and would have kept her away from writing. This is how Graham explains the toll her job had on her writing:

> sometimes teaching feels like an extraordinary price to pay for the freedom to write poems. I find myself increasingly unable to write—to make contact with my work—while I'm "talking out" so much, […]. Sometimes I feel I'm burning my own work so that the next generation can make theirs, that theirs can be added to the whole thing we're building together after all.[46]

Despite the pressures of her responsibilities, Graham managed to put together her first book of selected poems—*The Dream of The Unified Field*: *Selected Poems 1974-1994*

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bushes, in the third, it is the objects on a bakeshop table, a knife and a loaf of bread, in the fourth, the actor's morning coat, and in the last of the 'Notes', the occupants of a farm.

[45] Helen Vendler, 'Ascent into Limbo', *New Republic,* 211 (1994), 27-30 (p. 28).

[46] Graham, *The Glorious Thing*, (para. 12).

(1995). The book includes poems from Graham's first five volumes of poems and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1996. The bearing of Graham's growing reputation is also seen in the international publication of a volume of poetry for the first time with the publication of the next volume, *The Errancy* (1997), in both America and in the UK. Graham was named Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 1997.

Graham's personal life did not reflect the success of her academic achievements at this time. The late nineties witnessed the death of her long marriage to James Galvin, which culminated in a divorce in 1999. Graham's plight deeply saddened and troubled her and found its way into the themes and structure of the poems written in the years preceding her divorce. *The Errancy* (1997), *Swarm* (2000) and *Never* (2002) depict in different ways a diminished sense of self.

Graham's choice of title for *The Errancy* points to deviation from correctness and mistaken judgement, Moreover, the motif of errancy unites the poems and creates cohesiveness. There are six poems about guardian angels who serve to protect, seven love poems are presented under the title of 'Aubades' addressed to the dawn, and a group of meditations on paintings and philosophical principles appears towards the end of the book. Moreover, similar to the collage-like volume of *Materialism*, Graham continues, in *The Errancy*, to allude to Greek mythology as well as modern and contemporary poetry with references to poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Emily Dickson, George Oppen, Wallace Stevens and Rainer Maria Rilke, among others. Graham also continues to implement stylistic patterns first started in *Materialism*. Many of the poems start with descriptions of physical events—driving on the motorway, walking through a flock of geese, or the lifting of a curtain—but the descriptions of the physical objects then wade into abstract accounts that may not connect to each other. Moreover, the abundance of abstract diction with an excess of punctuation (such as parentheses, gaps and colons) work to diminish the unity of a poem. In *The Errancy*, narrative, meaning and form are intentionally reduced to relay Graham's diminished sense of self.

The difficult style with which the poems of *Materialism* and *The Errancy* were written drove Stephen Schiff to criticise Graham's verse. 'Graham's poetry will never be an offshoot of popular culture. It's too hard to get'. He sees that the poems of these two books 'look less than like conventional descriptions of things than like spidery maps of

thought'.[47] The difficulty he points to arises from a combination of a reliance on abstract subject matter, extensive description and interruptions of descriptions. The practice of reduction becomes more extreme in Graham's next volume, *Swarm* (2000), a book of free verse which is not for readers who are looking for narrative and meaning.

Graham describes *Swarm*'s poetics of reduction in the first poem, '*from* The Reformation Journal':

> I have reduced all to lower case.
>
> I have crossed out passages.
>
> I have entirely trimmed and cleared.
>
> *
>
> Locations are omitted.
>
> Uncertain readings are inserted silently.
>
> Abbreviations silently expanded.
>
> *
>
> A "he" referring to God may be capitalized
>
> or not.[48]

Graham explains her intentional approach to reduction: Capitalization has been forfeited, omission of passages has become a priority and settings are made vague. Abbreviations that are usually shortened forms have become extended. As for punctuation, the asterisk has been introduced to mark division between lines. The emphasis on a visible divider marks the departure she was feeling at the time.

Reviewers of *Swarm* acknowledged Graham's poetics of reduction and have theorized on its causes. Richard Eder views *Swarm* as a 'spiritual journey' for Graham whose 'withdrawal from the sensual, the material, and from the bite and snap of language and image, suggests whispering to incite attention'.[49] Michael Theuene sees that, 'in *Swarm*

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[47] Schiff, p. 60.
[48] Graham, '*from* The Reformation Journal', in *Swarm,* pp. 3-5 (p. 3).
[49] Richard Eder, 'A State of Withdrawal', *New York Times*, 2 January 2000, Book Review < https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/01/02/reviews/000102.02ederlt.html>, [accessed 01 August 2018] (paragraph 5 of 18).

the paring down of form reflects a massive paring down of subject and structure', and he traces the reasons for the trimming to 'a theme of weariness developing in Graham's work'.[50] 'In *Swarm*', remarks Andrew Osborn, 'Graham [is] pulverizing the line, the sentence, the normative sequence of thoughts, and with them the self'. His rationalization is as follows:

> Writing in a time when lyric's roots in epigram and song have eroded, Graham instead founds the genre on what poet-scholar Linda Gregerson has slyly termed the reformation of the subject. In *Swarm*, she conceives of the subject—that is the doer, the thinker, but also, etymologically, the thrown under, the thing controlled, the theme—as a composite, often held together by forces not intrinsic to it.[51]

While critics may not necessarily turn to the biographical background of the poet when assessing the poet's work, I believe that Graham's personal life has much to offer in understanding the evolution of the lyric self in her poems.

By the year 2000, Graham was married to her current husband, the poet Peter Sacks, and had by then relocated to Cambridge, Massachusetts, as she was offered a prestigious teaching position at Harvard University. The Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory is one of the oldest chairs at Harvard which Graham still holds until today. Poet and critic Dan Chiasson, one of Graham's students at Harvard, describes her commitment to teaching:

> [Graham] bears down on our poems as though they were her own, treats them as real poetry. She thinks very, very hard about students' work, and students are moved by that, moved to give her something worth thinking about. Jorie is extremely available for one-on-one meetings, which can last two, three, or four hours.[52]

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[50] Michael Theune, '*Swarm* by Jorie Graham (Review)', *Verse,* 17 (2001), 362-64 (pp.362-63).
[51] Andrew Osborn, 'Jorie Graham, *Swarm*', *Boston Review* (01 February 2000) <http://bostonreview.net/poetry/andrew-osborn-jorie-graham-swarm> [accessed 16.03.2018] (para. 7, 6 of 15).
[52] Craig Lambert, 'Image and the Arc of Feeling', *Harvard Magazine* (2001), <https://harvardmagazine.com/2001/01/image-and-the-arc-of-fee.html>, [accessed 01 August 2018], (paragraph 12 of 32).

Busy in the new faculty job, in a new relationship, in a new city, Graham was prompted to write the poems of *Swarm*: a book investigating the concept of conformity and integration into a new society. In the notes to the volume, Graham refers to *The Oxford English Dictionary* to emphasise the specific meanings of 'swarm' she employs in the book. Swarm is 'a body of bees which at a particular season leave the hive or main stock, gather in a compact mass or cluster, and fly off in search of a new dwelling-place, under the guidance of a queen,' as well as 'persons who leave the original body and go forth to find a new colony or community'.[53] In addition to the ideas of conformity and incorporation, Graham meditated on the notion of the 'underneath' as she saw herself to be 'underneath' the pressure to conform to new social roles. A group of poems in *Swarm* carry the title of the 'Underneath' and investigate spiritual undertakings where Graham felt to be under the authority of a God, 'master' or 'Lord'. Graham spoke in detail of the bearing her private life has on her work in *Smartish Pace*. In the interview, she was asked why she moved away from utilizing abstract diction and from including plentiful quotations from authors and thinkers. This is Graham's reply:

> As for what necessitated the shift: it is abundantly clear, unfortunately, that my personal life underwent a transformation. A divorce after many years of marriage is like a death, no matter what the reasons. So perhaps what you are asking me regarding *Swarm* has less to do with a movement "away from abstract diction" and more with a need to go to ground, to rebuild a sense of a possible person that could inhabit the "I" of the poem.[54]

Graham did not find the lyric 'I' a good fit for her sense of self ungrounded by divorce at the time. Writing the poems of *Swarm* proved therapeutic for Graham, who confessed to Gardner that she began to see a psychoanalyst, 'I began putting my life back together via the writing of these poems'.[55] The introspective poems, therefore, offered her a chance to reconsider her part as a partner, as a member of society, and with God. In Cambridge, Graham clarifies that she was, 'try[ing] to reconfigure a self, a life, in a new solitude, a new relationship, a new community, a broken relationship with the past, all the normal

[53] Graham, *Swarm*, p. 114.
[54] Smartish Pace, 'Q&A with Jorie Graham', *Smartish Pace* (2008), <http://www.smartishpace.com/pqa/jorie_graham/> [accessed 20 January 2018] (para. 10 of 71).
[55] Gardner, 'Jorie Graham, the Art of Poetry No. 85', (para. 153).

things these kinds of very sad life transitions inflict upon us'.[56] To restructure herself to fit into her new life, Graham first had to work through her shattered relationships. The decline of her relationship to Galvin made its way into the style and thematic concern of the poems of the following volume: *Never*.

Graham's eighth book of poetry was published in 2002. It is comprised of five parts, with a total of twenty-seven poems. *Never* opens with an epigraph by John Keats, upon first viewing the scenery of the Lake District in 1818: 'How can I believe in that? Surely it cannot be'.[57] Graham boasts that during the writing of these poems she had in mind 'Keats's notion of negative capability. Mostly I kept trying to record and not think, as I felt that thinking – or some activity of the mind – was something I was supposed to be learning to shut down. Of course, it only came more awake.'[58] Keats's astonishment sets the tone for a book that meditates on the existence of the outside world. 'He can't believe the scenery of the Lake District is real' clarifies Graham, 'it's so unbelievably filled with presence. If then it was *more* than foreground, now it's backdrop. The state of emergency is this: this is not-even-feeling-*it*-is-there, the not-even-feeling-*others*-are-real'.[59] The sense of being out of touch with reality is a common perception of the twenty-first century.

The first poem of *Never* is a prayer: a trope conveniently utilized for its features of meditation and interiority. Four poems of *Never* carry such a title: two named 'Prayer', 'Dusk Shore Prayer' and 'Prayer ("From Behind Trees")'.[60] Prayer establishes inward connections with the self in the practice of self-evaluation and the confession of sin, and an outward relationship with God, which takes a variety of forms: adoration of the Divine's greatness, petition for the fulfilment of spiritual and physical needs and thanksgiving.

The poems of *Never* are dense, consisting of many ideas in one sentence. Graham's shifting perception of nature begins also with *Never,* where nature is no longer mere setting but becomes an element that shapes the self and raises its awareness to natural

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[56] Smartish Pace, 'Q&A with Jorie Graham', (para. 14).
[57] Graham, *Never*, p. 1.
[58] Gardner, 'Jorie Graham, the Art of Poetry No. 85', (para. 20).
[59] Ibid, (para. 163).
[60] Graham, 'Prayer', in *Never*, p. 3; 'Prayer', in *Never*, pp. 14-18; 'Dusk Shore Prayer', in *Never*, pp. 31-32; 'Prayer ("From Behind Trees")', in *Never*, p. 51.

calamity. The first four sections of *Never* do not differ drastically from the poems of *Swarm*. *Never*'s introspective turn portrays her as completely lost in the world; she is 'sinking into the local the temporal open', trying to feel connected to 'that other-than-me who is the I'.[61] Nick Selby notes that, in *Never*, Graham's 'poetics registers an abject subjectivity, a sense of selfhood as a precarious "representational space", one that […] is always threatening to collapse into something other, another poem, another mythologization of American space, something beside itself'. Selby traces Graham's 'abject subjectivity' to the poet's preoccupation with 'the rhetoric of space and its poetic inhabitation'. Whereas Selby links the 'poetics of being-beside oneself' to 'a mythology of abjection, of America's sense of being-beside-itself', this work relates the diminished selfhood to the poet's personal circumstances at the time.[62]

The lyric speaker in these poems stands at the edge of water or at a natural location to meditate, but we know very little about the speaker. Moreover, the meditations occur in the present moment of the here-and-now. The poems of the new millennium are a witness to natural disasters, political conflicts and wars occurring beyond the geographical boundaries of her own country. The difference is that, in *Never*, the poems are informed by Graham's newly acquired environmental awareness.

Graham wrote some of the poems of *Never* for the Environmental Protection Agency in collaboration with her mother, the sculptor Beverly Pepper. Other poems in the volume were written for the turn of the 21st century on commission for the National Millennium Survey Project, in conjunction with the College of Santa Fe. Graham was fixated on extinction, ecocide and other destructive human practices that will wipe out species to be 'never' seen again:

> while Darwin was concluding *On the Origin of Species*, the rate of extinction [for species] is believed to have been one every five years. Today, the rate of extinction is estimated at one every nine minutes. Throughout the writing of this book, I was haunted by the sensation of that nine-minute span – which might amount to the time it takes to read any poem here before you. My sensation of

[61] Graham, 'Solitude', in *Never*, p. 68.
[62] Nick Selby, 'Mythologies Of "Ecstatic Immersion": America, the Poem and the Ethics of Lyric in Jorie Graham and Lisa Jarnot', in *American Mythologies: Essays on Contemporary Literature,* ed. by William Blazek and Michael K. Glenday (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), pp. 202-25 (pp. 214, 219, 222).

> that time frame [and its inevitable increase, even as we "speak"] inhabits, as well as constructs, the book. It is written up against the sensation of what is called "ecocide".[63]

Graham enlightens us in the book's endnotes that her poems are based on her reading of the *World Scientists' Warning to Humanity* of 1993 which urged people to rethink their exploitation of water resources and the pollution done to the environment. Elsewhere in the volume, Graham alludes to the Kyoto Accords which aimed at the reduction of the emission of harmful gases into the Earth's atmosphere. The Kyoto Protocol is

> an international agreement linked to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which commits its Parties by setting internationally binding emission targets. Recognizing that developed countries are principally responsible for the current high levels of GHG emissions in the atmosphere as a result of more than 150 years of industrial activity, the Protocol places a heavier burden on developed nations under the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities".[64]

The United States refused the protocol because of the downside to the economy.

With Graham's new focus on the environment comes a simultaneous change of form. Brackets and parentheses enable the poet to insert several ideas in the line without having to select one over the other. For Graham, brackets and parenthesis encompass 'things from consciousness, self-consciousness, memory, random thought, from an aside. Or multiple things noticed at once. Multiple things happening at once. The punctuation involves an attempt to nest everything into the here.' The decision to include multiple thoughts all at once stems from Graham's view of the poems as 'rather large exfoliations of what I would take to be an instant of time'.[65] The use of parentheses in poetry expands though on paper and in turn portrays the vividness of thought. The implementation of the long line along with the loosening of syntax identify Graham as postmodernist.

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[63] Graham, *Never*, p. 111.
[64] United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 'Kyoto Protocol', *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (1998) <http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php>, [accessed 01 August 2018].
[65] Gardner, 'Jorie Graham, the Art of Poetry No. 85', (para. 51).

Description is a significant element in capturing the details of objects and self. Graham resorts to an excessive use of description, thereby rendering the image incoherent, fractured or difficult to follow and/or visualize. The reason for this difficulty is that her thoughts are neither simplistic nor exact; therefore, their enactments are not simplistic or exact either. Enjambment is employed to carry these extravagant descriptions over the lines and across pages. The alternation of long and short lines is facilitated by chosen line breaks. Line breaks at prefixes create an impression of arbitrariness and suggest how easily a word may pivot into its opposite meaning. I believe the difficulty of this phase is further complicated by Graham's desire to introduce the thoughts of a personal lyric speaker while avoiding any connections with the body and the surroundings. A cognitive self can be neither disembodied nor isolated from its environment.

In *Materialism*, *The Errancy*, *Swarm,* and *Never*, the poems represent a mind in contemplation of its thoughts; they are therefore characterized as deeply meditative. In the four volumes, the main tool of investigation is introspection; focusing on conscious experiences, such as standing at a riverside. The 'I' of the poems refers reflexively to the person composing the poem and inhabiting the space of the experiencing self. The observations are vivid with details and create a sense of immediacy; we are in the situation/inside the mind as much as Graham is. On the employment of poetry as an instrument of thought, Morris suggests that Graham's meditations are 'thought experiments': an equivalent to a scientist's physical experiment in a laboratory.[66]

Introspective meditations of the mind, in the four volumes, occur with minimal focus on the role of body and surroundings. One would argue that deep immersion in self-examination may even lead to a disconnection from reality. The outside world is restricted to triggering the chain of thought that initiates these poems, then gradually disappears into the background as the thoughts dominate the poem. Reading the poems through Damasio's structuring of self, I argue that Graham's lyric self at this stage represents the internal thoughts of the poet but has not represented an autobiographical consciousness capable of discerning its sense of self. As Gardner has noticed, the mind is awakened to the surrounding world but is not capable of engagement yet.[67]

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[66] Morris, p. 149.
[67] Gardner, 'Jorie Graham's *The End of Beauty* and a Fresh Look at Modernism', p. 335.

Whereas the first four sections of *Never* are similar to *Swarm*, its fifth and final section is marked by a notable difference. Graham notes that, during the writing of the final section, she was overwhelmed and was overtaken with a feeling of isolation due to her daughter's illness.[68] As a result, she wanted the poem to convey a sense of a much-needed unity of the lyric speaker and the readers. Graham experiments with a new public mode in the poems of the final section in which significant others are introduced: a group of crying worshipers inside a church and a homeless woman sleeping on the side of the road. The poems portray Graham as insistent on reminding us of humanity's inclination for destruction as she meditates on the present dangers of climate change while envisioning the fearful future that awaits. Speaking of the concluding section of *Never*, Hogue acknowledges the shift and sees the 'brooding on the nature of being in these later poems, […] has become less historically focused, more contemporary with current global concerns'.[69] The power of the poems to promote ways of thinking about the self and the world we live in can be stimulating. In the volumes that preceded *Never*, there was no similar bearing by the environment or any individuals on the nature of selfhood.

In the essay, 'At the Border', published the same year as *Never*, Graham states that she endeavours 'to experience subjectivity and objectivity' in her poems so she may 'fee[l] the essential self, [she is] not afraid of being "found out" by philosophy' or poetry.[70] Graham believes she has the resolution to extend her thoughts beyond the internal to the outer world. What we find in the poems of the final section of *Never* is that Graham speaks directly to us in the present moment, unmediated and unmasked by other characters, and she has much to say. The three poems of the last section occupy twenty pages and are written in the long line. In fact, Graham mentioned that the book had to be redesigned to accommodate the longer lines expanding from the left to the right margin of the page. *Never* is a significant book of poems because it displays the shift into a new mode of writing and self-expression characteristic of Graham's volumes from 2002-2017.[71]

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[68] Gardner, 'Jorie Graham, the Art of Poetry No. 85', (paragraph 22).
[69] Cynthia Hogue, 'The Speaking Subject in | Me: Gender and Ethical Subjectivity in the Poetry of Jorie Graham', in *Essays* ed. by Gardner, pp. 238-56 (p. 249).
[70] Graham, 'Poetic Statement: At the Border', p. 146.
[71] The first two books of scholarly works on Graham appeared in the same year as *Overlord*. These are Thomas Gardner's *Jorie Graham: Essays on the Poetry* (2005) and Catherine Sona Karagueuzian's *No Image*

The shift towards a portrayal of an autobiographical self that is initiated in the final section of *Never* becomes more apparent in the lyric self in *Overlord* (2005) and *Sea Change* (2008). In these volumes, the major focus is on the self's perception of the politically and ecologically disturbed world and the corporeal embodiment of ethical awareness. Graham's meditations shift toward an expression of a cognitive identity. I say a shift rather than an expression of a cognitive self because of the exaggerated emphasis on the body in *Overlord*.

However, *Overlord* signifies the beginning of a phase of writing that can be characterized as one of an American sensibility. In the poems of her volumes from 2005 onwards, Graham portrays political and environmental problems tied to the government of the United States. In addition, Graham references contemporary American scientists. Graham's sense of accountability was formed during the administration of President George Bush and the involvement in the Gulf war on Iraq.

When she wrote the poems of her ninth book, *Overlord*, Graham spent her summer days in a house near Omaha Beach in Normandy, the north of France. The significance of the vacation home's location is in prompting Graham to rethink the horrific events of the invasion of Normandy: the most famous operation of WWII. The book takes its title from 'Operation Overlord', a major military offensive commanded by General Dwight D. Eisenhower and agreed upon by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the General Secretary of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin. The offensive was to open a second front in Europe, specifically in Omaha Beach in the Normandy region of France on June 6, 1944—what came to be known as 'D-Day'. Despite the operation's success, which led to the defeat of Germany, an estimated 10,000 of the allied soldiers died on D-Day alone, with 60,000 casualties in three weeks following the invasion.[72] Graham condemns the atrocities of the operation by giving voices to soldiers who died on D-Day in three long poems, all titled 'Spoken from the Hedgerows'.[73] To bring the personal nature of war and death closer to the reader, narrative and

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There and the Gaze Remains (2005), which investigates the influence of the visual on the sense of self. Karagueuzian offers the only book-length study of Graham's oeuvre.

[72] Stephen E. Ambrose and Taylor Stults, *Invasion of Normandy* (*Research Starters EBSCO host*: Salem Press Encyclopedia, 2013) [accessed 17.03.2018].

[73] Graham, 'Spoken from the Hedgerows', in *Overlord*, pp. 34-36; 'Spoken from the Hedgerows *[H-Hour—146 Minutes]*', in *Overlord*, pp. 37-39; 'Spoken from the Hedgerows', in *Overlord*, pp. 40-42.

meaning are restored once more as the poems narrate in detail the torture of soldiers, paratroopers' flights to their deaths, and the aftermath in their lives. *Overlord*'s notable publication coincided with the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II.

In the book, Graham directs her attention to other disturbing events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and offences by the U.S. government against other countries, such as the invasion of Iraq. The themes of *Overlord* extend to ecological issues of global warming, nuclear threat and ecocide. Sarah Howe notes the emergence of Graham's political voice in the experimentation with public concerns of the natural world in *Never*. 'The dark spaces of *Overlord* (2005) helped deepen [Graham's] political voice, with its prayer-like meditations on war and the poet's helplessness against human suffering'.[74] Calvin Bedient views *Overlord* to be 'an internally enormous and inescapable assessment of where we are now—our deadly stratum'.[75]

In *Overlord*, Graham maintains the introspective study of self, only now the study has broadened to incorporate her overt physical reactions. Graham turns her attention outward to evaluate the political and environmental situation of the Earth, and she turns it inward to observe her mental and somatic responses to these external factors. Graham's objection to the atrocities of war and conflict is physically embodied as forms of ailments, revealing that the body conveys its own account of its existence. *Overlord* hence becomes a chronicle of ongoing, personal and collective trauma of the 'personal yet collective "I"' Graham referred to in the interview with Wunderlich. Moreover, Graham's physical and mental suffering justifies the poet's repeated attempts at prayer. There are six poems in *Overlord* with the title, 'Praying'. In 'Praying (Attempt of April 9 '04),' Graham reluctantly offers hope to 'the girl standing in my doorway yesterday weeping | In her right hand was an updated report in global warming'. But she ends the poem passively, as she admits, 'I do not know what to tell her, Lord'. 'Praying (Attempt of June 14 '03) is chosen as an exemplary poem to be analysed in detail for its sense of urgency in relation to the reality of the destructive powers of humans on themselves and our environment and for the enactment of those powers in the infringement of war and ecological crisis on both mind and body. The poems of *Overlord*, according to Nikki Skillman, 'assert an

[74] Sarah Howe, 'To Imagine the Future: Jorie Graham's *Sea Change*', *PN Review,* 35 (2009), 22-25.
[75] Calvin Bedient, 'A State of Emergency', *The Boston Review* (April 5, 2005), <https://bostonreview.net/calvin-bedient-a-state-of-emergency-overlord-jorie-graham>.

increasingly politicized, coherent, autobiographical lyric subject with a strident, moral point of view'.[76] The autobiographical voice that emerges in the poems of *Overlord* and in the volumes of poetry that appear afterward is Graham's voice and she is engaged in simultaneous investigation of herself and her surroundings. Graham inhabits the position of the lyric self and no longer passively observes but actively evaluates and protests the conditions of the Earth in the hopes of altering her reality.

A critical issue for Graham is the prevalent widespread desensitisation to political and ecological pressures. In an interview a year after the publication of *Overlord*, Graham was asked about her technique for making the poems 'a representation of the reality of the mind'. Graham's response was expressed in terms of recognising the mind's capacity 'to take action that can interact with those pressures, affect them, effect change, create active conditions for hope, escape destruction'.[77] Graham, in her own view, also believes that the media – and especially the large amount of time we spend watching television – has distanced us from the violent realities of wars and the destructive consequences of ecocide. 'The mind grows overwhelmed, even the best mind', explains the poet, 'We become a nation of fact-gatherers instead of thinkers, of callers-in to talk shows instead of voters. A nation on Prozac dropping bombs, but only on TV, so you can switch it off'.[78] Graham is disturbed that the turning off is not limited to the TV but extends to a disengagement of our minds. Graham's depiction of the desensitised mind in 'Copy' is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

Graham's concern with the mental and corporeal directs her to researchers who share with her a fascination with the workings of the mind—specifically, neuroscience, cognitive linguistics and medicine. The swerve away from philosophy and myth to the disciplines of the sciences reveals an expected progression towards an appreciation of the somatic and cognitive dimensions of the self. The poet has explained that her poems are attempts to work through knowledge and to determine 'how to live in the full glare of the knowledge science has given us'.[79] The bright light of science has opened Graham's eyes to Damasio's philosophies of emotions and selfhood and to the account cognitive linguists

[76] Skillman, pp. 342, 221.
[77] Hila Ratzabi, 'Nothing Mystical About It: An Interview with Jorie Graham', *Lumina* (2006), <https://www.joriegraham.com/interview_ratzabi>, [accessed 01 August 2018], (paragraph 6 of 19).
[78] Graham, 'Friendly Fire', p. 3.
[79] Sharon Blackie, 'An Interview with Jorie Graham', *Earthlines*, 2 (August 2012), 36-41 (p. 39).

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson offer of metaphorical notions of reality in their ground-breaking *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (1999). Lakoff and Johnson propose that the concepts of everyday language are metaphorical in nature. For these authors, humans tend to conceptualize abstract notions such as time, mind and self in terms of physical metaphors which make them easier to comprehend. In addition, they suggest that everyday conceptual language is a product of human embodiment. Whereas Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive linguistic model has proven to be widely influential, Graham has her doubts regarding the suitability of metaphor for the portrayal of the self and reality. As the discussion in chapter 5 will reveal, Graham initiates a conversation with Lakoff and Johnson by misquoting them so as to question how much we truly know about the human mind. The investigation into the poems of *Overlord* inquires into allusions to empirical research, medicine and philosophy of mind to reveal Graham's effort to engage in dialogue with the fields' theories and discoveries regarding the workings of the mind and its connections to the body.

In the 2008 volume, *Sea Change,* Graham has made her choice for the lyric 'I' to simultaneously represent an individual and collective self. In her effort to control the identity position of the lyric self, Graham is hindered by the constraints of living in contemporary times. That is why she takes it upon herself to study the science of climate change for the composition of the poems of *Sea Change*. Graham vividly describes the changes in terms of droughts, the fluctuation of ocean tides and the variation of the occurrence of floods and hurricanes. The book's title invites readers to 'see the change' and transformations in our global ecological atmosphere. The urgency of the poems stem from an awareness that the Earth is reaching a tipping point of no return, that the future is not-too-distant. The planet is already witnessing the loss of animal and plant species, scarcity of water (such as the situation in Darfur), air pollution and ensuing global warming. Graham feels that, globally, we have passed the point of no return in terms of the inevitable destruction of the environment; and to avoid such an ending we need to put more effort into recycling, reducing and reusing.

Some of the poems' titles that reinforce these global concerns are 'Futures', 'Later in Life', 'Just Before', and 'No Long Way Round'.[80] The poems convey a darkness of tone and a resolve to action in their insistence on the imminent death facing the human race. Graham fears that the capacity to imagine a shared future on this Earth has been lost to us; she consequently feels the obligation to compose verse displaying the dark times ahead:

> the issue here is that the imagination of the future is something we have lost. We live in a very shallow present tense. People have been describing this for years, in many fields — neurologists, political scientists. Part of what art can perhaps do today is to try to find techniques that reawaken in us a capacity to squint-in a deep futurity — a time four or five generations ahead of us — because it is for those people, people we have no idea will ever even exist, that we are going to be called upon to make real sacrifices, sacrifices in the only life we have, as far as we know. Squinting it in and then feeling truly connected to it — to them — to those humans whose very language we cannot even be sure of, whose features and habits we cannot imagine. For them? we think.[81]

Graham considers the dangers of the immersion of living in the present moment which is typical of the modern way of life. The Latin phrase *carpe diem*, has extended beyond a call for indulging in the temporary delight of the moment to become a main characteristic of modern society with more than one downside. Living in what Graham calls the 'shallow present tense' creates a disregard for the welfare of our collective future, a direct consequence of the accelerating dependence on technology and mobile devices.[82] With the increased use of technology, minds have become adapted to instant gratification experienced in the quick email responses and follower comments received and read in real time. There is no need to wait, which means we no longer have either the time or the patience to imagine the delayed consequences of present actions. The superficial immersion in the present moment prevents the imagination from picturing the prospect of an inhabitable Earth. Graham's message seems to be that there is no way to imagine

[80] Graham, 'Futures', in *Sea Change*, pp. 14-16; 'Later in Life', in *Sea Change*, pp. 19-21; 'Just Before', in *Sea Change*, pp. 22-23; 'No Long Way Round', in *Sea Change*, pp. 54-56.
[81] Grubisic, (para.7).
[82] Ibid.

the destruction of the Earth that we can learn from except via poems of an imagined calamity.

Graham wishes to avoid labels. She says about the term *ecopoetry,* '[it] is reductive to my poetry-as, first and foremost, I am writing poetry, not doing politics'. With the label out of the way, Graham does not mind exploring the concept underlying the notion of ecopoetry further, 'it is true that I feel an increasingly activist element associated with the writing of poetry – most especially with the use of the imagination – at this juncture in our history'.[83] Poetry, with other arts, is now being called upon to warn us of the dangers of contemporary life by reactivating those hindered imaginations: a task no longer limited to the disciplines of neurology or political science. With the current state of pollution, global warming, and extinction, Graham wonders if our future generations will have an Earth to live on. '*Sea Change* is not only a book about the end of the world', Longenbach comments. 'The poems reflect the difficulty of reading the signs of our impending doom, and Graham's challenge is to reimagine what looks like certain death as a prelude to rebirth'[84] Graham's vision is redemptive: She warns us of the present dangers so that we may redeem ourselves and our Earth before it is too late.

Sea Change registers the 'desperate sense of self' in Graham's emotional and physical responses. In writing poetry, Graham tries to gain back the control and authority taken away from her by the ecological conditions. One way Graham achieves this is in the new lineation she implements for the first time. The poems have a long line extending from the left to the right margin of the page followed by several mid-indented short lines that in turn are followed by another long line. Graham calls the new style 'a series of exploded haikus'.[85] Graham suggests that the haiku, known for its expression of sentiment, cannot restrain the depiction of the self and instead explodes to be a suitable representation.

The expanded haiku consist of an alternation of long and short lines. The Walt Whitman long line—situated in the present moment—gains speed and plunges into the future. However, the momentum is cut off by a break at the end of the line, which pulls the line

[83] Blackie, p. 36.
[84] James Longenbach, '"The Wasted Land", Review of S*ea Change*', *The New York Times*, 6 April 2008, Sunday Book Review, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/books/review/Longenbach-t.html>, [accessed 01 August 2018], (paragraph 4 of 9).
[85] Graham, 'Q & A', *Poetry Magazine* (March 2008) 477-78 (p. 478).

away from the future and back in to the here and now of the present moment. For the sake of breath and attention, Graham explains, line breaks are introduced resulting in the William Carlos Williams short line.[86] The Whitman and Williams lines, in their distinct lengths, set out to convey the perceptions and feelings of having lost the earth. The accelerating momentum reflects the urgency of the situation and the apprehensive tone of the poem. 'Lines and their turns (at each ending),' explains Graham, 'give the reader a place from which to hear the rising and descending modulation of the voice, which is of course modulation of thought and transformation—evolution—of emotion'. The mid-indented lines produce an internal margin where the short lines begin. Graham describes this internal margin as the 'central axis' from which the lines spring at this 'juncture of our history'. [87]

It is interesting that Graham chooses varying positions for the lines to begin. Their significance is in suggesting the different places humans can begin from, even after the global troubles humanity has weighed down the planet earth. There is still a chance for new beginnings, even if it is only the beginning of the page. The alternation of short and long lines, consistently implemented throughout the book, creates a new form and a new rhythm. 'A new music is a new mind' Graham quotes Williams 'and this was a sudden new music which took me to places in my emotions and thoughts'.[88] In the novel form and the new music, Graham fashions the thinking, feeling lyric self of *Sea Change* into a deeply personal lyric speaker.

Graham continues to depict the exploded haiku in *Place* (2012). The book has been described as an autobiographical book with 'Jorie Graham […] at the centre of this collection'.[89] It is also the first volume by an American poet to receive the United Kingdom's Forward Prize for Poetry that same year.

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[86] Ibid., p. 477.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Deidre Wengen, 'Imagining the Unimaginable: Jorie Graham in Conversation', *Poets.org* (2008), <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/imagining-unimaginable-jorie-graham-conversation>, [accessed 01 August 2018], (paragraph 21 of 38).
[89] Sean O'Brien, '*Place* by Jorie Graham -Review', *Guardian*, 14 September 2012, Poetry section, < https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/sep/14/place-jorie-graham-review>, [accessed 01 August 2018], (para. 1 of 8).

Place advocates for environmental welfare as much as its predecessor did, and it also dwells on the physical and metaphorical positions in which Graham finds herself. The poet considers the function of physical locations and mental places of consciousness:

> In a poem, one is always given, I would argue, a sense of a place that matters—a place one suffered the loss of, a place one longs for—a stage upon which the urgent act of mind of this particular lyric occasion (be it memory, description, meditation, fractured recollection of self, or even further disintegration of self under the pressure of history, for example) "takes place." And although it is, most traditionally, a literal place […] often, too, a historical "moment"—especially the very conflagratory "now" of one's historical-yet-subjective existence— is felt as a location that compels action, reaction, and the sort of re-equilibration which a poem seeks.[90]

Graham is interested in the behaviours and replies necessitated by location. And when the entirety of the planet Earth is threatened, the response must naturally be compelling. The poems of *Place* are set in a period of calm preceding the onset of some unknown calamity. The lyric self responds to the apocalyptic disaster and to very personal ordeals. The poems that are of interest to this work are those that are marked by instances of self-awareness. Moments of self-consciousness are not meant here to refer to the idea of a triumphant arrival at insight. There is usually no moment of sudden awakening but an ordinary moment of knowledge into the self.

The instant of self-awareness can be seen in 'Cagnes Sur Mer 1950'.[91] Graham, who was in her early sixties at the time of writing *Place*, looks back on one of her first memories with her mother in this poem. The event is situated in Cagnes Sur Mer: a commune at the French Riviera with a rich historical past. Graham looks back on herself as a baby of a few months, 'before [she] knew about knowing' and describes herself in terms one would expect to hear in a laboratory. Graham says, 'I am a small reservoir of blood, twelve pounds of bone and | sinew and other matters'.[92] The crucial point of the poem occurs near its conclusion when Graham's moment of self-awareness is brought on by her mother's affirmation:

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[90] Graham, 'Introduction: Something of Moment', p. 7.
[91] Graham, 'Cagnes Sur Mer 1950', in *Place*, pp. 6-8.
[92] Ibid., p. 6.

> and I hear what must be prices and names called out
> of flowers and fruit and meat and live animals in small cages,
> all from below us, at the bottom of the village, from that part
> which is so comfortable to me which is invisible,
> and in which everything has to be sold by noon.
> I think that was the moment of my being given my name,
> where I first heard the voices carrying prices
> as her face broke and its smile appeared bending down towards me
> saying *there you are, there you are*.[93]

The incident is relayed in hindsight at an age when Graham did not have the tools to linguistically express her happiness at realizing her recognition of her mother. While we may think that the moment of awareness occurred in baby Graham's acknowledgement of her mother, there is also Beverly's knowledge of her maternal identity in the moment baby Graham recognized her. Graham's identity as an adult is grounded in these early memories and their reference to the present moment. Now that the lyric self of *Place* is portrayed as an autobiographical one, Graham is able to meditate on her own passage into motherhood. Elsewhere in the volume, Graham depicts another moment of self-awareness of her motherly identity as it occurred in a park playground as she spends time with her baby daughter. Chapter 6 investigates these shifts of identity more closely. These moments of realization occur in hindsight, as the mature poet imaginatively revisits locations associated with her sense of self from a new perspective. Graham sets the poems of *Place* in the European cities she grew up in or visited as a child: St. Laurent Ser Mer, Omaha Beach, Cagnes Sur Mer, Armagh Cathedral.

In March 2012, Graham was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent surgery, chemoradiation and radiation leaving her feeling like an 'artificial' human being.[94] While she battled the cancer, Graham also had to watch both her parents face death. Out of these devastating experiences comes the 2017 volume, *Fast*; the most personal of Graham's work to date. In the book, Graham wrote a group of poems to each of her parents. To her father Bill Pepper, who died at the age of 96 on April 4, 2014, Graham dedicates 'Reading to My Father', 'The Post Human', and 'The Medium'. In these poems,

[93] Ibid., p. 8.
[94] Howe, 'Interview', (para. 4).

she describes and meditates on her father's transition from life to death, his posthumous body and her attempts to contact him via a medium. Mother Beverly would have been 93 years old at the time Graham compiled 'With Mother in the Kitchen', 'Dementia', and 'Mother's Hand Drawing Me'.[95] Graham's contemplation of her mother's intellectual deterioration is a witness to a cognitively impaired self.

In addition to her personal loss, *Fast e*xamines the intersection of life and death, fear of global death and the body interacting with bots. In an interview, Graham spoke of the personal yet collective nature of the poems of 'a late season', which are not simply intended for bereavement:

> I wouldn't be writing the poems if I didn't think they were leading to a kind of consciousness that would allow one to become more fully awake, even in this period which is trying everything it can to shut one down.[96]

Reviews of *Fast* have been favourable. For Adam Fitzgerald, '"Fast" is a great book about the nature of social life in the 21st century, a book in which past and future unfold in "every cell" across the vast space of a few words'.[97] Kit Fan says that 'Reading *Fast* is like having deep tortured conversations with oneself and one's nearest and dearest in a world overcome by a vertiginous sense of disappearance. It is a tour-de-force and Graham's most memorable book to date'.[98] The reviewers' reactions to the poems of *Fast* implies that they have been moved by Graham's lyric self. The autobiographical lyric self is not a depiction of an ordinary self but the poet's extraordinary self. Damasio beautifully summarizes the capabilities of the autobiographical self via its extended consciousness to itself and to others:

> Extended consciousness allows human organisms to reach the very peak of their mental abilities. Consider some of those: the ability to create helpful

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[95] Graham, 'Reading to My Father', in *Fast*, pp. 23-25; 'The Post Human', in *Fast*, pp. 26-27; 'The Medium', in *Fast*, pp. 28-32; 'With Mother in the Kitchen', in *Fast*, pp. 36-38; 'Dementia', in *Fast*, pp. 39-41; 'Mother's Hand Drawing Me', in *Fast*, pp. 80-84. The Brooklyn Museum Website displays Beverly's date of birth in 1922. See Beverly Pepper. In *Brooklyn Museum* [online], (Brooklyn, New York, 2018) <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/artists/7544/objects> [accessed 17.03.2018]. In chapter six, the Peppers are referred to by first name basis as to avoid confusion.

[96] Graham, *Jorie Graham: 'I Am Living in the Late Season, but It Has Its Songs, Too'*, (para. 17).

[97] Adam Fitzgerald, 'Jorie Graham's Poetic Autopsy for Self and Nation', *New York Times*, 02 August 2017, Book Review: Poetry < https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/books/review/fast-jorie-graham-autobiography.html> [accessed 08 August 2018] (para. 11 of 12).

[98] Kit Fan, 'Tremors and Electricity', *The Poetry Review,* 107 (2017), 96-99 (p. 98).

> artifacts; the ability to consider the mind of the other; the ability to sense the mind of the collective; the ability to suffer with pain as opposed to just feel pain and react to it; the ability to sense the possibility of death in the self and in the other; the ability to value life; the ability to construct a sense of good and of evil distinct from pleasure and pain….[99]

The significance of the autobiographical voice in *Fast* is that it voices the predicament of the personal and collective humanity. Chapter 6 scrutinises the impact of illness and death on Graham and on her representations of the lyric self.

The chapters of this thesis present a close and detailed study of Graham's poems from her twelve collections to track the evolution of a moral lyric speaker from the impersonal to the fully-fledged autobiographical self. In fact, the desire to create 'a more moral terrain—a terrain in which one is more accountable', motivates Graham to go beyond Damasio's interpretation of the autobiographical self to an extraordinary lyric self that interweaves the personal and collective, the present and future.[100]

Before heading into these close readings, I would like to emphasize the importance of reading Graham's full body of poetry as opposed to specific volumes. Graham is a poet of the book. The examination of self and identity through cognitive theory works best when the longer trajectory of Graham's twelve books is made evident. The best way to justify the tracing of Graham's oeuvre is to quote Graham herself: 'Poems not only obviously contextualize each other, but they build up a sense of a speaker-in-predicament—and an ancillary sense of what they find most urgent'.[101] Although Graham's comment here, in her capacity as the a guest editor to the *Ploughshares* journal, was to clarify the reasons for her selection of poems by young American poets for the special edition, the reasons may very well be applicable to her poems chosen for this work.

First, reading Graham's complete production creates a feel for the lyric self of the poems and a sense of how that self has evolved over the years and what issues it finds pressing and urgent to confront. Moreover, Graham has repeatedly mentioned the need for readers to read her work or any poet's entire work of poetry to familiarise oneself

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[99] Damasio, *Feeling,* p. 230.
[100] Gardner, 'An Interview with Jorie Graham', p. 217.
[101] Graham, 'Introduction: Something of Moment', p. 7.

with the poet's style and language. The reason for this, as she sees it, is because 'more and more poetry is being written to satisfy that need for instant gratification, or, conversely, to elude the reader completely' which Graham asserts she does neither.[102] And with poetry that enacts and conveys processes, such as Graham's, is certainly one that requires time and patience. Furthermore, reading the poems against each other reveals the biographical, literary, philosophical and scientific backgrounds from which they have emerged. The poems comment on each other and relate to each other through shared diction and visual patterns, and the poems of each book are generally linked through the principle of the volume's title. Together, the poems relay both an artistic and personal story. The story begins with Graham's lyric self hidden behind mythical characters of her modernist poems of the 1980s, as the discussion of chapter 3 reveals.

[102] Smartish Pace, 'Q&A with Jorie Graham', *Smartish Pace* (2008), (para. 62).

Chapter 3 **Graham, Modernism, and the Seeds of Interest in 'a' Mind in *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts*, *Erosion*, *The End of Beauty*, and *Region of Unlikeness***

The present chapter investigates the seeds of Graham's interest in a lyric examination of identity by exploring poems which are thematically engaged with the mental and somatic components of self in her first books of poetry: *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* (1980), *Erosion* (1983), *The End of Beauty* (1987) and *Region of Unlikeness* (1991). *Hybrids* was published by Princeton University Press in 1980. Graham received the Pushcart Prize from Press that same year for the poem, 'I Was Taught Three' and again in 1982 for 'My Garden, My Daylight'. She accepted the Great Lakes Colleges Association Award for the volume in 1981.[1]

Despite the recognition, scholarly examination of *Hybrids* has not been as extensive as that available on Graham's subsequent volumes; critics regard the first volume as the outcome of an apprenticeship phase. In the introduction of *Jorie Graham: Essays on the Poetry*, Thomas Gardner makes passing reference to *Hybrids* as Graham's first book. He chooses reviews which have the volumes of *Erosion* and onwards as their focus of discussion. Bonnie Costello in 'Jorie Graham: Art and Erosion', Joanna Klink in 'To Feel an Idea: Review of *Swarm*', Willard Spiegelman in 'Jorie Graham Listening' and Stephen Burt's '"Tell Them *No"* Jorie Graham's Poems of Adolescence' are essays that briefly acknowledge the poems of *Hybrids* as crucial to Graham's career without any detailed discussions.[2]

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[1] Thomas Gardner, 'Accurate Failures: The Work of Jorie Graham', *The Hollins Critic,* 24 (1987), 1-10.

[2] The essays mentioned in this paragraph all appear in *Jorie Graham: Essays on the Poetry*, *Contemporary North American Poetry*, ed. by Thomas Gardner (Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 2005) (to be referred to as *Essays* from here on). Thomas Gardner, 'Introduction', pp. 3-12 (p. 4). Bonnie Costello, 'Jorie Graham: Art and Erosion', pp. 13-33. Joanna Klink, 'To Feel an Idea: Review of *Swarm*', pp. 156-69. Willard Spiegelman, 'Jorie Graham Listening', pp. 219-37. Stephen Burt, '"Tell Them No": Jorie Graham's Poems of Adolescence', pp. 257-74.

Other scholars who have shed some light on *Hybrids* include David Kellogg in 'Desire Pronounced and | Punctuated: Lacan and the Fate of the Poetic Subject', *American Imago*, 52.4 (Winter 1995), 405-37. Helen Vendler discusses 'The Geese' and 'Framing' in tracing Graham's movement from an immaterial to material

Poems from *Hybrids*, *Erosion*, *The End of Beauty*, and *Region of Unlikeness* relay a fascination with the mind, regardless of whether Graham had regarded the mental dimension a component of the self or not at the time. The poems are distinctive for their objective observation of 'a' mind from a third-person perspective, portraying it as a mysterious and at times disembodied phenomenon. Descriptions are borrowed from the dominions of the natural and mythological to depict the intrinsic nature of the mental realm.

One notable feature of the poems from Graham's first four volumes examined in this chapter is they all conclude with an image of the mind. First there is 'the mind entering the ground'; then we see the mind 'climb[ing] into | the open flesh' trying to 'mend itself'. Next comes 'the mind crawling out to the edge of the cliff | and feeling the body as if for the first time' and 'The mind with the white hole in it. | Then the mind stitched up again'.[3]

This chapter begins with a close reading of the only poem from *Hybrids* and in Graham's entire body of poetry to be titled 'Mind'. The poem marks the inception of an interest that flourishes into a noticeable preoccupation with cognition in Graham's later volumes. However, 'Mind' has not received much critical attention; Nikki Skillman does not include any poems from *Hybrids* in her cognitive examination of Graham. My research has turned up only a review by Steven Henry Madoff, who notes that the fourth section of *Hybrids*, in which 'Mind' is located, 'celebrate[s] the novelty provided by fleeting phenomena'.[4] The absence of any substantial criticism that points to 'Mind's significance to Graham's structure of self therefore becomes a motivation for the close reading that follows. But before turning to the close reading, the investigation turns to the poem which precedes 'Mind'.

In 'The Nature of Evidence', Graham wishes her meditation on nature's preparation for spring would enable her to 'catch the world | at pure idea'; this is a desire to know the

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poetics in 'Jorie Graham: The Nameless and the Material', in *The Given and the Made: Strategies of Poetic Redefinition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 90-130.

[3] Graham, 'Mind', in *Hybrids*, p. 61; 'At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body', in *Erosion*, pp. 74-77 (p.77); 'Vertigo', in *The End of Beauty*, pp. 66-67 (p. 67); 'Chaos (Eve) ', in *Region of Unlikeness*, pp. 46-53 (p.53).

[4] Steven Henry Madoff, 'Review: *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* by Jorie Graham', *New England Review (1978-1982),* 4 (Summer, 1982), 617-20 (p. 619).

principles governing the existence of objects in the world. Instead, Graham's contemplation of her natural surroundings leads her to 'find | only [her]self again'.[5] This is what Gerri Reaves notes in his remark that, 'Graham herself enters the poetic process rather than simply manipulating it'.[6] Graham 'enters the poetic process' by studying herself as a part of the world she is embedded in. Placement of 'The Nature of Evidence' before 'Mind' indicates that Graham's bid to discover herself starts with an inspection of her mind and its mechanisms. Since *Hybrids* is the product of an impersonal modernist tendency, we find that Graham does not refer in the poem to 'my mind' or even 'the mind'; she refers rather to 'mind'. The noun in the title is not preceded by an article; it therefore lacks identification and refers to a free-floating entity with no associations to a specific person or body. Thus, Graham's exploration of her mind is conducted as an exploration of a general, non-specific mind that belongs to no one. Dave Smith comments as follows on Graham's detachment in *Hybrids*: 'hardly anything personal is revealed, […] we do not discover where she lives, how many children she has or hasn't, […] the sort of thing that invites us to know *her* […] she is so detached that she does not contact or change what is seen'.[7] We may not be informed about Graham's person and life, yet 'Mind' merits close examination because it is the first time in Graham's poetry that the mind is addressed as a subject and is closely inspected to demystify its nature. Moreover, Graham turns to nature and music for inspiration and to evocative language rather than to biological descriptions. This is a move hinting at a dualistic separation of mind and body:[8]

MIND

The slow overture of rain,
 each drop breaking
without breaking into
the next, describes
the unrelenting, syncopated
mind.[9]

[5] Graham, 'The Nature of Evidence', in *Hybrids*, p. 60.
[6] Gerri Reaves, 'Jorie Graham's *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts*: Nature as Matrix', *The Carrell: Journal of the Friends of the University of Miami Library*, 27 (1989), 35-39 (p. 35).
[7] Dave Smith, 'Some Recent American Poetry: Come All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies', *The American Poetry Review,* 11 (1982), 36-46 (p. 37).
[8] The poem is significantly different from the poetic descriptions of neurological components of 'our skulled-in mind, its channels and runnels, its slimy stalked circuits' from 'Treadmill' in *Place* (2012).
[9] Graham, 'Mind', in *Hybrids*, p. 61.

The descriptions of the mind, in the first six lines, as the sounds of rain forming a musical symphony are suitable for their phenomenal nature. The lines refer to the movement of thoughts as they are generated in the mind, one thought giving way to the next without interruption of their continuity or uniformity regardless of their number. Graham's best attempt at understanding how this mental phenomenon works is framed in metaphorical terms; even then, these figurative descriptions are by no means simple. Graham complicates the metaphor by merging two vehicles: The mind's processes are simultaneously likened to the falling of rain drops and the musical notes of a symphony's overture. By borrowing attributes of music and rain to describe cognitive processes, Graham obscures the metaphor and makes it difficult to follow. The movement of the raindrops—and by analogy the flux of imagination, intuition, memory, perception and reason—proceeds in order and according to some form of arrangement. Whereas an overture is an orchestral composition that opens a musical performance, Graham opens her poem with an initiation of a new interest into the workings of the human mind simultaneously with the opening of the symphony. The metaphor suggests that the mind's thought processes start out slowly and are then followed by a succession of much quicker thoughts. The result of the flux of thoughts is a mind unyielding in its cognitive powers, and Graham sees that her account of the mind leaves it 'syncopated' or cut short.[10] The musical metaphor also suggests that what we know about the mind is a mere introduction to its hidden power and potential.

The poem's focus shifts between lines six and twenty-eight from describing each thought/piece of music/drop of rain 'breaking into | the next' to another implicit portrayal of the mind's (mis)perception of its reality. Graham resorts to describing how birds' misperception of their reality can result from the mental misinterpretation of the visual and auditory images of their surroundings.

Not unlike
the hummingbirds
imagining their wings
to be their heart, and swallows
believing the horizon
to be a line they lift

[10] 'Syncopated, adj', in *Oxford English Dictionary*, online edn, (Oxford University Press, 2018), < www.oed.com/view/Entry/196415>, [accessed 4 August 2018]. Syncopated could also be used figuratively to mean 'jerky movement'.

and drop. What is it
they cast for? The poplars,
advancing or retreating,
lose their stature
equally, and yet stand firm,
making arrangements
in order to become imaginary. The city
draws the mind in streets,
and streets compel it
from their intersections
where a little
belongs to no one. It is
what is driven through
all stationary portions
of the world, gravity's
stake in things.

Graham imagines the subjective experience of birds to emphasize its similarity to that of humans, as she has no access to her own mind. The human mind is 'not unlike' that of the hummingbirds and swallows. Information from different sensory inputs integrated in the brain of living organisms may not always be interpreted correctly, which can result in auditory and visual illusions. Hummingbirds translate the beating sound of their wings into the sound of their heartbeat. The brains of swallows interpret the image of the horizon to be a physical object they can 'lift | and drop'. Moreover, the swallows doubt that the poplar trees are real: Their minds 'mak[e] arrangements' to recognise the trees as imaginary.[11] The birds' perception of their reality and surroundings has been manipulated by the confusion of their senses. Through the implied analogy, Graham suggests that the human mind is also susceptible to a misinterpretation of its reality as much as is that of any other organism. Moreover, Graham makes the reader consider whether those (mis)perceived thoughts have been engendered from the dealings with their environment.

In the third shift in line nineteen, the poem returns once more to an account of the impersonal mind, but now the natural scene has been substituted by the alluring 'city', whose gravity 'draws the mind in streets'. Again, Graham points to the part surroundings play in shaping mental processes and, subsequently, one's reality. In the lines, the 'streets compel' the mind 'from their intersection' to follow their predetermined paths raising the

[11] In 'Day Break', in *Materialism*, Graham opens the poem with an allusion to Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* to emphasise the idea that images are not what they appear to be. Misperceived images are a constant motif in her poems.

question whether the mind is 'compel[led]' into existence from the connections and 'intersection' of its brain structures. Graham barely scratches the surface of the issue of cognition before shifting the scene one last time. The city attracts the mind, but there is no other mention of or expansion on how the surroundings shape cognition. The next image in the series of metaphors are November leaves:

> The leaves,
> pressed against the dank
> window of November
> soil, remain unwelcome
> till transformed, parts
> of a puzzle unsolvable
> till the edges give a bit
> and soften. See how
> then the picture becomes clear,
> the mind entering the ground
> more easily in pieces,
> and all the richer for it.

The autumn leaves that fall from trees to the ground are 'unwelcome[d]' by the Earth until their 'edges give a bit | and soften' then eventually decompose and become a part of the Earth's soil once more. '[T]he picture becomes clear', explains Graham after she has contemplated the natural course of the leaves leading her to propose another level of meaning for the extended analogy; that 'the mind enter[s] the ground'. The ground in the previously quoted line, may be interpreted to be the brain. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the ground is the foundation on which other parts are based. Accordingly, the mind and its activities naturally penetrate their physical foundation—the brain—just as raindrops and fallen leaves return to the Earth. The interpretation of the brain to be a ground or foundation is also supported by neuroscience. Damasio proposes that the external world is represented inside brain cells via the mind. Through a continuous flow of images, the mind registers in the brain cells (pp. 17-18). In Graham's version, 'the mind entering the [brain] more easily in pieces' suggests that mind is based in the brain and as a result the mental process is 'all the richer for it'. Portraying the mind through the laws of natural phenomena governing rainfall and regulating the separations of leaves from trees is ineffective for relating mind and brain without referring to science and biology. The poem is nonetheless successful for its incorporation of numerous metaphors that capture the potential of the mind.

Furthermore, the numerous analogies exemplify the concept of hybridity suggested in the book's title and borrowed from the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.*[12] To suggest that she too is interested in the proposition of hybridity as a technique for description, Graham quotes Nietzsche's definition of man in the epigraph: 'But he who is wisest among you, he also is only a discord and hybrid of plant and of ghost'. Just as the philosopher described the disposition of humans as a cross between plants and ghosts, so does Graham see the phenomena of mind as an amalgamation of rainfall on the one hand and leaves decomposing into the Earth on the other.

The poem is told by an impersonal voice assumed by Graham, and it suggests that she is attempting to take a glimpse at the workings of her mind and the complexity of sensory experience in language that is unscientific and familiar. Damasio proposes that living organisms always have a mind; however, the self may not have a glimpse of this mind as 'the view may be clouded'. Therefore, in no way can this poem be an expression of identity or subjectivity. Yet, the poet's curiosity regarding the functions and processes of the mind, read in conjunction with the previous poem in which Graham looks back at herself for knowledge, hints at a cognitive shift in the desire to understand her own mind and its role in the self.

The poem reveals Graham's signature traits as a poet. The descriptions of the mind extend across 31 lines. In 'Mind', the descriptions of the mind are controlled in seven complete sentences, pronoun referents are clear, and the ideas are connected. To maintain the coherency of thought, the majority of the line breaks are carefully positioned after a phrase which ends in a comma. Lines do not break mid-word or mid-phrase. The poem's shape as a long narrow column, left-indented and situated mid-page, extends from the top to the bottom of the page to reflect this vertical movement. The poem's scenery occurs at some elevated height and moves towards the Earth, with raindrops falling from the clouds, and 'the mind entering the ground'. In addition, the subtle shifts in images and scenery occur in a continuous flow of descriptions of images and scenes that reflect the uninterrupted flow of thoughts 'breaking into | the next' but 'without breaking'.

[12] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, England; New York: Penguin Books, 1961, 2003), p. 42.

Elsewhere in *Hybrid*s, Graham is noticeably enticed to wonder at the world's effect on the mind. In 'Strangers', she points to the magnitude of physical entities noting that 'We have no mind || in a world without objects'.[13] Here Graham's observation is in line with Damasio's assertions regarding the importance of objects to the creation of neural imaging responsible for mind creation; without objects there would be no mind. Later, in the frequently anthologized poem, 'The Geese', Graham indicates the function of the mind when she says, 'There is a feeling the body gives the mind | of having missed something, a bedrock poverty'.[14] For Graham, the mind would not be capable of interacting with the outside world had it not been for the body's perceptual experiences. The feelings that arise from sensual experiences are registered in the brain. For Damasio, 'feelings are images of actions rather than actions themselves; the world of feelings is one of perceptions executed in brain maps (p. 109-110). So, when Graham says '[t]here is a feeling the body gives the mind | of having missed something, a bedrock poverty', the perception of an action is linked to the object that caused that perception. However, the feeling of 'having missed something' signals that the object triggering the emotion must be absent.

Graham continues to take up the notion of a mind that wanders unattached to a body in her second volume, *Erosion* (1983). 'At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body', is an ekphrastic poem for the Italian Renaissance painter of the human body, Luca Signorelli.[15] Signorelli was famous for his cycle of frescos depicting scenes from the Last Day, including Last Judgement, the Appearance of the Antichrist and The Resurrection of the Flesh. These paintings appear in the Italian chapel of the Orvieto Cathedral in Umbria.[16] Graham mentions that Signorelli was known for his knowledge of human anatomy and mentions that he spent a significant amount of time dissecting bodies and studying their internal structure, using that knowledge to create lifelike paintings in anatomical detail.[17]

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[13] Graham, 'Strangers', in *Hybrids,* p. 12-13 (p. 12).
[14] Graham, 'The Geese', in *Hybrids*, p. 38-39 (p. 38).
[15] Graham, 'At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body', in *Erosion*, pp. 74-77.
[16] Jonathan B. Riess, *The Renaissance Antichrist: Luca Signorelli's Orvieto Frescoes* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995). Creighton E. Gilbert, 'Signorelli, Luca', *Grove Art Online* (2003) <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000078649> [accessed 08.02.2018].
[17] Michael Silverblatt (Host), *Jorie Graham with Michael Silverblatt* [podcast], Lannan Podcasts, Readings and Conversations Event, 20 May 1999 <https://podcast.lannan.org/2010/06/12/jorie-graham-with-michael-silverblatt-conversation-20-may-1999-video/> [accessed 08 August 2018].

Graham again resorts to keeping a distance between herself and the events of the poem, which she narrates in a third-person perspective. Graham depicts Signorelli in his studio dissecting corpses 'in the name of God | and Science' and in the name of 'the believable' so as to perfect his methods and render them lifelike. Signorelli's anatomical studies were for 'studying arrival' of life after the bodies and spirits merged for the day of judgement. One day, after learning of his son's tragic death, he had the body brought back to his studio. The poem's focal point appears half way through the poem where Signorelli is depicted dissecting his dead son's body with his fresco, 'The Resurrection of the Flesh', appears in the background:

When his one son
died violently,
he had the body brought to him
and laid it

on the drawing-table,
and stood
at a certain distance
awaiting the best
possible light, the best depth
of day,

then with beauty and care
and technique
and judgement, cut into
shadow, cut
into bone and sinew and every
pocket

in which the cold light
pooled.
It took him days
that deep
caress, cutting,
unfastening,

until his mind
could climb into
the open flesh and
mend itself.[18]

While the painter is seen contemplating his son's lifeless body, the hanging fresco illustrates angels endowing dead skeletons with bodies and souls to bring them back to

[18] Graham, 'At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body', in *Erosion*, p. 77.

life. The hung fresco sets an intended contrast between the painter immersed in the painting of the dead returning to life and the same grieving painter unable to bring his son back to life. The painter is not portrayed as resorting to prayer but to scientific dissection for an understanding of his son's death.

Signorelli's response to his son's death is not typical of a bereaved father. The poem portrays the father's patient observation of the body before methodically cutting into it. The image that forms in the reader's mind is of an unbodied brain free in its movement and capable of 'climbing' into the body in an attempt to 'mend itself' and recover from the anguish of loss. The pain of bereavement may have pushed Signorelli into mental instability and pushed him into doing what he did best: dissecting his own son's body as he would any other corpse brought to him. Only this time, things have changed. The son's death suggested new meanings for the devastated father. The investigation into the son's body was more an autopsy than an anatomical dissection, and it was performed not for religion, art or science but for Signorelli's own mental wellbeing. The autopsy was driven by the need to know the impact the brutal death had on the body, and it had the power to put Signorelli's mind at ease, as the final two lines suggest.

The regularly structured poem consists of 17 six-line stanzas, except for the last stanza, which consist of only four lines to imply that there is no conclusion to Signorelli's grief—that something is left missing in the narrative of the son's death. Another visual aspect of the poem is the implementation of the second indented line, which makes the left line appear to be eroding; hence, the title of the book.

Depicting Signorelli's mind rather than his heart or his feelings as the part of the body in need of healing is another of Graham's depictions that warrants consideration. It is peculiar here that Graham chooses the mind—an unobservable part of the body, unlike behaviour for example—to describe his response to grief. Graham cannot see Signorelli's mind, but she can see hers, and it would be safe to assume, therefore, that the mind being observed is Graham's as depicted through the painter's character in the poem.

Moreover, Graham's descriptions of Signorelli's response to grief can be interpreted through Damasio's ideas regarding emotions and feelings. Signorelli's perception of his dead son initiates an 'action program' of grief such that the brain generates a map out of the bodily changes and therefore generates body states. During grief, a number of

changes occur to the body that change Signorelli and make him behave in a particular manner. While the body changes are happening, two things are generated: an image of the body state of sadness; and an image of the object causing the grief, his dead son (p. 108). So the impact of his son's death manifests internally as images of sadness in the brain and externally in the behaviours most common to the painter: painting and dissection.

It is not only Signorelli that is enticed by the soulless body: Graham's investigative mind is also intrigued. The image raises questions of whether it is possible to survive death: could a living mind bring the lifeless body back? Graham's descriptions convey Signorelli's effort to be united with the flesh: a desire that can only be satisfied in the lines of the poem. There is no closure in the poem, nor is there a conclusion; we are left with Signorelli closely observing and studying his son's dead body in an almost objective, scientific autopsy, which can only be described as heart wrenching. Death is the unmaking of the self, and Graham imaginatively tries to understand the undoing process.

In a 1999 talk with Michael Silverblatt, Graham said she was intrigued in her poems of *Erosion* by the 'weaving together of the [many parts of the] self and the other, […] also with the sense that that self is woven together by certain kinds of actions; moral, aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual'.[19] Therefore, when Signorelli dissects his dead son and the mind is seen climbing into the corpse, Signorelli, through the poem, aesthetically unites the cognitive part of himself with the corporeality of his son.

Catherine Sona Karagueuzian interprets the scene as one of Graham's many recurrent efforts to convey 'the idea that discovery of the body's limits may somehow open the mind to a new connection, either with the body or with something beyond it. Here, in any case, the body's limits cannot even be quantified'.[20] Vendler understands the autopsy scene as Graham's resolution to art's persistent pursuit of knowledge and answers. Commenting on the poem, Vendler says that Graham 'reminds us of the painter's use of autopsy to ensure anatomical accuracy, extending even to the autopsy of his dead son'.[21]

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[19] Michael Silverblatt (Host), *Jorie Graham with Michael Silverblatt* [podcast].
[20] Catherine Sona Karagueuzian, *No Image There and the Gaze Remains: The Visual in the Work of Jorie Graham* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 65.
[21] Helen Vendler, '*Jorie Graham*', in *The Music of What Happens: Poems, Poets, Critics*, ed. by Helen Vendler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 455-58 (p. 458).

In fact, the autopsy serves to suggest much more. Bonnie Costello praises Graham's progress in *Erosion*, which 'marked a striking maturity for this poet in finding a focus to the roving eye of *Hybrids*, and in understanding the iconic and even sacramental nature of her mind'.[22]

The poems of *Hybrids* and *Erosion* are formally similar. Each meditation offers a specific observation of an image in regular stanzas and couplets. In *Hybrids*, the stanzas are left-justified short lines, and, she employs the second indented line in *Erosion*. For the most part, they are narrative poems that lack the extensive descriptions that characterise the poems in Graham's later books, commencing with *The End of Beauty*. As noted above, an important aspect of Graham's work is that each new collection seems to expand upon the form of its predecessor. The neatly aligned lines of 'Mind' lose some of their formal organization in the lines of *Erosion*. The diction of both volumes is made up of everyday language written in grammatically correct sentences. The sentences end in periods or other types of punctuation such as question marks and colons and thus display formal closure. The sentences also do not extend over more than two to three lines in the poem. The significance of the visual appearance of these early poems becomes evident when compared to the style of Graham's later poems.

'Vertigo' from *The End of Beauty* sets out the agenda for the later work as a departure from the modernist tendencies and looking forward to her future poetic endeavours in its depiction of a young couple standing at the edge of a cliff looking below at the new world awaiting them. One way the poem is a departure is in its adoption of an openness through the introduction of dashes to elongate the lyric line and the employment of commas to avoid stops. Furthermore, Graham's poem recalls William Wordsworth's contemplation of the world and the future in 'Tintern Abbey':

> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
> That on a wild secluded scene impress
> thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
> The landscape with the quiet of the sky[23]

'Vertigo' portrays a pair of anonymous lovers standing at the edge of a cliff and determined to leave their past lives behind for what appears to be a fresh start. The

[22] Bonnie Costello, 'Jorie Graham: Art and Erosion', in *Essays* ed. by Gardner, p. 13.
[23] *William Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 131-35.

poem does not relay a narrative of events as much as it describes the lovers' during a pivotal moment that separates their pasts from their future, their old and new worlds. Graham watches the couple and relays the young woman's thoughts. What we notice in 'Vertigo' is that Graham pictures herself as the young woman reluctant to inhabit the position of the protagonist.[24]

The young woman stands at the edge of the cliff contemplating the physical 'laws of flight and fall', pondering the idea of flying away to the natural world below while fully realizing the result would be fatal. The poem begins mid-scene:

> Then they came to the very edge of the cliff and looked down.
> Below a real world flowed in its parts, green, green.
> The two elements touched—rock, air.
> She thought of where the mind opened out
> into the sheer drop of its intelligence,[25]

The young woman was not free to depart on 'the updrafting pastures of the vertical in which a bird now rose'; nor could she escape into 'the passage of the rising notes off the violin | into the air'. Astonished at 'How close can the two worlds get,' she wondered: Is truly 'the movement from one to the other | being death?' And yet she bends over the edge for a closer look at the 'woods, fields, stream' which to her 'appeared as kinds of | falling.' The images of the 'real world' below bombard her mind, resulting in a sensation of dizziness or vertigo, as the title suggests.

> She leaned out. What is it pulls at one, she wondered,
> what? That it has no shape but point of view?
> That it cannot move to hold us?
> Oh it has vibrancy, she thought, this emptiness, this intake just
> prior to
> the start of a story, the mind trying to fasten
> and fasten, the mind feeling it like a sickness this wanting
> to snag, catch hold, begin, the mind crawling out to the edge of the cliff
> and feeling the body as if for the first time—how it cannot
> follow, cannot love.[26]

Damasio interprets vertigo to be the result of the 'produc[tion] of illogical continuities of images' (p. 71). The overwhelming situation pushed the lover into fight or flight mode, making her experience a whirling of her surroundings, when in fact she was not falling.

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[24] Graham, 'Vertigo', in *The End of Beauty*, pp. 66-67.
[25] Ibid., p. 66.
[26] Ibid., p. 67.

Her mind registered the overwhelming situation as an overflow of images creating a feeling of imbalance as she looks down from a great height. The girl wonders why her mind is 'feeling it like a sickness this wanting | to snag, catch hold, begin' the new narrative of her life in this other world. Gravity's 'pull at one' that 'it has no shape' pulls her to look farther down, as she is mesmerized by the allure of the 'emptiness, this intake'. The unbodied mind would have not stopped 'crawling out to the edge of the cliff' if not for the body's sensation of anxiety, which triggered the vertigo as a reaction for safety. Has the mind's curiosity to know what lies in store for the couple motivated her to disregard 'death' the outcome most certainly would have been fatal. But at the crucial instant, the mind realises the danger of diving into the world beyond and causes the body to respond accordingly. It is at this moment, when the mind is put at risk, that it 'feel[s] the body as if for the first time'.

The accusatory tone of the final line—'how [the body] cannot | follow cannot love' the mind's thirst for adventure—serves to emphasise the mind/body split. The body's reaction in not following the mind to its demise is the rebuttal to the duality. Graham challenges the Cartesian notion of the mind's disembodiment as the poem reveals that it is oriented towards the body; otherwise, the vertigo would not have manifested. The body is the ultimate saviour. Gardner views the scene in a positive light, suggesting that the self awakens as its mind recognises its corporeal restrictions (p. 7). The vertigo could be a manifestation of an overwhelming astonishment arising from seeing the world below: an alluring world she had hoped to reach, as 'the images in our minds are given more or less saliency in the mental stream according to their value for the individual'.[27] One only wonders at the pressures pushing her into such a departure.

Region of Unlikeness witnesses the introduction of a lyric self representative of Graham. However, Graham was not confident enough to relay all the poems in her personal voice; she employed her personal voice along with other voices of mythological characters as she juxtaposed the personal present moment with an event from deep history. In the last poem to be discussed in this chapter, 'Chaos' (Eve)', Graham brings the story of the creation of Eve to life. 'Eve is considered, in the three sections of this poem, at the moment where she is created and awake but not yet released from Adam's sleeping

[27] Damasio, p. 7.

body', Graham explains in the book's notes.[28] In Graham's version, Eve begins to grow arms and legs while still inside Adam, resulting in much chaos, as the poem's title indicates.

In the third section of the poem, Graham imagines herself in Adam's place and asks, 'Why should it come alive, the thing inside, who said it had | to come alive?' Sceptical of the Biblical narrative, Graham declares that, 'The question of the place of origin is not true, too slow'. She even tries to rationalize the narrative to herself:

> Because the hole that opens in him is the edge of matter,
> the very edge,
> the sensation of there not being enough
> —that rip—and then the squinting to see
> —what is it out there? —
> out of which the taut beast begins to grow,[29]

Eve came out of 'the hole that opens in' Adam, a hole that Graham interprets to be 'the edge of matter | the very edge'. The opening in Adam's side is the boundary at which man and matter meet. Out of '—that rip—', the dashes elongate Eve's thoughts as she ponders the tear and 'then the squinting to see' and curiously wonders 'what is it out there?' before she surfaces to the outer world. Graham has difficulty accepting Adam's side opening as the site of origin of 'the taut beast' or other physical things in the universe with which she is concerned.

Preoccupied with 'The question of the place of origin', Graham 'watched at the kitchen window a long time', only to witness 'as something rose out of the end of the night'. However, in Graham's version of events, the 'thing' steps inside her—not through an opening in the abdomen but through a hole in the head:

> I stood there.
> There was a hole in my head where the thing stepped in.
> The hole grew wider.
> Limbs on all sides pushed away from the center.
> Depth started to throb.
> The hole in my head ripped a bit wider.
> Now there were acrid smells. Greens. Degrees.
> Something all round stepping back, away.[30]

[28] Graham, *Region of Unlikeness*, p. 129.
[29] Graham, 'Chaos (Eve)', in *Region of Unlikeness*, p. 51.
[30] Ibid., p. 52.

The lines suggest that 'the thing' stayed inside the poet's head long enough 'to throb' with life, at which point it 'stepp[ed] back, away', leaving behind an uncovered hole through which 'the mind' could be seen. The second indented line renders the visual appearance of the lines similar to stair steps, as if 'the thing' is stepping down the stairs into the insides of Graham's open skull. Through the exposed 'hole in [her] head', two simultaneous phenomena can be seen: the phenomena of the mind and the astrological phenomena of the white gushing hole.

> The mind with the white hole in it.
> Then the mind stitched up again, good as new again (the breath).
> Then the knot pulled in, the knot bit off.[31]

Graham searches for a suitable alternative for the place of origin of life, and that search leads her to 'the mind'. Again, Graham does not profess ownership; it is not 'her mind' from which life springs but from a notion of 'the mind'. In *White Holes: Cosmic Gushers*, John Gribbin writes as follows: 'If the Universe has been expanding since the moment of creation, in order to reach its present state it would have been created as a massive singularity—a white hole—bursting outward with quarks, neutron stars, and galaxies being born'.[32] Gribbin suggests that the white hole's blasting of infinite material into space has created the present universe. Based on his assumption, and by analogy, Graham also suggests that 'the mind with the white hole in it' has generated the narrative of Eve, 'the thing' and all other material objects. It is through the mind's great potential that it creates narratives and generates feelings, emotions, ideas and, for Graham, the universe. 'Because the hole that opens in him is the edge of matter | the very edge,' it could be easily replaced to be '[the mind with the white hole in it] is the edge of matter | the very edge' to serve as a more suitable declaration of the source of origin for Graham.

The reader is offered a glimpse into 'the mind with the white hole in it' through an opening in the skull that was 'stitched up again, good as new' after the thing's departure. The striking analogy here is between the mind and the astronomical phenomena of the white hole: a hypothetical region in space that ejects matter and energy.[33] Graham, for

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[31] Ibid., p. 53.
[32] John Gribbin, *White Holes: Cosmic Gushers in the Universe* (London: ElecBook 2000), p. 46. ProQuest Ebook Central <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/soton-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3008579> [accessed 04 August 2018].
[33] 'White Hole, n., astron.' in *Oxford English Dictionary*, online edn, (Oxford University Press, 2018) <www.oed.com/view/Entry/228566> [accessed 4 August 2018]

the second time, turns to natural phenomena for descriptive purposes. In the poem, the access to the mind is imaginative and momentary because soon 'the mind is stitched up again, good as new again', with 'the knot pulled in, the knot bit off'. At the end of sewing a garment, a knot is made, and the extra thread cut off as opposed to biting off the knot that holds the sewing together. Graham proposes that, by biting the knot off, the stitches would loosen; thus, the mind is eventually re-exposed, ready to generate more narrative. Moreover, an impenetrable white hole, much like the mind, cannot be observed directly; this is why Graham resorts to the opening in the head. If the self is a cognitive construct, then acquiring physical access to the mind is a logical, not necessarily a possible, step towards understanding the self.

Close examination of the poems discussed in this chapter reveals Graham's fascination with, attraction to and questioning of the mind as a part of the self and as it relates to the body and the external world. As the chapter has revealed, Graham meditates on the mind as a cognitive component of the self. The poems display an implicit rejection of the dualist distinction of mind and body in favour of the mind's embeddedness in the body. Graham reflects on the mind from a critical distance through an impersonal 'I' without necessarily relating to identity. Masking herself behind the personas of various figures hinders Graham from observing her own mind and thoughts, which for Damasio is a prerequisite for the emergence of an autobiographical self. In a move towards an openness in poetry that engages directly with the self, Graham rejects the impersonal mode of thought by incorporating a personal lyric 'I' accompanied by a breaking down of form and narrative.

In the following chapter, Graham is determined to study her own mind as a part of knowing herself and what insights the poems can offer about the process of poetic self-making. The next chapter traces Graham's progression away from an objective to a subjective view of the self while shedding light on the crucial aspects of Graham's books composed at around the millennium; their thematic engagement, and stylistic changes in light of the poet's biological background

Chapter 4 The Lyric Speaker and the Introspective Turn in *Materialism*, *The Errancy*, *Swarm* and *Never*

Graham's volumes published in the 1980s and 1990s evoke an interest in the self through the workings of its consciousness. Knowledge of Damasio's theory tells us that the lyric self of these early poems had not yet been managed by an autobiographical self. In the next four volumes, *Materialism* (1993), *The Errancy* (1997), *Swarm* (2000) and *Never* (2002), Graham employs subjective introspection for an examination of her thoughts and perception. Introspection, which provides the only direct view of the mind and self, is essential to our understanding of who we are and what we know about ourselves. Graham-as-knower accesses her private thoughts in the poems to understand and describe herself-as-object.

Introspection refers to Graham's look into her mind. 'The conscious state of mind', clarifies Damasio, 'is experienced in the exclusive, first-person perspective of each of our organisms, never observable by anyone else' (p. 157). Most notable in the poems Graham composed around the turn of the century is that they all, in varying degrees, begin with the author observing a mundane action or object in a natural setting. The observation triggers the flow of Graham's thoughts, and her perception becomes narrative. The poems are mostly elaborate descriptions of Graham's perception of the visual objects intertwined with events from her personal life or from deep history and religion. The culmination of descriptions may not have any apparent links or connections. The finished product is a postmodernist poem that lacks coherence and meaning.

Materialism (1993) displays Graham's experimentation with cognitive materialism for an exploration of the mental dimension. Materialist philosophers have argued 'that the mind ought also be explicable in the terms of the same sort of mechanical account to which the rest of the universe has apparently yielded'.[1] In the poem, 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (1), Graham turns inward to observe her own mind attempting to understand the

[1] Feser, p. 51.

nature of her thoughts.[2] The poem opens with Graham observing a flooding river covered in foliage. The moment is not one of lasting enlightenment or sudden epiphany; it is rather the ordinariness of the scene that gives insight into the self:

> Watching the river, each handful of it closing over the next,
> brown and swollen. Oaklimbs,
> gnawed at by waterfilm, lifted, relifted, lapped-at all day in
> this dance of non-discovery. All things are
> possible. Last year's leaves, coming unstuck from shore,
> ripping suddenly again with the illusion,
> and carried, twirling, shiny again and fat,
> towards the quick throes of another tentative
> conclusion, bobbing, circling in little suctions their stiff
> presence
> on the surface compels. Nothing is virtual.[3]

The river's momentary resurrection of the dead leaves captivates the poet's attention—though initially the motion of the leaves is as futile as a 'dance of non-discovery'. For Graham, 'watching the river' sets the close examination of the self in motion. The lines begin with an account of the 'twirling, shiny' leaves, which are intrinsically without significance. What relevance the leaves have is in the meaning given to them. By interpreting the leaves being carried across the surface of the river as equivalent to thoughts transferred between neurological locations, Graham has given meaning to the leaves rather than perceiving them to be simply physical objects. Consequently, the descriptions of the leaves become a portrayal of Graham's thoughts 'bobbing,' and 'circling' in her mind. The subtle shift between the objects of the descriptions is hardly noticeable. The poem documents the transformation from the physical to the mental via metaphor. The image of a 'handful' of waves swaying along with the 'oaklimbs' brings images of hands and limbs to the reader's mind. By introducing the human metaphor into the lines, Graham hints at an implicit analogy between the river and the mind. Graham is in need of the river's physical descriptions for a description of her thoughts, as she did in 'Mind', where she employed natural phenomena as a source of portrayal. The descriptions used at the beginning of the poem to dramatise the river have now become descriptors of the mind, and they become puzzling: Are the pivotal objects of Graham's observations in fact the leaves or the poet's thoughts on the leaves?

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[2] Graham, 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (1), in *Materialism*, pp. 3-4.
[3] Ibid., p. 3.

The more Graham focuses on the details of the river scene, the more she is focused on the description of her thoughts, as though she is withdrawing from the observation of the external for the sake of the internal. Zona addresses the introspective turn in 'Notes' and acknowledges the correlation between the self and the external world: '[O]ur sense of interiority—locus of the "luminous" self—grows in direct proportion to our engagement with the world beyond; the more microscopic the speaker's descriptions become, the farther "inside" of herself she plunges'.[4] For Graham, if 'Nothing is virtual' then everything must be materially constructed, including the self. Just as the leaves fall and become part of the river, so do Graham's thoughts constitute a cognitive component of her sense of self:

> *I see myself*. *I am a widening angle of*
> and *nevertheless* and *this performance has rapidly*—
> nailing each point and then each next right point, inter-
> locking, correct, correct again, each rightness snapping loose,
> floating, hook in the air, swirling, seed-down,
> quick—*the evidence of the visual henceforth*—and henceforth, loosening—[5]

In the river surface, through the scattered leaves, Graham is offered a partial reflection of herself, at which point she declares, '*I see myself*'. The statement is set apart from the rest of the text in italics. As she stares into the river, she sees a distorted and incomplete reflection. But more importantly, seeing is a mental process, which means that what she has conceived of is her mind's existence. The statement, *'I see myself'* is a representation of the two facets of the self. 'I' is the first-person pronoun which represents the self-as-knower, and 'myself' is the material 'me' or the body. The moment of awareness emanates from the knowledge that the self is composed of its thoughts and fragments. The double meaning of the verb *see* turns the experience into a moment of literal and figurative self-awareness. For one thing, Graham visually 'sees' and perceives her reflection on the river surface, and at the same time, she figuratively 'sees' and understands who she is. Graham's perception of herself in the above-quoted lines is in the visual recognition of her physical appearance; but more crucial to this reading, it is in her recognition of cognition as a part of the self. The mind is the physical location of these thoughts, and for Graham to become aware of this reflects a sense of inwardness necessary for the articulation of selfhood.

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[4] Zona, p. 681.
[5] Graham, 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (1), in *Materialism*, p. 4.

The structure of the sentence, '*I see myself*', makes it the only syntactically and semantically complete declarative statement in the poem. However, reading the declaration in relation to the subsequent lines coveys some incoherence. '*I am a widening angle of*', Graham declares. But without providing a prepositional object, she leaves the reader hanging with a half-finished description of herself. She then links this incomplete statement with the adverb '*nevertheless*' by using the connector 'and'. The '*I*' realises the incoherence of its thoughts in the incomplete and unconnected words and statements. The disconnected patterns disorient the reader in more than one way. First, Graham fails to present a semantically complete description of her reflection. '*I am a widening angle of*' lacks a prepositional object, and the ambiguity is intensified with the incomplete thought situated next to '*nevertheless*': an adverb with no clear referent to modify. The adverb, in turn, is followed by a partial assessment of the narrator's situation, *'this performance has rapidly'*, which link neither to the phrases located before nor to that located after it. Restricted human perception combined with the limitations of the physical world create an insight deficient of meaning. Graham endeavours to establish links between the disconnected utterances. The connector 'and' is added in an attempt to forge meaning from scattered thoughts, to fill in the gaps of comprehension imposed by the mind's limitations. The attempt does not prove successful, as the lines continue to lack meaning. The missing links evoke an absence of meaning that results when the search for reality is restricted to the material. Graham's incomprehensible phrases, offered after seeing her distorted reflection, point to materiality's failure to accurately represent the self.

The resolve to experiment with a variety of adjectives for the same image and the insistence on their inclusion keeps the meditation in motion. For Graham, selfhood becomes a task of 'nailing' its 'correct' description:

> nailing each point and then each next right point, inter-
> locking, correct, correct again, each rightness snapping loose,
> floating, hook in the air, swirling, seed-down,
> quick—*the evidence of the visual henceforth*—and henceforth, loosening—[6]

The poem concludes with a dash and therefore avoids a conclusion while leaving the meaning open to more shifts and transformations similar to the fluid nature of thought.

[6] Ibid.

The dash may also signal that Graham's progress to an awareness of her individuality is an ongoing process. The elusive inner state of mind renders the task of linguistically portraying thought difficult. The strenuous portrayal does not stop Graham from dipping her fishing rod into the sea of the mind, attempting to catch thoughts in their most 'interlocking', 'floating' and forever 'loosening' state. In addition, Graham intentionally employs ambiguity to convey the instability of thought and the different perspectives it expresses. The shifts between the viewpoint of the self-as-knower and the self-as-object result in further vagueness. Moreover, the employment of pronouns with unclear referents adds to the ambiguity. For example, the river is introduced in the poem's first line as the first noun. In the following lines, the pronoun *it* is repeated eight times; and it is not clear whether the pronouns refer to the river, the leaves, the crocus, the rot or the 'invisible'. Graham's commitment to the detailed description takes precedence over the narrative and results in the uncertainty.

While Graham may have been criticised for the ambiguity and difficulty of 'Notes on the Reality of the Self'(1), she may certainly be praised for ascribing new meanings to the traditional metaphor of the river as a symbol of fertility, potentiality, death and renewal.[7] In a modern twist, the contemporary poet surpasses the limitations of a domain overcome with the poisonous fumes of rotting leaves by observing the mind as 'a new way of looking' for illuminations of the self. The river, whose purpose is to initiate enquiries into the self, disappears by the end of the poem, leaving the poet to observe the ebb and flow of her thoughts. The river's disappearance is an acknowledgement of the role and limits of the material domain in creating a sense of self.

Aiming for fresh 'discovery', Graham sees in the river's movement a promise of revelation from within the churning water—not only for the self but for her poetry. Positioning the 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (1) at the beginning of *Materialism* suggests that the poem also looks back at Graham's earlier work. 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (1) initiates *Materialism*'s movement away from the impersonal to the personal. It can be also interpreted as an abandonment of Graham's modernist poetics of the 1980s. Graham is no longer interested in 'Expression pouring forth, all content'; but when it comes to helping her understand who she is, the poetry has 'no meaning'. Her earlier style seems

[7] 'Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, 'River', in *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 808.

to be as unproductive as a 'dance of non-discovery': a phrase she borrows from John Ashbery's poem, 'Clepsydra' which is a precursor to the 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (1).[8]

'Clepsydra', an ancient device used to measure time, contemplates the passage of time and nature, and is structured to look outward at domestic life and inward into the self. Ashbery notes that 'The past is yours, to keep invisible if you wish | But also to make absurd elaborations with'. Should you choose to confront adult issues believing them to be grounded in childhood disturbances, then you will 'prolong your dance of non-discovery | In brittle architecture'. Ashbery refuses any alternative interpretations for ascribing meaning and value to an imagined reconstruction of the past, as what the time has passed is forever gone. Graham shares with Ashbery a refusal to dwell on the past and places her energy in looking into the future for new ways to capture the self in the present moment.

In 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (1), Graham was trying to analyse her conscious experience into its intricate material components to determine whether or not cognitive materialism provides adequate descriptions of inner experience. Graham temporarily succeeded in acknowledging a link between the self and matter: Engagement with the outside world enables the self to emerge, and the observation of nature creates an awareness of the two parts of the self, thus drawing the reader into the domain of the mind. Graham observes the river long enough for a sense of self to be realized, but the realization disappears, leaving Graham with what little information she was permitted to in the brief instant of epiphany. David Baker observes that 'Graham's wish is to make a complete examination of the empirical evidence in her search for a coherent and compassionate self'.[9] The poem serves as a record of thoughts and of the reflective self's evaluation of the ideas that constitute self-awareness. The poem ends with a dash to avoid a determined conclusion. It is left open and indeterminate such that readers may take part in the ascription of meaning and so that Graham may move forward with her explorations into the self.

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[8] Graham, 'Notes on the Reality of the Self'(1), in *Materialism*, p. 3. John Ashbery, *Rivers and Mountains* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 27-33. Graham may have had Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror' a meditation on the self and how the appearance of face is an expression of selfhood, while composing 'My Face in the Mirror Tells a Story of Delicate Ambitions' from *Hybrids*.

[9] David Baker, 'The Push of Reading', *The Kenyon Review*, 16.4 (1994), 161-76 (p. 164).

The theory of materialism, when used in the context of the philosophy of mind, refers to the theory that 'human reality, consists of purely material or physical objects, processes, and properties, operating according to the same basic physical laws and thereby susceptible of explanation via physical science.' The poem's title suggests an empirical approach to the self through observation and note-taking as tools for its exploration.

The poet's consideration of thoughts marks a persistent fascination with the mind. K.E. Duffin praises Graham's efforts in *Materialism*. 'In this world of mutating landscapes and shifting appearances,' Duffin remarks, 'Graham shows us how the mind must navigate, how the perilous and possessive act of seeing transforms both observer and observed'.[10] Helen Vendler speaks of the relation of the soul to the material in the 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (1) as one of definition and constitution: 'Graham proposes that the soul, on the contrary, must be materially definable'.[11] The previous close reading of the poem suggests that the self is influenced and stirred into actualization by its interaction with the material and is not composed of materials, as Vendler surmises.

In 'Existence and Presence', *Materialism*'s penultimate poem, Graham is still immersed in contemplation of her self-as-object in the natural environment.[12] Graham's voice is clearer as she is heard to say that, 'I think I feel my thinking-self and how it | stands' in the world. The statement offers several insights. First, Graham-as-knower has come to the realization that the part of herself that she is observing, the material 'me', is a cognitive part which consists of its mental processes. Second, Graham's observation of her material part registers as a feeling in the brain. Moreover, the poem's situatedness in the natural environment suggests that Graham has come to an awareness of the thinking part of herself by considering her surroundings. Graham's senses are engaged in seeing and hearing her surroundings, thereby ultimately making her aware of her presence amidst other organisms.

The poem's title suggests that the mode of existence in the world is linked to being mentally present in the moment. Graham's conception of herself as a 'thinking-self' echoes with that of the French philosopher Rene Descartes. In his famous dictum, Cogito

[10] K.E. Duffin, '*Materialism* by Jorie Graham (Review)', *Harvard Review,* 6 (1994), 181-83 (p.182).
[11] Vendler, 'Ascent into Limbo', p. 28.
[12] Graham, 'Existence and Presence', in *Materialism*, p. 142.

of 1637 'everyone can mentally intuit that he exists, that he is thinking', (*uniusquisque animo potest intueri, se existere, se cogitare* . . . AT X 368: CSM I 14).[13] Descartes declares that, if you think, then you must exist, thereby binding selfhood and identity with thought. For decades, science attempted to understand how mind and body interact despite the mind-body split. The problem arises as a consequence of Descartes' conception of body as essentially spatially extensive and mind as essentially not: How does that which occupies no space push or pull that which is essentially spatial? Though Cartesian duality has fallen out of favour in certain scientific circles, it continues to have a huge influence on contemporary thinking, as can be seen in Graham's notion of a thinking-self.

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, Graham's thematic concerns were highly impacted by her divorce in the years after the publication of *Materialism*. That is why in *The Errancy* (1997) Graham persisted with the introspective examination initiated in *Materialism*, but with an orientation toward more the abstract and the spiritual. The difficulties Graham underwent during the years leading up to her divorce in 1999 and after found expression in three of her books: *The Errancy* (1997), *Swarm* (2000) and *Never* (2002). Graham felt alienated from her own life, and the introspective turn in the poems of these three books seems to turn anew into a search for a sense of person. '*Errancy* is no longer the discovery of the world elsewhere,' remarks James Longenbach, 'but rather our very state of being'.[14]

'The Scanning' is a difficult poem which conveys a sense of a narrative unfolding beneath its fragmented surface.[15] Like many poems in *The Errancy* which are set in the city, 'The Scanning' portrays Graham travelling on the motorway with a repeated mention of 'a plan'. The modern-day road trip carries the symbolism of a traditional journey, representing a mission for truth, peace or a spiritual epiphany. Setting the trip after rainfall suggests spiritual fertility. However, as the poem unfolds, the journey and rain become deprived of their positive spiritual connotations. For a start, Graham is stuck in traffic. Graham is not alone on the road trip, although the lines avoid clarification of the

[13] quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 119.
[14] James Longenbach, 'Identity, Vision, Style: *The Errancy* by Jorie Graham', in *The Nation*, 265.3 (1997).
[15] Graham, 'The Scanning', in *The Errancy*, pp. 4-6.

referent of the 'we' as a specific other or a collective 'we' that includes the driver, passenger and readers. The traffic jam immobilizes Graham at the physical level of the car and at a figurative level in her life.

1.

After the rain there was traffic behind us like a long kiss.
The ramp harrowing its mathematics like a newcomer who likes
the rules—
glint and whir of piloting minds, gripped steering wheels . . .
Jacob waiting and the angel *didn't show*.
Meanwhile the stations the scanner glides over, not selecting, hiss—

The reference to motorists as 'piloting minds' dehumanizes them, rendering them soulless. There seems to be no connection between the first four lines' descriptions of the rain, ramp and motorists and the fifth line, 'Jacob waiting and the angel *didn't show*'. Yet, the line is not completely out of place. Graham's immobility and Jacob's waiting both point to futility. Graham and Jacob have not yet found what they were pursuing. In the meantime, Graham's search for a radio station is also unsuccessful. She can find neither a radio signal nor a spiritual calling. Exhausted from the drive and 'seeking a resting point', Graham feels the need to exit the highway for a short break:

2.

Once off the interstate, we exhausted the tangible.
The plan seemed to dagger forward on its own, towards the horizon-line,
the future its mother-of-pearl cadaver, down there, where the map
continues
onto the next blue page. . . . .

Travelling along the 'interstate', a road connecting two U.S. states, can also represent Graham's movement between two 'states' of life. Graham insists that 'we exhausted the tangible' and have moved beyond the material for an understanding of the human self. It is no longer the physical map and the concrete motorway that are taking Graham to her destination; it is rather a greater metaphysical 'plan [which] seemed to dagger forward on its own'. The descriptions are no longer of the rain, cars or motorway but of some abstract plot, as if we have been transported inside Graham's head and are listening to her think. Graham feels that the life plan seems to move forward in hostility, out of control towards a dead future. Graham's choice of adjectives and adjectival phrases is alarming and suggests an uneasy mind behind the lines. Graham's plan seems to aggressively be 'dagger[ing] forward', and instead of looking forward to tomorrow's

hopeful prospects, she sees the dead future a 'mother-of-pearl cadaver'. But it is not only about herself that she worries; she worries about the life towards which collective humanity is headed. Graham's thoughts continue to spin out through the poem:

> *Our* plan
> One must not pretend one knew nothing of it.
> One must not pretend one didn't tenderly finger its heavenly style.
> The skyline itself, bluing now towards evening,
> the spidery picture of the plan we tongued up —
> unquenchable – where were you? – never-to-be-defined,
> a solo first-fruit performance for which the eye
> is still intended. . . . What shall we move with
> now that the eye must shut? What shall we sift with
> now that the mind must blur?

The poet fears that the fatigue of living has left her vulnerable, though she confesses, in hindsight, that we all are aware of the kind of life we have embarked upon. As she watches the draw of evening, she asks 'where were you? – never to be defined'. Whether the addressee is a God or someone else is not clarified, but her relationship with this significant other is juxtaposed with Jacob's wrestling with the angel to suggest that she searches for a guiding force in these moments of loss. The answer to the question is the mention of Jacob's angel, interspersed through the poem.[16] According to the Biblical narrative, Jacob and his family were fleeing to Canaan. After helping his family to cross the stream, Jacob stops to spend the night next to a river bed. It is then that the angel appears, wrestles with Jacob and informs him that he has prevailed in his struggle with God and men and has been renamed Israel.[17] Graham plays out the scene from the Biblical narrative and presents different versions of the struggle. First, 'Jacob waited and the guardian angel *didn't show'*, then 'Jacob waited and the angel didn't—', after which 'The angel called out but Jacob, Jacob… had already left, and finally, 'The angel was on the telephone. | No. Jacob was on the telephone'. In all the scenarios, the meeting never occurs because of what seems to be an error in communication. For Graham to identify with Jacob suggests that her meeting with the angel, an intermediary between God and the world and subsequently a symbol of belief, also never materialises.[18]

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[16] Graham alludes to the Biblical story of the prophet wrestling with the guardian angel. The book of Genesis describes the role of the angel assigned to Jacob to be a protector.
[17] Alan Avery-Peck, and Jacob Neusner, *The Routledge Dictionary of Judaism* (Routledge, 2003), p. 66. ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/soton ebooks/detail.action?docID=182502> [accessed 22.03.2018].
[18] Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 'Angels', in *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 22.

For the present time, Graham is paralysed with uncertainty and asks, 'What shall we move with | now that the eye must shut?' Even more worrying to her is her inability to make conscious life decisions: 'What shall we sift with | now that the mind must blur?' The fear arises from the inability to see, perceive and make conscious decisions, whether for the drive on the freeway or for the life journey she has embarked upon. Off the congested highway, Graham is faced by a peaceful and calming river. By now it is apparent that the river is the place of choice for seclusion Graham resorts to when in need of clarity. Graham scans her surroundings in search of revelation, protection and assurance.

3.

> Down by the riverbed I found some geese asleep.
> I could see the billboards, but they were across the water.
> Maybe two hundred geese—now beginning to stir,
> purring and cooing at my walking among them.
> Groping their armless way, their underneaths greening.
> […]
> A mess of geese. Unperfectable. A mess
> of conflicting notions. Something that doesn't have to be
> imagined. An end-zone one can have pushed forward to,
> here at the end of the path, what the whole freeway led to,
> what the whole adventure led to,
> galleys, slaves, log-books,
> tiny calculations once it got dark enough to see,
> what the whole madness led to—the curiosity—viral—here,
> like a sign—thick but clear—here at the bottom of the sedge,
> the city still glimmering over there in the distance,
> but us here, for no reason, where the mass of geese are rousing,
> necessity and circumstance quivering in each other's arms,
> us in each other's arms, or no, not really.

In place of the immaterial angel, Graham turns again to meditate on 'the tangible'; in this case, the geese are the object of the meditation. It seems as if 'the whole freeway' and 'the whole adventure' known as life has led her to the 'end-zone' for her to witness the geese by the river. 'A mess of' two hundred 'geese. Unperfectable', declares the poet, and despite their illusion of enacting 'A mess | of conflicting notions', harmony and bonding lives between them. The reason for their unity, in Graham's view, is that they are 'Something that doesn't have to be | imagined'; their physicality is comprehensible to the mind.

The perception of the birds is the focal point of the poem. In Chinese and Ancient Egyptian mythology, the goose was regarded as a messenger between the Earth and Heaven.[19] For Graham, the geese are be messengers whose 'purring and cooing' communicates a freedom of movement that contrasts with the immobility of traffic. Freedom is created from their movement, as contrasted with traffic jam's inability to move. The cars are compacted together and yet they represent fragmentation, and the geese, despite their movement, move along together in agreement.

Moreover, the significance of the geese is in triggering the thought process. It is the poet's 'scanning' of the birds that facilitates the meditation on her life. The poet sees and describes the geese, whose descriptions then expand to include notions of freedom and constraint essential to the poet at the current stage of her life. The poem becomes an enactment of the poet's thought, and the monologue invites us inside her mind:

4.

[….]
Was it really, then, a pastime, the hostile universe?
Was the wrestling a mental color, an architecture of mockery,
a self-portrait of the unmargined thing by the margined thing?
The geese seemed to assemble, the freeway hissed.
Oh to sleep the sleep of those who are alive….
The brain extended its sugared fingertips.
Itching so to create something new.
Slightly, profoundly, the riverbottom gleamed.

Engaged in speculation on the meaning of occurrences in the universe, Graham is brought back to her reality by the gathering of the geese. Reacting to assembly, Graham notes that her 'brain extended its sugared fingertips' and was 'Itching so to create something new'. Graham has found her motivation in the 'tangible' and is inspired to create more poetry. After the immersion in introspection, the poet returns to focus on her setting and directs herself and readers to visually 'look up!'

[…]—below, the freeway lustrous with accurate intention—
above us now, the sky lustrous with the skeleton of the dream of
reason—look up!—
Jacob dreamer—the winged volumetrics chiselling out a skull
for the dream—

[19] Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 'Goose', in *A Dictionary of Symbols,* p. 446.

In the sky, the flock of geese fly in a V pattern, forming the shape of a 'skeleton' that holds up 'the dream of | reason'. Instead of spiritual belief, Graham's most valued aspiration is to consciously make sense of things and to ascribe meaning to life by exercising logic. Graham asks readers to notice the geese shaping a skull to complement the skeleton of reason. The 'chiselling out' suggests that the birds are arduously shaping the bony framework that lodges the brain, mind and thought. The body cannot exist without its head, nor the skeleton without its skull. 'Look up!' the poet instructs herself and the readers; the journey has guided us here to the flock of geese so that we learn from the birds and base our beliefs on their materiality. Accordingly, by the end of the poem, when Graham looks up to see the geese, it is not farfetched to say that her mind recognizes an image of the bones of a skeleton represented by the white geese. The image of the skeleton that registered in Graham's mind was prompted and shaped by the geese adopting the distinctive pattern of a skeleton, which Graham justifies as a 'molting of the singular' that has risen 'out of the manyness—'. The geese unite to portray one whole part, which for Graham symbolically represents an idea. Graham's intentional association of the geese with the skeleton of reason is a far more sophisticated mental act than is Karagueuzian's interpretation as an 'erroneous act of imagination or because of some inherent, animating spirt'.[20]

Forrest Gander interprets the upward glance not as a revelatory act but as a modest gesture. 'In such humble acts—expressed in the "look up!" of "The Scanning" [among other examples in the book]—we may not find redemption, Graham suggests, but the inertia to prevail against the fatigue of a culture come to the end of its utopias'.[21] Her optimistic descriptions, as Gander has hinted, are from the reference to the skeleton and skull as reservoirs of life ambitions rather than as representations of death.

The poem deserves critical attention for its illustration of some of the ways the mind operates. Graham visually scans the riverbed, meditates on the birds, and imagines new meanings. Robert N. Casper points out the strength of 'The Scanning': 'It is the work of a mind committed to seeing as fully as possible, and of a poet fully committed to the

[20] Karagueuzian, pp. 212, 139-40.

[21] Forrest Gander, 'Listening for a Divine Word (Review of *The Errancy*)', in *Essays e*d. by Thomas Gardner, pp. 75-81 (80).

process of finding'.[22] The sense of vision enables the meditation to occur. Information from the images of the geese and the outside world is processed by the brain, resulting in a conscious processing of the world upon which the poet acts. Here, unlike the poems in the early books, the 'scanning' associates both mind and body. The brain cannot operate without stimulation from the outer world. Brian Henry recognizes the association of the mental and the external environment in the poems of *The Errancy*: 'In her poems […] objects are secondary to her perception(s) of them. This relationship between the interior world of the poet and the exterior physical world repeatedly manifests itself in her poems'.[23] Graham's visual and mental perception of the geese instils in her a motivation to create something and a hope for a freedom to come. That is why Graham was fearful of the consequences of losing the connection between the eye and the world when she asked, 'What shall we move with | now that the eye must shut?' She was consequently afraid to lose her ability to examine her environment closely: 'What shall we sift with | now that the mind must blur?'

Stressing and exploring the importance and role of processes of thought and reason may provide Graham with a satisfaction that people acquire from holding on to spiritual beliefs. Focusing on the inner thoughts for the attainment of a meaning to life constitutes a form of modern spirituality. Graham's version of spirituality links the outer world with her inner thoughts and calls into question the function of established spiritual beliefs.

The poem begins with traffic congestion: a metaphor for the inability to move. Graham leaves the highway for a rest beside a lake, where her witness of the movement of the birds becomes a freeing from the traffic jam. Although Graham declares at one point that the material has been used up, it is the geese, and not spirituality, that offer her hope for a freedom from the present confinement of life. Stylistically, Graham creates verse out of her perception of her surroundings, which is conveyed in abstract diction and fragmented narrative.

[22] Robert N. Casper, 'About Jorie Graham', *Ploughshares,* 27 (2001), 189-93 (p. 190).
[23] Brian Henry, 'Exquisite Disjunctions, Exquisite Arrangements: Jorie Graham's "Strangeness of Strategy"', in *Essays e*d. by Thomas Gardner, pp. 102-12 (p. 107).

After waiting unsuccessfully for the angel to appear in 'The Scanning', a sceptical Graham is absorbed in an internal dialogue with God in 'Underneath (Always)' in *Swarm*.[24] Spiritual lacking has been interpreted as a type of death, and in the poem, Graham portrays the self as resisting death. In 'Underneath (Always)', Graham searches for the reasons 'underneath' feeling rejected; otherwise she will 'always' feel like an outsider. The poet's consideration of her stance on spirituality includes moments of cognitive insight, which are focal to the discussion.

Graham tells us she sits to observe herself 'underneath' the sky and wonders if anyone 'sits with [her]'; it is a request that suggests a need of emotional support in the troubling time. In her seclusion at the start of day, she 'thought to think till opened-up'. The line is crucial in establishing the act of introspection. 'I thought' is Graham consciously engaging in an observation of herself until she has been revealed to herself.

> Who sits with me?
> Once I thought to think till opened-up.
> The frost in the distance takes-in light.
> In front of my eyes day and night appear.
> They act like truth. They come at me.
> I am weaponless do they not know it.

Conscious observation makes her aware of the natural phenomena of frost, light, day and night. The objects of nature expand before her eyes; 'They act like truth. They come at [her]' and render her defenceless with no knowledge to fight off the power of fact. Frost, light, day and light are parts of nature visible to the eye, but when it comes to God, Graham is not so certain:

> There is a god here but it is not shaped.
> Is moving around us, sometimes shines from afar, is not
> a pure thing.
> Also in it a purring. Never a beckoning. Only sometimes a purring.
> How much difference among things it aims to show.
> Once morning sent arrows.
> Now it is anecdotal.
> Go loveliness.
> Diminishment I find thee here and there unclear.

Graham admits, 'There is a god here', but not to any physical features: 'it is not shaped'—certainly not in the way objects of nature are formed. Given Beverly Pepper's upbringing

[24] Graham, 'Underneath (Always)', in *Swarm,* pp. 30-31.

in a Jewish family, the god depicted here may well be the Jewish God. What knowledge she has is limited; God is omnipresent with total autonomy of movement but only occasionally shines and sends messages, like a cat giving off a low vibrating purring, never a summoning.[25] Calvin Bedient observes that 'the unpresentable Jewish deity has been superseded, or reinterpreted, as invisible vibrancy'.[26] Since the theological study to know God has been confused with the ontology of God as a pure being, Graham states that God 'is not a pure thing'. Knowing that knowledge of God is limited justifies the poem's tone of scepticism.

The onset of morning releases an arrow from heaven to Earth: a symbol of spiritual guidance brought down to humans. However, in Graham's version, 'the arrow *does* arrive, | just not in time', thereby making her feel vulnerable. The ray of sunlight has the power to bring images into focus. The arrow is a symbol of communication between Heaven and Earth. The spirituality Graham seeks does not arrive in time; therefore, she turns to a personal narrative of her life journey, for 'now [life] is anecdotal'. She awaits the break of dawn while waiting for divide guidance:

> Once morning sent arrows.
> […]
> It is not lost on me.
> The arrow *does* arrive
> just not in time.
> Not in time, as at tomorrow's trauma-center, say.
> *Not in time*, as the dancemaster scolds.
> But, master, I've gone a far way down your path,
> […]
> Not in time. My suit denied.

The previous line echoes with George Herbert's poem, 'Redemption'.[27] 'Having been tenant long to a rich Lord', Herbert was ready to leave the Earthly life and was eager to meet his Lord in Heaven. 'And make a suit unto him, to afford | A new small-rented lease, and cancelled th' old', to which God responded, '*Your suit is granted,* said, & died.' Unlike Herbert, Graham was not ready to leave this life; she may not believe in an afterlife, and consequently her 'suit [was]denied'. God's response to Herbert is altered to suit the needs of the poem: that Graham is not ready for death.

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[25] A.E. Garvie and I. I. Mattuck, *The Christian Approach to God and the Jewish Approach to God* (London: Society of Jews and Christians, [193?]), p. 7.
[26] Calvin Bedient, 'Toward a Jorie Graham Lexicon', in *Essays, e*d. by Thomas Gardner, pp. 275-91 (p. 284).
[27] *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1974), p. 60.

> And not in time. Oh
> I'd as lief not leave, my Earth.
> However far I've gone
> All that remains is where I began.
> Look, crane a bit love, look:
> Not even a beginning in it.
> Not the trace of a setting-off.
> What grows is the feeling of difference.
> Even muscles shrink back from it.
> Even the skin wants out from light.
> Only the sockets hold and hold.
> Can you let the self back in again, cold skull?

The heavenly arrow never reached the poet in time. Regardless of whether Graham is ready for passing on or not, death will occur. Death is not a process, 'Not even a beginning in it', nor is there 'the trace of a setting-off'; it is rather a feeling of dissimilarity that triggers bodily reactions. The self's withdrawal from the body also pulls back the muscles and skin; only the hollowness of the sockets grasps the eyes in place. It seems death has appeared and the soul has left the body, but only momentarily. Graham clings to life and pleads with the body; 'Can you let the self back in again, cold skull?'. In asking the 'cold skull' to allow the self back in is a reference to the self's need of its biological grounding. The self is let back in and Graham is alive once more, however necessary it was for her to undergo the experience of death. Yet, the temporary death was necessary; her waiting for a spiritual calling had to vanish for the self to evolve. Stability is not constant, and change is inevitable.

Graham hears a distant sound and realizes she has not died or that she has been reborn:

> There is the purr again, only across the vale this time.
> And then the train, of course, the 6 o'clock
> going again from there to there.
> *Once upon a time*, I think.
> We call the day Sunday.

The sound Graham hears is a purr, which was earlier in the poem associated with God. The 'purring' sound that is sent from the divine to the human. Only this time, the purr is heard from across the valley—too far away to reach Graham. She then hears the 6 o'clock train as it moves from 'there to there'. Sunday is the Christian day of worship and the day of the resurrection; it is also the first day of the week after the Sabbath for Jews. The train journey on a Sunday symbolizes a spiritual venture, a belonging to a spiritual society; but the symbolism is undercut by the train's failure to pick up Graham and take her to a place

of enlightenment. Not boarding the train shows Graham's problems in becoming part of a faith society. Graham imagines taking the train to be something that would have happened '*Once upon a time*' but not in the present time, for 'Now it is anecdotal': Life has become a narrative on paper, a substitute for belief in God.

'Underneath (Always)' opened with the start of day representative of a start of a new life, and it is permeated by the feeling of the self retreating from the body. The introspective inspection initiated a temporary death necessary for moving forward in life. Graham has explained that the writing of *Swarm* was about 'rebuilding a sense of a person who could inhabit the "I"'. The introspective turn inwards has revealed a self holding on to past convictions that no longer suit the poet. Having experimented with matter and spirituality, Graham is now ready to move forward into an experimentation with nature that closely represents a sense of self that was true to Graham.

In *Never* (2002*)*, Graham's poems are still introspective, and they continue in a manner similar to that of the previous books in which the observation of an object or action described in the opening lines of the poem prompts the poet's thoughts, which are described in extensive detail throughout the remainder of the poem. In addition, the poems of *Never* are located by a body of water whose location at the edge of land figures as a place of seclusion and privacy convenient for a personal examination of self. The first poem of *Never* is a prayer for self and nature that takes the form of a private individual mediation rather than a religious prayer. Graham's prayer is not a public mode of worship; she does not confess to a priest or sing hymns. An exhibition of Augustinian inwardness, her prayer acquires its significance by creating an inner experience by means of which the self communicates with and discovers God. For Graham, writing substitutes for prayer as a form of internalization of thought: to create a self-reflexive awareness and the illusion of communication. The repeated allusions to religious figures and biblical narrative represents more of a questioning of than an adherence to beliefs.

In 'Prayer', Graham stands over the dock to watch the minnows.[28] The visual experience engages her feelings and emotions. The first 12 lines of the 24-line poem describe the fish:

[28] Graham, 'Prayer', in *Never,* p. 3.

Prayer

Over the dock railing, I watch the minnows, thousands, swirl
themselves, each a minuscule muscle, but also, without the
way to *create* current, making of their unison (turning, re-
infolding,
entering and exiting their own unison in unison) making of themselves a
visual current, one that cannot freight or sway by
minutest fractions the water's downdrafts and upswirls, the
dockside cycles of finally arriving boat-wakes, there where
they hit the deeper resistance, water that seems to burst into
itself (it has those layers), a real current though mostly
invisible sending into the visible (minnows) arrowing
motion that forces change—

The 'current' of change registers simultaneously in the fish and in Graham as she stands at the railing taking in the scene. Graham explains how encountering the natural environment in 'Prayer' generated an ethical awareness in her in a manner quite like that described by Damasio:

> at a certain point there is a certain turn in the poem, and a series of pressures that the bodily experience of the witnessing of the minnows compels the speaker to suddenly undergo and they become feelings, then emotions, then they lead to thinking then eventually to a sense of moral or ethical predicament which I think Dr Damasio maps quite brilliantly in his work. Obviously, we [poets] do it instinctively.[29]

Graham establishes a link between her internal and external worlds and attempts to forge meaning and significance from this relationship. The minnows' unison and force against the water current creates an 'arrowing motion' of transformation in Graham's thought and reasoning, which we are privileged to have access to in the following lines:

this is freedom. This is the force of faith. Nobody gets
what they want. Never again are you the same. The longing
is to be pure. What you get is to be changed. More and more by
each glistening minute, through which infinity threads itself,
also oblivion, of course the aftershocks of something

[29] Graham, Damasio, and Metzinger, 'The Passionate Mind'.

at sea.[30]

The lines are honest in their conviction, Graham has accepted that she is a transformed person, 'What you get is to be changed'; she is now 'free to go. | [she] cannot of course come back' to her former life and earlier conceptions of herself. Her new consciousness extends to contemplate the Earth's existence:

> Here, hands full of sand, letting it sift through
> in the wind, I look and say take this, this is
> what I have saved, take this, hurry. And if I listen
> now? Listen, I was not saying anything. It was only
> something I did. I could not choose words. I am free to go.
> I cannot of course come back. Not to this. Never.
> It is a ghost posed on my lips. Here: never.

With her 'hands full of sand,' the Earth becomes visible to her eyes and sensible to her touch. The poet wants to rescue what she can of the Earth: '[T]his is | what I have saved, take this, hurry'. The new conviction of freedom arises from viewing the minnow's forceful movement against the powerful current. It unleashes a new self, as if the person speaking in 'Prayer' is someone else other than Graham: 'It is a ghost posed on my lips', as she declares in the poem's concluding line. This final line rings with Gilbert Ryle's 'ghost in the machine'. Ryle famously described the human self as something that is not from the physical world: an immaterial substance or soul inhabiting the body. In *The Concept of Mind*, the British philosopher attacked the Cartesian separation of mind and body, saying that 'minds are not merely ghosts harnessed to machines'.[31] Graham refuses to accept this concept of the self trapped in the body, thereby relinquishing the idea of herself merely as a thinking being.

Introspection poses to be problematic and inconclusive in its findings about the self, not only in 'Prayer' but as we have seen in the close readings of the poems from *Materialism*, *The Errancy*, and *Swarm.* Graham's engagement in first-person introspection focuses on the here and now, the meditative poems do not relate the poet's present situation to her memories or to any future anticipations. Moreover, the poems meditate on Graham's passive perception at the expense of a dismissal of external factors influential to the self.

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[30] Graham, 'Prayer', in *Never*, p. 3.
[31] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin Group, 1963), p. 21.

The outside world is restricted to prompting the chain of ideas that initiate the poems, and its impact is very limited as the physical world then gradually disappears into the background as Graham's perceptual knowledge dominates the meditation. Furthermore, the self's inward glance impairs the relationship with the reality of the world outside the mental domain and consequently with how the relationship is approached and how Graham responds. The lyric self of *Materialism*, *The Errancy*, *Swarm,* and *Never* is represented by a consciousness that has barely extended beyond its thoughts and is therefore not capable of reflecting on its identity.

And yet, the subjective study of self in 'Prayer' as well as in *Materialism*, *The Errancy*, and *Swarm* is more effective than the objective approach of the eighties. Graham's incorporation of introspection offers an account of the mental realm; her thoughts, experiences and feelings portray a clear sense of self. Damasio explains that, 'engaging in introspection turns out to be a translation, within the mind, of a process that complex brains have been engaged in for a long time in evolution: talking to themselves, both literally and in the language of neuron activity' (p. 184). In the close reading of the poems, the lyric 'I' is seen to be strong and open to change as she navigates her way through the material and the spiritual.

The next chapter explores a series of poems from Graham's ninth and tenth volumes to reveal her experimentation with the concept of embodiment. Graham no longer overlooks the effectiveness of embodiment and engagement with the surroundings to the formation of the self. The chapter portrays Graham's rejection of Cartesian and psychoanalytic conceptions in favour of a unified and embodied conception of selfhood. The implicit 'sense of a moral or ethical predicament' Graham speaks of in the previous discussion is made explicit in the fourth section of *Never*: a topic of discussion in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 The Body and the 'Desperate Sense' of Self in *Overlord* and *Sea Change*

Whereas chapter 4 discussed Graham's introspective look inward, which disregarded the role of the body in asserting a sense of self, this chapter looks at Graham's poems in *Overlord* and *Sea Change* which incorporate embodied interpretations of the political and ecological climate of the twenty-first century United States into Graham's expressions of identity. A comparison of the poems of *Overlord* with those from the previous four books discussed in the previous chapter reveals that Graham may have taken her focus on the body to an extreme, from overlooking embodiment altogether to emphasizing it in a manner that borders on the delusional.

The sudden shift from disregard to an overt attentiveness of a display of embodied reactions can be traced back to the final section of *Never*. Graham says of this section that it was not written till after the book, which she thought at the time, had been completed and was ready for print. Relaying the events that led her to writing 'The Taken-Down God', the first poem of the final section, Graham explains that, while on a visit to Italy, she wound up in a small chapel on an Easter Saturday where congregants were taking down the statue of Christ, as is customary to the occasion.

Graham remembers feeling that her attempt to write about the ceremony was like a theft: taking down what was not hers. The significant event that changes the course of Graham's poetry is when the statue is removed from its place on the cross and is situated inside a velvet-lined coffin, covered with a wedding veil and surrounded by weeping congregants:

> naked, still, of wood, pain [in the face], crown that doesn't come off, thorns
> steel, white-gauze wedding veil over the length of him, through which
> the small coughs of the weeping seem not
> to cross, mosquito netting really—[1]

[1] Graham, 'The Taken-Down God', in *Never*, p. 93.

The wedding veil forms a barrier of literal and metaphorical implications which Graham is determined to remove throughout the course of the narrative. On the one hand, the veil is perceived as a physical barricade that prohibits the worshippers from touching or embracing the statue. On the other hand, the shroud functions as a figurative barrier that separates the poet from the spiritual atmosphere. Moreover, the veil conceals the statue's body, which is representative of Graham's approach to the self in her poems so far. The need for an unveiling serves many purposes: It reflects Graham's desire to clearly observe the figure hidden behind the shroud and to be a part of the spiritual atmosphere of the chapel. And yet, Graham feels that her act of writing sets her apart from the rest of the congregation:

> Why are these words
> an insult to
> the god? Especially if written down. Why this notation on this page a
> rip? Presence. Forgive me [I take this pad indoors] [am sitting in
> a tiny pew] I mean to be among the women who surround the god and weep.
> They bend and kiss the feet. More coughs. Yes, the speaking subject in
> me wants
> to rip the veil.[2]

The poet feels a compulsive need to document the procedures, but in a place sanctified by worship, writing is viewed as a violation of the holiness of the chapel. Noteworthy in the above lines is Graham's reflection on herself as a 'speaking subject' of the psychoanalytic thought of Freud and Lacan. In their models, they refer to the unconscious and speaking subject. Graham rejects the psychoanalytical perspective, as it 'veils' the true self she wishes to portray in poetry, and her wish is to 'rip the veil' of modernist thought that held the self back from active engagement. She feels that the 'speaking subject', unlike the quiet worshippers, wants to remove Christ's veil. It is not only Christ's body that is veiled; Graham's body has been obscured as well. The realization arises from an immersion in thought which establishes an interior world for Graham to exist in and from which she can critically observe the churchgoers and relate their experience to hers. The moment that Graham grasped that the veiling of the body impacted not only the congregation but her as well is the moment that she became aware of the external world's influence on her sense of self. Graham now realised that 'the speaking subject in |

[2] Ibid., p. 94.

me' needs to be inclusive of her body and surroundings; without this condition, a coherent sense of her human identity cannot be conveyed.

In *Overlord* (2005) and *Sea Change* (2008), Graham maintains the introspective study of self, only now the study has broadened to incorporate her overt physical reactions. Graham turns her attention outward to evaluate the ecological, environmental and political atmosphere of the Earth, and inward to observe her mental and somatic responses to these external factors. Graham is no longer a passive observer; she is now equipped with a moral consciousness and actively evaluates and judges the conditions of the Earth in the hope of altering her reality.

The body conveys its own account of its existence in *Overlord*. Graham's objection to the atrocities of war and conflict is physically embodied as a form of ailment. *Embodiment* here refers to the body as a vehicle of expression for a moral consciousness. It includes the acts and conducts carried out by the body or through the body oriented toward the public sphere. In 'Praying (Attempt of June 14 '03)', Graham's pain is an embodiment of her fear for her fate on a politically and ecologically disturbed planet.[3] The close reading of the three-page poem is divided into four thematic parts for the sake of clarification, since 'Praying (Attempt of June 14 '03)' is difficult as it is built around the extended image of Graham in pain. Lines 1-28 introduce the prayer, toxic waste disposal and scientific study. Graham's wish to be accountable is the focus of lines 29-45, followed by a juxtaposed consideration of the role of a Mycenaean poet in lines 46-58. The fourth and final section (lines 59-74) chronicles Graham's feelings as pain travelling along the brain's crevices. The close reading conducted in the following pages is based on the divisions suggested above.

> This morning before dawn no stars I try again.
> I want to be saved but from what. Researchers in California have
> discovered a broken heart causes as much distress
> in the pain center of the brain as physical injury.
> The news was outside the door on the landing. I
> squatted to it then came back in. Resume my
> position. Knees tight, face pressed.[4]

[3] Graham, 'Praying (Attempt of June 14'03)', in *Overlord,* pp. 31-33.
[4] Ibid., p. 31.

The sky's darkness before sunrise, void of any illuminating stars, sets the scene for Graham 'to try [praying] again'. Conventionally, the first line would incorporate punctuation and would appear as follows: 'This morning before dawn, no stars, I try again'. The absence of commas hurries the reading, as there is no punctuation to slow or stop the flow of words. The line therefore replicates the flow of Graham's thoughts; she feels the need 'to be saved' from Earth's demise. Fear has inhibited her from naming the source of her anxiety, so she plainly remarks, 'but from what'. At this point, Graham steps outside to bring in the morning 'news', which includes an article on scientific research conducted on the human brain. Graham is referring to the neuroimaging study, 'Does rejection hurt? An fMRI study of social exclusion', which was carried out by psychologists Naomi I Eisenberger, Matthew D Lieberman, and Kipling D Williams at the University of California in 2003.[5] The study examined the impact of distress caused by social exclusion on the brain and suggested that the brain's response is highly similar to that of physical pain. Graham's allusion to contemporary cognitive research establishes a connection between her physical suffering of pain and her emotional state and steers readers away from the more established association of pain with bodily harm. She does not associate specific physical stimuli with painful reactions; rather, it is her awareness of ethical injustices responsible for triggering the pain. The scientific research serves as a basis for the extended image of the mind underpinning the poem.

The references to scientific study in the poem appeared in 'The news […] outside the door on the landing', which is telling. Graham uses *news* rather than *newspaper* as if she is asking, what new devastations will I read about in the media today? How will I be impacted by the 'news', and what is being done to eradicate the troubling 'news'? After reading the paper, Graham reassumes her prayer in a foetal position with 'Knees tight, face pressed', and a 'closed face'.[6] The instinctive position is the body's natural response to fear and is indicative of the need for physical and psychological protection. As she sits in the position, her fingers leave an imprint on her cheeks, which remind her of the ridges of a canyon. The imprint synecdochally turns into the Yucca mountains:

[5] Naomi I. Eisenberger, Matthew D. Lieberman and Kipling D. Williams, 'Does Rejection Hurt? An Fmri Study of Social Exclusion', *Science,* 5643 (2003), 290-92.
[6] Graham, 'Praying (Attempt of June 14'03)', in *Overlord*, p. 31.

> […]. Knees tight, face pressed. There seems to be
> a canyon. No light in it, yet it's there, but then
> nothing. *Waste* comes
> in, I know they are
> burying our waste, that it will last hundreds of millions
> of years in the mountain, that they are trying to cover it with signs they
> do not know how to develop in
> a language that will still communicate in that far
> future saying don't open this, this is lethal beyond
> measure, back away, go away, close the lid, close
> the door. The canyons where my face lies full weight on the platter
> of my hands have ridges and go forward only to
> the buried waste.[7]

In the 1980s, the United States government chose the Yucca Mountains in Nevada as a potential site for radioactive waste disposal, spending millions of dollars in addition to endless hours of research and work by engineers and scientists for the preparation of the project.[8] The United States, along with a number of leading countries of the world, decided that the safest means for the disposal of radioactive waste resulting from the health care system, scientific research, electricity production and nuclear weapons, was its burial deep underground in remote geological locations. The descriptions of toxic waste disposal are introduced in the context of the poem's focal image of the 'canyon', an image that extends over many of the poem's lines to reflect the sense of urgency with which Graham portrays the ecological condition.

The urgency is twofold for the poet. First, the act of toxic-waste disposal is in itself an act of violence against public health and the natural environment. Second, Graham fears that the Yucca mountain is a temporary solution. The potential danger to public health and safety from the radioactive waste is its ability to continuously emit radiation for long periods. Furthermore, the absence of a common language understood by present and future generations in the deep future may well result in the latter's exposure to harm. As humans develop, so does language. Scientists' responsibilities extend beyond the problem of safe disposal of the nuclear waste in their safeguarding of the planet. They need to construct a language and formulate written warnings through which future generations would be warned of the contents of the deep geological dumpsters.

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[7] Ibid.
[8] *Uncertainty Underground: Yucca Mountain and the Nation's High-Level Nuclear Waste*, ed. by Allison MacFarlane and Rodney C. Ewing (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014).

The word '*Waste*' written in italics attracts attention. The italicisation emphasizes the shock at the fact that it is waste and nothing else that was buried in the land. Graham could also be suggesting that her present world is a literal *Wasteland* like that which T.S. Eliot had depicted decades ago. It is interesting that the alternating short and long lines of the above-quoted lines form visual 'ridges' that correspond to the imprint on the speaker's cheek and imaginatively replicate the empty landfills ready for waste disposal.

Graham considers her responsibility as a human, a mother and a poet towards the ecological crisis and is heard saying, 'they are | burying our waste'. She therefore asserts that 'I am trying to take matters | into my own hands'. But her only response is that the body is 'tucked away' neatly in a prayer. The short sentences with the awkwardly placed stops reflect her fear as she realizes how personal the situation is for her as a mother. Graham fluctuates between her wish to save humanity and her wish to 'save my child, my only child'. Here are the lines:

> tucked the body away. Am all alone on this
> floor. In a city in America. To make a
> sacrifice. Of what. Save my beloveds. Save my
> child. Save her right now. Destroy this carpeting these
> windows the walls take the whole of what is wrong
> in payment from us. Let me fall through the air.
> Save the will to live, save the constituent part of
> the human. No. What is constituent. Oh
> save my child, my only child.

Her knowledge of the destruction of the Earth pulverizes the determination to live and is an assertion of an impending death of her daughter, a symbol of the generations yet to come, and a pulverization of the determination to live. Graham is ready to sacrifice herself. 'Let me fall', she begs, to save her child and the 'will to live'. The poet's ethical responsibility for the Earth's deterioration is the motivation for a prayer for personal safety of the self, loved ones and indeed for the will to survive.

The prayer becomes ever more personal and intense the further we read, and the force of Graham's clutched hands eventually takes us back in time. 'The more I press down onto the rug the more we move up the | canyon' of history, explains Graham, back 3,000 years ago to the once unified Greek Mycenaean civilization to witness 'the | poet ushered in. To sing of' the abduction of Helen. The following lines convey in detail the scene leading to

the singing, as poetry was orally communicated. The sentences become shorter with more frequent stops to slowly build up the anticipation of the announcement:

> The more I press down onto the rug the more we move up the
> canyon. In Mycenae we moved up this canyon too,
> up, up through the city to the throne room at the top.
> The columns still standing. The view of two oceans and over two
> ranges. Where the King and his retinue are receiving the news. Here. The
> poet ushered in. To sing of what has happened. Right here.
> On this floor. The voice telling this story. Long, slow, in detail. The opening
> of the singer at the throat. The still bodies of the
> listeners, high on this outpost, 3,000 years ago, the house of
> Agamemnon, the opening of the future. There. Right through the open
> mouth of the singer. What happened, what
> is to come. And the stillness surrounding them when it is done,
> the song. And the singer still. And the chalices empty.[9]

According to Greek mythology, Mycenae's King Agamemnon led a 10-year war against the Trojans, who had abducted Helen, his brother's wife. Although the Mycenaeans were ultimately victorious, the long and gruesome war brought Mycenae, the capital city of one of the oldest and most powerful civilizations known to man, to ruin. The city's destruction was part of the cause of the collapse of the Greek civilization.[10] The crucial pause between the poet's broadcasting the news of Helen's capture and the listeners' stillness while they await to be informed heightens the tension of the moment. Little did Agamemnon and his companions know that the news they awaited was to spark the beginning of the end of the Mycenaean civilization. To juxtapose her situation with that of the Mycenaean poet suggests that Graham sees herself to be part of a long history of poets who have shouldered the responsibility of conveying bad news to their people. What is more, in accepting the obligation of warning of imminent calamity, Graham places herself as a prophet whose prayer we listen to. The implication of the comparison is that, in much the same way that the Mycenaean poet 'sings' about the tales of tragedy, Graham also 'sings' a cautionary warning to humanity against actions that will only lead to their demise. Graham returns to her reality and can see the first light of day:

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[9] Graham, 'Praying (Attempt of June 14'03)', in *Overlord*, p. 32.
[10] M. S. Silk, *Homer: The Iliad* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/soton-ebooks/detail.action?docID=255217>, [accessed 06.03.2018].

> Dawn about to open it all up again. Dawn about to
> move it from inside the mind back out. Light almost visible
> on the far hills. Oh who will hear this. When it comes it will be time only for
> action. When it comes it will be time only for
> action. Keep us in the telling I say face to the floor.
> Keep us in the story. Do not force us back into the hell
> of action, we only know how to kill.[11]

The first light of day no longer represents hope after darkness but signifies the time when the memory of Mycenae moves out 'from inside the mind' into the present time to be relived in the reality of the two world wars and the Iraqi occupation. In this, Graham manages to reinterpret the traditional meaning associated with sunrise. With these armed conflicts in mind, Graham 'sings her song' and wonders 'Oh who will hear this'. She is worried that her warning will not be heard in time, and by then, that it will be time to engage in war. Graham's 'singing' is counter posed to action that presumably lacks ethical awareness of the other and leads to murder.

Graham speaks on behalf of a collective 'we'. It is no longer important what 'they' have committed: the focus now is on saving 'us'. These lines suggest that everyone wilfully participates in conflict by failing to protest being turned into instruments of violence in another man's war. Graham pleads on behalf of the soldiers to 'keep us in the story', as forgetting past atrocities results in the needless repetition of war. Graham's voice is thus a 'song' of warning, and her poem is an instrument of peace. The plea to be spared from taking part in combat conveys much about the horrors of conflict and its ability to create soldiers capable of murder: a realisation that adds to the speaker's mental anguish. The phrase 'back into the hell of action' evokes the casualty classification of 'killed in action': a military phrase used to describe the death of a soldier in combat. The poem becomes apocalyptic not only in its revelations of destruction and death, but also in the anticipation of 'the brain's' distress. The compelling request to be remembered forms the core appeal of this specific prayer and of *Overlord* as a whole.

Once the song of protest halts, as it eventually must, 'we' automatically march out and begin to differentiate the enemy from the ally: who is to be killed and who spared.

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[11] Graham, 'Praying (Attempt of June 14'03)', in *Overlord*, p. 32-33.

Once we stop singing we
only know how to get up and stride out of the room and begin
to choose, this from that, this from that, this from that—and the pain,
the pain sliding into the folds of the brain and lodging.

Look, the steps move us up through the dark, I can hear them
even though I can't see them, we are moving further up,
this that this that and the pain sliding all along,
sliding into the fine crevices on the side walls of this brain we are
travelling up, and the pain lodging, and the pain finding the spot of
unforgetting,

as in here I am, here I am.[12]

The memory of human violence travels along the nerve system in conjunction with the sensation of 'pain sliding all along, | sliding into the fine crevices of the side walls of the brain'. The travelling back through the canyon of time has now transformed into an internal travelling in the canyon of the head, the repository of the brain. Pain brought on by fear and distress is physiological pain. Graham suggests that information from sense organs moves up the nerves and registers in the thalamus region of the brain. The mind then believes pain to be present—even in the absence of physical pain triggers. The poem formally replicates the presence of pain in the brain, which is marked by the only double space in the poem. After the pain makes the brain its home and 'lodges' in the brain's crevices, the 67-line stanza comes to a stop. The deliberate gap is meant to be a material manifestation of the space in the brain crevices. The gap is also a period of silence used wisely, as it gives the audience time to imaginatively experience the sensation of pain.

Moreover, the extensive, nine-line description of the pain's movement emphasizes its intensity. The prolonged experience eventually takes over and infringes upon the mind, as the pain specifically targets the temporal lobe of the brain, which controls memory, or 'the spot of unforgetting'. Pain registered in the temporal lobe ensures that human tragedies are not forgotten. Memories associated with pain tend to linger inside the 'canyon' of the mind well into the future, so the pain is constantly present. Pain is personified as having the authority to assert its presence in the mind. The intersection of pain as a sensation and pain as a personified presence adds intensity to the descriptions.

[12] Graham, 'Praying (Attempt of June 14'03)', in *Overlord*, p. 33.

The final line imagines the pain proclaiming, 'as in here I am, here I am', and it is therefore very telling. The personified pain's proclamation rings with the response the prophets Abraham and Moses gave to God's call: 'here I am'.

The concluding line's image of the brain takes the poem full circle: back to its initial allusion to the scientists' research in California. The descriptions suggest Graham's scientific knowledge of the anatomy of the human brain. Reading the lines, the reader can imagine the sensation spreading throughout the brain ridges. Graham believes in poetry's power to assert the moral significance of our acts towards the Earth and toward each other. By re-enacting past and present, Graham wants us to be conscious of our actions and to be morally responsible. We may have forgotten the past and overlooked the present; but in the long run, our actions will come back to haunt us.

The eleven closing lines manage to daze the reader in a number of ways. First, 'this from that' is repeated three times and is followed by a dash which signals the end of Graham's thoughts on the external world of physical war and indicates a shift to her internal world. The multidirectional movement taking place in the poem imitates the thoughts whirling in Graham's mind. There is the flowing movement of the 'the pain sliding all along' and the head-first direction of the canyons 'that go forward'. The prayer ascending from the speaker's position on the rug is emphasised by the 'floor plants that rise' and the atmosphere of travelling upward: '[W]e move up the | canyon'. The rising movement of the prayer, the plants and the time travel contrasts with the speaker's wish to sacrifice herself, which is portrayed in a downward plunge: '[L]et me fall through the air'. Then there is the movement from the inner to the outer: 'Dawn about to | move it from inside the mind back out'. There is also marching out of the room: '[W]e | only know how to get up and stride out of the room'.

'Praying (Attempt June 04'03)' is as enthralling as it is disturbing. It grips the reader with its descriptions of the mental realm, but the accumulation of these descriptions into a continuous pain is unsettling. The embodiment of fear is horrific as it results in the consistent sensation of the pain the speaker endures. It seems that, for as long as the devastation persists, Graham will always feel responsible for communicating this knowledge in her poetry, and she will continue to live in agony. The embodied and emotional lyric self Graham summons here suits the needs of the poem and of *Overlord* in

general in its dealing with the themes of war and death. Rather than offer advice for dealing with these political problems, Graham informs her readers of the implications of disregarding political morals.

Before moving on to the next poem in which the body asserts its existence, the discussion turns to the many poems in Graham's oeuvre which have been titled 'prayers' or a variation. Praying is an active mode of thought involving the hope or wish for a specific outcome. Yet the striking feature of 'Praying (Attempt of June 14 '03)' is the present continuous tense. The act of worship becomes a prolonged mental request for the cessation of the ongoing torment of personal and public trauma. The mind repeats the attempt to pray five other times to a 'Lord' who has yet to answer. Six of *Overlord*'s twenty-five poems are called 'Praying'. The parenthetical phrases that follow the poems' titles include the date of each attempt: (Attempt of June 8' 03), (Attempt of June 6 '03), (Attempt of May 9, '03), (Attempt of June 14 '03), (Attempt of Feb 6, '04) and (Attempt of April 19, '04).[13]

The date of each attempt is given in parentheses after the poem's title, as if taken from a diary. An investigation into the dates reveals the political and environmental situation of a two-year period (2003-04). The exact circumstances leading to the composition of these poems is not a prerequisite for reading and enjoying the poems. However, they do reveal the poet's concerns with the political situation and environmental concerns. 'Praying (Attempt of June 6 '03)' marks the anniversary of D-Day, which is considered one of the greatest massacres in American history; it is followed by 'Praying (Attempt of June 8'03)', a poem dated two days later. May 9 2003 was the day the U.S. government and its allies asked the UN Security Council to legitimise their occupation of Iraq. It was also the day a camouflaged gunman shot and killed one and injured others during a seven-hour standoff at Case Western University in Cleveland, Ohio. On June 14, 2003, a large wave off of the northern Oregon coast flipped over a charter fishing boat, killing at least nine people. On February 6, 2004, an explosion ripped through a Moscow subway car, resulting in the death of 41 people in an attack blamed on Chechen separatists. On the day of the final

[13] Graham, *Overlord*, pp. 8, 16, 24, 31, 65, 80.

prayer attempt, April 19, 2004, American officials and local leaders in Iraq agreed to a number of measures to reduce tensions.[14]

The fact that the days of the prayers coincide with violent political, military and natural events responsible for the deaths of innocent people suggests that these events troubled Graham. The repeated attempts at prayer emphasise the poet's sense of accountability through the continuous search for an understanding of humanity's tragedies. While these historical events coincide with the prayer dates, there is no proof that Graham had these specific events in mind. and the fact that the poems are not in chronological order suggests that *Overlord* is first and foremost a work of art, not a history book.

'Physician' is the next poem from *Overlord* to be discussed, as it takes bodily expression of its existence to an extreme by portraying Graham to be manifesting a psychosomatic condition: a physical disorder caused by psychological factors.[15] In the poem, Graham presents with a series of symptoms that appear to be unrelated to any known disease. Graham takes it upon herself to be both patient and physician and therefore refers to herself in third person as an ill 'person' sitting up in bed reading the medical reference for a diagnosis. Graham seems to have been exposed to the contagion of a global illness and as a result 'My person is sick. It trembles. They have looked everywhere | in my body for a cause, oh my body is brilliant'.[16] To say that the person is sick is to unite it with a pathological syntax. The poet's preference for the pronoun 'it' to describe the body suggests the body's subordinate or dependent position in relation to the mind. This is not to dismiss the body but to maintain the focus on the self. The interpretation reaffirms Graham's confession in 'Praying' to 'Hav[ing] tucked the body away'.[17] The positions with which the body is associated in these two poems – curled up on the floor, then lying in bed – reveal the extent to which the sense of accountability strains the mental and consequently the corporeal.

The poem's first line, in which Graham claims that '[her] person is sick', creates a tone of detachment, as if Graham experiences an out-of-body perspective. The line, and the

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[14] These are among other events that occurred on the day as listed on the *Timelines of History* website. See Timelines of History, 'The 21st Century', *Timelines of History* (Online Directory of Historical Timelines) (Daly City, California: 2015) < http://timelines.ws/21stcent/21st.HTML > [accessed 06 August 2018].
[15] Graham, 'Physician', in *Overlord*, pp. 58-60.
[16] Ibid., p. 58.
[17] Graham, 'Praying (Attempt of June 14'03)', in *Overlord*, p. 32.

poem, would read better if the third-person pronoun were substituted for the first-person pronoun: 'I am sick' is clearer than 'My person is sick'. And since the lines also distinguish between the 'person' and the body, the option we are left with is to equate the 'person' with a sense of self, which is cognitively represented by Graham's ethical consciousness. Preoccupied with depressing thought, Graham searches for a diagnosis in the *Physician's Desk Reference*:

> My person, ah, America, sinks into its bed.
> Into the brooding.
> All day long reads only the *Physicians' Desk*
> *Reference.* To find out what is wrong. Has *all*
> the symptoms. Is not mad. Wants to tell you,
> read carefully, you will find you have them
> too. This takes a while, but after a while, you will find yourself
> shuddering into your diagnoses.[18]

Graham sees poetry as an allegory of the nation's environmental and political troubles and addresses her homeland with the interjection 'ah' as an expression of pain. Her pain is not caused by any disease, as she has established her physical wellbeing from the onset. And yet her body 'trembles' because her 'person is sick'. The body's susceptibility to sickness is the result of Graham's self-implication in a moral dilemma. Such an extreme situation of embodiment reflects the distress of the mind. Intent on self-diagnosis, Graham frantically reads the numerous symptoms as they appear in the consumer edition of the popular *Physicians' Desk Reference*.[19] Medical science has succeeded in explaining the various functions of the human body and has been able to diagnose ailments and diseases that affect its normal operations. However, the extended period spent reading the medical reference with no success implies that the human mind ought to be explicable in the same terms that are applicable to the human body.

An ill Graham stands at her window in the evening:

> At evening my person
> looks briefly out of
> the upstairs window, just before the light goes,
> over the stony valley, where the hawk always sweeps round
> the left end of the field. This is YOUR field my person says under its
> breath, and the hawk knows it, and the disease knows it,

[18] Graham, 'Physician', in *Overlord*, pp. 58.
[19] PDR Staff, *Physicians' Desk Reference* (Thomson PDR, 2003).

> and the summer which is very far away and which might never
> come back knows it, even the steps out the front door
> which might never again give of their service
> to my person know it. *Your field, yours,* it says

The Earth is a responsibility she will not turn away from. The planet is 'your field', Graham says to herself, and it is also 'your field', reader. The sense of accountability is powerfully reinforced in the initial capitalisation and subsequent italicisation of the possessive adjective *your.* Graham knows that her body conveys her distress of being aware of the Earth's condition as symptoms of a disease that so far has not been identified; accordingly, the search for an apt medical diagnosis persists:

> The sickness: new doctors come every day, I send them
> away. I read the *Desk Reference*. I am on page 293.
> You can see it open here, and all the underlining.
> The disease is not as bad as the remedies. I try
> them all. I will try them all till it is over.
> How do I tell my person it is not my body that is ill.
> Not my body, not me, that is right. To be sure, there *is*
> terminal illness, but this is not personal, there is no longer
> *personal illness.* No. It is something else.[20]

Graham's physical disorder remains unexplained by any recognisable disease even after what appears to be an extensive medical evaluation. Throughout the poem, Graham distinguishes between disease, sickness, personal illness and terminal illness, evincing her familiarity with medical terminology. The poem's first two thirds describe the condition as a sickness and disease. A disease is a bodily disorder attributed to a certain cause and manifests recognisable symptoms. While in the final third section of the poem, the condition is portrayed as an 'illness': The subjective experience of a disease's symptoms. The diagnosis is conducted in a medical manner by excluding any obvious causes of the symptom. Personal illness is ruled out as the origin of the trembles. In fact, the poem offers no clues to a personal illness, which is the style of *Overlord*, in which private subjective experiences represent a larger collective experience.

The best diagnosis fitting the symptoms is not medical, 'No. It is something else'. It is the perception of life after the environmental apocalypse. The ethical consciousness'

[20] Graham, 'Physician', in *Overlord*, pp. 58-59.

perception of the disrupted cycle of weather patterns, the perception of 'seasons,' or in the case of ecological catastrophe, 'what is left of them'.

> Outside: seasons, what is left of them, a household, what is
> said and done, ashes cleaned up again, a new fire set, bread, promises
> called-out from one room to another, solid floors,
> and then motion, motion all day long,
> its miraculous invisible millions of paths
> all over everything. *That* is *that* says my body. Then there's *this*—my telling
> to you, the me in me, the multiplication of persons, out of control….[21]

Graham's awareness of a calamity looming close causes 'the me in me, the multiplication of persons, out of control. . . '. Graham is beyond passive perception of the political and environmental context; she now actively engages with her reality, but to an unmanageable extent. Graham's illness may be interpreted as a psychosomatic disorder in which her mental stability is threatened by the environmental calamity that infringes upon the 'person' who is Graham and every other person on the planet. When her mind is unsettled, Graham can be easily convinced of all the diseases she reads about in the *Physicians' Desk Reference.* The suggestion that Graham has been convinced of the symptoms she has read about up to page 293 in a book of more than 3,000 pages long is serious and suggests her vulnerability to the contraction of more diseases:

> what will my body do when the book is all read.
> It will have had them all, the possible illnesses.
> It will ask for others. The unknown ones.
> That their symptoms be listed and brought to it.
> It trembles. It is trembling. It will look back on even this with a memory
> of devastating joy.

The anxious mind is easily deceived into believing it is unwell and when this happens; the scope of the illness becomes uncontrollable, multiplying at a cancerous speed, and the body will continue to tremble as a result. Knowing the cause of her disease and unable to heal herself or the Earth, Graham 'will look back on even this with a memory | of devastating joy.' While the final lines suggest that a return to health may be attainable, the poem's dreadful tone suggests otherwise. Graham's descriptions of her mental state is superior to anything medicine has to offer.

[21] Ibid., p. 60.

Whereas 'Physician' takes embodiment into account as a form of self-expression, the poem is not successful in its depictions of a robust sense of identity for Graham. A stable identity arises from an incorporation of memories from the autobiographical memory and information from the external environment. A healthy consciousness is implicated in a person's behaviour and emotions, but Graham's trembling in 'Physician' seems to be the result of pathologies of consciousness rather than from a morally strained consciousness. The pathological selfhood is seen in her reference to herself in the third person: 'How do I tell my person it is not my body that is ill'. It can also be seen in the descriptions of her internal realm: 'It's like having inside you | numberless confused angels' and 'the me in me, the multiplication of persons out of control….'. The poem can only be seen as successful in the larger context of Graham's experimentation with different approaches to the expression of identity, which Graham described in her interview with Howe as 'her desperate sense of self'.

The cumulative effect of 'Praying (Attempt of June 14 '03)' and 'Physician', is intense. In the two poems, Graham offers a personal account of how the reality of the world impacts her emotionally and physically. Graham realises the power of poetic language to convey the brutality of the world on an anguished personhood. While the scenario in both poems is highly unlikely to occur in real life, Graham moves on to a more realistic representation of self and reality in 'Copy *(Attacks on the Cities, 2000-2003)*'.[22]

'Copy *(Attacks on the Cities, 2000-2003)*' investigates the impediment of imagination on loss of empathy regarding the suffering of others. When the imagination is hindered from picturing the suffering of others, human consciousness loses its capacity to be ethically responsive. Empathy is 'simulating the equivalent body states of others', and accordingly experiences the same feelings and emotions. Graham criticises the media for numbing the moral sensitivity of the individual toward the killing of human beings; in so doing, she engages in a dialogue about our knowledge of the human mind with cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.

Graham states that 'Copy' is 'a poem about wanting to survive'. The parenthetical references following the poem's title include the attack on the New York twin towers in

[22] Graham, 'Copy *(Attacks on the Cities, 2000-2003)*', in *Overlord*, pp. 74-79

September of 2001 and the Iraqi invasion of March of 2003. In the poem's pivotal section, Graham suggests that the ethical awareness should not be confined to the poet but rather needs to be the mind-set of the reader as well:

> 4.
>
> We have to remember we are human. Something
> said
> that. It is in me, that
> something. But see how I now
> want
> to place it in *you*. Human. As in having no privileged access to
> knowledge of our own mind. Or of the world. Although we
> think otherwise. To place it deep in you. That it *trouble*
> you. You. Yes, it is true, someone is always crying out for you to listen.[23]

Graham reminds herself and her readers of their humanity. 'Something' inside Graham told her that she must 'remember we are human'. That something is her ethical consciousness, and she 'want[s] | to place it in *you*'. While cognitive scientists have asserted that we have no access to knowledge of our minds, Graham thinks otherwise. We can access our minds introspectively; otherwise, she would not have come to know of her ethical consciousness. In turn, Graham wants to awaken her readers' moral awareness so 'That it trouble | you'.

The previously quoted section begins with lines borrowed from Johnson and Lakoff's *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. In this passage, Graham uses the cognitive linguists' words to make a statement regarding access to the human mind. These are the original lines:

> If we are going to ask philosophical questions, we have to remember that we are human. As human beings, we have no special access to any form of purely objective or transcendence reason. We must necessarily use common human cognitive and neural mechanisms. Because most of our thought is unconscious, a priori philosophizing provides no privileged direct access to knowledge of our own mind and how our experience is constituted.[24]

[23] Ibid., pp.76-77.
[24] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 7.

Graham agrees with the cognitive linguists' claims, as she proclaims that we '[have] no privileged access to | knowledge of our own mind or of the world. Although we | think otherwise'. Graham hints that, although she agrees with the linguists' proposition that we may think we can access the mind by observing its mental states and physical manifestations and behaviours, we still have much to learn about this amazing part of the human being.

How exactly the poet intends 'to place' the sense of responsibility 'deep in you', reader, is a question that can be answered in light of the readings of 'Praying' and 'Physician'. The unsettling knowledge of the state of the world, overtaken by environmental destruction and war-related killings, causes the ethical consciousness to worry itself into pain and illness. The embodiment of such knowledge is an active acknowledgment and portrayal of the sense of responsibility. However, what worries Graham is the way mass media limits the mind's capacity to think about the world around us.

Graham challenges the ground-breaking ideas of Lakoff and Johnson. They have proposed that everyday language is metaphorical in nature or what is better known as conceptual metaphor. For them, humans tend to conceptualize abstract notions such as time, mind and self in terms of physical metaphors which make them easier to comprehend. In addition, they also suggest that everyday conceptual language is a product of human embodiment. Whereas Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive metaphors have proven to be widely influential, Graham has her doubts about metaphor's suitability for the portrayal of reality. Metaphors 'seem to incorporate a principle of "transference" in that properties that are attached to one object are "carried over" and applied to another'.[25] For Graham, portrayal of reality through the properties of some other physical object sways attention from the reality being described to a focus on the transferred properties. Accordingly, metaphor mediates a middle ground between the reality and its perception as mediated by the metaphor. For Graham, the middle ground mediated by metaphor conflicts with the inhabitation of the lyric moment. Hence, Graham initiates a conversation with Lakoff and Johnson by misquoting their idea that conceptual metaphor provides an opening into the function of the mind. By misquoting, Graham questions how much we actually know

[25] John Strachan and Richard Terry, 'Metaphor and Simile', in *Poetry* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 112-15 (p. 112).

about the human mind in an age when, thanks to media, mind has been numbed to others' suffering. Graham attacks Lakoff and Johnson for what she perceives to be illegitimate remarks regarding the human mind. Graham attempts to resist the numbness by inhabiting the moment of violence and by not by approaching it through metaphor, thereby awakening readers to the horrific reality of the world we live in.

Nikki Skillman interprets Graham's reinterpretation of the cognitive scientists' quote 'to remind us instead that theoretical descriptions of the self as a diaphanously virtual, impotent illusion have jeopardized the experience of selfhood that grounds and guides moral action'.[26] Skillman reads this poem as Graham's stance towards cognitive materialism; however, I would argue that this poem is in dialogue with the philosophy of mind for other reasons.

The fourth passage of 'Copy' vividly dramatizes the violence of war portrayed on a television screen. The director's creative control over how and why a television broadcast is produced proves catastrophic. Graham perceives such manipulations of reality for the sake of audience amusement, ratings and recognition as dangerous because 'they play tricks with the soul'.[27] She categorises these television directors in the pronoun category 'they', to which the perpetrators of 'Praying' and 'Physician' also belong. 'They' are all responsible for the destruction of humanity and the planet.

Graham describes, in a disturbed tone, thoughts on an imaginary director's comments regarding the best way to produce a moving piece of entertainment out of a violent stabbing scene. The director explains that a work will only receive recognition when it 'brings forth the bitterness most vividly' and 'makes us laugh at the scattered limbs'; then will it 'get the' Oscar, the Emmy or whatever 'prize' for a moving performance. The fact that the grim details seem not to cause the director to worry in itself disturbs Graham. Her thoughts about the situation are poured out in long lines that extend from one margin of the page to the other. The long lines acquire speed as they move across the page, carrying with them the gruesome details of the images depicted by the media industry. Furthermore, the long lines embody the poet's commitment to detailed

[26] Skillman, p. 231.
[27] Graham borrows the phrase from Hafiz, 'In the marketplace, where they play tricks on the soul'. See Hafiz of Shiraz, *Thirty Poems* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1952), p. 48.

descriptions of the horrific particulars at play in the creation of our 'virtual | selves'. Graham's portrayal is interspersed with quotes of the director's harsh words in this 18-line sentence. Numerous dashes signal the shifts in point of view:

> […] Yes, it is true, someone is always crying out for you to listen.
> Out from the screen. Where they play tricks with the soul.
> Where they cry out "whosoever brings forth the bitterness most vividly,
> whosoever makes us laugh when the blood shoots forth
> from the open mouth of an other—any other—
> from the open chest, cut throat, penetrated eye,
> severed hand, arm, leg, cock, ear, severed artery wherever accessible—[28]

Exposure to the media's simulated violence desensitises audiences to the violence in the real world. While psychologists worry that exposure to violent imagery may result in anxiety, Graham is more concerned with it becoming a source of amusement—especially when directors and producers aim to make audiences laugh.

The play on the word *access* renders the scene even more haunting. The age-old desire to penetrate the mind and understand its mysteries is replaced by deadly weapons striking their victims 'wherever accessible'. Moreover, the word *access* is a reminder of Johnson and Lakoff's ideas. Graham attributes new meaning to the linguists' ideas regarding our access to the human mind by questioning how much we know of the mind when it can be numbed to others' suffering. The director's words are interrupted by the Graham's thoughts of the somatic:

> what a thing a body, what a citadel, so penetrable—ah—
> never ever to be tricked into believing
> a thing so breakable could house a soul!—whosoever
> makes us laugh at the scattered limbs, blades still flashing
> from the hands of killers, the giddy heat
> *on/off on/off* in the eyes of the dead—yes—close-up on that—end of
> shot, end of scene—whosoever makes us feel
> we are among those left at the end—oh lucky few—how very special we are
> in our seats, ticket in hand—*among*
> *the survivors*—worth the price of admission—yes yes let that one, that maker of

[28] Graham, 'Copy *(Attacks on the Cities, 2000-2003)*', in *Overlord*, pp. 77.

our virtual

selves, replacer of the heavy-headed virtuous self [or were you elsewhere
when it all went down] let him, let him get the prize."[29]

Once viewers' minds have stopped empathising with the images of simulated violence, they become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others. One way this desensitising occurs, Graham explains, is through the detachment of the body from its soul: the immaterial essence of life. The soul conveys moral, emotional and spiritual connotations; this is why twentieth century science has decided to substitute it with the self: a default word with no connotations. A body without a soul eats, drinks and sleeps, but it has lost its freedom, dignity and the capacity to love and be in relationships. The victim becomes an inanimate object for viewers and loses its status as a human being. Therefore, when the 'blades still flashing | from the hands of killers' and the dying victim loses blood 'from the open chest, cut throat, penetrated eye, | severed hand, arm, leg, cock, ear', viewers are unable to relate to the victim. Graham holds the media accountable for convincing audiences that they are 'never never again to be tricked into believing | a thing so breakable could house a soul!' In fact, audiences see themselves as 'lucky' and 'special', for they are '*among/the survivors*'.

The audiences' belief that the image of the body is soulless justifies Graham's reminder in the opening line of the section that 'We have to remember that we are human'. The price of creating entertainment is that it disconnects the viewer from the reality of the world we live in, thereby causing audiences to believe that they are the survivors and that such violence could never impact them. The danger of such an assumption is in hindering viewers' imaginations from simulating the feelings and emotions of the victims of bodily harm, whether the victims are real or part of an act. When imaginations are impeded, and all empathy is lost, humanity suffers a great loss at the hands of the entertainment business, which has succeeded in generating 'virtual | selves' with which viewers are unable to empathize. Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec argues that 'Graham's poetry has struggled to foster the desire for peace by exposing the media's use of language to promote wars that are unjust'.[30]All Graham's poems in *Overlord* work towards establishing 'the heavy-

[29] Ibid.
[30] Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec, 'Overlord Vs The Din: Writing Poetry to Promote Peace Now', *Arts of War and Peace Review,* 1 (2013), 91-104 (p. 98). Kilgore-Caradec also notes in her discussion of 'Dawn Day One' from

headed' morally conscious 'virtuous self'. Virtue is the quality of conforming to ethical and moral principles and supporting the collective welfare. As long as people carry a sense of virtue and support the wellbeing of others, the mind will respond actively rather than passively watch the television screen.

'Copy' is a more successful poem than 'Praying' and 'Physician' for its investigation into the causes responsible for the disappearance of the righteous self and for committing itself to no more than a portrayal of Graham as a victim of the global condition. Identity-wise, the poem provides Graham with little progress in her formulation of identity; it does not go beyond her address to the reader to 'remember that we are human'.

A tone of helplessness in the face of human suffering permeates *Overlord* and is reflected in Graham's view of herself. However, the lyric voice does not completely yield to despair. Instead, it holds on to hope in its continuous attempts at praying: an active mode of thought which suggests a wish for a specific outcome. Graham's activism is illustrated in the poems' titles. The poet is 'Praying' for the safety of the Earth, then sees herself as a 'Physician' identifying symptoms and treating illnesses. In 'Copy', she composes 'a poem about wanting to survive. | It must clearly try anything'.[31] Embodiment is an active and reciprocal process of body and mind. The ethical mind orients the body to behave in a specific manner, while this embodiment is manifested in somatic symptoms. Where once she completely dismissed the body, now she talks through the body.

It is more likely readers would respond to a healthy Graham than to a diseased version of herself. But what she does maintain from *Overlord* is the emphasis on the imminent death we are to face. The lyric speaker of the poems of *Overlord* is taken to be a representation of Graham herself and conveys an improvement over the speaker in the earlier volumes; the lyric speaker cannot be said to be autobiographical yet.

Exploration into selfhood evolves after *Overlord*. The lyric self moves beyond speaking through the body, away from embodiment as a manifestation of the moral

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Overlord, 'there is also an acknowledgement that the woman is assertively writing a war poem, and it is almost beyond acknowledgement. No one asks whether or not women can write war poems today'. Here she makes an interesting point on Graham's attempts at writing war poems, a focus that could possibly be taken up further, one that I have not seen tackled in any of the commentaries and criticism available on Graham to date.

[31] Graham, 'Copy *(Attacks on the Cities, 2000-2003)*', in *Overlord*, p. 78.

consciousness's objections to the public conditions. The poet's view of herself in *Sea Change* is being refashioned dependent on her renewed perspectives of her personal history, her interactions with her environment, the new information she has come to know and integrate into her mind and her worried future outlook. In *Sea Change*, Graham highlights the dilemma of human indifference towards the Earth's climate change. She imagines the worst-case scenario when climate change runs loose and plunges the planet into a catastrophe for humankind. To avoid this scenario, Graham believes that the role of the poet is to find modes of expression not available to scientists, to communicate to readers. '[W]hat is being sought by scientists, in artists practical use of the Imagination,' explains Graham, 'is how to make the "deep future"—seven to ten generations hence — feel actually "connected" to us, right down to this very minute of our lives, this choice to make to use this styrofoam cup, this plastic bag'.[32] Artists and scientists both take on the responsibility of warning readers about the consequences of their current habits of consumption and wastefulness for the planet's future and for future generations.

In *Sea Change*, Graham is peculiarly attentive to the role of the imagination in awakening the reader's consciousness by envisioning a future of the planet vastly different from the present,

> Perhaps if we use [the imagination] to summon the imagination of where we are headed—what that will feel like—what it will feel like to look back at this juncture—maybe we will wake up in time? I have written it in order to make myself not only understand—we all seem to "understand"—but to actually "feel" (and thus physically believe) what we have and what we are losing—and furthermore what devastatingly much more of creation we are going to be losing.[33]

Imagining the future involves creating feelings that arise from visualizing what the future has in store. Only when feelings are activated will the knowledge have an impact both on the poet and on the readers. This is why Graham worries that her embodiment of fear may inhibit her mental ability to imagine the future.

[32] Blackie, p. 38.
[33] Wengen, (para 7).

In ‘Embodies’, Graham explores the influence of the irreversible changes setting in on the Earth’s relatively stable climatic conditions on her sense of self and on her capacity to imagine the future.[34] The poem embodies a series of environmental mistakes:

> Deep autumn & the mistake occurs, the plum tree blossoms, twelve
> blossoms on three different
> branches, which for us, personally, means none this coming spring or perhaps none on
> just those branches on which
> just now
> lands, suddenly, a grey-gold migratory bird—still here? —crisping,
> multiplying the wrong
> air, shifting branches with small
> hops, then stilling—very still—breathing into this oxygen which also pockets my
> looking hard, just
> that, takes it in, also my
> thinking which I try to seal off,
> my humanity, I was not a mistake is what my humanity thinks,[35]

The ominous first line sets an apprehensive tone and establishes the settings, Graham is outdoors, and the time is ‘Deep autumn & the mistake occurs’. The one mistake turns into a series of deviations from the natural cycle of living organisms. First, there are the plum tree flowers blossoming in autumn instead of spring, ‘which for us, personally, means none this coming spring’. Then Graham notices the ‘grey-gold migratory bird’ that should have flown off to a warmer region to escape the cold of winter and asks it, ‘still here?’ She even takes a second look at the blossoms, in case her vision has failed her, ‘to see if | those really were blossoms, I thought perhaps paper’. But the discrepancies are real. Nothing can be known from the inaccessible consciousness of the flowers and bird, and yet the creatures’ susceptibility to the degradation of the environment gives way to the speaker’s own vulnerability. The ‘looking hard’ at the discrepancies of nature unsettles Graham, who opts ‘to seal off’ thinking of the potential impact that climate change will have on her and reminds her to ‘breathe, breathe’. The oddities of nature direct Graham to contemplate the impact that the oft-denied global warming may have

[34] Graham, ‘Embodies’, in *Sea Change*, pp. 6-7.
[35] Ibid., p. 6.

on her and prompts her to question whether she too could possibly be a mistake; but her moral consciousness chimes in and a consoled Graham reassures herself: 'I was not a mistake is what my humanity thinks'. The tone turns sombre, sad, then worried again:

> […]--I can see my prints on the sweet bluish mud—where I was just
> standing and reaching to see if
> those really were blossoms, I thought perhaps paper
> from wind, & the sadness in
> me is that of forced parting, as when I loved a personal
> love, which now seems unthinkable, […]
> […]
> what am I to do with my imagination—& the person in me trembles—& there is still
> innocence, it is starting up somewhere[36]

Contemplation of the scene stirs up feelings of sadness at leaving behind nature that was once untouched by climate change. The feeling seems much like 'that of forced parting' from a loved one, 'which now seems unthinkable'. Graham's dismay is deep and personal. But though she could imagine herself experiencing love again after heartbreak, Graham is worried that this may not be the case with the Earth. The imagined future of a planet whose vagaries of weather are directly tied to the inconsistency of non-human creatures is terrifying. The only future to be envisioned is one of a disturbing prospect to the mind and body hindered by fear, leaving Graham to ask, 'what am I to do with my imagination—'? The dash signals the time it takes for the speaker to think of an answer before she realizes that the fear spreads to the body '& the person in me trembles'. Still preoccupied with disturbing thoughts, Graham reminds herself 'there is still | innocence' in the world' when the sound of the 'grey-gold migratory bird' grabs her attention:

> […] and the sound of the
> wings of the bird as it lifts off
> suddenly, & how it is going somewhere precise, & that precision, & how I no longer
> can say for sure that it
> knows nothing, flaming, razory, the feathered serpent I saw as a child, of stone, &

[36] Ibid., p. 6-7.

how it stares back at me
from the height of its pyramid, & the blood flowing from the sacrifice, & the oracles
dragging hooks through the hearts in
order to say
what is coming, what is true, & all the blood, millennia, drained to stave off
the future, stave off,
& *the armies on the far plains*, the gleam off their armor now in this bird's
eye, as it flies towards me
then over, & the sound of the thousands of men assembled at
all cost now[37]

In the second pivotal part of the poem, personal and collective memories are intertwined to relay humanity's inclination towards annihilation. The 'sound of the | wings of the bird as it lifts off' prompts an unpleasant childhood memory. Graham remembers 'the feathered serpent I saw as a child, of stone, &' relives the fear in the present tense as 'it stares back at' her. The sight and sound of the flying bird are sensual triggers of the memory, now embodied imaginatively in the statue of the feathered serpent. The personal memory extends back in time and turns into a historical myth from the Mesoamerican civilization. The feathered serpent deity, who was worshipped in the regions of central Mexico by different groups in the pre-classic and classic eras, could fly and walk and was believed to have created the cosmos and had the power to control human events. Sacrificial offerings were presented to the deity to bring good fortune and ward off foreseen harm.[38]

Graham questions whether the practice of human sacrifice has indeed disappeared. Self-preservation is instinctive as we seek to protect our survival on Earth, but how it is attained is another issue. The poem suggests that we either live life with precautionary steps to avoid the risk of total annihilation or we wait until grave hazard is present and, in that moment, we decide to offer the lives of the many in exchange for the lives of the few. The essence of self-preservation has not changed, whether it takes the form of human sacrifices to deities or the form of young men being shipped off to die in war. Graham's descriptions of '*the armies on the far plains*, the gleam off their armor now in

[37] Ibid., p. 7.
[38] Theresa Bane, 'Feathered Serpent', in *Encyclopedia of Beasts and Monsters in Myth, Legend and Folklore* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co. 2016), p.125.

this bird's | eye, as it flies towards me', confirm that humanity will do what it must to preserve life, power and authority even 'at all cost now'. At the end of the poem, the migrating bird comes into view and appears to be 'a hawk after all, I had not seen | it clearly, it has gone to hunt in the next field'. The hawk soaring in the sky is an ill omen for the direction in which humanity is headed.

The poem's distinct visual layout, or what Graham calls an *exploded haiku*, enacts an artistic response to the ecological conditions.[39] The long line that initially opens the poem can be read as a Japanese haiku, as it represents a moment of objective perception rather than of subjective expression.[40] Imagist poets adopted haiku at the beginning of the twentieth century. The English haiku is approximated, not a total replication of the Japanese form. The original haiku is composed of an image from an everyday moment in each of its three lines. In the lines, there is a word that refers to a season and a pause appearing at the end of the first or second line. Haikus are restricted to no more than 20 syllables, but Graham's first line alone consists of 18 syllables. Graham's poem 'explodes' from the objective perception of the blossoms to the subjective expression of childhood memories and contemplation of the present in a 61-line poem.

The poems of *Sea Change* are all written in the form of an 'exploded haiku'. The poems tend to have a long line extending from the left to the right margins of the page, followed by several mid-indented short lines that are in turn followed by another long line. The long lines expand across the page to replicate the movement of conscious thoughts, but they pertain a certain level of control essential to survival and wellbeing.

'The Violinist at the Window, 1918' portrays an image of hope symbolized by the French artist Henri Matisse.[41] Graham's ekphrastic poem was written for Matisse's painting with the same title, 'Here he is again, so thin, unbent, one would say captive' of his home during the cold of winter. The painting depicts a self-portrait of the artist standing at a window playing 'the sustained one note of obligatory | hope' on his violin after 'the war to end all wars has come | to an end—for a while' that is.[42] Matisse would spend the

[39] Graham, 'Q & A', *Poetry Magazine*, p. 478.
[40] Rhian Williams, 'Haiku', in *The Poetry Toolkit: The Essential Guide to Studying Poetry*, 2 edn (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 101.
[41] Graham, 'The Violinist at the Window', in *Sea Change*, pp. 32-34.
[42] Ibid., p. 32.

winter months in Nice, France and has produced a number of works depicting figures looking out a window. The window represents a frame between the private and public realms.

Graham sees herself through Matisse's eyes, except she has lost any affirmation of identity: '[M]y head totally | empty', she explains, 'you can see | the whole sky pass through this head of mine'.[43] However exaggerated the image, it remains intriguing. The head has been known to be associated with a variety of meanings, including power and enlightenment. But to say her head is vacant is to imply an absence of mental activity. To compensate for the emptiness, Graham, who is looking out of a window, explains that 'the mind is hatched and scored by clouds | and weather'. The mind replicates the images it perceived in the sky, which has some truth according to neuroscience. 'The human brain is a mimic of the irrepressible variety.' explains Damasio, 'Whatever sits outside the brain—the body proper, […] as well as the world around, man, woman, and child, cats and dogs and places, hot weather and cold, […]—is mimicked inside the brain's networks' (p. 64). Neural cells imitate the objects of the body and the exterior world in neural maps, which makes the reality of the exterior world a literal extension of the body. Graham sees in the movement of nature a temporary grounding of the self.

However, the war to end all wars was soon followed by a longer, more violent war with a higher death toll. We hear Matisse's words through Graham's voice:

> […] everything
> and nothing slipping through—no, I cannot be reached, I cannot be duped again says
> my head standing now in the
> opened-up window, while history starts up again, &
> is that flute music in the
> distance, is that an answering machine—call and response—& is that ringing in my ears
> the furrows of Earth
> full of men and their parts, & blood as it sinks into
> loam, into the page of statistics, & the streets out there, shall we really
> be made to lay them out again, & my plagiarized
> humanity, whom
> shall I now imitate to re-

[43] Ibid., p. 33.

become

before the next catastrophe—[44]

Graham's shock at 'the furrows of Earth | full of men and their parts, & blood' leaves her at a loss. The implication of the above-quoted lines is that the annihilation of humanity annihilates her sense of self. She is left to imitate other objects and people for a 'plagiarized humanity'. She aspires to 're- | become' a human once more, at least 'before the next catastrophe'. In the meantime, she searches for that one musical note of hope and harmony:

> the note, sustained, fixed, this is what hope forced upon oneself by one's self sounds
> like—this high note trembling—it is a
> good sound,[45]

'The Violinist at the Window 1918' is a consolation for Graham and Matisse, who suffered psychologically from fear of the unknown future—only for Matisse, the Earth was not threatened with environmental calamity. In the poem 'Positive Feedback Loop (June 2007)', Graham provides illustrations of the anomalies that are destroying the planet to create a realistic image of the end waiting for us.[46] In the twenty-first century, the Earth is swaying between sustainability and annihilation, and Graham is worried that our life habits will push the Earth towards a tipping point of no return. The poem's title refers to environmental processes that can increase the Earth's warming temperatures. Scientists have identified changes in cloud amounts, precipitation patterns and melting of ice to be positive feedback loops that make the Earth warmer.[47] The rise of temperatures caused by the positive feedback loops will in turn lead to a climate tipping point. For example, the strong positive feedback of melting ice will change ocean circulation; with it, regional weather will cause the Earth's surface to absorb more heat and lead to the release of deposits of methane gas and carbon dioxide laying underneath the permafrost of the Artic region. The result is the climate tipping point when the Earth's climate unexpectedly alters between somewhat steady states.

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[44] Ibid., p. 33.
[45] Ibid., p. 34.
[46] Graham, 'Positive Feedback Loop *(June 2007)*', in *Sea Change*, pp. 42-44.
[47] NASA: Climate Change and Global Warming, 'The Study of Earth as an Integrated System', in *Earth System Science* (NASAClimate, 2018) <https://climate.nasa.gov/nasa_science/science> [accessed 09.03.2018].

Graham has stated that our knowledge of the scientific facts underpinning climate change is not enough on its own. She believes that our feelings need to be stirred for personal responsibility to be affirmed and for changes of consumption habits and patterns of energy use to occur. 'I am listening in this silence that precedes', she says, and she asks us to '[f]orget | everything, start listening.' It is the senses that need to be moved so that we consciously reflect on the reality of the current ecological conditions. Later in the poem, Graham demands we feel the urgency within:

> speed your thought to it,
> till your feet themselves are
> weary not just your
> heart—the
> skins, the flesh, the heat, the soil, the grain, the sound of each birdcall heard over the millennia,[48]

We do exist in isolation but are part of a world consisting of interlocked systems and our morality should require us,

> to hold in mind the North Atlantic Deep Water
> which also contains
> contributions from the Labrador Sea and entertainment of other water masses, try to hold a
> complete collapse, in the North Atlantic Drift, in the
> thermohaline circulation, this
> will happen,
> fish are starving to death in the Great Barrier Reef, the new Age of Extinction is
> now

We are now in 'the new Age of Extinction' when the 'fish are starving to death' and yet we are not attentive to what is happening:

> you know not what
> you
> are entering, a time
> beyond belief. Who is one when one calls oneself
> one?[49]

[48] Graham, 'Positive Feedback Loop *(June 2007)*', in *Sea Change*, p. 43.
[49] Ibid., p. 42.

Graham worries that, with the extinction of species and loss of habitat, we too are experiencing an annihilation of a virtuous self. 'Who is one when one calls oneself | one?' she asks; is this 'one' humane? can we still refer to the 'one' as the 'self' or has it lost all empathy for other living organism? Does humanity not know that the extinction of other species and the natural environment, will lead to the annihilation of the human? Or have people become numb to their surroundings and fellow inhabitants? She points out our ignorance when it comes to the threatened environment: We 'are entering a time | beyond belief'.

On her part, the poet took to researching and familiarizing herself with climate science. In fact, Graham explains that *Sea Change* was written 'after a very deep apprenticeship to the facts and issues involved in climate science'.[50] She says she will go to extremes in defence of the Earth:

> […]. I will learn everything there is of this my spouse the future, here in my
> earth my parents' house, the garden of
> the continuing to think
> about them, there is nothing else *in fact* but the
> past, [51]

The past holds lessons for the future. Scenarios from the past, as in the allusion to 'The Great Dying again, the time in which life on Earth is all but wiped out | again', are possible for the future. The great dying or the Permian extinction was the greatest mass extinction of all time when, a quarter of a billion years ago, nine out of ten plant and animal species disappeared from the face of the Earth. However, unlike the natural forces that produced the great dying and subsequent extensions, the annihilation toward which life on Earth is currently headed is man-made. The poet battles her fear by appreciating the present moment and ends the poem on an optimistic note:

> […] —we must be patient—we must wait—it is a
> lovely evening, a bit of food a bit of drink—we
> shall walk

[50] Blackie, p. 40.
[51] Graham, 'Positive Feedback Loop *(June 2007)*', in *Sea Change*, p. 42-43.

out into the porch and the evening shall come on around us, unconcealed,
blinking, abundant, as if catching sight of us,
everything in and out under the eaves, even the grass seeming to push up into this our
world as if out of
homesickness for it,
gleaming.[52]

Through the alternation of short and long lines, the poems of *Sea Change* attempt to register the feeling of a catastrophe waiting to occur in the future yet so near to the present. The long lines speed into the future, while the line breaks slow the reading and shift into shorter lines representative of the present moment. The hope is that the ecological conditions can be stabilized and we can manage to survive while adapting to the changes our planet is witnessing. In the annual column 'To A Green Thought', Garth Greenwell praises Graham's efforts in *Sea Change*. 'In shouldering the topic of global climate change,' Greenwell remarks, 'Graham is charting territory almost unvisited by our major American poets.' He highlights Graham's specific achievement:

> Although the aesthetic results of this effort [by Graham and other American poets] have not always been heartening, it marks a valuable correction of the retreat to the psychic interior that has characterized much of the central strain of American poetry in the three decades since the death of Robert Lowell.[53]

Graham 'retreat to the physic interior' is not for a personal confession but for an investigation into the correlation of the ecological states of the planet with the devastated selfhood.

Graham's meditation on the political and environmental reality of the twenty-first century is instinctively driven by her biological homeostasis and the broader sociocultural one. By detecting the relevant problem at the level of her conscious mind, Graham can reflect and respond in a way needed for her survival and wellbeing. 'The self […] infuses the exploration of the world outside the brain with a *concern* for the first and foremost problem facing the organism: the successful regulation of life'.[54] When life outside the

[52] Ibid., p. 44
[53] Garth Greenwell, 'Beauty's Canker: On Jorie Graham', *West Branch,* 63 (2008), 115-34 (p. 115-16).
[54] Damasio, p. 268.

brain is threatened, 'The spontaneously, intrinsically feeling self signals directly, as a result of the valence and intensity of its affective states, the degree of concerns and need that are present at every moment'.[55] *Overlord* and *Sea Change* are books that register the self's somatic and cognitive responses to the fear of annihilation. In the poems quoted from these two volumes, Graham has contemplated, questioned and communicated her feelings of a 'desperate sense of self' with respect to the global conditions. The degree of concern is urgent, and the morally alert poet aims for a reaction from readers in the form of awareness and a commitment to change.

Not until the poems of 2008 does Graham convey a lyric self that is both cognitive and embodied, individual yet collective. The poems of *Sea Change* fulfil the criteria for Damasio's autobiographical self; they bring together the past, present and future, they focus on the body, and they observe the movements of consciousness and self-formation. The speaker enacts a self that Damasio describes as the peak of human consciousness. In chapter 6, we are given deeper insight into the personal trials of the lyric speaker in Graham's two recent volumes. Never before has Graham been as transparent about her life predicaments as she has been in these poems. The close reading of the poems reveals the reasons that lead the poet to characterise her sense of self as simulated and inauthentic.

[55] Ibid.

Chapter 6 The Autobiographical Self and the 'Artificial Me' of *Place* and *Fast*

In the largely autobiographical volumes, *Place* (2012) and *Fast* (2017), self-reflective poems are relayed from an embodied perspective to reveal the external world's impact on the self. The two volumes of poems specifically register the impact of Graham's individual experiences—such as physical locations at which she lived and the personal loss she has lived through—on her shifts of identity. As the title of the 2012 volume suggests, place is the thematic concept Graham reflects on. The poems question Graham's ability to reconcile a notion of identity with her metaphorical place as a human, as a mother and as a daughter.

Place and *Fast* register Graham's authentic voice, speaking on behalf of no one, about her personal traumas and yet simultaneously representing a collective self defending the fate of humanity of Earth. In these two recent volumes, Graham avoids being the impersonal narrator of the eighties and the introverted speaker of the nineties. Her poems do not show exaggerated bodily responses to Bill and Beverly's decline; nor do they overlook the material and physical environment. Graham finally inhabits the position of the lyric speaker speaking from the depths of her heart about the issues that matter the most to her: family, ecology and how these two shape her into the person she has become. The transition from a state of health to an 'artificial' condition, the passing of her father, and the intellectual and corporeal decline of her mother are all personal trials that could not be portrayed in any voice other than the autobiographical.

This chapter closely examines three poems from *Place*: 'Treadmill', 'Lull' and 'Lapse'.[1] 'Treadmill' questions the reality of autonomy in the postmodern world of the twenty-first century. 'Lull' and 'Lapse' are more personal poems which relay the shifts of identity Graham experienced after the death of a parent and the birth of a child. All three poems

[1] Graham, 'Treadmill' in *Place*, pp. 34-36; 'Lull', in *Place*, pp. 56-58; 'Lapse', in *Place*, pp. 71-74.

associate private experiences respectively with a road, a valley, and the planet Earth to portray how location requires action and response.

In 'Treadmill', Graham feels entrapped and stripped of agency on the metaphorical road of life. In the fast-tracked, technology-based, ecologically disturbed and globalized world of 2012, Graham compares her existence to running in place on a treadmill. Movement on a treadmill is unconscious, compulsory, dull, repetitive and leaves you feeling tired and unaccomplished. The treadmill metaphor is employed to reveal the lack of personal agency experienced in a world of our making. The lack of agency is further highlighted by comparing her running on the treadmill to Robert Frost's thoughtful assessment of 'The Road Not Taken'.[2]

As Graham runs on the exercise machine, she represents humanity speeding along a disastrous road towards its own annihilation. The variation between the line lengths replicate Graham's short and long strides on the treadmill.

The road keeps accepting us. It wants us to learn "nowhere," its shiny
emptiness, its smile of wide days, so swollen
with void, it really means it, this is not a vacation, it wants us
to let out our skulled-in mind, its channels and runnels, its
slimy stalked circuits, connecting wildly, it the road
wants us
right now
to cast it the
mind
from its encasement
forward
to race up ahead and get a feel for what it is, this always-receding, this place in which
you were to deposit your
question—the
destination![3]

[2] Robert Frost, *The Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1951), p. 129.
[3] Graham, 'Treadmill', in *Place*, p. 34.

Graham's road, a synecdoche of the Earth, is urging humanity to wake up to reality. As our civilizations have developed and continue to prosper, we have been very destructive with respect to our environmental and ecological habitat; and yet, the Earth has adapted and has sustained life. It is 'accepting us' with our abusive patterns of behaviour. 'It wants us to learn' that our destination is '"nowhere"', the literal absence of a place, a disintegration of the Earth. The quotation marks suggest that '"nowhere"' refers not to a status but a place. Although our civilized lifestyles portray the illusion of a move forward, in reality we are 'always-receding,' to '"nowhere": its 'shiny | emptiness,' consisting of 'its smile of wide days, so swollen | with void'. The adjectives *shiny* and *smile* add a level of underlying irony to the horrifying 'nowhere'.

The road 'wants us | to let our skulled-in mind' out of 'its encasement'. The description of the road deserves critical attention. The problem with the current ecological situation is in the embodiment of 'our skulled-in mind, its channels and runnels, its | slimy stalked circuits; connecting wildly' has become its entrapment. The 'skulled-in mind' is no longer connected with the reality of its surroundings. 'The mind is meant to want this, isn't it', asks Graham. It is 'meant to rage to | handle' the global changes. But the reality is that we are passing through life/running on the treadmill without being alert to the consequences of our actions. The consciousness needs to extend beyond its physical 'encasement' to become alert to its non-conscious running on the treadmill/passing through life. The mind needs to 'race up ahead and get a feel for' 'the | destination'--in other words, for the upcoming annihilation. Only when the body registers the feeling of knowing the outside world will the ecological situation be of significance to the mind. Graham's descriptions of the neurological components of the mind suggest that the physical mind, without the added-on process of consciousness, is not sufficient for assessing the seriousness of the predicament at hand. Only when the self comes to the mind will conscious reflection arise, which Graham initially confuses for the road:

> […] — have you not looked into them enough says the grayish
> road, hissing, or maybe
> that is my mind, I
> entered the poem here,
> on line 28, at 6:44 pm, I had been trying to stay outside, I had not wanted to
> put my feet here too, but the wind came up, a little achilles-wind, the city itself took

> time off from dying to whisper into my ear we need you, the complaint which we will nail once again to the door must be signed by everyone, everyone needs to be walking together, everyone must feel the dust underfoot, death by drought, death by starvation, death by neglect, death by no cause of death, by unfolding—[4]

Once Graham 'entered the poem', the narration switches from the first-person plural to the first-person singular pronoun. Graham announces her inhabitation of the lyric self position. And with the assumption of the first-person position is the shouldering of responsibility for the environmental condition. Moreover, the visual depiction of the lines changes once Graham enters the poem. The lines become longer, spreading from the left margin to the right margin of the page, as a depiction of stability which takes the place of the instability that arises from the alternation of long, medium and short lines. Entering the poem reflects the progress Graham has achieved in self representation far from her cry 'to rip the veil' in *Never*.

Graham admits that her attempts at raising ecological awareness were meant to be from a distance; she meant 'to stay outside'. However, she acknowledges that conscious change will not take place in our zombie-like existence but when we reclaim our agency. Much like Achilles, the Greek hero of the Trojan war in Homer's *Iliad*, an ambitious Graham is also the hero of grief. In her mind, she puts down her mortal foot/heel to respond to the murmurs of the dying city and to save the planet. Inevitable death lurks beyond the environment's tipping point in the form of drought, starvation, negligence or other forms to unfold. There simply will not be food, water and clean air for the population.

Graham employs the image of the road to create an array of meaning. She contrasts the treadmill with Frost's forest road to highlight postmodernity's tendency to dull the mind and render it uncapable of making decisions. When Frost 'looked down one as far as [he] could | To where it bent in the undergrowth', he was considering the destination of the individual roads; meanwhile, Graham has no say in the treadmill's compulsory movement to '"nowhere"'. Furthermore, the forest roads were no more than a passive part of Frost's travels, while the treadmill actively participates in Graham's life direction: a hint at the artificial minds that are taking over postmodern life. By the end of the poem, 'the road

[4] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

seems to want to be spooled into our hands, into your mind', expressing a reinstalled confidence in humanity's ability to act in good faith. 'Treadmill' is an enthralling poem, as it is one of the clearest instances in which Graham places herself in the poem. 'Treadmill' illustrates the necessity of poetry for Graham's sense of self essential for her wellbeing.

The apocalyptic tone of 'Treadmill' continues in 'Lull', which is a poem set in the stillness of the 'interglacial lull': a period of warm climate between consecutive glacial periods defined by melting ice and a change in vegetation.[5] The title implies a pacified condition of humanity irresponsive to the ecological changes. It could also suggest governments singing lullabies to their people. Graham sees through vacant political gestures as in when a court demands that 'we are to be | compensated'. She knows that the monetary compensation is not a substitute for 'our way of life being | taken from us'.[6] The passivity with which the globalized life is approached alarms the poet, who feels the need for a more active stance towards global warming and habitat destruction. In preparation for the environmental tipping point, Graham stocks up on life necessities and notices as a fox approaches her:

> At the forest's edge, a fox
> came out.
> It looked at
> us. Nobody coming up the hill hungry looking
> to take
> food. The fox-
> eye
> trained. Nobody coming up the
> hill in the broad
> daylight with an
> axe for
> wood, for water, for the store in the
> pantry. I stock

[5] Otto H. Muller, 'Interglacial period', *Salem Press Encyclopedia Of Science* (2013), in *Research Starters*, EBSCO*host* < http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=5&sid=47055f9a-69ce-42ee-a524-1313c7add081%40sessionmgr4007&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmU%3d#AN=89475708&db=ers >(accessed August 6, 2018).
[6] Graham, 'Lull', in *Place*, p. 58.

the pantry.[7]

The formation of the next glacial period requires prolonged snow and the formation of ice sheets and glaciers. Variant global temperature and high pressure divert rain clouds away from land, resulting in excessive dryness and little rainfall. Aridity is one of the signs of the ice age setting in. The end of the favourable living conditions of the present interglacial period resonates with the end of her father's time on Earth. She remembers visiting him in the hospital:

> […]. When dryness begins I hear the woods
> click. Unusual.
> I hear the arid. Un-
> usual. My father
> is dying of
> age, good, that is usual. My valley is,
> my touch, my sense, my law, my
> soil, my sensation of
> my first
> person. Now everything is clear. Fact lick their tongue deep
> into my ear.[8]

Unlike the ecological transformations that result from man-made intrusion in the environment, the father's impending death in the foreseeable future, however it weighs down on Graham, is nevertheless 'good, [it] is usual'. In losing her father, she is losing the sense of security and feeling of belonging to her 'valley', which contributed to the 'first | person' she has become. Valleys have been a central image in American literature, as they suggest a peaceful state, fertility and hope. After overcoming the hardships of a journey, fictional characters typically stand at the edge of a valley contemplating their arrival. For Graham to connect her identity with the valley suggests healthy associations with stability and hope.

'My valley,' explains Graham, is 'my touch, my sense, my law, my | soil,' and most importantly, it is 'my first | person'. Touching the land awakens the senses and nurtures

[7] Ibid., p. 56.
[8] Ibid., pp. 56-57.

feelings of awe and wonder. Without place, subjectivity would not exist. Her acknowledgement of the valley as formative to her identity helps her to navigate the future and justifies Graham's decision to name the collection *Place*. The form of the lines quoted above is captivating. The long lines visually represent the brink of the mountain from which the poet stands contemplating downwards into the valley's depth for mental clarity. The announcement of the end of visiting hours brings Graham back to reality and to another thought:

> Visiting hour is up. We are curled
> on the hook we placed in our brain and down
> our throat into our
> hearts our inner
> inner organs we
> have eaten
> the long fishing line of the so-called journey and taken its
> fine piercing into
> our necks backs hands it comes out our
> mouths it re-enters our ears and in it goes
> again deep the dream
> of ownership [9]

Her father's looming death has her considering immortality. Graham creates a disturbing image of a brain excerebration: the process first practiced by ancient Egyptians before mummification to pursue 'the dream/of ownership' of immortal life. The ancient Egyptians believed rebirth into an immortal afterlife was secured by preservation of the body. Through a process known as excerebration, the brain was either liquefied and removed from the cranial cavity through the nostrils by a hook or extracted through an incision to the back of the neck in the area where the spinal cord exists. Graham refers to both procedures in the above descriptions with the accumulation of the image, implying that humanity's oblivion is a result of the extraction of its 'brain'. Again, immersed in thought, Graham focuses to see the fox again, who tries to outsmart her into handing over her supplies:

[9] Ibid., p. 57.

fox says
what a rough garment
your brain is
you wear it all over you, fox says
language is a hook you
got caught,
try pulling somewhere on the strings but no
they are all through you,
had you only looked
down, fox says, look down to the
road and keep your listening
up,[10]

The antihero of many stories is well-known for its trickery. In Graham's apocalyptic version, the hungry fox attempts to lure her away from the stocked pantry, not by asking her to sing, but by ridiculing her linguistic abilities. The deceptive creature suggests that there is nothing advantageous about human mental capacities; they are mere hindrances. The fox debates Graham and says that the brain is a garment which covers, instead of facilitates, the perception of the outside world.[11] As for language, it is a hook that catches and takes control, not necessarily the other way around. The fox's proposal for Graham is to avoid such ordeals, to focus on the road and listen carefully for early warning to detect the arrival of the coming glacial era. Despite its articulate comments and suggestions, Graham resists the trickery and asks, 'fox will you not | move on my heart thinks checking the larder', to which fox relies, 'your greed is not | precise enough', implying that she needs to step outside for more supplies for the ecological change setting in.

The shift that the global environment is undergoing has Graham considering her own transition into her maternal identity. In 'Lapse (Summer Solstice, 1983, Iowa City)', Graham reminisces on her feelings of first becoming a mother and defines her sense of self in grand statements: The birth of her maternity is the onset of her humanity, while

[10] Ibid., p. 58.
[11] The lines echo Graham's demand in 'Notes on the Reality of the Self' (4) when she asks, 'Oh mind what you're doing!— | | do you want to be *covered* or do you want to be *seen*?—', in *Materialism*, pp. 59-61 (p. 61).

the beginning of her daughter's life is likened to the start of the first form of life on Earth.[12]

The poem centres on the image of Graham fastening the 'twenty two pounds of eyes, blood, hair, bone—so recently inside [her]— | into the swing' and contemplating the ethical responsibility of bringing a child into 'an Earth that will only swallow us entire'. Graham first considers what motherhood entails for her sense of self. Embracing the new role means accepting new physical and physiological changes that made Graham feel she 'was still in the very beginning of being human'. The start of motherhood for Graham is behind her sense of individualism; it is 'the thing no one can tell another,' as parenthood is not a 'thing' to be recounted but an experience to be lived for it to be known.[13] Graham describes the experience of pushing her daughter on the swing and its implications in the poet's mind:

> eyes closed as your eyes close, and for the first time in this lifetime
> lift you back and up as far as I can, as high as I can,
> then let you collapse so suddenly as I push you away from me,
> with more force than gravity as I summon from within
> what I try to feel is an accurate amount, a right fraction, of my strength,
> not too much promise, not too much greed or ambition
> or sense of beginning or capacity for dream—no—just
> the amount to push you by that corresponds to pity,
> who knows how to calculate that strong firm force,
> as if I were sending a message forth that had to be delivered
> and the claimant expects it, one of so many,
> accompanied by my prayer that you be spared
> from anything at all, from everything, and of course also its opposite,
> that everything happen to you in large sheets of experience[14]

The physical push of the swing for Graham symbolizes the emotional and mental empowerment she will need to instil in her daughter the ability to prepare for the future. The 'accurate amount, a right friction, of my strength', notes Graham, with 'not too much promise, not too much greed or ambition | or sense of beginning or capacity for dream', the force has to be 'just | the amount to push you by that corresponds to pity', mercy and compassion. But then again, there are no exact equations for Graham to follow, as parenthood is not a precise science. Sending her daughter into the world is a daunting

[12] Graham, 'Lapse (Summer Solstice, 1983, Iowa City)', in *Place*, p. 71-74.
[13] Ibid., p. 71.
[14] Ibid.

ordeal, 'as if [she] were sending a message forth that had to be delivered'. The wish to empower her daughter with knowledge and experience is combined with a fear for her safety. And the mother says the push into the air/future to live and experience life is 'accompanied by my prayer that you be spared | from anything at all, from everything,' and simultaneously 'that everything happen to you in large sheets of experience'.

Graham's fears are quietened as she is comforted by the realization that her child will inevitably reach her own moment of self-realization and awareness:

> and you alone are life, a huge bloom, a new force entering—
> how then—even then—the sensation of *enough*
> swarms, and *thought* or something like it, resumes,
> and your mind is again in your hard grip
> on the chains which had been until then as if unknown to your body
> during what might have been the interglacial lull,
> or the period during which the original ooze grew single-cell organisms,[15]

Graham explains to her young daughter that consciousness will arise when '*thought* or something like it, resumes', and then 'your mind is again in your hard grip'. Before the first instant of conscious awareness was generated in the nine-month old baby, the feeling of knowing 'the chains' did not register in her mind and was 'unknown to [her] body'. The poet compares the time before her daughter's consciousness awareness to 'the interglacial lull,' which is better known as the Huronian glaciation, the oldest interglacial period known to scientists that occurred more than two billion years ago.[16] The onset for her daughter's awareness becomes an allegory for the creation of 'the single-cell organisms' which grew out of 'the original ooze'. For Graham, the inception of the phenomena of consciousness is as grand as the rise of the first form of life on Earth.

The significance of 'Lapse' is that it serves as a mental place where Graham works through her new responsibilities and where she can reassure herself of any maternal fears:

> It is here with me today in this hand grasping this pen
> the weight of my transmission of force into you
> the weight of catching you the first few times
> the slow disappearance of your flesh from mine

[15] Ibid., p. 73.
[16] Michael Marshall, 'The History of Ice on Earth', in *New Scientist* (London: New Scientist Ltd, 2018) <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn18949-the-history-of-ice-on-earth/> [accessed 12.03.18] (para. 5 of 29).

> as you hardly need a push when the centrifuge takes hold
> and I just tap you a bit to keep you going[17]

The swing's forward motion metaphorically moves the scene to the foreseen future when the force of the rotation of the Earth around the sun will take hold and push the child further along. The time will come when the daughter is not in need of the mother's thrust, when the Earth's 'centrifuge takes hold | and [she] just tap[s] you a bit to keep you going'. The poem's left-aligned single-spaced lines reflect the poet's need for the entirety of the page to express her concern for her daughter and for the planet. For Graham, poetry is an ethical observation of herself, her daughter and the world in which she acknowledges the planet's needs for our undivided attention.

Place's success is attributed to its illuminations of the role readers inhabit in their capacities as guardians, exploiters or even annihilators of this planet through the poems' images, metaphors and visual representations. The poems reflect a personal yet collective lyric self which is worried for the fate of the Earth. Graham's affirmations of identity are associated with the grand movements of the Earth. Her father's declining health is equivalent to the ecological corrosion of the Earth. The inception of her humanity is triggered by her child's birth and is parallel to the unicellular life forms that first roamed the Earth. The analogies give insight into the poet's emotions: the grief for her father and the love she has for her daughter. Graham's analogies are no different from the metaphysical conceit of the seventeenth century poets.

Similar to *Place, Fast* is also a volume of autobiographical records of the reality of life for Graham. The poems depict the ramifications of loss and illness on Graham's sense of self. The book's title suggests the quick passage of time, and the uncapitalized first letter of the title implies that the poet has no time to stop for details, as life and death events are quickly developing that require her attention. The title could also indicate an abstinence from food and drink, which would be for a religious observance; more likely in Graham's case, however, a fast would be an expression of sorrow.

The designation of the first poem to the title, 'Ashes', signals the volume's preoccupation with disintegration and death. In the poem, Graham feels that cancer has taken away her identity, leaving her 'thinning but almost still here in spirit'. Graham's characterization of

[17] Graham, 'Lapse (Summer Solstice, 1983, Iowa City)', in *Place*, p. 73.

herself as a human of a 'small identity' alerts us to the toll chemotherapy has had on her body. The depiction also refers to a mentally and emotionally diminished sense of self. It is no wonder that Graham refers to herself in the interview with Sarah Howe as an 'artificial me'. This is how Graham portrays her sense of self during the difficult times in 'Ashes':

> Manacled to a whelm. Asked the plants to give me my small identity. No, the planets.
> The arcing runners, their orbit entrails waving, and a worm on a leaf, mold, bells, a
> bower—everything transitioning—unfolding—emptying into a bit more life cell by
> cell in wind like this
> sound of scribbling on
> paper. I think
> I am falling. I remember the Earth. Loam sits
> quietly, beneath me, waiting to make of us what it can,
> […]
> *Here you are* says a voice in the light, the trapped light. Be happy.[18]

Graham, who feels 'Manacled' and restrained 'to a whelm' of personal bereavement, appeals to the natural and astronomical worlds to bestow her with a 'small identity'. The description also implies that her illness is trivial compared to the atrocities being committed in the world. The cancer multiplying in her body 'cell by | cell', may possibly lead to death, which, in an effort to console herself, she asserts to be the natural course of life. It is no different than the 'arching runners' and the 'worm on a leaf' which are logically changing from one state to another. The 'transitioning—unfolding—', that leads to 'emptying into a bit more life' for the plants and the planets, is further extended by the dashes. Unlike the vegetation and the heavenly bodies, Graham is losing her life 'cell by | cell'. The pun in 'cell by' hints at a 'sell by' date for Graham's life, which she worries is soon to expire. Overcome with the realization of her mortality, Graham feels herself 'falling' and remembers that she will be placed inside a grave one day. 'Loam sits | quietly, beneath me', remarks the poet, 'waiting to make of us what it can', once we are dead. The unnerving image is a reminder of the harsh reality of death. It depicts an image of the body that decomposes in a grave and contributes to the fertility of the soil that will, in turn, produce new life. The shift from the singular 'I am falling. I remember the Earth' to the plural 'to make of us what it can', and 'we would become glacial | melt', signals the encompassment of all in death; even the 'universe *can* die'. The poem concludes with a

[18] Graham, 'Ashes', in *Fast,* p. 3.

confirmation of life, as Graham hears a response to her request: '*Here you are* says a voice in the light, the trapped light'. But the voice is not the voice of nature, but of the surgeon waking her up after an operation when 'one skin clamp[ped] down upon [the cancer which] now is no longer | missing'. The treatment offers a new lease on life, and the surgeon tells her to, 'Be happy' once more. From there, Graham embarks on a mission to explore the nature of the 'small identity' in the poems of the volume.

In the first poem of the second section of *Fast*, Graham thinks she 'shall self-identify' after watching her father pass away 'as still | mortal'. 'Reading to My Father' is a poem about just that: reading to her father in the minutes before his death.[19] The poem, in a deeply sad tone, captures Graham's vivid response to the realization of death:

> I lay our open book on you, where we left off. I read. I read aloud—
> *grove, forest, jungle, dog*—the words don't grip-up into sentences for me,
> it is in pieces,
> I start again into the space above you—*grandeur wisdom village,*
> *tongue, street, wind—hornet—feeler runner rust red more*—oh
> *more*—I hear my voice—it is so raised—on you—are you—*refinery portal*
> *land scald difference*—here comes my *you*, rising in me, my feel-
> ing your *it*, my *me*, in-
> creasing, elaborating, flowing, not yet released from form, not yet,
> still will formed, swarming, mis-
> informed—*bridegroom of spume and vroom*.
> I touch your pillowcase. I read this out to you as, in extremis, we await
> those who will come to fix you—make you permanent. No more vein-hiss. A
> masterpiece. My phantom
> father-body gone—how gone. I sit.[20]

The somber tone with which the death scene is relayed stresses the initial shock, while the present tense narrative conveys Graham's feelings as they happen. The close encounter between the living Graham and the dead body is exceptional and heart wrenching. It is not always the case that a living offspring witnesses the death of a parent.

[19] Graham, 'Reading to My Father', in *Fast*, pp. 23-25.
[20] Ibid., p. 24.

The details of the minutes before and after the death are chilling, and so are Graham's genuine reactions.

Upon first realizing his death, Graham's reaction was to continue reading, and read aloud she does, as if somehow, to avoid disappointing him. However, the reading proves to be a difficult task, she cannot focus, and 'the words don't grip-up into sentences', and the passage 'is in pieces'. She then becomes aware that her 'voice—it is so raised—on you' followed by the awareness that '*you*, rising in me,' ready to address her deceased father in the first person as if he were still alive; but she knows that her 'feel- | ing your' now has to be substituted with the pronoun *'it'*. The dashes mark her pauses during the reading; the more she reads the more pauses/dashes there are, and the more disoriented she becomes. She tries to justify his death as something good: 'No more vein-hiss' to endure.

Bill's posthuman condition evokes for Graham thoughts about the quality of her own cancer-ridden body. She feels that she is turning into the life support machine that lends her more time. The biological operations of her body are controlled by the mechanics of an apparatus:

> Must I be this machine I am
> become. This brain programming
> blood function, flowing beating releasing channeling.
> This one where I hold my head in my hands and the chip
> slips in and click I go to find my in-
> formation.
> […]
> […]—must I already *become* when it is still
> *happening*.[21]

The image in the above lines becomes vivid as her thinking about her body in relation to mechanically recorded movements is a part of her cancer-phase, as she contemplates death. There is something strange and unnatural in thinking about the body as dependent on a machine for the sustenance of life. The material living body is linked up to a mechanical apparatus that monitors and regulates 'blood function, flowing beating releasing channeling'. There is a point at which the person whose life is being regulated

[21] Ibid., p. 25.

and monitored by the mechanical apparatus becomes the apparatus; there is no distinction between the diseased person and the machine providing life. They become one and the same since, without 'The brain programming' the person, the latter would cease to live. When body, soul and machine unite, they form an artificial way of being. Therefore, Graham asks, 'must I already *become*' the machine 'when it is still | *happening*'? The italics signal her alarm. Her body has turned into a mechanical body, and Graham is depressed, as anyone would be, that her recently acquired mechanical body pushes her towards health. The machine outperforms the human body in terms of proficiency. Graham shifts the capabilities of the body that are decided by the 'brain programming' contraption, because the body is no longer a body that is controlled from within. The body now belongs to a different world that most readers of Graham's poems would not have experienced and would marvel at.

Graham wonders what types of mechanical replacements there may be for the human mind. If the body may be augmented through the mechanical, who is to say that the human mind is not to be enhanced—or even replaced for that matter. The reason for Graham's elicitation of such thoughts is her mother's dementia which has been difficult both on Beverly and on Graham, who witnesses her mother's mental and physical erosion. In 'Dementia', Beverly's mental deterioration evokes Graham's meditation on other forms of minds that have surfaced in the twenty-first century:[22]

> now there is
>
> another mind, prefigured by drones→algorithms→ image vectors→ distributive consciousness→ humanoid robotics→ what is required now→ is→a demarcation→ what is *artificial*→technological end-times now only just beginning[23]

The artificial mind that is 'prefigured by drones' has infiltrated the war zone without the need of a pilot. From some remote location thousands of miles away, western military officials watch surveillance videos of battle fields before pushing the button which fires the drone's projectile. The depersonalized killing of human beings is done through

[22] Graham, 'Dementia', in *Fast*, pp. 39-41.
[23] Ibid., p. 40.

'prefigured' 'algorithms' controlled by the 'distributive consciousness' of multiple individuals working together in pursuit of a common goal in which technology plays a central role.[24] The string of arrows rushes the reading of the lines and enhances the urgency of the world's situation of mechanical minds created by and designated to kill the human. The depersonalized mind is an indication of the 'technological end-times' and, sadly, not of medicinal or therapeutic benefits for Beverly's dementia.

In the moving final poem, Graham painfully watches and describes her mother's decline into dementia—or what she refers to as the 'non-being'.[25] In the first line, Graham tells us that 'only mother's hands continue | undying', as her cognitively impaired mother retains the ability to draw. Beverly's lifetime career in sculpting busts and statues was to preserve the self through time. Ironically, in her cognitive state, her sense of self is being reduced to nothing. An impaired consciousness brought on by dementia results from neural damage and is characterized by a disturbance of autobiographical memory, which is the basis of identity.[26] Now that she is unable to recall past personal events and facts, Beverly has become the remains of the human being she once was:

Mother,
dying—mother not wanting to
die—mother scared awakening
each night thinking she's dead—
crying out—mother not
remembering who I am as I run
in—who am I—mother we must
take away the phone because who
will you call next—[27]

If healthy mental life is reflected in the conventional left-aligned poem, then the mother's deterioration into 'non-being' is represented as the other side of living, in the page's right margin. Beverly's memory is impaired, leaving her unaware of time and place, 'scared

[24] 'Distributed Cognition' definition by Katherine L. Plant and Neville A. Stanton, in *Distributed Cognition and Reality: How Pilots and Crews Make Decisions* (London: CRC Press, 2016), p. 2. ProQuest Ebook Central < https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/soton-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4751226> [accessed 14.03.2018].
[25] Graham, 'Mother's Hands Drawing Me', in *Fast*, pp. 80-84 (p. 81).
[26] Damasio, p. 40.
[27] Graham, 'My Mother's Hands Drawing Me', in *Fast*, p. 80.

awakening | each night thinking she's dead', and unable to recall who her daughter is. '[M]other not | remembering who I am', remarks a heart-broken Graham. Because the connection between past and present events is severed, Beverly's ability to consciously reflect on herself and her human and material environment has been compromised. And when she is awake, her reasoning is not rational, 'I | dreamt I have to get this dress on,' declares Beverly; 'if | I get this dress on I will not die'. Unfortunately, her health also failed her:

> mother who cannot get this dress on
> because of broken hip and broken
> arm and tubes and coils and pan
> and everywhere pain, wandering
> delirium, in the fetid shadow-
> world—geotrauma—trans-
> natural—what is this message
> you have been scribbling all your
> life to me, what is this you drag
> again today into the non-being. Draw it.
> The *me* who is not here. Who is the
> ghost in the room. What am I that is
> now drawn.

The mother's 'wandering | delirium', is portrayed as if she were in the dark and unseen 'trans- | natural' 'fetid shadow- | world' of fleeting and fluctuating self. Graham looks at her demented mother's drawing and asks her: What have you been trying to tell me all your life? 'Draw it.' Graham pleads with her mother, 'The *me* who is not here'. Then she appeals for clarification: 'What am I that is | now drawn'? What part of the drawing makes me the person I am? What is lost from you, mother, in your demented state? Does your selfhood transform into a 'ghost in the room'? Graham knows her mother has difficulty thinking, and the difficult questions Graham puts forth are almost impossible to answer. Neuroscience, however, has a scientific explanation from why Beverly may be different for her usual self in ways difficult to pinpoint. According to Damasio:

> When autobiographical self disturbances appear independently, with an otherwise intact core self system, the cause is some aspect of memory dysfunction, an acquired amnesia. The most important cause of amnesia is […]

> Alzheimer's. […] In cases of amnesia, there is a considerable disruption of the unique memories that correspond to one's past and one's plans for the future. (p. 237)

Unable to remember who she is, Beverly makes sense of the present through the drawing. However, her feelings quickly shift from fear to anger:

> Into what do you throw
> me with your quick eye—up onto
> me then down onto the blank of the
> page. You rip the face
> off. I see my elbow there where
> now you bend it with the pen, you
> fill it in,
> […]
> the
> fingers dipping frantic into the bag
> of pens, pencils, then here they
> are—the images—and the hands
> move—they are making a
> line now, it is our world,[28]

Graham wonders at her mother's angry glance towards her: '[W]hat do you throw | me with your eye' 'then down onto the blank of the | page'? Dissatisfied, Beverly 'rip[s] the face | off' the outline before repeatedly studying Graham for inspiration when, finally, an idea materializes. '[D]ipping frantic into the bag | of pens, pencils', Beverly draws what turns out to be a sketch of 'our world'. Graham is surprised by the drawing and sadly acknowledges it is the fingers, not her mind, that created the drawing:

> the mind
> does not—I don't think—know this
> but the fingers, oh, for all my life
> scribbling open the unseen,
> done with mere things, not
> interested in appraisal, just seizure[29]

[28] Graham, 'My Mother's Hands Drawing Me', in *Fast*, p. 82.

In the drawing, Beverly recreates and seizes on paper the world she is no longer capable of engaging with, given her condition. Neither appraisal nor fame are her ambitions; rather it is the 'seizure' of the world she once knew in a moment on the canvas. And as Graham looks at the drawing, she is seized by a sense of unhappiness and defeat and leaves us wondering with her about how the world can continue to exist when her mother is dying in front of her eyes.

how is it
possible the world still exists, as it
begins to take form there, in the not
being

For Graham, the world could easily cease to exist just as her mother disappears into the 'non-being'. Drawing the reader into imagining what it would be like to face illness and death marks the aesthetic of *Fast* as one of mourning and death.

This chapter investigated Graham's attentiveness to identity formation as dependent on the conscious mind's singular ability to relate its mental mechanisms to both embodiment and environmental situatedness. The reading acknowledged the profound influence of the social, political and natural environment on the emergent self. Moreover, Graham's lyric self generates an ethical alertness in a manner analogous to that described by the neuroscientist. Like Damasio, Graham asserts both the complexity and the distinctiveness of the mind, the body and their experiences. The reading of the poetic meditations presented here suggests that Graham's knowledge of her identity results from her contemplation of her thoughts, memories, hopes and ethical awareness. The poet extends her poems to include active meditations of her sense of self as a human to a global level.

[29] Ibid.

Chapter 7 **Why Cognitive Identity?**

Graham's poems depict what it is to live with a reflective consciousness. Throughout her forty-year career, Graham has unceasingly experimented with representations of the lyric self which have swayed between the impersonal, the introspective, and the embodied. Intricately linked to her private life experiences, Graham's body of poetry has evolved from reflections on a disembodied disengaged mind in *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* (1980) to poems that ponder her thoughts, feelings, actions and responses to her personal troubles and to the global predicament in *Fast* (2017).

In her reflection on herself as a conscious being, Graham's poems in *Hybrids*, *Erosion* (1983), *The End of Beauty* (1987), and *Region of Unlikeness* (1991) meditated on the idea of a mind. Due to the modernist tendencies of these early books, the first-person was masked. The results of Graham's investigation into selfhood were meditations on disembodied minds of fictional characters. Exploring the early poems is necessary to understanding the ways in which the poetry has developed over four decades. This first stage of Graham's career can be regarded as the stepping stone to the personal lyric that would enable her to inhabit the position of the lyric self. The issue with these poems, regardless of their success, was that Graham could not utilize them, in Damasio's view, to 'formulate interpretations about [her] existence and about the world […] certainly [not] at the cultural level and, in all likelihood, [not] at the biological level' (p. 13). Her frustration with the modernist shunning of personality and with Cartesian duality was marked by her abandonment of these two specific modes of thought in favour of an embodied personal lyric. To articulate an understanding of her being in the world, Graham would have to witness her own mind.

The second stage of Graham's career originated with a brief inquiry into the philosophy of the material for an understanding of the mind and self in *Materialism* (1993). This was followed by poems that responded to the established psychoanalytic paradigms of the second half of the twentieth century in *The Errancy* (1997), *Swarm* (2000), and *Never* (2002). Graham was committed to presenting introspective poems as a manifestation of thought located in concrete events which function to anchor the cognitive process in a

specific time and place and hold the meditation together. On the one hand, the introspective poems enabled Graham to separate herself from the immediacies of life experiences and to think critically about her thoughts and sensations in the here and now. On the other hand, the poems exemplified the dangers of the complete enmeshment in the first-person introspection. Uninformed and unshaped by her surroundings, Graham appeared to be isolated and trapped in her own mind.

In the next phase of her writing career, Graham instigated a third mode for the representation of the self where the body was the object of focus. Graham portrayed the poems of *Overlord* (2005) and *Sea Change* (2008) to be embodied responses to the world. Whereas the body has become the site of identity construction in contemporary society with a focus on slim figures, tattooed or pierced body parts, Graham presented her own vision of the ailing body as the site of her 'desperate' sense of self.

Graham's most recent books, *Place* (2012) and *Fast* (2017), dramatize the thinking mind of a personal lyric self. The autobiographical self that manifests is a product of a lengthy process of conscious contemplation, investigation, imagination, and response to experiences perceived over a longer period of time. The reader wanting to learn more about themselves will not have the scientific advantages to which a neuroscientist is privileged, but through poetry can have a glimpse into the workings of the self. The more the lyric voice was associated with body, mind, and surroundings, the more it came to be linked to Graham. The poems of the recent two volumes convey the story of the ethical inhabitation of the Earth from the perspective of the same lyric speaker, spoken from the same body and mind. Reading Graham's body of poetry produces a sense of continuity between the past and present lyric 'I'.

With the evolution of the lyric self across Graham's oeuvre are other parallel changes. First, the sources of description in her poems have altered; whereas Graham once borrowed from nature and mythology, she then turned to cognitive science, medicine, and science of climate change. Second, the environment which once was employed for settings was later depicted for its influence on the self and in identity formation.

Other aspects of Graham's poems have remained consistent. The structure of the majority of the poems follows a typical pattern; Graham's core self watches something or someone. The object of observation engages the poet's attention long enough for the

autobiographical self to emerge. The autobiographical self then observes the scene and registers the change as a feeling, which is followed by thoughts on the observed object and its impact on the observer. Graham's technique of suspending the personal experience in a moment of time enables her to closely inspect her thoughts, actions, roles, and relations. The poetic possibility of knowing how long the present moment is and how it unfolds offers the opportunity to arrive at further insights into selfhood and to prolong the engagement with subjective experiences that would not be attainable once the moment has passed. The poems, therefore, become a structure for the mind to think within about the mysterious self.

The reinvention of the lyric self in the poems coincides with an experimentation with form. The closer the lyric self is to being a representation of the poet's voice, the less restricted the poem's visual appearance. Graham's first two volumes projected an allure to the mystifying self and the poet's way to gain control was to inflict formal constraint through a strict shape. In her two latest books, Graham was in touch with her identity and the poems were visually represented as 'exploded haikus'. The terminology is quite intriguing here. Graham seems to suggest that the haiku, known for its expression of sentiment cannot hold in the portrayal of selfhood and inflates to fit the necessary expression.

The constant innovation in form and theme convey Graham's preferences to discover new positions for the lyric speaker to occupy. In 1996, the lyric self had to be situated 'Somewhere between the "I" that takes its authority from an apparent act of confessional "sincerity", and the "I" that takes its authority from seeing through to its own socially constructed nature'.[1] In 2003, Graham was intent on making her poems in the service of knowing 'what goes into the construction' of the self.[2] In 2017, Graham felt the lyric self to be connected to her 'increasingly desperate sense of [herself] as a member of a species' and her 'increasingly thin sense of [her] "singular individuality"'.[3] Over the years, Graham has consistently maintained the relevance of the private and public dimensions to the lyric self. The lyric presence signifies for Graham a personal individuality and an

[1] Graham, *The Glorious Thing,* (para. 7).
[2] Graham, Damasio, and Metzinger, 'The Passionate Mind'.
[3] Howe, 'Interview', (para. 4).

ethical role with which the lyric 'I' acquires a representative cultural status, a collective 'I' speaking on behalf of and to the readers.

Graham is more committed to a truthful portrayal of self than to aligning herself with the dominant epistemologies. Eliot's impersonal lyric considers personal identity inconsequential whereas the romantic lyric fails to acknowledge the pressures of contemporary life, as it views the world as a sort of utopia. The thesis locates the embodied, cognitively fluctuating self in the middle ground between personal 'sincerity' and the 'socially constructed'. Since there is no mode of writing that emphasises such a description, the turn to the scientific ideas of identity for a descriptive language of Graham's lyric is justified. The cognitive reading renders the tracing of the construct, shifts, and embodied expressions of Graham's human identity possible.

Expressing oneself through the autobiographical self appears to be the default mode of writing for any writer. However for Graham, the process involved experimentation with voice to reach that position. Poetry enables Graham to envision herself as a part of the global dilemmas by placing herself in the present moment:

> the practice of writing poetry is my essential way to keeping myself connected, or of bringing myself back into presence when I have dispersed into estrangement. Like everyone else in our culture my senses are often ready to shut down altogether. Not-feeling is easier than feeling the loss of a loved one… Every act of writing—every stage of it—is a practice to overcome the impulse in myself, which is in everyone, to turn away….and poetry is equipped to this task so well…[4]

Undergoing the emotional responses and bodily reactions to the global predicament enables Graham to reflect on herself and on her surroundings. Damasio argues that a 'reflective' consciousness is responsible for the emergence of one's autobiographical self. The importance of storytelling, or in this study, my attempt to string a story out of Graham's poems, is to reveal the autobiographical self's interaction with the world. Damasio suggests the presence of a link between the lyric self and the nonverbal, biological representation of self. Narrative maps what happens to the brain, body and surroundings. The same mapping concept is applicable both to the biological and literary

[4] Blackie, p. 40.

narratives of self. Graham's literary narrative spun through twelve volumes of poems maps what has happened to the mind, self and body as a consequence of engaging with the surroundings. Furthermore, her poems reveal that Graham's emotional and physical responses to her physical environment shape her cognitive processing and neural activity in the brain. Therefore, the literary narrative of self has its origin in the biological narrative of the self. According to Damasio:

> Individuals and groups whose brains made them capable of inventing or using such narratives to improve themselves and the societies they lived in became successful enough for the architectural traits of those brains to be selected, individually and groupwise, and for their frequency to increase over generations. (p. 293)

The intricate attentive readings of the specific poems from Graham's oeuvre draw out a narrative of her developing comprehension of her body of poetry and ultimately her life.

The cognitive literary reading proposed in this manuscript has proved to be beneficial. First, the thesis's cognitive reading responds to Marjorie Perloff's call for an interdisciplinary method rather than an 'other disciplinary' approach that renders literary texts secondary to other disciplines. This thesis illustrates the type of interdisciplinarity that Perloff calls for since the close readings of the poems have been presented for Graham scholars without requiring previous acquaintance with cognitive literary studies. Second, the interdisciplinary approach to Graham's poems exemplifies Oren Izenberg's theory of the lyric by offering insight into the workings of the mind. Izenberg advocates that it is time we reached out beyond the dominant critical theories that have become the norm for the interpretations and assessment of poetry. In limiting our interpretations to the Romantic and poststructuralist paradigms we overlook the potential of Graham's poems to offer us far greater knowledge to learn about the literary texts and about ourselves as well. Furthermore, the cognitive interpretation of Graham's poems is an answer to Alan Richardson and Francis F. Steen's question of 'how' identity is formed. The cognitive literary critics acknowledge the biological foundation of identity and its relevance to cultural studies: 'human beings intimately rely on immensely complex bodies, nervous systems, and sensory systems; these structures have a history that is

neither identical to nor separate from the culture they make possible'.[5] A cognitive approach can supplement the available historical and culturalist paradigms by proposing a framework for reinterpreting what it is to think and construct one's identity through poetry.

Damasio's theory proves to be advantageous for the present cognitive reading of self in more than one manner. Employing Damasio's ideas offers insight into what the poems can tell us about the process of poetic self-making. Damasio links the particulars of the intricate structure of self to each other and to their usefulness for living in the world. Furthermore, Damasio asserts the significance of neurological operations to the shaping and reshaping of one's identity to adjust to the constantly changing conditions of the environment. Damasio himself regards Graham's poems as a reasonable portrayal of the self that responds emotionally and mentally to the outside world by generating images, recalling memories, and producing future expectations and responses. The theory also provides a language and context to identify and clarify the assembly of the lyric self. The poems describe silent mental events through Graham's highly descriptive and vivid poems. Graham sees that 'The astonishments of poetry, for me, reside most vividly in its capacity to make a reader receive utterable and unutterable realities at once.'[6] Damasio's theorization enables these truths to take shape.

By closely reading Graham's poems through Damasio's ideas, I hope to have accomplished a few goals simultaneously. First, the reading portrays Graham as a postmodern poet who struggles to reverse the sentimental trend of the confessional poets by pursuing a greater interiorization of consciousness. Second, the poems portray a mind thinking and the chapters investigated the significance of the mental dimension as a part of the self. The neurology of emotions and body awareness are deeply connected to the generation of the self and yet the close readings are evidence that a cognitive literary approach is not limited to the identification of biological components. The narrow search for neurological correlations would offer a deficient view of the poetic process of identity formation. The chapters of the thesis have spanned both the cognitive and literary, thus highlighting the images, metaphors, figures of speech which would be overlooked had the

[5] Richardson and Steen, p. 3.
[6] Graham, 'Poetic Statement: At the Border', p. 48.

approach been purely cognitive. Finally, a reading focused on the mind reveals the poetry to be more than a criticism of the environment. The poems do not merely warn of the dangers of contemporary life but relay the human self as it figures its place amidst the global dilemma.

The utilization of Damasio's theory for a scrutinization of self and identity in Graham's oeuvre has provided new interpretive potentials. It brought to light an implicit model of selfhood in the poetry where Graham-as-knower consciously observes herself-as-object. Graham-as-knower and Graham-as-object are present in any one poem and complement each other as two parts of the same lyric self. Damasio's autobiographical self is a broad abstraction of how an adult's mind normally functions. Graham, by contrast, is studying her own mind's thoughts with meticulous consideration and in its assumption of accountability for humanity's ill behaviour is far beyond regular human conduct.

Graham's fascination with the human self has motivated the present study into the meaning and implications of a cognitive identity. I hope that this thesis has proved its effectiveness both for cognitive literary studies and for Graham studies in particular. I believe that Graham's continuous innovation will create new poems that surpass the existing critical paradigms, therefore, producing a gap for researchers that owes much to the poet's shifting perception, the reinvention of style, and the relentless desire to 'go into a more moral terrain'. Graham will remain a subject of inquiry for as long as she continues to reinvent herself as an artist.

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