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University of Southampton

Faculty of Humanities

School of English

Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology

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by

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Abstract

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Mentoring is an increasingly common way that UK-based page poets develop their writing practice. Yet academic discourse has largely centred on university, US, and prose-based contexts for writing education. This study addresses this gap by elucidating contemporary UK poetry mentoring (1990-2025). Using a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology that includes empirical insights from mentors and mentees, it asks: What do poets and scholars define as poetry mentorship? How have certain shapes of poetry mentoring become dominant and what other models and approaches exist? What is the significance of poetry mentoring?

This study reveals that scholars' and poets' understandings of poetry mentorship tend to be dyadic and conceptual, listing a series of processes or stages occurring between a single mentor and mentee. These conceptualisations collude with the tendency of literary criticism to see authors, reductively, as individual, secluded agents. They also collude with notions of individualism and isolationism, which pervade contemporary UK poetry, and lead to poetry's formal and textual elements being prioritised above interdisciplinary factors in poetry writing and mentoring.

Instead, this thesis proposes that poetry mentoring can also take place non-dyadically, encompass more than formal aspects, and —rather than a practice happening in isolation— is deeply connected to the wider ecology. To broaden conceptualisations of mentorship in this way, the research uses ecological theory as a framework to challenge collusions with individualism and isolationism, advocate interconnectedness and multiplicity, and situate mentoring within the poetry ecology. It implements more dynamic, fluid models that attend to non-dyadic mentoring and wider social and cultural contexts. It explores many approaches to poetry mentorship —like writing for wellbeing or politically-engaged practice— and posits that multiple approaches occur simultaneously. Ultimately, it provides a language to more accurately articulate poetry mentoring.

Revaluating poetry mentoring practice contributes to cultural debate around how to support poets, particularly in light of the proliferation of formalised mentorship programmes in the twenty-first century and new challenges posed by the pandemic and post-lockdown eras. Accordingly, this research considers where characteristics of mentoring may support or fail to support particular types of poetry practice or poets themselves and their circumstances. The reorienting of poetry mentorship towards multiplicity and interconnection thus proposes a way of increasing its supportive potential.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: JOANNA NISSEL

Title of thesis: Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology

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;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
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.

Signature: Date: 25/05/2026

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Introduction

[...] Yet every hum
or knock or swoop, below our consciousness,
is heat or closeness, the in-out vapour of single cells,
a pressing-up-against – the fungi and the algae
in the lichen, the red beside the yellow of the bird's foot,
the lacing bowers of the canopy, apprehending
the noonday sun, emboldening the shade.

Excerpt from 'The sun is as high' by Kay Syrad.¹

0.1 A Brief Introduction to Poetry Mentorship and its Surrounding Lack of Scholarship

0.1.1 Reflection: Poetry Mentorship as Involving a Range of Support

When I saw the callout for applications to take on a doctoral project on poetry mentorship, I reflected on my own mentors.² While there were several standout figures, they were only one element of my growth as a poet. This was made more striking by the context in which the callout was released. It was November 2020, an intense period of the Covid-19 pandemic; I was living alone and had been advised to shield due to autoimmune issues. I had not touched another human being in months. Yet I felt more connected with poets and my poetry practice than ever. This connection took place through the online world, which unfurled in response to social distancing. I discovered more poets through attending online readings, workshops, festivals. I still regularly meet with the poets I encountered in these sessions. The online world also facilitated material contact: Liz Berry sent shielding poets (including me) writing prompts in the post; I took part in The Outposted Project, which saw a map posted to writers and artists in Brighton and Hove and we collaboratively embellished it with our creativity.³ During this time, I read and read; I inhaled poetry. I wrote my debut pamphlet with the help of this poetic support, and also with the help of various material and social factors. Access to priority supermarket delivery slots enabled me to eat safely. Video calls and socially distanced coffees with friends and family kept me connected to my day-to-day life. As is evident through the two large poems

¹ Kay Syrad, 'The Sun Is as High', *Finished Creatures*, no. 8 (2023), p. 20.

² Will May, Samantha Walton, and Matt West, 'CDA-3-Mentoring Description', South West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership, 2020 <<https://www.sww-ahdtp.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CDA-3-Mentoring.Further-Details.pdf>> [accessed 30 November 2020].

³ JLM Morton, 'The Outposted Project: Connecting Artists in Isolation', *JLM Morton*, 20 April 2022 <<https://www.jlmmorton.com/blog/the-outposted-project-connecting-artists-in-isolation>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

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recounting my daily walks in my pamphlet, access to the blue space of the seafront also did wonders for my physical health and wellbeing.⁴ As my account of lockdown implies, my understanding of poetic growth and maintaining a poetry practice took into consideration a range of factors. The question was, how could my understanding enhance the study of poetry mentorship?

0.1.2 A Gap in Scholarship on Contemporary UK Poetry Mentorship

The question of how to approach mentorship analysis comes at a pertinent time. From The Women Poets' Prize⁵ to the Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Programme,⁶ over the past twenty-five years, mentorship schemes and opportunities have become so commonplace that most regional writer-development agencies offer such programmes,⁷ and poets' websites frequently advertise their mentoring services.⁸ The scale of poetry mentorship is also evident in the 180 accounts and examples I gathered for this study in surveys, interviews, and mapping (see Methods and Appendix G), and in the many reflections on poetry mentoring from secondary literature across this thesis.

Despite its proliferation, there is little academic scholarship on poetry mentoring. By contrast, mentorship more broadly is a vast domain, particularly across youth mentoring,⁹ the

⁴ Joanna Nissel, *Guerrilla Brightenings* (Against the Grain Poetry Press, 2022), pp. 7–9, 26–29.

⁵ Rebecca Swift Foundation, 'Women Poets Prize', Rebecca Swift Foundation, 9 March 2025 <<https://www.rebeccaswiftfoundation.org/women-poets-prize/>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

⁶ Arvon, 'Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Programme 2019/20', Arvon, n.d. <<https://www.arvon.org/learning/jerwood-mentoring/>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

⁷ Such as Dynamo (Writing West Midlands), Momentum (Writing East Midlands), A Writing Chance (New Writing North), Representing Wales (Literature Wales), and Poetics Lab (Spread the Word). Writing West Midlands, 'Dynamo', Writing West Midlands, 23 November 2022 <<https://writingwestmidlands.org/projects/dynamo/>> [accessed 27 February 2024]; Writing East Midlands, 'Momentum', Writing East Midlands, 15 November 2023 <<https://writingeastmidlands.co.uk/for-writers/momentum/>> [accessed 27 February 2024]; New Writing North, 'A Writing Chance 2024-25', New Writing North, n.d. <<https://newwritingnorth.com/a-writing-chance/a-writing-chance-2024-25/>> [accessed 4 April 2025]; Literature Wales, 'Representing Wales 2024-25 Mentors Announced', *Literature Wales*, 18 September 2024 <<https://www.literaturewales.org/lw-news/representing-wales-2024-25-mentors-announced/>> [accessed 14 January 2025]; Spread the Word, 'Apply to Join Poetics Lab, a New Poetry Programme for Young Writers', Spread the Word, 2025 <<https://www.spreadtheword.org.uk/apply-to-join-poetics-lab-a-new-collective-for-young-writers/>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

⁸ Examples include Helen Bowell, Liz Berry, Laurie Bolger, and Caroline Bird. See Appendix G's mapping sample for thirty-eight further independent mentoring services. Helen Bowell, 'Work with Me', Helen Bowell, 2025 <<https://www.helenbowell.co.uk/services-4/>> [accessed 22 June 2025]; Liz Berry, 'Workshops, Feedback, and Mentoring', Liz Berry Poetry, 2025 <<https://www.lizberrypoetry.co.uk/>> [accessed 22 June 2025]; Laurie Bolger, 'Online One-to-One Sessions', Laurie Bolger, 2025 <<https://lauriebolger.com/ola/services/1-to-1-s/>> [accessed 22 June 2025]; Caroline Bird, 'Mentoring', Caroline Bird, 2025 <<https://carolinebird.co.uk/mentoring/>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

⁹ David L. DuBois and Michael J. Karcher, *Handbook of Youth Mentoring* (SAGE Publications, 2005) <<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=H5h2AwAAQBAJ>>; Davielle Lakind, Marc Atkins, and J. Mark Eddy,

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social sciences,¹⁰ business,¹¹ and sport¹²—the latter two via the related term, coaching, which implies a flatter hierarchy.¹³ While mentorship literature is a vast domain, it rarely overlaps with poetry, despite the frequency with which poets and facilitators adopt the term. Instead, poetry mentorship relies on the broader field of creative writing education research, as well as models of writer-development. Both of these have largely prioritised three specific types of, or contexts for, writers' growth. The first context is the university classroom. For instance, J.T. Welsch outlines that the focus on creative writing MA/MFA programmes 'overlooks the proliferation of other training schemes over the past twenty years.'¹⁴ Given that creative writing was first established as an academic discipline in North America, it is perhaps unsurprising that writing education scholarship has also been US-centric. Marshall Moore and Sam Meekings have produced multiple texts featuring writing educators from across the globe in an effort to decentralise creative writing education studies from US contexts.¹⁵ Thirdly, models of writer-development and other writing education research are rarely specific to poetry and more often

'Youth Mentoring Relationships in Context: Mentor Perceptions of Youth, Environment, and the Mentor Role', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 53 (2015), pp. 52–60, doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.03.007; Jean E. Rhodes and others, 'Youth Mentoring in Perspective: Introduction to the Special Issue', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30.2 (2002), pp. 149–55, doi:10.1023/A:1014676726644.

¹⁰ Carol A. Mullen and Cindy C. Klimaitis, 'Defining Mentoring: A Literature Review of Issues, Types, and Applications', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1483.1 (2021), pp. 19–35, doi:10.1111/nyas.14176; Helen Colley, *Mentoring for Social Inclusion* (Routledge, 2003), doi:10.4324/9780203458310; Laura C. Atkins and Shelley B. Grant, 'Diverse Applications of Sociological Imagination: A Qualitative Study of Service-Learning Mentoring', *Journal of Applied Social Science*, 16.1 (2022), pp. 328–45, doi:10.1177/19367244211021390; S. M. Gaddis, 'What's in a Relationship? An Examination of Social Capital, Race and Class in Mentoring Relationships', *Social Forces*, 90.4 (2012), pp. 1237–69, doi:10.1093/sf/sos003.

¹¹ Sharon K. Gibson, 'Mentoring in Business and Industry: The Need for a Phenomenological Perspective', *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 12.2 (2004), pp. 259–75, doi:10.1080/1361126042000239974; Brian Hansford, Lee Tennent, and Lisa Catherine Ehrich, 'Business Mentoring: Help or Hindrance?', *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 10.2 (2002), pp. 101–15, doi:10.1080/1361126022000002428; Lea Waters and others, 'The Role of Formal Mentoring on Business Success and Self-Esteem in Participants of a New Business Start-Up Program', *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 17.1 (2002), pp. 107–21, doi:10.1023/A:1016252301072; Dvora Yanow, "'Mentoring," Past and Present', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 53.4 (2020), pp. 770–74, doi:10.1017/S1049096520000578.

¹² Tania Cassidy, Paul Potrac, and Steven Rynne, *Understanding Sports Coaching: The Pedagogical, Social and Cultural Foundations of Coaching Practice*, 4th edn (Routledge, 2023), doi:10.4324/9781003184348; Janelle M. Griffo and others, 'A Decade of Research Literature in Sport Coaching (2005–2015)', *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 14.2 (2019), pp. 205–15, doi:10.1177/1747954118825058; Richard L. Light and Stephen Harvey, 'Positive Pedagogy for Sport Coaching', *Sport, Education and Society*, 22.2 (2017), pp. 271–87, doi:10.1080/13573322.2015.1015977.

¹³ Eric Parsloe and Melville Leedham, *Coaching and Mentoring: Practical Techniques for Developing Learning and Performance*, Fourth edition (Kogan Page Limited, 2022), p. 165; Mullen and Klimaitis, 'Defining Mentoring', p. 31; International Coaching Federation, '3 Things to Know about Coaching - ICF', <https://Coachingfederation.Org/>, 23 August 2024 <<https://coachingfederation.org/blog/3-things-to-know-about-coaching/>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

¹⁴ J. T. Welsch, *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem Press, 2021), p. 206.

¹⁵ *The Place and the Writer: International Intersections of Teacher Lore and Creative Writing Pedagogy*, ed. by Marshall Moore and Sam Meekings (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), doi:10.5040/9781350127180; *The Scholarship of Creative Writing Practice: Beyond Craft, Pedagogy, and the Academy*, ed. by Marshall Moore and Sam Meekings (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024).

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concern prose. In summary, many texts prioritise North America, universities, and/or prose. For instance, in a recent talk, Felicia Rose Chavez described her seminal text, *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop*, as focusing on the US.¹⁶ She also recounted that she came to write the text after experiencing a nonfiction workshop at the University of Iowa, which implies a prose-centric and university-centric lens.¹⁷ Other examples of writing education research that focuses on these three areas, either separately or together, include texts by Janelle Adsit,¹⁸ Arielle Greenburg and Rachel Zucker,¹⁹ Jeff Parker and Annie Lontas,²⁰ or articles by Brett Millier,²¹ or Marwa Helal.²² In short, a gap in literature exists surrounding poets in the UK outside of purely an academic context, which is the setting where much contemporary poetry mentorship in the UK takes place. I seek to bridge this gap through this doctoral study.

While neither creative writing education nor mentorship literature are specific to poetry mentoring in the UK, they nevertheless provide a useful foundation for this research. For example, creative writing education research evidences common notions in US writing and writing education practices, such as ‘assumptions about what counts as valid writerly selfhood and valid artistic production’, explored by Adsit.²³ Scholarship about such ideas may sometimes be applicable to the UK since, as Lise Jaillant’s account of the establishment of the University of East Anglia’s creative writing courses illustrates,²⁴ UK and US writing education practices have long been in dialogue.²⁵ The existing literature therefore has varying levels of relevance to UK contexts and, by identifying transferable scholarship, it can help elucidate contemporary UK poetry mentorship.

¹⁶ Felicia Rose Chavez, *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom* (Haymarket Books, 2021).

¹⁷ Felicia Rose Chavez, ‘Decolonising the Curriculum with Felicia Rose Chavez’, 5 June 2025.

¹⁸ Janelle Adsit, *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing: Threshold Concepts to Guide the Literary Curriculum* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

¹⁹ *Women Poets on Mentorship: Efforts and Affections*, ed. by Arielle Greenberg and Rachel Zucker (University of Iowa Press, 2008).

²⁰ *A Manner of Being: Writers on Their Mentors*, ed. by Jeff Parker and Annie Lontas (University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

²¹ Brett Millier, ‘Mentoring and the Female Poet’s Voice’, *American Literary History*, 23.1 (2011), pp. 117–25, doi:10.1093/alh/ajq070.

²² Marwa Helal, ‘Bridging the Student-Mentor Gap’, *Poets & Writers Magazine*, 43.5 (2015), p. 16+, Gale Academic OneFile
<<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A441489685/AONE?u=anon~3b6a4d0&sid=googleScholar&xid=c5e2772f>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

²³ Adsit, *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing*, p. 3.

²⁴ Lise Jaillant, *Literary Rebels: A History of Creative Writers in Anglo-American Universities* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 136, doi:10.1093/oso/9780192855305.003.0001.

²⁵ This dialogue also appears in Randall Albers and Steve May’s US-UK dialogue about the nature of learning to write. Randall Albers and Steve May, ‘Revelation, Transgression, Disclosure and the Tyranny of Truth’, in *Creative Writing and Education*, ed. by Graeme Harper (Multilingual Matters, 2015), doi:10.21832/9781783093540.

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To fill the overall gap in literature, I ask what poetry mentorship looks like: who conducts mentoring? Through which methods and approaches? In what settings? What is the impact of poetry mentoring, both in terms of the mentees, and mentoring's broader significance? These are the foundational questions of this research. They contribute to a wider theoretical drive across this thesis, which I now begin to articulate through defining the key terms: poetry and poetry mentoring. Since my core research questions could potentially relate to an array of topics, this definitional work will simultaneously delineate the scope of my research.

0.1.3 Defining Key Terms: Poetry

I examine poetry as a practice rather than an artefact. This being said, poetry as a practice and as an artefact remain linked. Poems are, after all, produced by the practice. Poets and scholars have repeatedly created definitions of poetry,²⁶ and, in doing so, have gestured towards defining practice as well.²⁷ William Wordsworth's definition of poetry, for example, ties in the writing process and the poems' origins. In his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, he notes, 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings',²⁸ and particularly high quality work is produced 'by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply.'²⁹ For Wordsworth and the Romantic poets, poetry production happens in isolation,³⁰ both literally and mentally, which I investigate and critique at length throughout this thesis.³¹ Anthony Wilson and Sue Dymoke update Wordsworth's perspective, postulating 'a view of poetry composition as a socially contextualised process in which poems can be woven as a

²⁶ Michael Baldwin, *The Way to Write Poetry* (Elm Tree, 1982), p. 2; Edgar Lee Masters, 'What Is Poetry?', *Poetry*, 6.6 (1915), pp. 306–08 (pp. 306–07), JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20570534>> [accessed 24 October 2023]; Robert B. Pierce, 'Defining Poetry', *Philosophy and Literature*, 27.1 (2003), pp. 151–63, doi:10.1353/phl.2003.0030.

²⁷ Definitions of poetry are also relevant in that they evoke ways mentors may encourage their mentees to think about poetry. For instance, form is important to Anna Christina Ribeiro and Terry Eagleton. Anthony Wilson and Sue Dymoke, Virginia Riley Human, and Carl Leggo emphasise poetry's impact on its readers. Finally, some poets mediate on the content of poetry, including Rory Waterman, Eagleton, Robert J. Yanal (summarising Aristotle), and Hyman (analysing Philip Sidney). Anna Christina Ribeiro, 'Intending to Repeat: A Definition of Poetry', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65.2 (2007), pp. 189–201 (p. 189), doi:10.1111/j.1540-594X.2007.00249.x; Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem*, 7th edn (Blackwell, 2012), pp. 25–28; Anthony Wilson and Sue Dymoke, 'Towards a Model of Poetry Writing Development as a Socially Contextualised Process', *Journal of Writing Research*, 9.2 (2017), pp. 127–50 (p. 129), doi:10.17239/jowr-2017.09.02.02; Virginia Riley Hyman, 'Sidney's Definition of Poetry', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 10.1 (1970), pp. 49–62 (p. 49), JSTOR, doi:10.2307/449695; Carl Leggo, 'Living Poetry: Five Ruminations', *Language and Literacy*, 6.2 (1944), doi:10.20360/G2D307; Rory Waterman, '(Good) Person Poems', *Poetry London*, no. 100 (October 2021) <<https://poetrylondon.co.uk/good-person-poems/>> [accessed 13 February 2025]; Robert J. Yanal, 'Aristotle's Definition of Poetry', *Noûs*, 16.4 (1982), pp. 499–525 (p. 499), JSTOR, doi:10.2307/2215204.

²⁸ A sentiment Oscar Wilde famously rebuked.

²⁹ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* (Taylor and Francis, 2012), p. 196.

³⁰ Which is ironic given *Lyrical Ballads* was a collaboration between William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

³¹ Adsit, *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing*, p. 23.

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result of a range of motivations and influences’.³² My view of poetry practice builds on Wilson and Dymoke. I look at poetry practice as communal, involving the many resources, people, and ideas surrounding the poet, amongst other factors. As the children’s author, Chris Vick, said, ‘everyone thinks [writing is] about tortured artists sitting in the garage. In reality, very few people do it alone. It requires nurturing, connections, mentoring, and a heck of a lot of practice.’³³ In this way, I see poetry practice as community-led and informed by communities.

While I define poetry practice as involving communities, these communities also define practice for themselves—they have different ideas of what constitutes poetry practice. Nicky Marsh and Joseph Owen point towards this in their observation that poetry

isn’t a single essential thing: the boundaries between poetry and other cultural forms, especially narrative and story, are undelineated and undelineatable. Poetry is culturally and historically specific; it means different things to different communities.³⁴

Similarly, Wayne Holloway-Smith speaks to the elasticity of the term, poetry, stating: ‘Poetry is not a museum [...] some kind of fixed and stable, state-funded building’ that commemorates “‘good poetry” [which is] now confined to history’.³⁵

In addition to practice as communal and communally-defined, there are two further significances of Marsh and Owens and Holloway-Smith’s contributions. The first being that they illustrate a wider phenomenon: poets and academics sometimes use the term ‘poetry’ to signify the poem as artefact or artform,³⁶ the practice of writing poetry, the experience of being a poet, and also the wider systems to which poetry is connected. These systems may be called a poetry community, network, infrastructure, culture ‘as a kind of social unconscious’, or an ecology—an encapsulating term I adopt widely and expand upon at length in Chapter One.³⁷ As a result, poets’ accounts and academic analyses have a certain blurriness to them that suggests their

³² Wilson and Dymoke, ‘Towards a Model of Poetry Writing Development as a Socially Contextualised Process’, p. 130.

³³ *Paper Nations - Writing for All*, dir. by Paper Nations (Corsham, 2019) <https://youtu.be/_okXu4avrM4> [accessed 22 June 2025].

³⁴ Nicky Marsh and Joseph Owen, ‘Poetry, Policy and Place: The Crab and The Mole’, *And Towns*, 21 March 2024 <<https://andtowns.co.uk/news/poetry-policy-and-place-the-crab-and-the-mole/>> [accessed 9 April 2025].

³⁵ Wayne Holloway-Smith, ‘Editorial’, *The Poetry Review*, 113.3 (2023), p. 1.

³⁶ Owen Bullock and Niloofar Fanaian, as well as Paul Davies, write about poetry as artefact, while John Wells makes a connection between artefact and writing practice. Owen Bullock and Niloofar Fanaian, ‘Warp and Weft: Aesthetics of the Poem as an Artefact of Experiences in Time’, *TEXT*, 20.2 (2016), pp. 1–12 (p. 2); Paul Davies, ‘A Poem and Its Context’, *Textual Practice*, 22.4 (2008), pp. 635–56 (p. 637), doi:10.1080/09502360802457418; John Wells, ‘Writing Poetry: Text and Artefact in Cambridge University Library.’, *PN Review* (Manchester), 30.5 (2004), pp. 25–29 (p. 26), ProQuest One Academic; ProQuest One Literature, 2418403204, pp. 25–29 <<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/writing-poetry-text-artefact-cambridge-university/docview/2418403204/se-2?accountid=13963>>.

³⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Culture* (Yale University Press, 2016), p. viii.

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insights could apply to poems, practices, something wider, or multiple at once.³⁸ Both Marsh and Owens and Holloway-Smith's descriptions of poetry, for example, could speak both to the poem form and to broader poetry culture. Vick, although he primarily discusses novels, encompasses writing practice and the conditions under which it is produced when he uses the term 'writing'.³⁹ For poet, Sarah Corbett, 'Making a Life in Poetry' involves the practice of writing poetry, the reception of poetry (both in terms of Corbett reading poems herself and critics reviewing her work), and being supported by teachers, mentors, publishers, and by mental health services.⁴⁰ Consequently, definitions of poetry may inform understandings of practice regardless of whether practice was explicitly part of said definition.

The second significance is that poetry practice, like poetry as an artform, varies; I must therefore be specific about which kinds of practice I focus on in this thesis. My research encompasses practices that are traditional and experimental, highbrow and accessible, which I do not place in a hierarchy.⁴¹ However, I ultimately lack capacity to include every type of poetry in this study. I therefore limit this research to page-based poetry, poetry that works with what Glynn Maxwell terms a poet's 'two materials, one's black and one's white',⁴² summarised by David Constantine as 'black signs on a white page which we call the text'.⁴³ I do not focus on performance poetry, slam poetry, or spoken word, texts that Dymoke describes as 'incomplete' when read alone, that 'only come fully alive when performed'.⁴⁴ Of course, making this distinction is contentious. As J. Paul Hunter raises, 'Even the most print-oriented of us probably believe down deep in our hearts that poetry is essentially an oral art.'⁴⁵ While I agree with Hunter, for this thesis, I take Dymoke's postulation, layering it with Julia Novak's notion that performance poetry is 'an artistic medium in its own right', not simply a 'derivative practice in opposition to a stable written "original"'.⁴⁶ Moreover, educational structures and mentoring opportunities available to performance-based poets differ slightly from those rooted in page-

³⁸ In my own writing, I limit these slippages as much as possible by being specific about whether I am referring to poems, poetry writing practice, poetry mentoring practice, as well as locating the analysis to their sources, such as poets, mentors, scholarship and research, or, particularly in instances where a sense of source is multifaceted or diffuse, a macro-sense of poetry culture.

³⁹ Paper Nations, *Paper Nations - Writing for All*.

⁴⁰ Sarah Corbett, 'The Long Game: On Making a Life in Poetry', in *Why I Write Poetry*, ed. by Ian Humphreys (Nine Arches Press, 2021), pp. 140–46.

⁴¹ Although mainstream practices are perhaps slightly better represented than experimental ones.

⁴² Glynn Maxwell, *On Poetry* (Oberon Books, 2012), p. 11.

⁴³ David Constantine, *Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 7–8.

⁴⁴ Sue Dymoke, "'Poetry Is Not a Special Club": How Has an Introduction to the Secondary Discourse of Spoken Word Made Poetry a Memorable Learning Experience for Young People?', *Oxford Review of Education*, 43.2 (2017), pp. 225–41 (p. 228), doi:10.1080/03054985.2016.1270200.

⁴⁵ J. Paul Hunter, 'Poetry on the Page: Visual Signalling and the Mind's Ear', in *The Work of Form: Poetics and Materiality in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Elizabeth Scott-Baumann and Ben Burton, First edition (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 179–97 (p. 179).

⁴⁶ Julia Novak, *Live Poetry: An Integrated Approach to Poetry in Performance*, Internationale Forschungen Zur Allgemeinen Und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 153 (Rodopi, 2011), p. 12.

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based practices. For instance, Dymoke notes how spoken word performances form a key part of the drafting process, since poems ‘might be substantially reworked or even abandoned [after a performance]’ based on audience feedback.⁴⁷ For these reasons, performance poetry mentoring deserves its own study. It is also important to acknowledge the political and racial implications of excluding performance poetry from my analysis. As Kwame Dawes states, ‘the page is as much a performance space as is the stage’, and the line drawn between performance poetry and page poetry is a racially charged one, often used to delegitimise Black poets.⁴⁸ To ensure this narrative does not play out in my research, I do not exclude poets who engage in both types of practice, writing them off, as historically has been the case, as ‘only’ performance poets.⁴⁹

0.1.4 Defining Key Terms: Poetry Mentoring

From academic scholarship to pop culture, mentoring is traditionally conceptualised as a one-to-one relationship between a more experienced teacher and a less experienced student who learns from them. James Donovan and Kathleen May et al. describe this as the ‘archetypal dyad’⁵⁰ ‘between a novice in a discipline and a person who is knowledgeable and wise in that area’.⁵¹ Mentoring in poetry often accepts this dyadic premise, and poets and poetry mentors commonly see formal critique of the mentee’s poems as a key component of the learning process. While this description provides an initial shape of the practice and may helpfully orient readers, the notion of poetry mentorship is complex and contested, requiring fuller exploration than can be achieved in an introduction. This exploration takes place in Chapters One and Two. For introductory purposes, I will simply delineate some fundamental characteristics of poetry mentoring in this thesis. My research encompasses both dyadic and non-dyadic forms. I also focus on mentorship from 1990 onwards. This is because attitudes to varying mentorship structures have shifted across time (see Chapter Four), as have its delivery methods, particularly since the introduction of email and video conferencing software like Zoom. Occasionally, such as in Chapters Two and Four, I draw from historical contexts of mentoring and models of authorship in the Romantic era and broader twentieth century to better explain how contemporary mentorship has come to exist. This research also pertains to adult poets

⁴⁷ Dymoke, “‘Poetry Is Not a Special Club’”, p. 228.

⁴⁸ Kwame Dawes, ‘Black British Poetry, Some Considerations’, *Wasafiri*, 18.38 (2003), pp. 44–48 (p. 44), doi:10.1080/02690050308589827.

⁴⁹ *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different: Poems from Malika’s Poetry Kitchen*, ed. by Rishi Dastidar and Maisie Lawrence (Corsair, 2021), pp. 6–8.

⁵⁰ James Donovan, ‘The Concept and Role of Mentor’, *Nurse Education Today*, 10.4 (1990), pp. 294–98 (p. 294), doi:10.1016/0260-6917(90)90054-T.

⁵¹ Kathleen M. May, A. I. Meleis, and P. Winstead-Fry, ‘Mentorship for Scholarliness: Opportunities and Dilemmas’, *Nursing Outlook*, 30.1 (1982), pp. 22–28.

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since, although support like the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award bears a striking resemblance to formalised schemes for adults, poetry mentoring for children and teenagers differs.⁵² It often takes place in schools, like the InkPots Mentoring Programme⁵³ or First Story's Young Writers Programme.⁵⁴ Additionally, all forms of young people's poetry mentorship are pedagogically distinct from adults, since they address factors such as safeguarding, and levels of emotional, psychological, and cognitive development across childhood and adolescence. Mentorship for young poets therefore merits its own analysis.⁵⁵ My research may support such endeavours through cultivating a mentoring language specific to creative practice, which can expand the existing academic literature on youth intervention.

0.2 Explaining the Gap in Scholarship: Poetry Mentorship as a Hidden Practice

Formalised mentorship programmes like The Complete Works,⁵⁶ The James Berry Prize,⁵⁷ or Primers⁵⁸ have a public profile —poets share them on social media, organisers document them on webpages, and there are often publications and events attached.⁵⁹ In contrast to such publicity, poetry mentoring largely happens in private spaces like emails (previously letters), or in living rooms, libraries, and community centres. Even mentoring in well-known programmes occurs behind closed doors. Outsiders may see glimpses of it, such as in acknowledgements at performances or in published texts. For example, the 2022 celebration event for the Jerwood Compton Poetry Fellowship programme saw mentors and mentees reflecting on what had taken place during their mentorships, such as mentors providing —and mentees responding to—

⁵² The Poetry Society, 'Foyle Young Poets Award', Poetry Society, 2025 <<https://poetrysociety.org.uk/competitions/foyle-young-poets-of-the-year-award/>> [accessed 15 May 2025].

⁵³ Gill Pawley, 'Mentoring in Schools', InkPots, 30 January 2023 <<https://inkpots.org/mentoring-in-schools/>> [accessed 15 May 2025].

⁵⁴ First Story, 'Young Writers Programme', *First Story*, 14 May 2025 <<https://firststory.org.uk/young-writers-programme/>> [accessed 15 May 2025].

⁵⁵ See the Young Poets' Stories project. Sue Dymoke and Anthony Wilson, 'Young Poets' Stories Research Project', *Young Poets' Stories*, 8 April 2020 <<https://youngpoetsstories.com/young-poets-stories/>> [accessed 15 May 2025].

⁵⁶ The Complete Works, 'The Complete Works Poetry Home', The Complete Works, 2018 <<https://thecompleteworkspoetry.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 23 February 2024].

⁵⁷ Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts, 'James Berry Poetry Prize - Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts - Newcastle University', Newcastle University, n.d. <<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/ncla/james-berry/#theprize>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

⁵⁸ Nine Arches Press, 'Primers', Nine Arches Press, n.d. <<https://ninearchespress.com/primers>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

⁵⁹ Such as the showcasing events around The Complete Works' anthology, *Mapping the Future. Mapping the Future: In Conversation*, prod. by Speaking Volumes and The Complete Works (Online, 2024) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC1JHArf7xE>> [accessed 22 May 2025].

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prompts.⁶⁰ Yet the process of mentoring remains relatively obscured, both practically and in terms of academic literature.

As such, my research comes at a vital time. Poetry mentorship is becoming more visible, both through the rise of formalised mentorship schemes, and through mentoring services offered independently by poets (see Appendix G). Yet, poets often come to mentoring for the first time with little knowledge of what it entails.⁶¹ Only those already engaged in mentoring have such expertise. Accordingly, many stand to benefit from what this research achieves. I outline a range of approaches to and forms of poetry mentoring at play today, elucidating both popular and lesser-known options, which offers a comprehensive language to clearly describe mentoring. Poets looking for mentorship could use this to identify opportunities that meet their needs and ambitions, reducing the amount of mentorship opportunities they try before finding a suitable match. Since mentorship often comes with a financial cost (see Appendix A), limiting this trial and error may make poetry mentorship, and poetry practice broadly, more accessible. Additionally, the research could inform or better articulate the provision offered by mentors and writer-development agencies. Funders could use this study to shape their calls, guidance, or policies. In both cases, the research being used in this way could expand the scope of poetry mentorship provision offered in the UK, better meet the needs of a range of mentees, and mentors could see their mentees becoming more fulfilled. Should the mentorship utilise a paid model, mentors could generate more income through these positive outcomes, as mentees may engage in long-term mentorships, or new mentees could be attracted by the mentors' reputations.

0.3 Methodology

0.3.1 Overview

In this doctoral study, I investigate how mentoring takes place in the contemporary UK poetry ecology. Poetry mentoring is a prolific practice but there are few scholarly accounts or data sets which document the process. Therefore, I needed to gather empirical data to capture the poetry mentoring process and its potential wider significances. I used the following data collection tools and analysis methods:

⁶⁰ The 2022 celebration event for the Jerwood Compton Poetry Fellowship programme, for example, saw mentors and mentees reflecting on what had taken place during their mentorships, such as mentors providing—and mentees responding to—prompts. *The Gift of Mentoring or How to Nurture a Poet*, dir. by Jerwood Arts (2022) <https://youtu.be/ykbzjUWI1_k> [accessed 30 September 2022].

⁶¹ Rishi Dastidar, 'Poetry Mentor Interview', October 2022.

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Data Collection Tool	Date of Data Collection	Engagement	More Information Available In
Online survey	3 rd May – 30 th September 2022	74 responses	Appendix A
Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with UK poetry mentors and mentees, conducted on Zoom and via email	2022-2024	31 interviews	Appendices B, E, and F
A mapping sample of contemporary UK mentorship provision	February 2024	75 examples	Appendix G Chapters One and Three
Visual models of the contemporary UK poetry ecology	Across the project	N/A	Appendix C Chapter One

Table 1: Data Collection Tools

Data Analysis Method	Source Analysed Via This Method
Statistical analysis	Mapping sample Survey responses
Textual and thematic analysis	Interview transcripts Literary criticism relating to the poetry ecology and writing practice Mapping sample Poems (largely relating to mentorship or produced via mentorship, including some of my own work) Promotional material for mentorship schemes Publicly available accounts of mentorship Survey responses

Table 2: Data Analysis Methods

Together, these methods create detailed accounts of both the public and private narratives of contemporary poetry mentoring in the UK. I delve into my reasonings for and the consequences of these methodological choices below.

0.3.2 Analysis of Data Collection Methods

This study spans English literature, creative writing, and education, and borrows from further areas to contextualise the writing and writing-development processes with their material, psychological, and socio-political surrounds, much like writer-scholars Francis Gilbert and Vicky Macleroy's suggestion that creative writing research could do well to 'look [sic] at the overall conditions [of writerly production, such as] the writer's psychological state, their

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biography, the time, the location of their writing’.⁶² As such, my most significant data collection tools were closely aligned with the core disciplines —English, creative writing, and education— but I also paired these with practices found elsewhere to create a comprehensive data set that reflected the interdisciplinarity of the project. For instance, I selected qualitative semi-structured interviews and surveys as the central data-collection tools, much like writing scholars, Anthony Wilson,⁶³ Teresa Cremin,⁶⁴ Janette Hughes,⁶⁵ Sue Dymoke,⁶⁶ Mandy M. Archibald and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie,⁶⁷ and Camea Davis.⁶⁸ Since writing processes ‘are ultimately different for every writer’, my data collection tools needed to be able to capture potentially complex beliefs and circumstances surrounding writing and mentoring.⁶⁹ As Gilbert and Macleroy outline, these qualitative accounts ‘afford [sic] the richest and most meaningful avenues.’⁷⁰ In short, they tell deep and nuanced stories. Therefore, I reasoned qualitative surveys and interviews were particularly suitable for poetry mentoring research. These tools also allowed me to gather data on interdisciplinary aspects of the writing process, echoing their use in social science research. For instance, in both my interviews and survey, I included thematically-designed questions that asked participants to consider both creative writing concepts —such as how their writing had changed as a result of mentorship— but also concepts that belonged to further fields —such as mentoring’s impact on wellbeing or its therapeutic potential.⁷¹ In this way, these qualitative tools allowed me to chart poetry mentoring’s potential interdisciplinary significances, resulting in a more complex account of how poetry mentoring takes place.

I continued this interdisciplinary thread by incorporating quantitative methods; I did so to amplify potentially anecdotal interview accounts into the beginnings of a national picture of

⁶² Francis Gilbert and Vicky Macleroy, ‘Different Ways of Descending into the Crypt: Methodologies and Methods for Researching Creative Writing’, *New Writing*, 18.3 (2021), pp. 253–71 (p. 256), doi:10.1080/14790726.2020.1797822.

⁶³ *Making Poetry Matter: International Research on Poetry Pedagogy*, ed. by Sue Dymoke, Andrew Lambirth, and Anthony Wilson (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 63.

⁶⁴ Teresa Cremin, ‘Exploring Teachers’ Positions and Practices’, in *Making Poetry Matter: International Research on Poetry Pedagogy* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

⁶⁵ Janette Hughes, ‘Digital Poetry, Power and Social Justice’, in *Making Poetry Matter: International Research on Poetry Pedagogy* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

⁶⁶ Sue Dymoke, ‘Teaching Poetry in New Zealand Secondary Schools at a Time of Curriculum Change’, in *Making Poetry Matter: International Research on Poetry Pedagogy* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

⁶⁷ Mandy M. Archibald and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, ‘Poetry and Mixed Methods Research’, *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 12.2 (2020), pp. 153–65 (p. 153), doi:10.29034/ijmra.v12n2editorial3.

⁶⁸ Camea Davis, ‘Sampling Poetry, Pedagogy, and Protest to Build Methodology: Critical Poetic Inquiry as Culturally Relevant Method’, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 27.1 (2021), pp. 114–24 (p. 114), doi:10.1177/1077800419884978.

⁶⁹ Gilbert and Macleroy, ‘Different Ways of Descending into the Crypt’, p. 255.

⁷⁰ Gilbert and Macleroy, ‘Different Ways of Descending into the Crypt’, p. 253.

⁷¹ See Appendix F for a full question list.

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mentoring in the UK poetry ecology. For instance, my project survey and mapping sample also collected quantitative, statistical data, which Gilbert and Macleroy note is an unpopular choice in research on the creative writing process.⁷² They observe that, because writers and scholarship see writing processes as unique to individuals,⁷³ creative writing education research is particularly in opposition to quantitative research, since this type of analysis seeks to use numeric data to find patterns, ‘to know how strong [the] finding is’, how generalisable it is to the wider writing community.⁷⁴ Generalising stands in stark opposition to an individualised process of writing, or indeed, of learning to write creatively. Quantitative methods alone are therefore unlikely to capture the nuance required to produce meaningful research on poetry mentorship. In recent years, writing education experts acknowledge this and have moved towards mixed methodologies that incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods, such as Nicole Westmarland,⁷⁵ Jennifer Harrison et al.,⁷⁶ Dymoke,⁷⁷ Archibald and Onwuegbuzie,⁷⁸ Davis,⁷⁹ and Lori Howe.⁸⁰ Gilbert and Macleroy offer a helpful explanation as to why such mixed methods can be successful. They note that quantitative survey questions can help researchers establish a broad overview ‘of how people are thinking or feeling about a particular way of writing.’⁸¹ Together, then, I utilised quantitative and qualitative methods to capture both the richness of individual accounts and provide a sense of how applicable these accounts are to the national UK poetry ecology, thus avoiding the anecdotal.

My decision to include quantitative and qualitative methods was taken not simply to follow the traditions of the disciplines that overlap with this project, but also to challenge arbitrary exclusions, divisions, or binaries. As such, I took inspiration from feminist scholar, Westmarland’s assertion that ‘there is no need for dichotomous “us against them”, “quantitative against qualitative” debates’ and incorporated both types of data collection

⁷² Gilbert and Macleroy, ‘Different Ways of Descending into the Crypt’, p. 258.

⁷³ Gilbert and Macleroy, ‘Different Ways of Descending into the Crypt’, p. 255.

⁷⁴ Gilbert and Macleroy, ‘Different Ways of Descending into the Crypt’, p. 259.

⁷⁵ Nicole Westmarland, ‘The Quantitative/Qualitative Debate and Feminist Research: A Subjective View of Objectivity’, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol 2 (2001), doi:10.17169/FQS-2.1.974.

⁷⁶ Jennifer Harrison, Sue Dymoke, and Tony Pell, ‘Mentoring Beginning Teachers in Secondary Schools: An Analysis of Practice’, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22.8 (2006), pp. 1055–67 (p. 1055), doi:10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.021.

⁷⁷ Dymoke, Lambirth, and Wilson, *Making Poetry Matter*, p. 140.

⁷⁸ Archibald and Onwuegbuzie, ‘Poetry and Mixed Methods Research’, p. 153.

⁷⁹ Davis, ‘Sampling Poetry, Pedagogy, and Protest to Build Methodology’, p. 114.

⁸⁰ Lori Howe, ‘A Review of Creative Writing Workshop Pedagogy in Educational Research: Methodological Challenges and Affordances’, *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 29.4 (2016), pp. 195–206 (p. 205), doi:10.1080/08893675.2016.1215379.

⁸¹ Gilbert and Macleroy, ‘Different Ways of Descending into the Crypt’, p. 259.

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methods to acknowledge their validity and to ensure no arbitrary exclusions or subject-specific traditions limit the effectiveness of this study.⁸²

However, some may find this decision problematic, given the hostile history between scholars working in qualitative or quantitative traditions. To summarise this extensive debate, Westmarland,⁸³ Howe,⁸⁴ and Lawrence Leung outline that policy makers and STEM disciplines have historically viewed qualitative research as less credible than quantitative.⁸⁵ This is partially due to qualitative research's association 'with interpretivism, non-scientific, subjectivity and femininity',⁸⁶ that arts-based practice pioneer, Elliot Eisner, traces back to Plato's mistrust of the sensory response to the arts which he believed did not reflect objective truth.⁸⁷ Today, this history manifests in creative writers continuing to resist quantitative methods that cannot accurately capture the significance of their work, yet have been thrust upon them via the continuing legacy of quantitative research being perceived as more reliable.⁸⁸ Such a history may lead writing experts to question whether I should have conducted this study using purely qualitative means. I agree this would have still afforded a rich data set and elucidating analysis of poetry mentoring. However, as mentioned, it was necessary to adopt quantitative data collection methods to capture an essence of the national picture; to do this using only qualitative accounts would have required a far larger data set, which would have been unachievable for the timescale of a doctoral project.

Finally, utilising a variety of data collection tools was essential to describing poetry mentoring at scale because it prevented my identity as a poet-researcher hindering the research. For instance, there was a risk that the participants in my study would be limited to poets I could access through existing connections, which I reasoned may not be representative of the entire poetry ecology and could be influenced by my identity (white, British-Austrian, queer, middle-class, cis-woman, neurodivergent, university-educated, and largely lyric poet who began the study at age twenty-six based in the South of England). I therefore employed a survey, since this could reach poets I did not already know and who may not share any of my

⁸² Westmarland, 'The Quantitative/Qualitative Debate and Feminist Research'.

⁸³ Westmarland, 'The Quantitative/Qualitative Debate and Feminist Research'.

⁸⁴ Howe, 'A Review of Creative Writing Workshop Pedagogy in Educational Research', p. 205.

⁸⁵ Lawrence Leung, 'Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability in Qualitative Research', *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 4.3 (2015), pp. 324–27 (p. 324), doi:10.4103/2249-4863.161306.

⁸⁶ Westmarland, 'The Quantitative/Qualitative Debate and Feminist Research'.

⁸⁷ Elliot Eisner, 'Art and Knowledge', in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, ed. by J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole (SAGE Publications, 2008), p. 4

<<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=986800>>.

⁸⁸ This legacy continues in creative writing research that may influence policy makers. To engage these audiences, researchers represent their impact via statistics, such as in First Story and Paper Nations' 'Creative Writing in Schools' project, which I contributed to in its latter stages. Will Millard and others, *Creative Writing in Schools - Executive Summary* (LKMco, 2019).

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poetic or personal characteristics. To facilitate a wide reach, I posted the survey link on social media and engaged a range of organisations to share the posts, such as the Scottish Poetry Library, Poetry Ireland, Literature Wales, and the majority of English regional writer-development agencies. This increased both the number and diversity of respondents. I also included a survey question that allowed participants to indicate their openness to an interview, which ensured that participants whose experiences were not initially well-represented in the study were featured in an in-depth, qualitative manner. Including further tools, such as adding a mapping sample of mentoring provision in the latter half of the project, and conducting additional interviews with experimental poets who were sparsely represented in my first tranche of interviews in 2022, enabled me to draw from outside my immediate networks. Overall, this mixed methodology made my research far more representative of the national poetry ecology.

0.3.3 Interview Methodology in Detail

This project also has social justice ambitions in that it considers where approaches to mentoring have contributed to perpetuating inequalities, could be more inclusive, and where white, patriarchal, heteronormative sites of power have influenced which forms of mentoring varying stakeholders laud or disparage. As such, I needed to gather data that reflected how poets from a wide variety of poetic traditions, genders, ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations, disabilities, and further characteristics experienced the poetry ecology. Therefore, I considered which methodologies were most appropriate for social justice research to reach the widest range of poets. I engaged several accessibility measures to enable equitable participation, such as using alt-text on digital flyers and informational graphics, utilising a high-contrast (but not black and white) colour scheme on these to ensure partially sighted or dyslexic poets could read digital and print materials. Additionally, my survey questions were not compulsory, which meant participants did not have to answer every question to take part; this supported those facing time or energy-related barriers.⁸⁹ I also offered participants options to be interviewed in written format rather than verbal, to support factors such as social anxiety.

However, most of my accessibility measures and efforts towards creating an accessible methodology took place within my verbal interview method. It was important that interviewed poetry mentors and mentees were treated as interlocutors whose knowledge and experiences were just as valid as my own, if not more so. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, academic researchers have historically been hierarchically above participants, a dynamic that

⁸⁹ One flaw in my method was that my survey was only available digitally. The option of a paper-based survey would have made the project more accessible to those with low digital literacy. I did not include this since transcribing handwritten responses to include them in the dataset would have been too time-consuming.

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risks making participants unable to freely express themselves for fear of judgement or invalidation of their experiences.⁹⁰ Psychologists, Henrik Skovlund et al. allude to the potential power imbalance within research and offer a mitigating technique. They advocate for developing mutual trust, arguing this is essential to ensure research is ‘emancipatory and not oppressive’, and add, ‘Without trust, the research may be invalidated in a methodological sense due to a lack of openness and honesty.’⁹¹ In the context of poetry, it is particularly important to establish trust with interviewees given that poets often acquire a sense of legitimacy to their practice through accruing academic qualifications, as Sue Dymoke and Jane Spiro’s study on poet-academic identity observes.⁹² As such, my position as a PhD researcher working in a Russell Group university could have made participants who did not have university backgrounds nervous to express themselves for fear I would disregard accounts that did not echo my thoughts or the thoughts of other interviewed academic poets.

In practice, I achieved a sense of equality through being as verbally and expressively encouraging, open, and non-judgemental as possible to demonstrate that even if the interviewees’ experiences or opinions diverged from those generally accepted in academia, they were respected and valid. For example, one poet, who wished to remain anonymous, was unsure about having their experiences included in this thesis because they work in a more experimental tradition that rejects many of the premises of poetry mentorship such as ‘goal-oriented mentorship’, of which the goals can include publication, prizes, or similar milestones.⁹³ The poet said they ultimately realised these goals served to ‘make [them] feel like a proper poet’, quelling an ‘internal struggle’ for validation rather than being ‘forthcoming’ for their practice.⁹⁴ They then abandoned such milestones and mentorship in any formal sense, preferring a more community-oriented method of mentoring and being able to define what ‘writing meaningfully’ meant for themselves.⁹⁵ In the context of equitable methods, it is significant that the poet felt concerned about having their narrative included in this thesis. It was only after further discussion between us, in which I reassured them that their experiences were valid, interesting, and extremely useful to hear about, that they gave permission for them to be

⁹⁰ Jodie Taylor, ‘The Intimate Insider: Negotiating the Ethics of Friendship When Doing Insider Research’, *Qualitative Research*, 11.1 (2011), pp. 3–22 (p. 7), doi:10.1177/1468794110384447.

⁹¹ Henrik Skovlund, Line Lerche Mørck, and Martin Celosse-Andersen, ‘The Art of Not Being Neutral in Qualitative Research’, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 20.3 (2023), pp. 363–81 (p. 377), doi:10.1080/14780887.2023.2223529.

⁹² Sue Dymoke and Jane Spiro, ‘Poet-Academics and Academic-Poets: Writing Identities, Practices and Experiences within the Academy’, *Writing in Practice*, 3 (2017) <<https://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/wip-editions/articles/poet-academics-and-academic-poets-writing-identities-practices-and-experiences-within-the-academy.html>> [accessed 24 May 2024].

⁹³ Anonymous, ‘Experimental Poetry Mentee Interview’, 2024.

⁹⁴ Anonymous, ‘Experimental Poetry Mentee Interview’.

⁹⁵ Anonymous, ‘Experimental Poetry Mentee Interview’.

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included. Even then, the inclusion had to be anonymous. This demonstrates that participants were wary of being judged when taking part in the interviews, either by me directly or the potential readers of this thesis, and that these were assuaged through methods such as a trust-building interview technique and the option to remain anonymous.

A further, vital measure I took to creating a more equal relationship between myself and my interviewees was being honest about my gaps in knowledge and where they likely knew more than I did in the early stages of the project, given many had decades of experience. This placed their responses at the same level of importance as my own research, as did my policy to tell each participant they were free to ask me questions in return at any stage. This made the interview feel more conversational, relaxing, and also empowered them to clarify or contextualise any topics, terms, or questions that were unclear. For instance, at the end of each interview, I explicitly asked interviewees if they had any questions for me. Many opted to ask me about what ideas had come up in other interviews. While maintaining the anonymity of precisely who had voiced which topics through avoiding names and details that could be used to identify particular organisations or individuals, I shared some details with the interviewees as time progressed. This solidified my interviewees' position as interlocutors, as they were able to weigh in on these ideas, and ultimately the interviews became much more fruitful.

0.3.4 Visualisation

Extending my mixed methodology further, I responded to the data by creating visual models of the poetry ecology, which added value to the research by allowing me to condense complex structural interpretation into a few images. The visual models are particularly valuable to me as a neurodivergent researcher. For example, some symptoms of ADHD I experience are an aptitude for visual processing, enhanced pattern recognition, and some working memory deficiency.⁹⁶ The visual models mitigate the latter and harness the two former, allowing me to more effectively recall and analyse data. Therefore my visualisations represent an important accessibility tool, firstly, for me, but also for any readers with similar access needs.

Moreover, my use of ecological models builds upon the work of sociologists such as Luc Boerboom and Valentina Ferretti,⁹⁷ Alexis Comber et al.⁹⁸, Emile Silvis and Patricia M.

⁹⁶ Kathryn Wheeler, 'What Is 'enhanced Pattern Recognition'? And Why Does It Affect Those with ADHD and Dyslexia?', *Happiful*, 20 June 2024 <<https://happiful.com/what-is-enhanced-pattern-recognition-and-why-does-it-affect-those-with-adhd-and-dyslexia>> [accessed 31 March 2026].

⁹⁷ Luc Boerboom and Valentina Ferretti, 'Actor-Network-Theory Perspective on a Forestry Decision Support System Design', *Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research*, 29.sup1 (2014), pp. 84–95 (p. 89), doi:10.1080/02827581.2014.946960.

⁹⁸ Alexis Comber, Peter Fisher, and Richard Wadsworth, 'Actor–Network Theory: A Suitable Framework to

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Alexander,⁹⁹ and Lisa Payne, who all adopt visualisations to articulate the interrelatedness of Actor Network Theory, a theory that underpins my ecological analysis.¹⁰⁰ The anthropologist, Flora Mary Bartlett, observes that such ‘Image making [is] entangled in the research process of understanding relations to the non-human’ and the visualisations in her research in rural Swedish communities ‘create a visual portal into everyday aesthetics of life in this community’.¹⁰¹ My ecological models enact a similar process for poetry communities, offering a transformative meaning-making experience that renders visible the interconnectedness of the poetry ecology, which can often be felt as intangible.

0.3.5 Acknowledging Non-Neutrality in Poetry Research

Scholars across education, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and the social sciences describe an ‘ongoing dispute about ethical and methodological standards of neutrality within qualitative research’, in which researchers have been expected to occupy a ‘neutral, impartial, or non-involved observer position’.¹⁰² This standard has been impossible to achieve for this project, given it is insider research, research ‘which is conducted within a social group, organization or culture of which the researcher is also a member.’¹⁰³ Put simply, I am a poet myself. My work is published in books and magazines, I edit and review publications, perform at readings, speak at conferences, belong to teams behind festivals and writing-development initiatives, have mentored young poets, and am part of workshop groups and collectives. I am, therefore, anchored within the poetry ecology I research, and my status as researcher can never be entirely neutral. As scholars such as Skovlund et al.,¹⁰⁴ Melanie J. Greene,¹⁰⁵ Lesley Lowes

Understand How Land Cover Mapping Projects Develop?’, *Land Use Policy*, 20.4 (2003), pp. 299–309 (p. 305), doi:10.1016/S0264-8377(03)00048-6.

⁹⁹ Emile Silvis and Patricia M. Alexander, ‘A Study Using a Graphical Syntax for Actor-Network Theory’, *Information Technology & People*, 27.2 (2014), pp. 110–28 (p. 117), doi:10.1108/ITP-06-2013-0101.

¹⁰⁰ Lisa Payne, ‘Visualization in Analysis: Developing ANT Analysis Diagrams (AADs)’, *Qualitative Research*, 17.1 (2017), pp. 118–33 (p. 124), doi:10.1177/1468794116661229.

¹⁰¹ Flora Mary Bartlett, ‘Freezers Full of Gold: Living Well with Landscape in Rural Northern Sweden’, *Kulturella Perspektiv – Svensk Etnologisk Tidskrift*, 32 (2023), p. 3, doi:10.54807/kp.v32.2173.

¹⁰² Skovlund, Lerche Mørck, and Celosse-Andersen, ‘The Art of Not Being Neutral in Qualitative Research’, p. 363.

¹⁰³ Melanie J. Greene, ‘On the Inside Looking In: Methodological Insights and Challenges in Conducting Qualitative Insider Research’, *The Qualitative Report*, 19.29 (2014), pp. 1–13 (p. 1) <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss29/3?utm_source=nsuworks.nova.edu%2Ftqr%2Fvol19%2Fiss29%2F3&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages> [accessed 12 April 2024].

¹⁰⁴ Skovlund, Lerche Mørck, and Celosse-Andersen, ‘The Art of Not Being Neutral in Qualitative Research’.

¹⁰⁵ Greene, ‘On the Inside Looking In: Methodological Insights and Challenges in Conducting Qualitative Insider Research’.

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and Morag Prowse,¹⁰⁶ Justine Mercer,¹⁰⁷ Carl Ratner,¹⁰⁸ and Jodie Taylor outline, non-neutral, insider research can have both benefits and drawbacks.¹⁰⁹ I analyse these below but first consider the relevance of insider research to poetry mentorship.

Poetry as a discipline faces a sparsely-acknowledged challenge: in poetry, the bounds between professional colleague and friend are often blurred, which further increases my status as an insider researcher due to the additional knowledge friendship brings. In some cases, the interviewees were more definitively professional colleagues. Rishi Dastidar filled in my survey, and was subsequently interviewed, without knowing me beforehand, and we had little contact outside of the research. However, others were more intimate to me. For instance, I had known my fellow members of the *Tears in the Fence* workshop group—who appear across the thesis and are a case study in Chapter Four—for years. While we mostly interacted in poetry settings, I had become close enough with them to discuss some of the personal circumstances behind my poems and they felt closer to friends than colleagues. Although this perhaps may be obvious to other poets, it is necessary to point out that such relationships are commonplace within the poetry ecology. For instance, Andrew Epstein remarks that ‘the notion that friendship is integral to poetics’ was popularised in post-war American experimental poetry communities, in which small press magazines were ‘vehicles for making new friends’, and ‘by the time the 1960s rolled around, the followers of [Frank] O’Hara, [John] Ashbery, and [Kenneth] Koch had developed a full-blown “poetics of sociability”’.¹¹⁰ My interviewees suggest this has continued into today, since several reflect on the emotional closeness of their networks. For instance, Carrie Etter remarks, ‘some of my closest friends are fellow poets’, and describes friendships with poets, such as Claire Crowther, that ‘support my practice as a writer’.¹¹¹ Cat Chong’s description of the poetry community surrounding the MA in Poetic Practice at Royal Holloway, University of London, also suggests an overlap between poetry colleague and friend. They describe engaging in ‘collaborations, discussions on work, shared platforms, and publications’ with this poetry community, resulting in

¹⁰⁶ Lesley Lowes and Morag A. Prowse, ‘Standing Outside the Interview Process? The Illusion of Objectivity in Phenomenological Data Generation’, *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 38.4 (2001), pp. 471–80, doi:10.1016/S0020-7489(00)00080-8.

¹⁰⁷ Justine Mercer, ‘The Challenges of Insider Research in Educational Institutions: Wielding a Double-Edged Sword and Resolving Delicate Dilemmas’, *Oxford Review of Education*, 33.1 (2007), pp. 1–17, doi:10.1080/03054980601094651.

¹⁰⁸ Carl Ratner, ‘Subjectivity and Objectivity in Qualitative Methodology’, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol 3 (2002), doi:10.17169/FQS-3.3.829.

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, ‘The Intimate Insider’.

¹¹⁰ Andrew Epstein, *Beautiful Enemies* (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 26–33, doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195181005.001.0001.

¹¹¹ Carrie Etter, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’, June 2022.

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a number of things including academic funding for publishing creative work, departmental prizes, introductions to more senior poets, platforms at academic and creative conferences, advice on further funding, public endorsements of published work, and invitations to international literary festivals. In short, the chance to make friends.¹¹²

By summarising the wealth of poetry activities in terms of friendships, Chong indicates the blurriness between colleague and friend. Moreover, Taylor comments that ‘the cultural participant as insider researcher has become relatively commonplace across the humanities’ in the twenty-first century.¹¹³ Yet, despite its ubiquity, my research has revealed no academic accounts that frame poets specifically as insider researchers. Accordingly, occupying and consciously analysing my position as an insider researcher represents a useful addition to poetry education scholarship.

My insider status offered a number of benefits. Greene summarises these, outlining that insider researchers come already equipped with knowledge about their research area, may have a network of contacts to access, and the interactions with those contacts can be deeper because of the existing relationship.¹¹⁴ All three were true for this project. I had already taken part in poetry education research projects and many poetry events outside of academia, resulting in a knowledge base on the key figures and culture of the contemporary UK poetry ecology. As noted above, many interviewed or surveyed poets I knew beforehand, whether personally or professionally or in the blurry space between. In relation to the last of Greene’s list of benefits, I believe my insider status resulted in more detailed interviews. My reasons mimics Skovlund et al.’s findings in their own research. They note that having a more personal relationship with the interviewees results in greater trust because they ‘can be sure that the information [they provide] will not be distorted or abused because [they know] researchers are allied working to explore our common research interests and that we care about [their] well-being.’¹¹⁵ Similarly in my research, my discussions with interviewees and in my promotional materials often conveyed my overall ambition to try and make poetry as a form more accessible through enhancing poetry mentoring’s visibility. Stakeholders were often likewise invested in such a goal and were more forthcoming, which leads me to conclude my insider status was beneficial.

¹¹² Cat Chong, ‘Poetry Mentee Interview’, 2024.

¹¹³ Taylor, ‘The Intimate Insider’, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Greene, ‘On the Inside Looking In: Methodological Insights and Challenges in Conducting Qualitative Insider Research’, pp. 3–4.

¹¹⁵ Skovlund, Lerche Mørck, and Celosse-Andersen, ‘The Art of Not Being Neutral in Qualitative Research’, p. 378.

0.3.6 Mitigating The Potential Damage of Insider Research

There were also possible drawbacks of insider research that I mitigated against, largely subjectivity and bias.¹¹⁶ As psychologists Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke outline, ‘qualitative data analysis is about telling “stories”, about interpreting, and creating, not discovering and finding the “truth” that is either ‘out there’ and findable from, or buried deep within, the data’.¹¹⁷ As such, insider researchers have the potential to fill in gaps in knowledge with their own assumptions and experiences, ultimately telling a subjective and biased story. At first, I attempted to avoid this possibility by collecting a diverse range of empirical data, which I hoped would minimise the amount of potentially subjective leaps in my analysis and present a more objective picture of poetry mentorship. I also reasoned that treating my interviewees as interlocutors with whom I shared my ideas-in-progress, as described above, would ensure my theories were not developed in isolation, thereby limiting both subjectivity and bias. However, as the project progressed, I realised it would be impossible to eliminate subjectivity and bias entirely. I therefore decided to actively recognise my status as insider researcher, as scholars such as Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams,¹¹⁸ Braun and Clarke¹¹⁹ and Taylor advocate.¹²⁰ I did so by acknowledging any personal involvement in the initiatives I discuss, thus highlighting the potential bias and subjectivity of that position.

One significant complication of conducting insider research in poetry mentoring was a potential conflict of interest surrounding whether my critiques could damage the mentor’s or mentoring organisation’s future prospects, or my own. For instance, although surveyed mentors reported that mentoring does not often form their *main* source of income, interviewed mentors commented that mentoring was still an income-generator. Therefore critiquing a mentor’s practices could have negative financial repercussions, as well as reputational ones.¹²¹ At the organisational scale, the precarity of the financial landscape often renders arts organisations just one or two declined funding bids away from crisis, as Tim J L documents¹²² and recent

¹¹⁶ Greene, ‘On the Inside Looking In: Methodological Insights and Challenges in Conducting Qualitative Insider Research’, pp. 4–5.

¹¹⁷ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, ‘Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis’, *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11.4 (2019), pp. 589–97 (p. 591), doi:10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806.

¹¹⁸ Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams, ‘Autoethnography as Becoming-With’, in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sixth edition (SAGE, 2024), p. 421.

¹¹⁹ Braun and Clarke, ‘Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis’, p. 591.

¹²⁰ Taylor, ‘The Intimate Insider’, p. 9.

¹²¹ Joanna Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey* (University of Southampton, 2022).

¹²² Tim J L, ‘Arts and the Logics of Survival’, *New Socialist*, 3 (2023) <www.newsocialist.org.uk/arts-and-logics-survival/> [accessed 24 May 2024].

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fundraisers by the Rebecca Swift Foundation,¹²³ the87press,¹²⁴ and Broken Sleep Books evidence further.¹²⁵ Critiquing organisations could impact the success of their next funding bid and signal the collapse of a whole writing community as a result if the organisation had to cease its activities, particularly because these organisations often draw poets together. In terms of myself, if my research were to contribute to such a negative impact, individuals or organisations may be hesitant to work with me in future. Particularly given that poets often hold multiple roles—such as in universities, magazines, festivals, or writer-development agencies— at once, these consequences could be long-standing and far-reaching. In short, I was highly aware that my critique could have very real ramifications both on me and the wider ecology.

My supervisors were integral to helping me overcome this, as they reminded me that critique is the role of the researcher and this study would be of no use if I were to simply praise everyone. Moreover, I realised that critique does not nullify the high-quality work many of the practitioners have conducted elsewhere, and draw attention to this where relevant in the thesis, which I believe is an ethically responsible research practice in addition to its ability to help me overcome my qualms about problematising work that had good intentions and indeed was far from being wholly damaging. Another approach I used to bypass the possible negative repercussions of critique is tactical anonymisation. There were moments at which I had permission to attribute a quotation to a person or organisation but opted to anonymise them; this allowed me to discuss the issues at hand without triggering potentially inflammatory consequences.

Overall, this conflict of interest highlighted one of the potential methodological flaws of this project, which is its attempt to create a national picture of poetry mentoring. Since mentoring is a highly varied process, part of the problem of analysing the poetry ecology at scale is that this distance tends to show glimmers of many practices or individuals/organisations, without showing them in their entirety. Perhaps this is why much literature on poetry networks and communities opts to focus on a specific coterie, movement, or organisation, since this approach gleans detail rather than pattern. Examples include the set of essays edited by Barton C. Hacker et al. on women's poetry networks in the long nineteenth century,¹²⁶ Andrew Epstein

¹²³ Lauren Brown, 'Rebecca Swift Foundation Calls for "Urgent" Donations', *The Bookseller*, 3 October 2023 <<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/rebecca-swift-foundation-calls-for-urgent-donations>> [accessed 24 May 2024].

¹²⁴ the87press, 'Support The87press 2022', Crowdfunder, October 2021

<<https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/support-the87press-2022>> [accessed 15 July 2025].

¹²⁵ Aaron Kent, 'A CALL TO ARMS: One Book Could Make All the Difference', letter, 24 May 2024 <<https://mailchi.mp/brokensleepbooks/support-broken-sleep-books-buy-just-one-book-today?e=f6b53de4b1>> [accessed 24 May 2024].

¹²⁶ *Connecting Women: National and International Networks During the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by

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on 1950s-60s American avant-garde poets,¹²⁷ or, to a less microcosmic extent, the 2020 special edition of *College Literature* journal that uses examples such as Lucille Clifton¹²⁸ or *Poetry* magazine to discuss poetry networks.¹²⁹ Yet I maintain that part of the gap in knowledge that this thesis fills is its ambitions towards a large-scale ecological framework of how the poetry ecology functions, with mentoring as one of its most prolific and affective components. I believe such a framework will enhance further research studies, including studies on both specific, smaller groups of poets, or the poetry ecology at scale.

0.4 A Reflection, The Central Provocation, and Chapter Summaries

0.4.1 A Reflection on the Challenges of this Study

To take a temporal leap back to 2020 and the process of developing my application for this doctoral study, I saw poetry production and poetry education—and continue to see them—as deeply interlinked with their surroundings, such as material and sociocultural considerations. In more informal terms, I would never have grown my poetic practice without whole communities sharing wisdom, advice, recommending books, and countless other ways of expanding my horizons. Even the concept of studying poetry mentorship is not solely mine—the project was proposed by my supervisors and I replied outlining how I would address and lead that project. Although this latter example refers to scholarship about poetry rather than directly writing it, the collaborative nature of poetic practice and growth is apparent. Today, I am also indebted to the poets who kindly provided their insights on poetry mentorship in interviews and survey responses. Without their contribution, this research would not exist. Kay Syrad evokes both the sense of interconnection with wider systems and collaboration in her poem, ‘The sun is as high’, which is why I chose it for the epigraph of this thesis. The ‘pressing-up-against’, the shared ‘vapour’ between cells, the ‘lacing bowers of the canopy’, the spreading of heat, and the diversity of the red and yellow, sun and shade, spoke to me of being a poet, the transmission and multiplicity in artistic practice.¹³⁰

As this study progressed, it became increasingly apparent that writing culture, scholars, and poets frequently frame poetry writing and mentorship practices in individualist and

Barton C. Hacker and others, *A Smithsonian Contribution to Knowledge* (Smithsonian Scholarly Press, 2021).

¹²⁷ Epstein, *Beautiful Enemies*.

¹²⁸ Sumita Chakraborty, ‘Poetic Networks Begin After Death’, *College Literature*, 47.1 (2020), pp. 230–39, doi:10.1353/lit.2020.0013.

¹²⁹ Kamran Javadizadeh and Robert Volpicelli, ‘Introduction: The Scales of Poetry Networks’, *College Literature*, 47.1 (2020), pp. 1–8 (p. 5), doi:10.1353/lit.2020.0007.

¹³⁰ Syrad, ‘The Sun Is as High’.

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isolationist ways. They valorise narratives of the individual, use binaries and demarcation lines to divorce poetry production and education from wider ideas, processes, and effects that may span interdisciplinary areas, and poetry itself is written by an individual, isolated poet.

Stephanie Vanderslice remarks that writing culture ‘continually reinscribes’ such notions.¹³¹

Throughout this project, poets spoke about mentoring as hugely influential but somehow were more reticent to tie mentoring to a specific poem or text. There was a sense of needing to claim the work as definitively theirs, produced by them alone. This did not seem to match the nature of poetry writing practice. I detail how my thesis addresses this disconnect in the chapter summaries below but first want to keep reflecting on other moments of tension surrounding mentorship that arose as part of this project, since these can help frame the content of my chapters.

One tension was that some poets resisted the term, mentoring. Mentorship can have problematic connotations with notions of the institution, such as mentoring as a way of aligning poets with institutions to give them prestige, mentoring’s role in making poetry practice more exclusive, and in replicating existing power structures, depending on who receives mentorship. It was for these reasons that liz breslin notes some poets would hate to be referred to as mentors.¹³² In the course of this doctoral thesis, I likewise found instances of poets resisting the language of mentoring, particularly experimental poets. I investigate the significance of this in Chapter Two.

A second difficulty concerned my approach to situating poets within wider artistic, social, cultural, and economic systems. These are systems poets may not agree with, may have to manipulate, and systems which may actively do harm. Camille Dasseleer, for instance, addresses the hostility, elitism, and bureaucracy of artistic systems,¹³³ drawing on Pilar Rodríguez Aranda and Edwing Roldán Ortiz.¹³⁴ breslin reflects, ‘To get your work funded, you have to prove the dynamism of your art, which means you have to temporarily believe in it, which makes it all the more painful when it gets rejected.’¹³⁵ They also raise that such funding

¹³¹ Stephanie Vanderslice, *Rethinking Creative Writing in Higher Education: Programs and Practices That Work*, Creative Writing Studies (The Professional and Higher Partnership, 2011), p. 27.

¹³² Will May and others, ‘Q&A from Panel I: Poetry Community: Behind the Scenes’, unpublished paper delivered at Poetry Off the Page, Around the Globe: Advances in Poetry Performance Research (13 June 2025).

¹³³ Camille Dasseleer, ‘Globalising the Ephemeral: The Paradoxes of Spoken Word in the Digital Age’, unpublished paper delivered at Poetry Off the Page, Around the Globe: Advances in Poetry Performance Research (13 June 2025).

¹³⁴ Pilar Rodríguez Aranda and Edwing Roldán Ortiz, ‘Coordinates of Poetry Out Loud Approaches to the History of the Spoken Word in Mexico’, *Voices of Mexico*, no. 96 (2013), pp. 109–12 (p. 112) <<http://www.revistascisan.unam.mx/Voices/pdfs/9621.pdf>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

¹³⁵ liz breslin, ‘Performing Bodies for Funding Bodies: A Performance Review’, unpublished paper delivered at Poetry Off the Page, Around the Globe: Advances in Poetry Performance Research (13 June 2025).

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facilitates survival as a human being: 'It's more than just endorsement we're asking for, it's food on the table.'¹³⁶ Yet there are moments in this thesis, particularly Chapter Three, where I analyse the operational workings of such systems, notably prize culture and the funding landscape. To do so risks readers inferring I believe the poets see their work in flat, transactional terms, or accusations of complicity. To the contrary, the research instead aims to reveal how artists try to navigate, change, and at times work against, those systems.

In contrast, across this doctoral project, poets highlighted the humanity of poetry as a practice and artform. I was reminded multiple times by my supervisor, Matt West, that poetry mentorship can distinctly oppose transactionality, and is, at its heart, a process about nurturing artists. Humanity and nurturing are evident in poems that mediate on co-journeying towards a sense of growth. For instance, in my poem about facilitating others' creative practice, that practice flourishes by cultivating joy: 'I turn their faces to the sun / coax the smile in each one / as they begin to gleam.'¹³⁷ Meanwhile, in Gabrielle Bates' 'The Mentor', it is through the mentor understanding the mentee's past experiences and pain that growth takes place. The mentor listens, and 'trace[s] what [the mentee] said / back to [their] left breast, down to the tender hole / where [they were] once attached to [their] mother'.¹³⁸ After identifying this raw root, the mentor listens to the mentee, finally asking 'when [the mentee] stopped shouting everything / and started keeping language close to [their] mouth / as if [they] were reading to a match that had to last [their] life.'¹³⁹ This conversation allows the mentor to begin the work of mentorship, which Bates represents through the mentor carving art into the 'dead parts' of a tree, a metaphor that stands for the mentee themselves. Mentorship in these two poems is utterly contingent on seeing the mentee as a person, and is far from transactional.

In the vein of moving away from transactional relationships, relationships with clearly defined purposes, beneficiaries, and outcomes, I was also reminded of poetry as an artform that resists such flat reductions and binary thinking. During a session in early 2025 with The 57 Collective, of which I am a member, we discussed poetry's ability to sit in ambivalence and uncertainty, moving away from binaries. This is an idea that stems back to John Keats' negative

¹³⁶ breslin, 'Performing Bodies for Funding Bodies: A Performance Review'.

¹³⁷ Nissel, *Guerrilla Brightenings*, p. 25.

¹³⁸ Gabrielle Bates, 'The Mentor', *POETRY*, February 2020
<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/152115/the-mentor>> [accessed 6 September 2025].

¹³⁹ Bates, 'The Mentor'.

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capability,¹⁴⁰ and has been explored by more recent poet-scholars including Jane Hirshfield,¹⁴¹ Ben Belitt,¹⁴² Daniela Freitas,¹⁴³ Jack Underwood,¹⁴⁴ Andrea Brady,¹⁴⁵ and Keston Sutherland.¹⁴⁶

Poetry itself, then, can deal with the multifaceted and that which is unclear. This shift away from definitive binaries also occurs on a macro scale—at the level of ecology. The ecologist, Timothy Morton, for instance, sees ecology as a huge, interlinked system that bewilders through never knowing the totality of entities and how they are connected. They describe the ecology through the metaphor of a mesh, understood as a layering of threads in multiple directions, ‘a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection without a definite center [sic] or edge.’¹⁴⁷ This mesh represents ‘radical intimacy, coexistence with other beings, sentient and otherwise’.¹⁴⁸ Yet, despite this closeness, ‘Each entity in the mesh looks strange’.¹⁴⁹ Ecologies are disorienting, unclear. Ultimately, Morton’s vision of the ecology mimics poetry in its complexity and ambiguity. Given this symmetry and that I use ecology as a framework to understand poetry communities, infrastructures, and activities, what might ecological theory offer to the study of poetry mentorship?

0.4.2 Central Provocation and Chapter Summaries

Mentoring models tend to be conceptual, listing a series of processes or stages that happen in a dyadic relationship between a single mentor and mentee.¹⁵⁰ I argue that poetry practice needs more dynamic, fluid models which attend to non-dyadic mentoring and wider social and cultural contexts. Further, existing dyadic models collude with the tendency of literary criticism to see authors as individual agents—which I contend is reductive—and also collude with notions of

¹⁴⁰ John Keats, *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. by Grant F. Scott, Rev. ed (Harvard University Press, 2002), p. xxxii.

¹⁴¹ Jane Hirshfield, ‘Poetry and Uncertainty’, *The American Poetry Review*, 34.6 (2005), pp. 63–72 (p. 63), JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20683075>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

¹⁴² Ben Belitt, ‘Toward a Poetics of Uncertainty’, *Southwest Review*, 76.2 (1991), pp. 164–91, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43470253>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

¹⁴³ Daniela Silva de Freitas, ‘Beyond Binaries: A Counter-Colonial Perspective of Slam Poetry’, unpublished paper delivered at Poetry Off the Page, Around the Globe: Advances in Poetry Performance Research (13 June 2025).

¹⁴⁴ Jack Underwood, ‘On Poetry and Uncertain Subjects’, *Poetry*, 212.2 (2018), pp. 166–74, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26492662>> [accessed 22 June 2025].

¹⁴⁵ Andrea Brady, ‘JJJJJerome Ellis: Making Time Otherwise’, unpublished paper delivered at Poetry Off the Page, Around the Globe: Advances in Poetry Performance Research (13 June 2025).

¹⁴⁶ Keston Sutherland, ‘Wrong Poetry’, *Textual Practice*, 24.4 (2010), pp. 765–82, doi:10.1080/0950236X.2010.499663.

¹⁴⁷ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 8, doi:10.2307/j.ctvjhzskj.

¹⁴⁸ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 15.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, the GROW and Zone of Proximal Development models. Mastura Binti Kamarudin and others, ‘A Review of Coaching and Mentoring Theories and Models’, *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 9.2 (2020), p. Pages 289–298 (pp. 291–96), doi:10.6007/IJARPED/v9-i2/7302.

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individualism and isolationism that pervade contemporary UK poetry. By challenging these collusions, advocating interconnectedness and multiplicity, and situating poetry mentoring within a wider ecology, I evidence that poetry mentorship can also take place non-dyadically, encompass more than formal aspects, and is deeply connected to the wider ecology.

In Chapter One I work towards this, first, by positing an ecological framework that underpins my interconnected approach, drawing on the social ecology and network analysis of theorists including Morton,¹⁵¹ Bruno Latour,¹⁵² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari,¹⁵³ and Elizabeth Jane Burnett.¹⁵⁴ I develop visual models of the poetry ecology that make visible the resources mentoring works with, thus setting up subsequent chapters' exploration of non-formal approaches to poetry writing and mentoring. My ecological model also makes mentorship's impact both on the poet and on the poetry ecology evident. Connecting mentoring to its influence on the wider ecology represents a strong move away from conceptualising poetry education in isolation, and allows me to build upon this strategy throughout the thesis. To be able to analyse poetry mentorship throughout the subsequent chapters, in Chapter One I expand upon what mentoring means across disciplines and map various forms of poetry mentoring, which establish the dyad as the dominant configuration. Through detailing that I will focus both on dyadic and non-dyadic forms of poetry mentorship in this research, as well as interrogating poetry mentoring's negotiation between the Romantic notion of single authorship and more collaborative models of poetry practice, I begin to open notions of mentorship.

In Chapter Two I document that, in addition to the dyad, much writing scholarship positions purely textual or formal approaches to mentorship as normative. I challenge this and outline a spectrum of approaches spanning practical, professional, personal, or political emphases, and advocate a multimodal model in which these are layers that can exist in endless combinations, reflecting the nature of poetry writing practice.¹⁵⁵ I then return to challenging the

¹⁵¹ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*.

¹⁵² Bruno Latour, Nathaniel A. Rivers, and Paul Lynch, *Thinking with Bruno Latour in Rhetoric and Composition* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2015) <<http://site.ebrary.com/id/11092141>>.

¹⁵³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'Introduction: Rhizome', in *Transatlantic Literary Studies*, ed. by Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 226–31 <<https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=6141785>> [accessed 4 January 2023].

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth-Jane Burnett, *A Social Biography of Contemporary Innovative Poetry Communities* (Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2017).

¹⁵⁵ Scholars already theorise different ways of approaching writing education. For example, Michelle Cross and Michelene Wandor create categories like literary or commercial pedagogy. Lindsey Drager, 'Against "The End": The Art Studio as Template for the Creative Writing Classroom', *Writing on the Edge*, 27.2 (2017), pp. 82–85 (p. 82) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44647488>> [accessed 1 February 2023]; Michelene Wandor, 'Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1: Self Expression? Whose Self and What Expression?', *New Writing*, 1.2 (2004), pp. 112–23 (p. 120), doi:10.1080/14790720408668928.

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dyad through an investigation of mentoring in the context of experimental poetry, which offers fluid and community-based forms of mentorship.

I apply Chapter Two's multimodality to specific mentorship settings in Chapter Three, delving more deeply into how poets, mentors, organisations, critics, and scholars entwine or try to disaggregate the various approaches to poetry mentoring. Building on Chapter One and Two's research into the purely formal, normative model of mentorship, I identify that this model often correlates with publication-centric notions of success in authorship, which does not reflect how poets experience writing practice but nevertheless affects conceptualisations of mentorship. I explore this affect in relation to two areas: mentoring's engagement with emotional or potentially therapeutic approaches, and the provision offered by formalised mentorship schemes. Through these areas, I illustrate that poetry mentorship largely upholds disaggregated ways of seeing mentoring practice, which has resulted in gaps in support for some mentees. My research also reveals instances where mentoring programmes utilise publication-centric notions of success to create broader change, increasing the UK poetry ecology's supportiveness to a range of poets and poetries. I consolidate these examples into a core finding: poetry mentoring and the wider ecology respond to each other and have a reciprocal impact on one another. As such, Chapter Three demonstrates poetry mentoring's deep interconnection with the ecology.

Both the reciprocity between mentorship and ecology, and mentorship's capacity to render the ecology more accessible are key to my final chapter. Here, I address the participatory emphasis of contemporary non-dyadic mentorships, contextualised by a brief history of group mentoring. Through case studies of Malika's Poetry Kitchen, The 57 Collective, and the workshop group and community surrounding *Tears in the Fence*, I illustrate that non-dyadic mentoring responds to both formal and non-formal needs in the poetry ecology, such as the need for spaces for multilingual or marginalised writers. Furthermore, non-dyads create an enduring shift in the ecology towards generosity, nurturing, and openness. Non-dyadic mentoring's multimodality and group structure are central to both this impact, and to its effectiveness as a form of mentoring. As a result, Chapter Four presents a clear example of poetry mentorship occurring non-dyadically, encompassing more than formal aspects, and, through the non-dyad's long-lasting impact, elucidates mentoring's continual imbrication with the poetry ecology.

0.4.3 A Final Introductory Reflection: Ecology as Home

Across this thesis, the major tensions are between the single and plural, the isolated and interconnected. I have already suggested that my ecological models represent a method of

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situating poetry mentoring amongst its wider connections, thus circumventing a conceptualisation of mentoring as a practice that happens in isolation, but the concept of ecology also gestures to these major tensions. To explain how, I start by tracing ecology's etymologic roots.

Ecology stems from the Greek, *οἶκος*, meaning house or dwelling;¹⁵⁶ scholars across disciplines trace ecology's origins not to just a physical building, but a home.¹⁵⁷ As Joel J. Muddamalle's lexical survey of *οἶκος* demonstrates,¹⁵⁸ for some, that sense of home may also refer to all the home's material objects and inhabitants. In this sense, a home is both single—a singular building or site—and deeply plural, encompassing not just an individual but a plurality of persons and things that together build a sense of home. Here, a German word springs to mind. Unheimlich. It means uncanny but its literal translation is un-homely.¹⁵⁹ When I first heard the word, I assumed that, without the prefix, heimlich would mean homely. This was not true. Heimlich means secretly. Personal. Unknown. Or perhaps deeply known but only to oneself. This, I felt, articulated the paradox of home. Home is comprised of more than just one building, object, or perhaps person, but the feeling of home is deeply personal and subjective, utterly mediated by the individual.¹⁶⁰ This is one potential confusion of studies of the poetry ecology. It is a great, sprawling mass of poets, educators, publishers, organisations, venues, courses, workshops, open mic nights, festivals, universities, collectives, and more. And yet, a poet's sense of their interconnection to the poetry ecology—the sense of being at home in, or a part of, the poetry ecology—is unique to every poet; it is also a sense that changes all the time. Just as one can turn around and suddenly find themselves feeling alone, perhaps for reasons they may not even understand, the experience of ecology is slippery. The poetry ecology is thereby tangible and intangible at once. Physically present but also felt, or unfelt. Individual and multiple.

¹⁵⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, 'Ecology, N. Etymology', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2024) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8140041101>> [accessed 18 September 2024].

¹⁵⁷ Donna E. Alvermann and Bradley Robinson, 'Youths' Global Engagement in Digital Writing Ecologies', in *Handbook of Writing, Literacies, and Education in Digital Cultures* (Routledge, 2017), pp. 161–72 (p. 163).

¹⁵⁸ Joel J. Muddamalle, 'Paul's Οἶκος Terminology in Ephesians: Babel and Deuteronomy 32 as Background Texts', in *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (unpublished Ph.D., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), ProQuest One Academic, 2615122782, p. 5 <<https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/paul-s-oikos-terminology-ephesians-babel/docview/2615122782/se-2?accountid=13963>>.

¹⁵⁹ Scar De Courcier identified this literal translation. Scar De Courcier, 'At Home in My Body: Disability, Chronic Illness and the Uncanny', unpublished paper delivered at SSWDTP Summer Research Festival 2024: Home and Belonging (5 June 2024) <https://youtu.be/GkKxWnCFwH8?si=jdr0ckxw1LUoiQ_d> [accessed 19 September 2024].

¹⁶⁰ After all, what one person may feel as homely may feel hostile to another.

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These characteristics signal a conceptual knot of this research, which is my attitude towards the individual voice. While I seek to challenge narratives of the individual, demolishing all sense of individuality risks mentoring being reduced to a series of one-size-fits-all recommendations. This would be unfit for purpose, since, as the range of approaches to mentoring I outline in Chapters Two and Three demonstrate, poets' needs are varied and nuanced, and they are tied to highly personal questions of identity, psychology, and self-expression, amongst others. Poetry mentoring is thereby a highly individualised process. Although it may appear counterintuitive, to meet those various and unique needs, this research moves away from individualistic understandings of writing and mentoring to broaden approaches to and forms of mentorship. By dethroning narratives of the isolated individual poet, this research nurtures, not negates, the individual voice.

Chapter 1 A Meshy Existence: Articulating Poetry

Mentoring and Situating it in the UK Poetry Ecology

1.1 Modelling the Structure and Operationality of the Poetry Ecology

1.1.1 Reflection: Ecology's Potential to Elucidate Poetry Mentoring

Seventh Room: Systems Art

Entering art is like passing through customs.
Systems within systems within systems within systems.

Think of Bach's Partitas as origami.
Dream of art as a honeycomb piquant as salami.

Think Alloway, Noland, Stella, Naumann, LeWitt.
Sooner or later you'll get the hang of it.

That is the system. This is your place in it.
I think you'll find a peculiar grace in it.

An excerpt from 'Guided Tour of the Exhibition' by Helen Ivory and George Szirtes.¹

Following on from the notion of ecology as home, which evokes the bewilderment of ecology, Helen Ivory and George Szirtes's poem adds further dimensions to this bewilderment.² Reading art as a stand-in for ecology, one can see its intricacy through the four layers of 'systems' depicted in the first line.³ Ecological submersion is also synaesthetic: music becomes 'origami', a visual and tactile shape; visual art becomes 'piquant' taste.⁴ The unexpected continually confronts the speaker in the manner of Timothy Morton's strange stranger.⁵ Ivory

¹ The piece was also adapted into a poetry film by Martin Figura. Helen Ivory, George Szirtes, and Martin Figura, 'Guided Tour of the Exhibition', *Magma Poetry*, no. 78 (Autumn 2020) <<https://magma-poetry.com/collaborations-magma-78/>> [accessed 6 June 2025].

² Bewilderment in relation to ecology was used as a theme for the 2022 *Tears in the Fence* literary festival. Carla Scarano D'Antonio, 'Tears in the Fence Festival: 'Bewilderment / Bewildered / Be Wild'', *Tears In The Fence*, 13 September 2022 <<https://tearsinthefence.com/2022/09/13/tears-in-the-fence-festival-bewilderment-bewildered-be-wild/>> [accessed 23 June 2025].

³ Ivory, Szirtes, and Figura, 'Guided Tour of the Exhibition'.

⁴ Ivory, Szirtes, and Figura, 'Guided Tour of the Exhibition'.

⁵ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 15.

and Szirtes' poem invites the speaker to find their 'place in it', to find some sense of orientation in the chaos.⁶

The challenge of doing so in relation to this research is that ecology refers to different impulses in relation to poetry. Ecology can be used to represent a group of defined entities, like organisations or people. This is one way poets and writers have often applied ecology in the past quarter of a century, leading to J.T. Welsch describing ecology as a 'flash word of recent years' in 2021.⁷ Meanwhile, ecological theory questions the boundaries of those entities, linking them through relationships. Take, for example, Peter Finke's understanding of cultural ecology:

[Ecological space] is characterized by webs of complex energetic relationships, and the unceasing processes by which it is shaped are feedback processes: something acts upon something else, and the result of this process, together with additional factors, in turn acts back upon the source[.]⁸

Finke's construction of ecology, as well as other theorists I discuss later in this chapter, sees each entity influencing and shaping each other, thus making the border between them less distinct. Thus ecology can be used to both increase awareness of all the entities involved in poetry's production, reception, and overall culture, and frustrate attempts to establish concrete identities for them.

In this way, ecological theory may create bewilderment. Yet it also offers something to my research. It augments the ecological metaphor and allows it to represent both the formulation of all those involved in poetry, and also how they interact with each other. Ecological theory helps me to articulate how poets, mentors, organisations, and wider infrastructures of poetry are always coming into contact: hosting events, publishing works, funding opportunities, and passing on knowledge, confidence, and other resources that enable poetic acts. These interactions create connections that form the web of relationships to which Finke refers, rendering those involved in poetry as linked within a greater ecological structure.

As Karen Simecek notes, 'the notion of ecology situates poetry in a broader space, one that goes beyond an individual poem or poet to consider the poem's place in a network of interaction with others – other poems, other poets, other audiences'.⁹ In this thesis, I build on Simecek's approach and situate poetry *mentorship* within its wider ecological contexts. Doing

⁶ Ivory, Szirtes, and Figura, 'Guided Tour of the Exhibition'.

⁷ Welsch, *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem Press, 2021), p. 204.

⁸ Peter Finke, 'Die Äußere Und Innere Landschaft. Über Psychische Energie Und Kulturelle Kreativität', in *Piet Trantel Auf Dem E 1 von Hameln Bis Freiburg*, ed. by M. P. Schiltsky, trans. by Hubert Zapf (Selbstverlag der Künstlergruppe Arche, 1998), pp. 107–31 (p. 130).

⁹ Karen Simecek, 'Community of/in/through Poetry', in *Social and Technological Aspects of Art: Challenges of the 'New Normal'* (University of Rijeka, 2022), pp. 27–45 (p. 30).

so enables a fuller understanding of mentoring's role and significance by making visible its impact and function, not just within the context of the mentorship itself, but on a grander cultural scale. As a result, poetry mentorship's embeddedness within the poetry ecology becomes evident.

However, some further definitional work is required for clarity's sake. For instance, I have already indicated that ecology is a widely adopted and variously interpreted term; the same is true for poetry mentoring. To provide clarity on both terms, this chapter will contextualise their varying usages, and ultimately enunciate my conceptualisations of the poetry ecology and poetry mentorship. Articulating their structure and operationality will provide the foundation to illustrate the relationship between poetry mentorship and the ecology, and the impact they have on one another throughout this thesis, thus circumventing mentorship as a discrete, isolated practice. At the same time, detailing various interpretations of the terms will enable me to identify where poets and scholars conceptualise poetry writing and mentoring practices in individualistic or isolationist ways. In doing so, I will reveal where my approach challenges these and by extension, offers the possibility that poetry mentoring can also take place non-dyadically, encompass more than formal aspects, and is deeply connected to the wider ecology.

I start by more fully addressing what a poetry ecology may mean.

1.1.2 Introducing Dynamic, Fluid Models of Poetry Mentorship and the Ecology

Twenty-first century poetry scholarship increasingly uses ecology as a metaphor to understand the sum total of those people, organisations, and structures involved in UK poetry and their interactions. The term ecology can be found everywhere in poetic discourse—from academic policy reports to social media. Jo Bell encourages readers of *How to Be A Poet* to think of themselves within 'the creative ecology of which you are a part'.¹⁰ Bambo Soyinka et al. published, *The Writer's Cycle*, a tool to aid writer-development, with the 'intention to support the growth of a nationwide ecology of creative writing'.¹¹ Soyinka's cycle is firmly situated within an ecology, offering moments within the text at which users should consider forming connections and sharing written work with others. Poet Tom Sastry describes 'poetry as an ecology of peer networks',¹² and prominent mentor Nathalie Teitler utilises the term 'poetry

¹⁰ *How to Be a Poet*, ed. by Jo Bell and Jane Commane (Nine Arches Press, 2018), p. 157.

¹¹ Bambo Soyinka and others, *The Writer's Cycle* (Paper Nations, 2020), p. 3
<<https://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writers-in-schools/paper-nations.html>> [accessed 21 March 2022].

¹² Tom Sastry, 'I See Poetry as an Ecology of Peer Networks.', Twitter, 21 December 2022
<<https://twitter.com/SastryTom/status/1605524673482985474?s=20>> [accessed 2 January 2023].

ecology' at a showcasing event for the Jerwood Compton Poetry Fellowship mentoring initiative.¹³ The term, ecology, used in this social way to describe networks of people, may be traced back to its popularisation in the 1960s-1970s, where theorists such as Murray Bookchin¹⁴ and Urie Bronfenbrenner used ecology to elucidate societal models and human development, respectively.¹⁵ Poets, likewise, began thinking about poetry in ecological terms in the same period, although often using related terms such as interlinked networks rather than the term ecology itself. For example, in 1980, MP Ryan described 'the profession of poetry' as a 'total network' that includes individuals, groups, and movements.¹⁶ The poet, critic, and editor, Andrew Duncan, created a map of poetry groups active in the 1970s and their relationships.¹⁷ He expands upon this map in a written interview for my doctoral project, describing a kind of social ecology of poets in the era, including their rivalries. One notable example is the way in which Eric Mottram's 'The British Poetry Revival 1960-74' exhibition at the Polytechnic of Central London 'create[d] an In Group of Modernity, an out-group, and an incredibly strong boundary between them.'¹⁸ In more recent scholarship, Elizabeth Jane Burnett augments Ryan's groups of poets interacting with one another in *A Social Biography of Contemporary Innovative Poetry Communities* (2017), where she explores 'the social relations within poetry communities and how these might link, or choose not to link, to the wider society in which they are also a part'.¹⁹

This research also builds on work by professional writing organisations that has sought to map the writing ecology. Similarly to some areas of academic scholarship, professional writing organisations have long conceptualised poetry as a larger interlinked system, but it is only in the last decade that their mapping works have become more inclusive, in the sense of including the totality of those involved in poetry, and explicitly ecological. For instance, in the late 1970s, Sam Gardiner expanded upon the work of *The Writer's and Artists' Yearbook*²⁰ through his series, *The Poet's Yearbook*, which mapped specifically poetry books published in that year, as well as

¹³ Jerwood Arts, *The Gift of Mentoring or How to Nurture a Poet*.

¹⁴ Murray Bookchin, 'What Is Social Ecology?', in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. by Michael Boylan, 3rd edn (John Wiley & Sons, 2022), pp. 63–75.

¹⁵ Jonathan Tudge and Edinete Maria Rosa, 'Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory', in *The Encyclopedia of Child and Adolescent Development*, ed. by Stephen Hupp and Jeremy Jewell (Wiley, 2020), pp. 1–11 (p. 10), doi:10.1002/9781119171492.wecad251.

¹⁶ Michael Peter Ryan, 'Career Patterns Among Contemporary British Poets' (University of London, 1980), p. 360, National Poetry Library.

¹⁷ Andrew Duncan, 'Styles of British Poetry 1945-2000', *Chicago Review*, 53.1 (2007), JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40784169>> [accessed 15 November 2024].

¹⁸ Andrew Duncan, 'Comments on Mentoring in the 1970s', 9 August 2022, p. 6.

¹⁹ Burnett, *A Social Biography of Contemporary Innovative Poetry Communities*, p. 1.

²⁰ Writers and Artists, 'About the Writers' & Artists' Yearbook', Writers and Artists, 2025 <<https://www.writersandartists.co.uk/about-writers-artists-yearbook>> [accessed 12 February 2025]; *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook 2024: The Best Advice on How to Write and Get Published*, ed. by Claire Fuller (Bloomsbury, 2023).

active publishers and literary magazines focused on poetry.²¹ Gardiner's work took strides towards making visible those involved in poetry production. Since 2018, writer-development agencies Dialect,²² The Places of Poetry project,²³ and Paper Nations have taken this work further and created online interactive maps of the writing ecology.²⁴ These include not just publications, but poets and writers themselves irrespective of publication history, as well as the infrastructures that support them. In the same period, Literature Works produced an events calendar and writer's directory,²⁵ and ArtfulScribe and the University of Southampton published a policy report featuring key statistics about writing infrastructure in the South of England.²⁶ Poet Scott Tyrrell even represented the community of South-Western spoken word artists in tea towel form.²⁷ These strides into mapping the poetry ecology form a valuable foundation to more deeply investigate the structure and operationality of the poetry ecology.

All the poets, organisations, and scholars detailed above perceive the writing ecology slightly differently: who and what is included in the ecology, how it is structured, and how it operates. I offer my own model of the poetry ecology with which to understand these factors, as well as how each element of the ecology is connected with and interacts with one another. At its most basic level, the ecology is composed of parts and relationships that connect them, as illustrated in Figure 1.

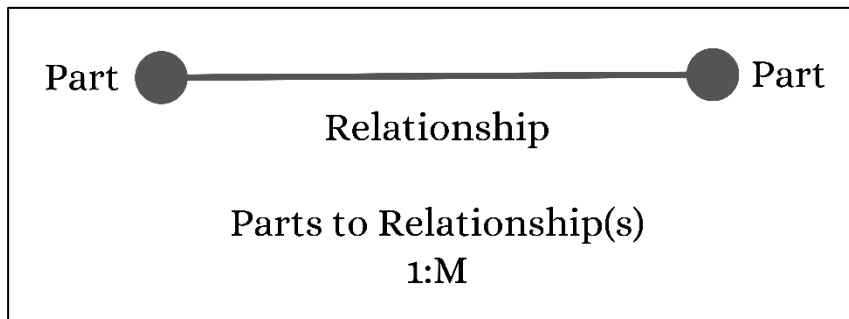


Figure 1: Ecological Components

²¹ *The Poet's Yearbook 1976*, ed. by S. T. Gardiner (Poet's Yearbook Ltd, 1975).

²² Dialect, *Writer Mapping Project*, Dialect, 2021 <<https://www.dialect.org.uk/writer-mapping-project>> [accessed 28 December 2022].

²³ Places of Poetry, 'Places of Poetry', Places of Poetry, 2019 <<https://www.placesofpoetry.org.uk/>> [accessed 28 December 2022].

²⁴ Paper Nations, 'Dare to Write? Atlas Interactive Map', Dare to Write, 2022 <<https://daretowrite.org/atlas/writing-landscape/region/south-west/>> [accessed 28 December 2022].

²⁵ Literature Works, 'Writer's Register', Literature Works, 2022 <<https://literatureworks.org.uk/developing-writers/writers-register/>>.

²⁶ Will May and Joanna Nissel, 'Stories for Survival: Putting Literature at the Heart of Regional Development', University of Southampton, 2022 <https://issuu.com/university_of_southampton/docs/stories_for_survival>.

²⁷ Scott Tyrrell, 'This Will Be the Spoken Word Tea Towel Design Which Will Be Printed Once I've Sold a Few Posters.', Twitter, 14 October 2018 <<https://twitter.com/scottytyrrell/status/1051268023213051904>> [accessed 28 December 2022].

Parts can be: a poet, mentor, publisher, festival, prize, writer-development agency or organisation, open mic night, writing group, arts funder, literary journal, society, or any other person or group related to the practice of poetry. Drawing on Actor Network Theory (ANT), a part may also be a non-biological entity, such as a venue.²⁸ I include non-biological entities within the definition of a part to reflect the importance of infrastructure in the poetry ecology. For instance, when I conducted interviews for ArtfulScribe and the University of Southampton's 2021 mapping investigations, several participants noted the vital importance of a central venue for workshops, networking, and open mic events in Bournemouth, and how the effectiveness of the writing ecology in that region rapidly deteriorated when this venue was lost.²⁹

In retaining an awareness of the physical environment in which poetry mentorship occurs, my model draws from its predecessors, Bookchin and Bronfenbrenner, who, in using ecological metaphors, do not divorce social processes from the environment in which they take place. MY model also reflects Morton's more recent, object-oriented ecocriticism, furthered by Irene Gammel in her scholarship on Dadaist poetics, which advocates for the 'dismantling [of] boundaries'³⁰ such as the 'bifurcation of nature and culture',³¹ and calls on readers to recognise the materiality of poetry: 'all art [...] is made from materials and exists in the world. [A] poem [is] on a page made of paper from trees'.³² Or, as Don Paterson says, 'The truth [...] is that we [poets] are continuous with our environment, and cannot exclude ourselves from [it].'³³ My recognition of material and social factors within my ecological model will be particularly pertinent to Chapter Two, where I explore approaches to poetry writing and mentoring that extend beyond solely formal aspects, such as practical considerations.

My use of the term 'part' —as opposed to 'actor' or 'member', which are commonly used in discussions of networks— is a loaded and deliberate one.³⁴ In a purely operational sense, a part is a 'piece or section of something which together with another or others makes up the whole'.³⁵ One may view parts in an ecology in this way —as ultimately being part of something larger. A part is also used in relation to machines, as in an item with a function. Indeed, parts in

²⁸ Latour, Rivers, and Lynch, *Thinking with Bruno Latour in Rhetoric and Composition*, p. 26.

²⁹ ArtfulScribe Consultation Group, 'Interviews for "Stories for Survival: Putting Literature at the Heart of Regional Development"', 2021.

³⁰ Irene Gammel and John Wrighton, "'Arabesque Grotesque': Toward a Theory of Dada Ecopoetics', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 20.4 (2013), pp. 795–816 (p. 798) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44087293>> [accessed 21 March 2022].

³¹ Gammel and Wrighton, "'Arabesque Grotesque': Toward a Theory of Dada Ecopoetics', p. 796.

³² Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 11.

³³ Don Paterson, *The Poem: Lyric, Sign, Metre* (Faber & Faber, 2018), p. 114.

³⁴ Marlen Komorowski, Sara Pepper, and Justin Lewis, *Joining the Dots – Understanding the Value Generation of Creative Networks* (Creative Cardiff, 2021), p. 2.

³⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, 'Part, n.1', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138188>> [accessed 29 December 2022].

the poetry ecology perform a variety of functions, such as a publisher sharing work with an audience. One can also *take* part in an activity, and *be* part of a family. Likewise, a part of the ecology is not just reduced to its purpose. As Robert Darnton points out in the context of socially-engaged models of book production: ‘Models have a way of freezing human beings out of history.’³⁶ Therefore, many parts in the ecology are sentient beings. While they may perform a function, they are at all times their own beings that exist on more planes than the poetry ecology. In adopting the term, part, I utilise all of these potential meanings at once, with the intention to honour parts’ status as living beings (if they are, in fact, living), and also to point towards the actions they perform and their situatedness within the ecology.

Structurally, parts can form many relationships with other parts, and these relationships can also take several forms. This research looks primarily at the mentoring relationship but other kinds of relationships also exist, such as a funding agreement, membership of a writing group, a publishing contract, or less concrete but still influential bonds like friendships, belonging to an educational cohort, or sharing a publisher.

Relationships and parts come together to form an ecology, such in the simplified example, Figure 2.³⁷

³⁶ Robert Darnton, ‘What Is the History of Books?’, *Daedalus*, 111.3 (1982), pp. 65–83 (p. 69) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024803>> [accessed 7 February 2023].

³⁷ It is more accurate to include poems themselves in ecological models (See Appendix C) but this does not further our understanding at this time.

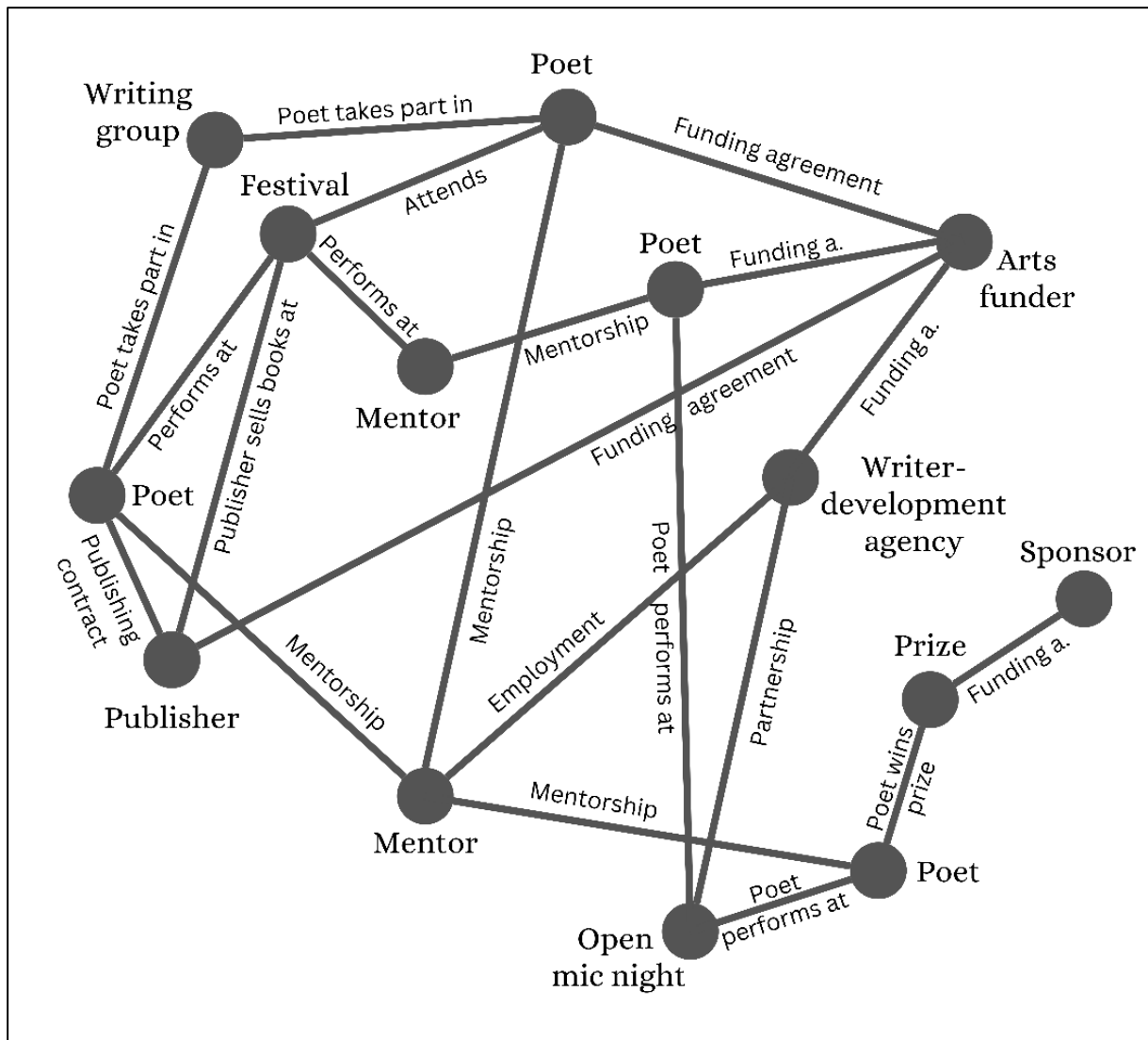


Figure 2: Basic Poetry Ecology

Part	Part is connected to	Relationship between the two parts
Writing group	Poet Poet	Poet takes part in Poet takes part in
Poet	Writing group Festival Mentor Arts funder	Poet takes part in Attends Mentorship Funding agreement
Arts funder	Poet Poet Publisher Writer-development agency	Funding agreement Funding agreement Funding agreement Funding agreement
Sponsor	Prize	Funding agreement
Prize	Sponsor Poet	Funding agreement Poet wins prize
Poet	Prize Mentor	Poet wins prize Mentorship

	Open mic night	Poet performs at
Open mic night	Poet Writer-development agency Poet	Poet performs at Partnership Poet performs at
Mentor	Poet Writer-development agency Poet Poet	Mentorship Employment Mentorship Mentorship
Publisher	Arts funder Festival Poet	Funding agreement Publisher sells books at Publishing contract
Poet	Publisher Festival Writing Group	Publishing contract Performs at Poet takes part in
Festival	Publisher Poet Mentor Poet	Publisher sells books at Performs at Performs at Attends
Mentor	Festival Poet	Performs at Mentorship
Poet	Mentor Arts funder	Mentorship Funding agreement
Writer-development agency	Arts funder Open mic night Mentor	Funding agreement Partnership Employment

Table 3: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 2

My use of the term, ecology, may be a controversial one for some academics and poets, since I include the movement of resources within the operationality of the poetry ecology. Amongst these resources, money may be the most controversial and poets tend to dislike discussing it outright. For example, Jo Bell remarks that there is ‘the idea that poets should be ‘above’ taking money for their art,’³⁸ and Welsch critiques the extent to which poets, scholars, and organisations use ‘ecology’ euphemistically to discuss economic matters, straying from the use of the term in a biological or sociological sense. He cites Kate Fox and Tamar Yoseloff, who use ecology in their 2015 ‘Poetry and Spoken Word Artists Network Fees and Needs Survey’ to refer to the variety of educational and performance work that can generate income.³⁹ Other scholars likewise shy away from using ecology when they are discussing money. For example, in

³⁸ Welsch, *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem Press, 2021), pp. 206–07.

³⁹ Welsch, *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem Press, 2021), p. 204; Kate Fox and Tamar Yoseloff, ‘Poets and Spoken Word Artists Network Fees and Needs Survey, March 2015 Short Report’, Kate Fox Writer, 27 March 2015 <<https://katefoxwriter.wordpress.com/2015/03/27/poets-and-spoken-word-artists-network-survey-interim-report/>> [accessed 13 February 2025].

Burnett's research, the introduction of resources —primarily money— renders her networks a *gift economy*, not a gift ecology.⁴⁰ A recent Creative Cardiff policy paper on networks in the creative industries incorporates the transference of values between stakeholders, yet they too prefer the more structural term 'ecosystem' over ecology.⁴¹

This thesis challenges traditional biological and sociological definitions of ecology and I include resources such as money within my conceptualisation of the contemporary UK poetry ecology. Money affects how activities and relationships in the poetry ecology function —venues must pay their running costs; mentoring can be a paid service— therefore it is vital to include money within my model. Refusing to do so risks painting an inaccurate picture in which all poets and organisations have access to the same resources. By integrating money, this research draws from scholarship acknowledging money's material state and ability to produce social and ecological effects, such as Morton's ecocriticism⁴² and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's work on rhizomes.⁴³ Despite using the term economy, another close theoretical ancestor is Burnett's networks of relationships, in which resources pass to one another. Similarly, in my model (Figure 3), resources can travel along relationships in one direction, such as money from funder to poet. Resources can also move in both directions simultaneously, and multiple resources can travel along relationships at once.

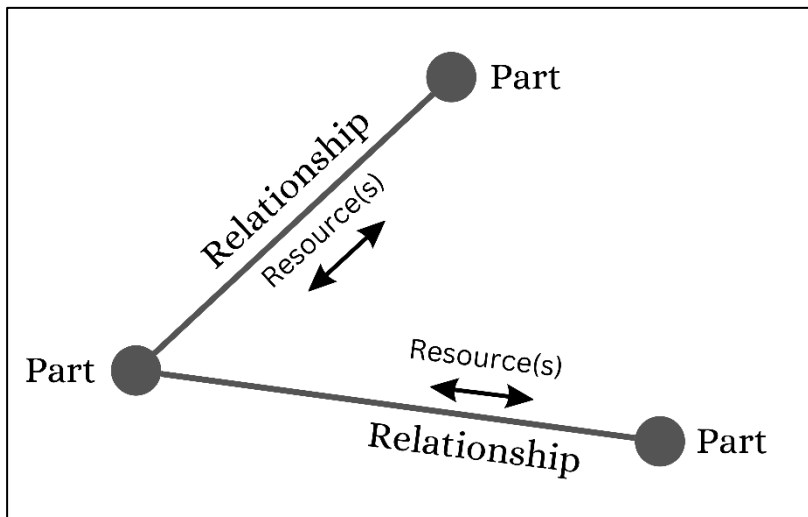


Figure 3: Resource Flows

⁴⁰ Although Gareth Farmer's review of Burnett remarks on the similarity between the two terms. Gareth Farmer, 'Book Review: Elizabeth-Jane Burnett, *A Social Biography of Contemporary Innovative Poetry Communities* (2017)', *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 15.1 (2023), doi:10.16995/bip.10262.

⁴¹ Komorowski, Pepper, and Lewis, *Joining the Dots – Understanding the Value Generation of Creative Networks*, p. 2.

⁴² Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 4.

⁴³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 12th edn (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 7.

It is important to note that money is only one resource in the ecology; Figure 4 outlines a non-exhaustive array of possible resources, some of which are aligned with formal approaches to writing and mentoring, and others that shift our understanding beyond solely formal emphases. For example, information can be broken down into what many consider the meat of formal poetry mentorship, such as knowledge on craft, the writing process, writing traditions, publishers, and more. Yet I also include happiness, confidence, validation, inspiration, and a sense of community as resources (but also note the diagrammatic lines and arrows in Figure 4 do not yet fully capture their patterns of movement). Featuring these resources illustrates that technical prowess is not the only approach to writing and mentoring.

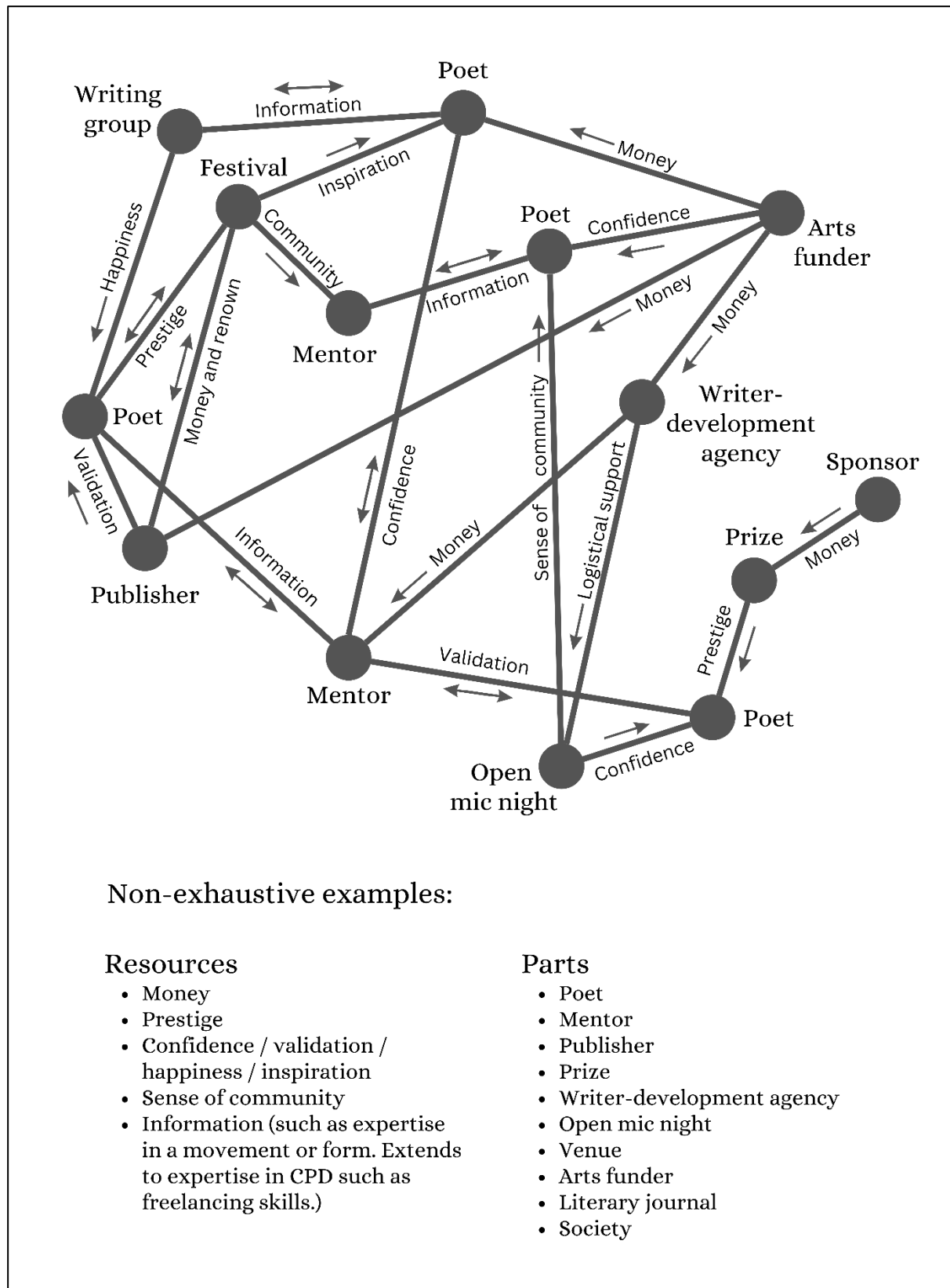


Figure 4: Ecology with Resources I

Part	Part is connected to	Resource transferred by the relationship
Writing group	Poet Poet	Happiness (from writing group to poet) Information (in both directions)
Poet	Writing group Festival	Information (in both directions) Inspiration (from festival to poet)

	Mentor Arts funder	Confidence (in both directions) Money (from arts funder to poet)
Arts funder	Poet Poet Publisher Writer-development agency	Money (from arts funder to poet) Confidence (from arts funder to poet) Money (from arts funder to publisher) Money (from arts funder to writer-development agency)
Sponsor	Prize	Money (from sponsor to prize)
Prize	Sponsor Poet	Money (from sponsor to prize) Prestige (from prize to poet)
Poet	Prize Mentor Open mic night	Prestige (from prize to poet) Validation (in both directions) Confidence (from open mic night to poet)
Open mic night	Poet Writer-development agency Poet	Confidence (from open mic night to poet) Logistical support (from writer-development agency to open mic night) Sense of community (from open mic night to poet)
Mentor	Poet Writer-development agency Poet Poet	Validation (in both directions) Money (from writer-development agency to mentor) Confidence (in both directions) Information (in both directions)
Publisher	Arts funder Festival Poet	Money (from arts funder to publisher) Money and renown (in both directions) Validation (from publisher to poet)
Poet	Publisher Festival Writing Group	Validation (from publisher to poet) Prestige (in both directions) Happiness (from writing group to poet)
Festival	Publisher Poet Mentor Poet	Money and renown (in both directions) Prestige (in both directions) Community (from festival to mentor) Inspiration (from festival to poet)
Mentor	Festival Poet	Community (from festival to mentor) Information (in both directions)
Poet	Mentor Arts funder	Information (in both directions) Confidence (from arts funder to poet)
Writer-development agency	Arts funder Open mic night Mentor	Money (from arts funder to writer-development agency) Logistical support (from writer-development agency to open mic night) Money (from writer-development agency to mentor)

Table 4: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 4

The movements of these resources across different relationships can be challenging to predict or track. For instance, in the case of a funding agreement, the financial resources move from funder to recipient as per the terms of agreement; the relationship is transactional and easily pre-determined. Yet in the case of other kinds of relationship, particularly mentoring, the resources that may be transferred are harder to pin down.⁴⁴ This is because aspects like confidence are abstract, infinite, and non-transactional. As I will expand upon in the middle of this chapter, one cannot guarantee mentoring will boost confidence; one can create pre-conditions to increase the likelihood of increased confidence, but confidence itself cannot be reliably given in the same way as a physical or finite resource like money. A mentor may intend to give confidence but the mentee may not necessarily receive it. Moreover, a mentee can receive resources the mentor never intended to provide. Or a mentee may lose resources, such as a loss in confidence. In this case, the confidence does not transfer to the mentor — mentoring is not so transactional— instead, confidence is simply lost. Hubert Zapf similarly identifies abstract resources in his conceptualisation of literature as a cultural ecology, such as ‘various forms of social, psychic, or creative energy’; he notes that while these ‘must be included in any adequate account of [...] literary phenomena’, research has not yet yielded an accurate representation of how they function.⁴⁵ Likewise, the simple lines of my diagrams thus far have not captured the diffuseness of abstract resource-transference.

A better visual representation of the poetry ecology may therefore allow for a more immaterial, indeterminate transference of resources, rather than a discrete line between two parts. I offer an alternate metaphorical model that represents this radical possibility: the water-ecology (Figure 5), drawing from Morton’s description of ecology as a ‘liquid life’,⁴⁶ as well as Jen Webb and Monica Carroll’s reference to poetry ecologies as ‘A Seethe of Poets’,⁴⁷ meaning an ‘ebullition (of waves).’⁴⁸

⁴⁴ This also applies to the auxiliary benefits that may come from transactional agreements, such as prestige.

⁴⁵ Hubert Zapf, *Literature as Cultural Ecology: Sustainable Texts* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 163–64.

⁴⁶ Timothy Morton, ‘Queer Ecology’, *PMLA*, 125.2 (2010), pp. 273–82 (p. 275) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25704424>> [accessed 8 March 2022].

⁴⁷ Jen Webb and Monica Carroll, ‘A Seethe of Poets: Creativity and Community’, *TEXT*, 21.Special 40 (2017), pp. 1–15 (p. 1), doi:10.52086/001c.26051.

⁴⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, *Seethe*, *n.* (Oxford University Press, July 2023), Oxford English Dictionary <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6758497598>>.

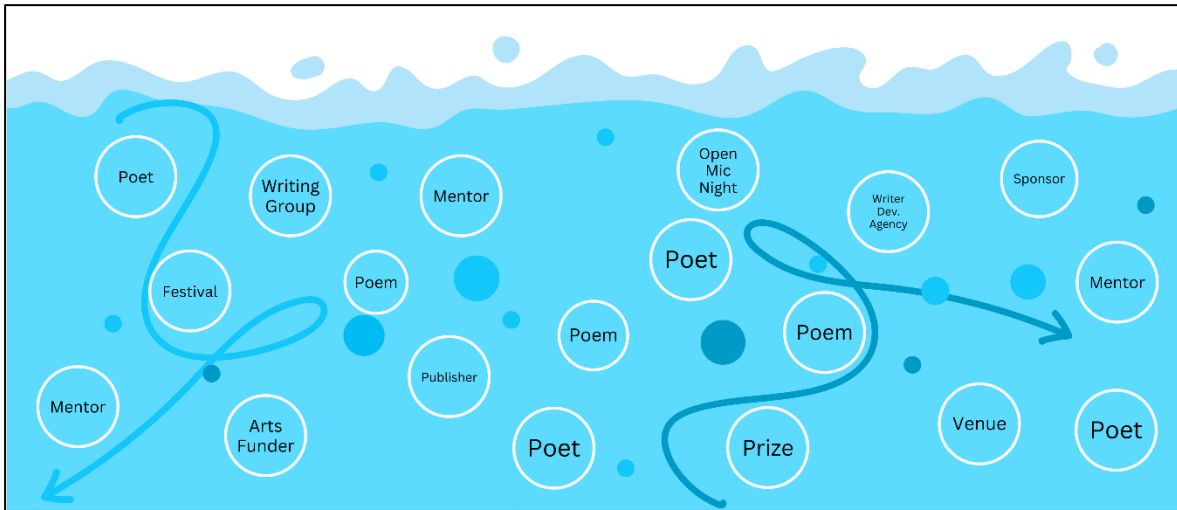


Figure 5: Example of a Water-Ecology

In a water-ecology, the poetry world is like a body of water, in which all elements exist as a molecule of water. Every molecule is the overall body of water at the same time as being a smaller part of the water. Molecules move freely and at random, joining with other molecules all the time. Relationships in the water-ecology can be represented by currents (see the arrows in Figure 5) where certain molecules tend to come into contact with each other more often.

Resources in this model are more like kinetic energy. Those with the most resources move more dynamically in the water-ecology, coming into contact with a larger range of molecules than those with access to fewer resources. Presenting resources as liquid, moving osmotically, enables resources to transfer in more indeterminate patterns since their movement is not bound by the presence of a line, or bridge, connecting two parts, only currents that can be joined or exited at any stage. As such, the water-ecology may better represent the abstract resources that can be transmitted during mentorship.

The water-ecology also offers advantages in that it moves away from the individual and conceptualises the poetry ecology as radically interconnected. For instance, by having everything in the poetry ecology represented as water, the model embodies Morton's concept of the mesh, in which 'Entities are mutually determining: they exist in relation to each other and derive from each other. Nothing exists independently, and nothing comes from nothing.'⁴⁹ The water-ecology also follows Morton's imperative to blur boundaries 'at practically any level: between species, between the living and the non-living, between organism and environment.'⁵⁰ In doing so, the water-ecology abandons the concept of individuals entirely and collapses this distance; everything being comprised of water mimics a rhizomatic structure in which there are no individuals —everything simply *is* the rhizome. In this way, a more radical structure may

⁴⁹ Morton, 'Queer Ecology', p. 275.

⁵⁰ Morton, 'Queer Ecology', p. 275.

better represent the way in which elements of the poetry ecology are coproduced by each other, never able to be separated.

Yet there is a critical conceptual issue with the water-ecology in that it does not accurately portray the experience of mentoring. If all resources are represented by kinetic energy, then it does not explain how different poets require different kinds of mentoring support (i.e. for different types of resources like knowledge or money to be passed to them) in order to meet their goals. To illustrate this with a hypothetical example: in the water-ecology, by simplifying all resources to kinetic energy, one could mentor a poet by giving them more and more knowledge in the form of critique and that would enable them to flow around the ecology at speed, coming into contact with more and more parts of the ecology and developing a complex and successful poetry practice. Yet, a poet does not simply need knowledge. Their needs are diverse and vary from individual to individual. Therefore, to truly analyse mentoring's impact, the model of the ecology needs to include a variety of formal and non-formal resources, drawing from examples with more concrete elements, such as ANT⁵¹ and Burnett's gift economy,⁵² which echoes earlier theories of gift exchange by David Cheal⁵³ and Marcel Mauss.⁵⁴ I therefore submerge my previous models (Figure 6).

⁵¹ Latour, Rivers, and Lynch, *Thinking with Bruno Latour in Rhetoric and Composition*, p. 26.

⁵² Burnett, *A Social Biography of Contemporary Innovative Poetry Communities*.

⁵³ David J. Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (Routledge, 2017).

⁵⁴ Marcel Mauss, with Jonathan P. Parry and Maurice Bloch, *The Gift*, trans. by Jane I. Guyer (HAU Books, 2015)

<<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1891862>> [accessed 12 February 2025]; James Carrier, 'Gifts, Commodities, and Social Relations: A Maussian View of Exchange', *Sociological Forum*, 6.1 (1991), pp. 119–36 (p. 121), JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/684384>> [accessed 30 March 2023].

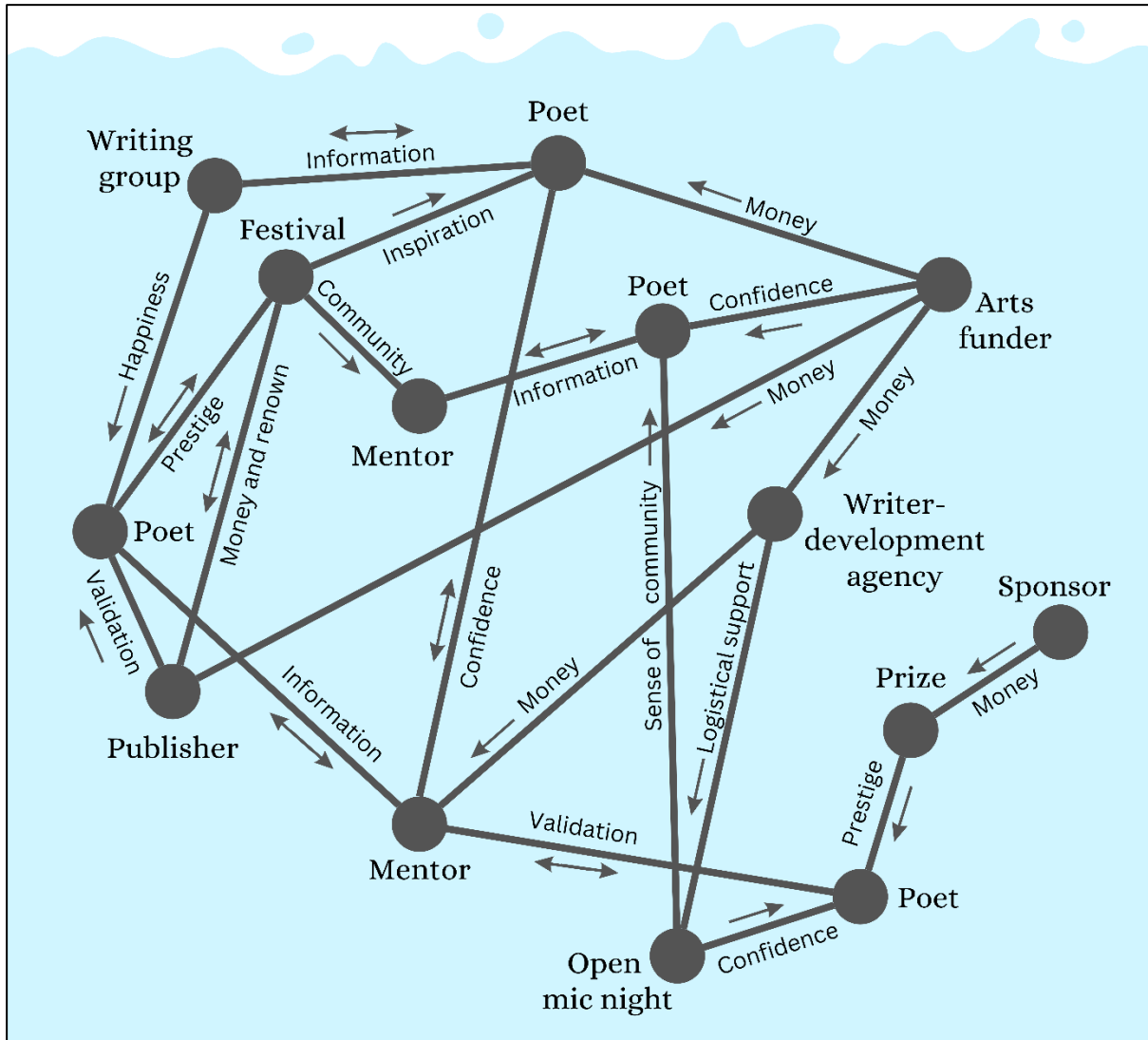


Figure 6: An Immersed Poetry Ecology

Presenting the ecology as not simply existing in a vacuum—as in ANT—but immersed in liquid will help me to expand conceptualisations of poetry mentoring across subsequent chapters. For example, by situating my model in water as opposed to utterly transforming it *into* water, the relational lines of connection retain enough structure to transmit multiple resources—having varying kinds of resources is essential to articulate both formal and non-formal approaches to writing and mentoring. Additionally, immersion enables the relationships to keep that indeterminacy and diffusion that better represents the transference of abstract resources. This representation is vital to abandoning purely formal mentoring because non-formal approaches often transmit abstract resources, like happiness. Therefore my model must accurately depict how abstract resources move to understand non-formal approaches to mentoring. Conversely, my immersed model limits the extent to which I can present mentoring as inextricable from the wider ecology. For instance, even though the parts in the immersed model are more permeable than in previous models, they are still distinct individuals rather than indistinguishable from the ecology. In theoretical terms, this could be described as only partially adopting Morton’s mesh, or a rhizomatic structure. Nevertheless, the water ecology’s fuller shift

towards radical interconnection would make the nuances of mentees' needs and thus the analysis of mentorship unclear. I therefore apply a hybrid model through immersion.

Finally, my immersed model informs how literally I use the term 'poetry ecology' across this thesis. While previous accounts of literary production —such as Darnton's Communications Circuit— have created models that map relationships between figures like publishers, readers, and authors, I argue for a more dynamic, fluid way of understanding such bonds.⁵⁵ Therefore, my use of 'poetry ecology' throughout this thesis remains close to reality but draws on my model's watery immersion to better describe the ecology's fluid functioning. This fluidity is key, for example, to Chapter Two's exploration of personally-engaged approaches to mentorship, Chapter Three's investigation of mentorship's overlaps with therapeutic practice, and the non-transactional generosity of non-dyadic mentorship in Chapter Four.

1.1.3 Of All Types of Ecological Relationships, Why Focus on Why Mentoring?

As Figure 6 illustrates, the poetry ecology is comprised of many relationships that mutually influence the parts involved. Although this influence helpfully demonstrates my overarching assertion that mentoring is interconnected with the wider ecology, the fact that other kinds of relationship are also influential begs a question: why is mentorship is the focus of this research?

I focus on mentoring because of its strong affective capacities; it fundamentally alters the structure of the ecology, as I will now explain. Mentoring has the capability to change the poet, enabling them to form more relationships with other parts in the ecology (Figure 7).

⁵⁵ Darnton, 'What Is the History of Books?', p. 67.

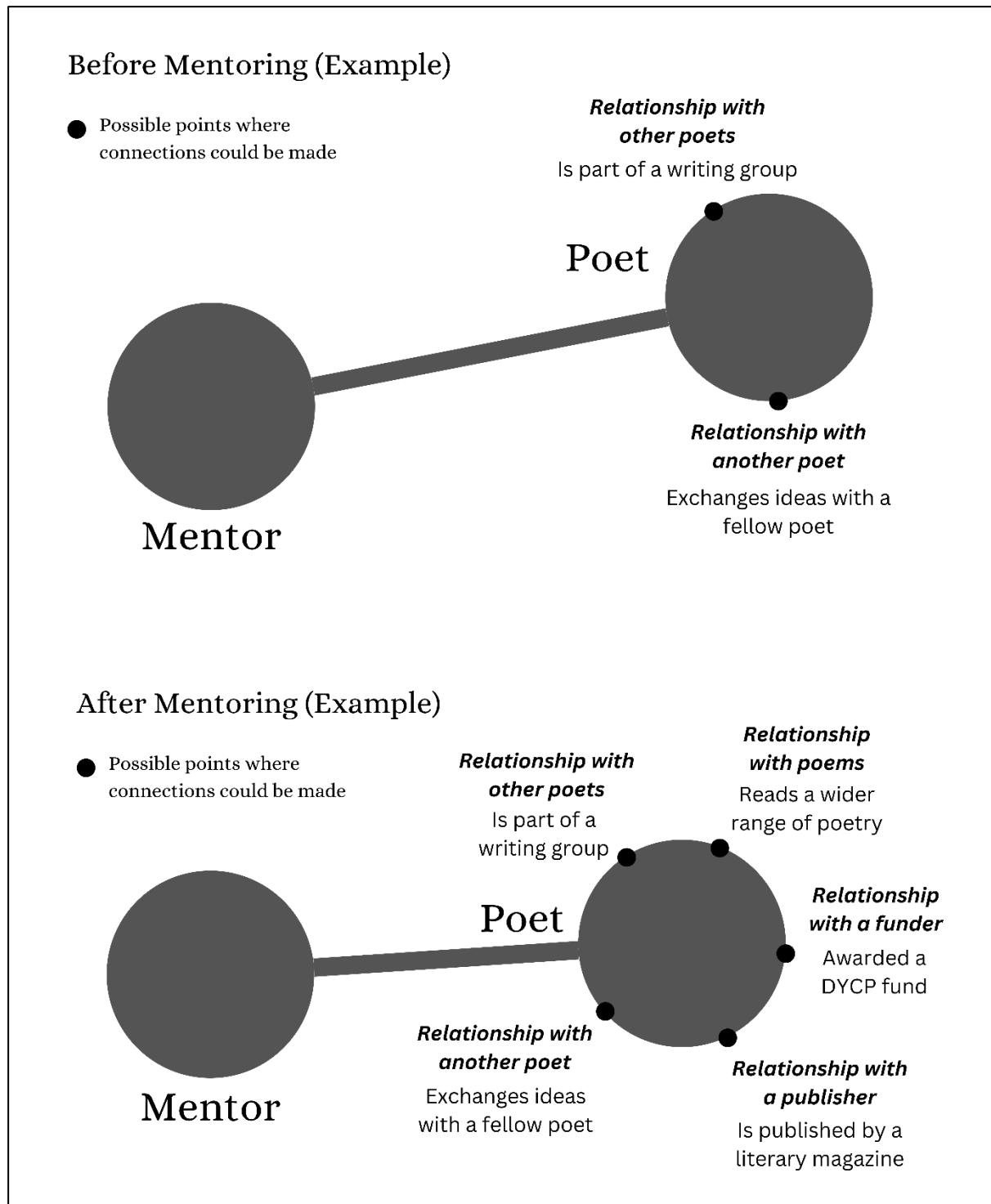


Figure 7: The Impact of Mentoring

In this way, mentoring embeds the overall poetry ecology with more relationships, allowing it to become more interconnected as a whole. Other relationship types similarly give parts the ability to form greater connections through the transmitting of resources, such as a funding agreement allowing a writer-development agency to create relationships with poets by providing the capital to enable a workshop series. Nevertheless, I explore mentoring rather than any other type of relationship, firstly, since mentorship remains relatively unexplored in the context of UK poetry despite its popularity, as outlined in my introduction. As Anitra Nelson and Catherine Cole note ‘arts policy and creative writing education inadequately understand how writers learn the skills

and knowledge necessary to succeed as writers.’⁵⁶ Their report cites the work of Rebecca O’Rourke, who suggests that apprenticeships such as mentoring ‘are the powerful and often overlooked structural element underpinning all cultures of writing’.⁵⁷ Though hidden, mentorship is extremely prevalent in UK poetry. Thousands of mentorships take place across the UK today in the form of official mentoring schemes, workshop series, informal workshopping of poems between two poets, university courses, and more. Secondly, I select mentoring because it is one of the most versatile of all the relationship types; it can facilitate the transference of a wide range of resources, and in doing so, enables the mentee to create many more types of further relationship. For instance, a mentorship may transfer money when a mentee pays for mentorship, perhaps facilitated via a grant, which enables the mentor to fund their own writing time.⁵⁸ A mentorship may transmit information to both mentor and mentee as they enter into a dialogue about poetic techniques, traditions, movements, or histories, enabling the mentee to better understand their practice and develop their writing. A mentorship may transmit confidence, inspiration, happiness, validation, or a sense of community through the critique of the mentee’s work and encouragement of their practice, which could lead to further relationships being formed with other poets. A mentorship may even bestow prestige through its sheer existence, which may open up opportunities like performing at a festival. Therefore, mentorship enormously influences the overall ecology through its scale and potential to create so many further connections for poets beyond the initial scope of the mentorship. Subsequently, an analysis that acknowledges mentoring’s affective capacity on the ecology may elucidate its deep entwinement with the contemporary UK poetry ecology and offer comprehensive insights into how and why that ecology exists and operates as it does.

To this end, I will model but also question the use of ecology as a representative metaphor for contemporary UK poetry in this thesis, making a clear distinction between an awareness of the ecology’s existence, and thinking about poetry *ecologically*. For instance, the wealth of recent scholarship and industry-based research mapping the UK’s writing ecology clearly demonstrates that academics and practitioners are highly aware of parts in the ecology, and regularly conceptualise those parts as being connected in an ecological structure. However, my research indicates that the dominant manner of thinking in contemporary UK poetry is far more aligned with narratives of individual endeavour. Steve Westbrook and James Ryan discuss this phenomenon amongst writers. They argue that contemporary writers still conceptualise

⁵⁶ Anitra Nelson and Catherine Cole, ‘Productive Creative Writers’ Relationships: A Communities-of-Practice Framework’, *New Writing*, 9.3 (2012), pp. 396–407 (pp. 396–97), doi:10.1080/14790726.2012.693095.

⁵⁷ Rebecca O’Rourke, *Creative Writing: Education, Culture and Community* (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2005), p. 44.

⁵⁸ See Appendix A, Figure 27 for survey data on the cost of mentorships.

themselves as solo creatures, drawing on the Romantic figure of the isolated writer. Authors may be involved in collaborative acts and influenced by mentoring, yet must conceive of their work as detached from that larger interconnection to achieve, in Roland Barthes' words, 'the prestige of the individual'.⁵⁹ Westbrook and Ryan term this 'the dominant mythology of so-called single-authorship'.⁶⁰ Other academics had similar findings. Vlad Petre Glăveanu comments that '[t]raditionally the "locus" of creativity has been the individual'⁶¹ but '[w]e simply do not create as individual, isolated brains, but as minds intertwined with the minds of others, within specific institutional and material contexts.'⁶² Anthony Wilson and Sue Dymoke likewise note:

Historically poets have often been portrayed as solitary figures who write in isolation evoking their muse to descend and engage them in sensuous reverie [...] we believe they do not reflect the reality of how poetry is written.⁶³

I echo their sentiments, arguing that the myth of the individual runs so deeply that poets and the organisations they lead, despite their awareness of the ecology, rarely situate themselves or their actions in that ecology. For instance, in a 2022 panel, Co-Executive Director of the Forward Arts Foundation, Mónica Parle, described her mission for the foundation in ecological terms. She spoke about her mission as being 'about how we can create rich ecosystems that are diverse, that feature multiple pathways and allow multiple people to access [poetry]', which clearly demonstrates an engagement with a wider ecology.⁶⁴ Some might argue that Parle's mission shows she has situated Forward Arts in the poetry ecology and their work is about actively changing that ecology. However, Parle's next comments complicate this interpretation. Parle went on to illustrate that poets do not view themselves as embedded within the poetry ecology: 'So many people who are engaged in poetry and often people who I would have described as being at the very centre of the culture felt like they were somewhat on the outside looking in.'⁶⁵ She added that herself and many of the staff at the Forward Arts Foundation felt this way.

These statements reveal the nature of existing in such a complex web: parts may be aware of the ecology but not feel embedded within it, resulting in a sense of being isolated and alone. This may be particularly true for marginalised poets. For instance, in the same session, Parle

⁵⁹ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text: Essays*, trans. by Stephen Heath, 13th edn (Fontana, 1977), p. 143.

⁶⁰ Steve Westbrook and James Ryan, *Beyond Craft: An Anti-Handbook for Creative Writers* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p. 87, doi:10.5040/9781350119482.

⁶¹ Vlad Petre Glăveanu, 'A Culture-Inclusive, Socially Engaged Agenda for Creativity Research', *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 51.4 (2017), pp. 338–40 (p. 339), doi:10.1002/jocb.198.

⁶² Glăveanu, 'A Culture-Inclusive, Socially Engaged Agenda for Creativity Research', p. 338.

⁶³ Wilson and Dymoke, 'Towards a Model of Poetry Writing Development as a Socially Contextualised Process', p. 130.

⁶⁴ Mónica Parle and others, 'What Do We Talk about When We Talk About Poetry Culture?'

⁶⁵ Parle and others, 'What Do We Talk about When We Talk About Poetry Culture?'

noted UK poetry has historically excluded poets from diverse communities, such as Parle herself, who is a Latina woman of mixed heritage.⁶⁶ Yet this sense of exclusion did not change when she spoke about Forward Arts itself. She and her team still felt on the margins. Therefore, this suggests that despite becoming organisers of one of the UK's most significant poetry organisations, Parle still sees the Forward Arts staff as a group of outsiders.

Lemn Sissay critically reflects on the way poets perceive themselves as insiders or outsiders in a 2021 broadcast for BBC Radio 4 through the term, poetry establishment, and at what point poets could be considered part of the establishment.⁶⁷ He notes, 'I'm going to explore how the rebel poets stormed the establishment and how they became the establishment themselves. And I guess that could include me.'⁶⁸ Sissay lays out a history of spoken word artists being excluded as 'court jesters in the palace of poetry', and slowly becoming more and more recognised by official institutions, such as Brian Patten who eventually became a fellow for the Royal Society of Literature.⁶⁹ Next, Sissay raises the question of whether Patten now belongs to the establishment. The idea of an establishment in poetry is a contested one. For instance, *PN Review* editors, Michael Schmidt and John McAuliffe, stated in 2020 that 'a couple of decades ago, [...] there was no perceived poetry establishment'.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, poets active in that era frequently reflect on how they felt the presence of the establishment,⁷¹ and, today, poet-academics commonly employ the term as a longstanding phenomenon, not as a new invention.⁷² Even when one ascribes to notions of the poetry establishment, the borders of who or what belongs to or represents it lack definition. Anthony Anaxagorou notes the establishment's role in taste-making, as occupying 'positions as "knowers" of good poetry', linking them to 'Gatekeepers [who] traditionally have been

⁶⁶ Parle and others, 'What Do We Talk about When We Talk About Poetry Culture?'

⁶⁷ 'The Establishment Poets', *Lemn Sissay's Poetry Rebels*, prod. by Richard Lea and Joe Hallam, dir. by Lemn Sissay, performed by Lemn Sissay (BBC Radio 4, 25 December 2021), episode 4 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0012r7n>> [accessed 18 July 2025].

⁶⁸ Sissay, 'The Establishment Poets'.

⁶⁹ Sissay, 'The Establishment Poets'.

⁷⁰ Michael Schmidt and John McAuliffe, 'Editorial', *PN Review*, 47.1 (2020) <<https://www.pnreview.co.uk/archive/editorial/10816>> [accessed 18 July 2025].

⁷¹ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, pp. 1–2; Sissay, 'The Establishment Poets'.

⁷² Jasmina Bolfek-Radovani, 'Close to Heart: Collaborative Work and the Practice of (Heartbeat) Listening in Heart Monologues', *Tears In The Fence*, 29 June 2022 <<https://tearsinthefence.com/2022/06/29/close-to-heart-collaborative-work-and-the-practice-of-heartbeat-listening-in-heart-monologues/>> [accessed 18 July 2025]; The Guardian, 'The Guardian View on Spoken Word Poets: Powerful Voices That Are Needed Today', Opinion, *The Guardian*, 7 July 2023 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jul/07/the-guardian-view-on-spoken-word-poets-powerful-voices-that-are-needed-today>> [accessed 18 July 2025]; Apples and Snakes, 'Poetry and Protest with Roger Robinson', Apples and Snakes, 2023 <<https://applesandsnakes.org/opportunities/poetry-and-protest-with-roger-robinson/>> [accessed 18 July 2025].

responsible for maintaining a sense of quality control'.⁷³ Poets, critics, and scholars might also call those associated with long-standing and influential poetry institutions and publishing houses as being part of the establishment—including those running such organisations and those platformed by them. To return to Sissay's broadcast, he directly asks Patten, 'Are you the poetry establishment, now, Brian? And have you won in being so?'⁷⁴ Sissay's supplementary question alludes that Patten could very much be seen as part of the establishment by some. Nevertheless, Patten responds, 'I don't think of us as establishment. I think of us as an elder part of' the rebellious poetic tradition that Patten and Sissay operated in across the 1960s-80s.⁷⁵ To summarise, some, like Sissay, may be open to being described as part of the poetry establishment, which suggests an evolving understanding of establishment. Alternatively, other poets may see their practice as oppositional to notions of establishment, connoting it with the negative force they experienced it as, and thus reject such labels, preferring to see themselves as outsiders.⁷⁶

Parle, Sissay, and Patten's accounts unearth a tension between an awareness of the overall poetry ecology and how the systems of power at play in said ecology can serve to undermine and exclude particular groups, such as writers from the global majority, leaving them to constantly feel unconnected to the ecology. It is also important to note that there is a difference between having connections in the poetry ecology and being part of the poetry establishment; for example, one could have many connections with many parts that poetry culture at large does not commonly esteem, meaning few would describe them as an establishment figure. Nonetheless, the fact that Patten and the Forward Arts team feel like outsiders is symptomatic of a larger phenomenon in which poets and organisations view themselves in individual, rather than interconnected, terms.

My research demonstrates this phenomenon extends beyond marginalised groups, such as in the foundation of university creative writing programmes in the UK, as noted by Lise Jaillant. She states, 'these programmes, in the United States and Britain, were founded and developed by literary outsiders'⁷⁷ and despite their vastly growing popularity and influence,

⁷³ Sarah Crown, 'Generation next: The Rise – and Rise – of the New Poets', Books, *The Guardian*, 16 February 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/feb/16/rise-new-poets>> [accessed 18 July 2025].

⁷⁴ Sissay, 'The Establishment Poets'.

⁷⁵ Sissay, 'The Establishment Poets'.

⁷⁶ My analysis suggests a vacant centre to the idea of poetry establishment, which signals a need for a deeper academic study surrounding definitions, applications, and understandings of the poetry establishment. However, since this study this may likely involve metaphysical and psychoanalytic questions over the existence and psychological function of poetry establishment, it is beyond the scope of my thesis.

⁷⁷ Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 1.

Malcolm Bradbury at the University of East Anglia and his US counterparts ‘have continued to position themselves on the margins of the literary field—despite obvious signs that they are now part of the “system”.’⁷⁸ Additionally, Schmidt and McAuliffe, editors of one of the most well-established poetry journals in the country, state that ‘The words “poetry” and “establishment” seemed to exist in different registers’.⁷⁹ While they refer to the noughties, this quotation illustrates some poets may always reject conceptualisations of themselves as at the centre of or well-embedded within the poetry ecology since they see their poetry as a different register to the notion of establishment. Of course, there is much unpacking that could be done on the gender and ethnicity implications of why the white, male leaders of these institutions position themselves as outsiders compared to why the current staff at Forward Arts do, given that many of the latter face far more barriers and discrimination due to their gender and/or ethnicity. Nonetheless, the fact remains, poets tend to conceive of themselves in individual, isolated terms. As Luís Costa remarks, ‘I sometimes think a lot of poetry is written by outsiders. Or by people who feel as if they are outsiders, at least...’⁸⁰

Recent attempts to visualise the writing ecology support the idea that many poets still think in narratives of individual endeavour; they visualise an ecology, but have a tendency to conceptualise their actions as taking place in isolation rather than within a wider ecological context. Take, for instance, the interactive maps of Paper Nations, The Places of Poetry, and Dialect, and Tyrrell’s tea towel of poets. All of these methods seek to concretize and make visible the rich ecology of writing in the UK, anchoring these to the geographical landscape. Such visual aids are valuable resources for those trying to find more connections and they allow us to conceive of the people and organisations at play in the poetry world—or, to use my terminology, view the parts of the ecology. Yet, these methods do not make explicit the relationships between parts in the ecology. Which poets mentor each other? Which venues are linked to an organisation or funder? While there are obviously privacy concerns with making visible all such relationships, these visual aids are symptomatic of a problem of visualising and valuing parts of an ecology, which results in perpetuating narratives of individual endeavour in poetic practice. For example, these representations are designed to help a writer fulfil a need, such as finding a publisher to share their work, or joining a writing group to provide feedback, or discovering other nearby poets to provide a sense of community. The narrative is framed individualistically: a single poet seeks resources to aid their individual writing development.

⁷⁸ Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 16.

⁷⁹ Schmidt and McAuliffe, ‘Editorial’.

⁸⁰ Jack Westmore and Luís Costa, ‘Meet the Editors: Jack’, *Seaford Review*, 17 June 2024 <https://open.substack.com/pub/seafordreview/p/meet-the-editors-jack?r=1tl2qi&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email> [accessed 20 June 2024].

Arguably, through these connections, a poet may become more embedded within the ecology given that they will now have relationships with other poets and/or publishers. While this is true, the whole interaction is conceptualised with an individual mindset, similar to Joseph Campbell's notion of 'The Hero's Journey', a well-known narrative theory that places the hero at the centre of the story.⁸¹ The goal in using these resources is to solve an individual problem, similar to a hero (poet) overcoming a barrier in order to attain the reward (functional writing practice), rather than thinking about how the overarching world changes as a result of the hero's actions. There are side characters—such as mentors, helpers, and allies—who contribute to attaining the reward, but ultimately, it is the hero's journey, their narrative.

I want to rethink the structure of the poetry ecology in ways that open notions of mentorship away from individualist or isolationist narratives and towards multiplicity and interconnectivity, ways that make the roles of those involved in mentoring visible. To begin such analysis, it is important to consider the visual arrangement and structure of the ecology. These qualities will impact the representation of existing power structures in the contemporary UK poetry ecology, and therefore offer the possibility of disrupting those power structures, particularly if the model enables those who have been historically excluded from UK poetry to be represented equally with already-acknowledged influential figures. The most effective ecological models to draw from are those that are non-hierarchical and embrace a certain level of chaos and contingency, such as Morton's mesh⁸² and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomes.⁸³ For instance, one of the integral qualities of the mesh is that it refuses binaries and categorisations (such as gender or Nature) that are used to exclude certain groups.⁸⁴ In poetry, poets routinely exclude parts from the ecology. They use a complex range of values and cultural capital in order to categorise which poets (and work of poetry organisations) they consider serious and relevant, and thereby which they will include and exclude from the poetry ecology.⁸⁵ If one considers something as not real poetry (or relevant to poetry), they will likely, to greater or lesser extents, exclude it from their concept of the poetry world.

The rise of Instagram poetry provides a potent example. A flurry of articles appeared between 2018-2021 decrying its existence and denouncing it as poetry, which Sarah Crown, then the Director of Literature for Arts Council England, summarises. She states, 'while there's a

⁸¹ Joseph Campbell, with Joseph Campbell Foundation, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Collected Works of Joseph Campbell, 3rd edn (New World Library, 2008) <<http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0816/2008014990.html>>.

⁸² Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 8.

⁸³ Deleuze and Guattari, 'Introduction: Rhizome', p. 227.

⁸⁴ Morton, 'Queer Ecology', p. 274.

⁸⁵ Elliot B. Weininger and Annette Lareau, 'Cultural Capital', in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (2007), p. 1, doi:10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosc169.

growing acknowledgement that spoken word poetry deserves its place at the table [...] the line often seems to be drawn at Instapoetry'.⁸⁶ She analyses how statements from influential poets and/or publishers, Schmidt, Don Paterson, and Neil Astley position Instapoetry, like work by '[Rupi] Kaur, Lang Leav, Nayyirah Waheed and Nikita Gill', as 'not real poetry'.⁸⁷ Rebecca Watts, a poet published by Schmidt's press, Carcanet, likewise lambasts Hollie McNish's poetry,⁸⁸ stating her collection, *Plum*, 'is the product not of a poet but of a personality. [To review *Plum*] for a poetry journal would imply that it deserves to be taken seriously as poetry.'⁸⁹ Journalists also followed suit, such as Thomas W. Hodgkinson, who describes Instapoetry as 'Clichéd, banal, derivative, portentous, repetitive and manipulative. [...] like passing thoughts, hastily expressed, then cut up at random to resemble our conventional idea of poetry.'⁹⁰ These writers, in deciding they do not see Instagram poetry as real poetry, exclude it from their notions of what the poetry ecology should, or does, entail. Timothy Yu, partially in response to Watts, remarks that the way that one values different types of poetry shifts the way in which they perceive 'different poetry worlds' —and, here, Yu uses 'world' almost interchangeably with ecology.⁹¹ He reflects that Instagram poetry occupies its own poetry world that can feel disconnected from more traditional poetry because of these kinds of value-judgements, which demonstrates the extent to which one's perception of the ecology is subjective.

However, if one removes the subjective perspective, here, and rejects categorisation in the manner of Morton's mesh, a poetry ecology must include everything linked to poetry.⁹² As a result, those who have historically not been taken seriously as poets must be firmly included in the ecology. One such example are the poets that formed the collective, Malika's Poetry Kitchen, many of whom were from global majority backgrounds. In their twentieth anniversary anthology, Daniel Krumb recounts how, at the time of the collective's formation (2001), 'if you are Black, no matter how good you are as a poet, people don't see you.'⁹³ Many poets, critics,

⁸⁶ Crown, 'Generation Next'.

⁸⁷ Crown, 'Generation Next'.

⁸⁸ Although some may contend describing McNish as an Instapoet given her work has been published by Picador and she won the Ted Hughes Award.

⁸⁹ Rebecca Watts, 'The Cult of the Noble Amateur', *PN Review*, 44.3 (2018)

<https://www.pnreview.co.uk/cgi-bin/subscribe?item_id=10090> [accessed 14 February 2025].

⁹⁰ Thomas W. Hodgkinson, "'Instapoetry' May Be Popular, but Most of It Is Terrible", *The Spectator*, 23 November 2019 <<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/instapoetry-may-be-popular-but-most-of-it-is-terrible/>> [accessed 14 February 2025].

⁹¹ Timothy Yu, 'Instagram Poetry and Our Poetry Worlds', The Poetry Foundation, 24 April 2019

<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/featured-blogger/81555/instagram-poetry-and-our-poetry-worlds>> [accessed 14 February 2025].

⁹² My conception of an ecology therefore includes spoken word artists, performance poets, visual and hybrid poets, as well as poets below the age of eighteen. These groups are not the focus of this research but true to the concept of an interconnected, non-hierarchical ecology, they are still part of the poetry ecology.

⁹³ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, p. 7.

and scholars did not recognise or respect the literary traditions these writers were working from, the cultural capital they were drawing on, and therefore discounted them as serious poets, excluding them from their narratives of who belonged in the ecology.⁹⁴ An inclusive ecological approach ensures that marginalised voices are part of the dialogue. More than this, an ecological approach that draws from Morton and Deleuze and Guattari has no order or centre and is always changing; it therefore rejects the idea of any one particular institution or group of parts being in a constant position of power at the top or core. So, rather than excluded groups simply being added to the bottom of a hierarchy, an ecological approach values them as equal to historically esteemed poets, thereby disrupting the existing power structures.

By positing my model of the poetry ecology—with its interconnected emphasis that illustrates the co-productive relationships, interactions, and parts that comprise and shape the poetry ecology—the role and significance of mentorship becomes more visible, since mentoring not only operates in discrete, closed settings, but also creates a ripple effect on a much grander scale. I will evidence this ripple effect across my thesis, especially in Chapters Three and Four, thereby realising the interconnectedness theorised in my model, and ultimately shifting mentoring to a practice that cannot be separated from the poetry ecology.

1.2 Poetry Mentorship in the UK Today: A State of Play

As Tammy Allen and Lillian Eby outline, since the concept of mentorship was established in Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*, the term has been applied so variously and in so many fields—such as medicine, business, education, and sports—that there is 'definitional and conceptual confusion' surrounding mentoring.⁹⁵ Indeed, one of the few continuities in mentorship studies is the agreement that mentoring is hard to define, with scholars such as Heidi Hass and Tony White,⁹⁶ Joan Kaplowitz,⁹⁷ Nadine Klasen and David Clutterbuck,⁹⁸ and Andy Roberts all detailing the blurriness of mentoring and the possible overlapping terms, such as coaches or counsellors.⁹⁹ To be able to talk about what mentoring means for poets with any

⁹⁴ See Chapter Four for further exploration of Malika's Poetry Kitchen, and Chapter Three for more on cultural capital.

⁹⁵ *The Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring: A Multiple Perspectives Approach*, ed. by Tammy D. Allen and Lillian Turner de Tormes Eby (Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 7.

⁹⁶ V. Heidi Hass and Tony White, 'Mentorship Task Force Report, Professional Development Committee, ARLIS/NA', *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 24.2 (2005), pp. 49–56 (pp. 49–50), JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27949376>> [accessed 30 October 2023].

⁹⁷ Joan Kaplowitz, 'Mentoring Library School Students--A Survey of Participants in the UCLA/GSLIS Mentor Program', *Special Libraries*, 83.4 (1992), pp. 219–33 (p. 219).

⁹⁸ Nadine Klasen and David Clutterbuck, *Implementing Mentoring Schemes* (Routledge, 2012), p. 15, doi:10.4324/9780080508511.

⁹⁹ Andy Roberts, 'Mentoring Revisited: A Phenomenological Reading of the Literature', *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 8.2 (2000), pp. 145–70 (p. 162), doi:10.1080/713685524.

precision across this thesis, in the next section of this chapter I explore the few widely agreed upon conventions of mentoring across disciplines and connect these to how poets and scholars commonly describe poetry mentorship, underpinned by a mapping sample of contemporary UK poetry mentoring schemes and services, as well as this project's survey. I then delineate which types of poetry mentorship I do and do not focus on in this thesis and why, as well as where my focal group rejects, echoes, or augments common understandings of poetry mentoring.

1.2.1 Reflection: Mentoring Support as Captured in John McCullough's 'A Walk with Our Imaginary Son'

Having just claimed to aim towards precision, before I move on to specific components of poetry mentoring, I want to start by conjuring a sense of poetry mentorship in a looser manner. John McCullough's 'A Walk with Our Imaginary Son',¹⁰⁰ does exactly this.¹⁰¹ McCullough dedicates the poem to his friend and mentor, Roddy Lumsden, who worked with McCullough on his first collection through his role as poetry editor at Salt and who died in 2020, a year after the poem was published in *Reckless Paper Birds*.¹⁰² The poem imagines McCullough and Lumsden as parents. Fresh from his first year at university, their son is home in Brighton for a visit. The three wander Brighton Pavilion's gardens, hearing about the new experiences their boy has gained since they were last together and reconnecting with 'his wild inheritance' in the 'punks and jugglers' of Brighton.¹⁰³ McCullough notes other forms of inheritance: 'the nose I saddled him with, / the cryptic Lumsden eyes, a moon-sized laugh'¹⁰⁴ and an encyclopaedic knowledge of seashells and tree species.¹⁰⁵ There is also a curiosity about the world, a way of seeing magic in the world, evident in the son's question 'Did you know every shadow has a negative weight?'.¹⁰⁶ McCullough suggests this is another legacy he has passed to his son by connecting the weight of the shadow to his own experience of 'how a moth feels on my hand'.¹⁰⁷ While one might read these examples as familial inheritance, these are also akin to poetry mentorship through the act of passing down not just knowledge but poetic ways of seeing the world.

¹⁰⁰ John McCullough, *Reckless Paper Birds* (Penned in the Margins, 2019), p. 80.

¹⁰¹ With thanks to my supervisor, Will May, whose talk, 'Must Be Visible/Invisible: Queering the Mentor in Postwar British Poetry', informed me about McCullough and Lumsden's relationship and reminded me of this poem's existence. Will May, 'Must Be Visible/Invisible: Queering the Mentor in Postwar British Poetry', unpublished paper delivered at English Department Research Seminar Series (25 March 2025).

¹⁰² Will May, 'Extract from the Draft Manuscript of "Poetry and Mentoring"', Forthcoming with Liverpool University Press, Unpublished Draft Manuscript, Liverpool, June 2025, p. 9.

¹⁰³ McCullough, *Reckless Paper Birds*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁴ McCullough, *Reckless Paper Birds*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁵ McCullough reflected in a tweet memorialising Lumsden that they shared a love of such 'strange trivia'. John McCullough, 'RIP Roddy Lumsden', Twitter, 11 January 2020

<https://twitter.com/JohnMcCullough_/status/1215990228701327361> [accessed 5 June 2025].

¹⁰⁶ McCullough, *Reckless Paper Birds*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁷ McCullough, *Reckless Paper Birds*, p. 80.

The poem presents further facets of mentorship. For instance, in the last four lines, the parents express care for the son by ensuring he does not miss his train, which assumably will whisk the son away to new adventures. In other words, Lumsden and McCullough put support in place to enable their son's trajectory of learning and development to continue beyond their direct involvement in it. That sense of growth in unexpected and uncontrollable ways continues throughout the poem, such as in 'The grass today is full of legs that might escape their owners' and 'a word fluttering who knows where' like a 'moth or butterfly'.¹⁰⁸ While the parents take delight in finding resonances of themselves in their son, they also welcome facets that diverge from their own identities. For instance, when his son describes romantic exploits with women, McCullough finds himself speechless with love and pride: 'there are no words for the difference it makes to have him here, how we've built a special tent and now it's flying.'¹⁰⁹ In this way, poetry mentorship is similar to parenting in that it is not about creating exact replicas. Some characteristics may be apparent, or less tangible aspects like a sense of shared poetic sensibility. The mentee's growth may also be unpredictable, perhaps even to the mentee themselves, like McCullough's image of the unruly legs.

Yet the parents' experience of seeing their child develop is not without its conflicts. The shadows that spoke to a connection between father and son in the middle of the poem take on a new resonance in the final lines. The shadows become 'philosophies, dominions' that are 'advancing from our feet', shadows that move further and further away from the people themselves, their physical bodies.¹¹⁰ The three can only 'slow our pace and watch' this process occur, suggesting an anxiety that the young man's mind may increasingly change in concerning ways, and his parents will be powerless to stop it.¹¹¹ The final line amplifies the concern, since it outlines these shadows are 'nothing like moths', nothing like the weightlessness, the free-flying hope —like a fledgling bird— associated with the son earlier in the poem.¹¹² The worry, then, is that the son will grow in ways that do not feel true to himself. This worry speaks to poetry mentoring's often-cited ambition to unearth the poet's authentic voice. For instance, Rebecca Goss, says that as a mentor 'I can help you hone what you have, unlock ideas, feel sure of your voice',¹¹³ and Teitler, Director of The Complete Works, describes centralising 'find[ing] your voice as strongly as possible' within the programme.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ McCullough, *Reckless Paper Birds*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁹ McCullough, *Reckless Paper Birds*, p. 80.

¹¹⁰ McCullough, *Reckless Paper Birds*, p. 80.

¹¹¹ McCullough, *Reckless Paper Birds*, p. 80.

¹¹² McCullough, *Reckless Paper Birds*, p. 80.

¹¹³ Rebecca Goss, 'Mentoring 2024', Instagram, 5 January 2024

<<https://www.instagram.com/p/C1umEc7NkCu/?igsh=b24zOHdiYTgxb3lt>> [accessed 10 January 2024].

¹¹⁴ Speaking Volumes and The Complete Works, *Mapping the Future: In Conversation*.

Throughout the poem, McCullough evokes the feeling of support that poetry mentorship entails, suggesting poetry mentorship enables mentees to grow, establish poetic ways of experiencing the world, develop their voice. These are powerful lessons that will be useful to keep in mind as I now detail some more concrete aspects of poetry mentorship.

1.2.2 Dominant Understandings of Poetry Mentorship as a Purely Formal, Discrete Dyad: Mentorship Literature and a Map of Contemporary Poetry Mentoring Provision

In February 2024, I mapped seventy-five poetry mentorship schemes and services on offer across the UK (see Appendix G). This mapping sample, together with my project's survey (see Appendix A) and analysis of mentorship literature, provide us with a 'state of play' of poetry mentorship in the UK today.

Around half of mentoring provision¹¹⁵ in the mapping sample was delivered by writer-development organisations (49.33%), and half by independent mentors (50.66%).¹¹⁶ Most large or regional writer-development agencies (such as New Writing North, The Poetry School, or The Irish Writer's Centre) offer some form of mentorship. Additional providers include publishers (such as Nine Arches Press, Fawn Press, or Cinnamon Press), small-to-mid-scale writer-development agencies (such as Dialect), and organisations formed specifically to run a prize (such as The James Berry Prize and Disabled Poets Prize). Multiple organisations frequently partner to run mentorship programmes, often working with universities (such as the University of Southampton, which partnered with ArtfulScribe to deliver Poetry Ambassadors). Within those services run by writer-development organisations, 24.3% required the mentee to pay for support and the remaining 75.7% were won via an application or prize and asked for no direct payment from the mentee.

The results of my project's survey (see Appendix A) indicates that poetry mentorship is delivered through a combination of in-person and online formats.¹¹⁷ Mentorship is often free, with 54.7% of survey respondents saying their mentorships either had no cost or were paid in reciprocal labour. A further 31.3% had mentorships funded, often via a prize or award —this statistic reinforces my mapping data as this also outlined that approximately one third of mentoring is delivered through a prize/award-based scheme. Moreover, these financial figures

¹¹⁵ This even split indicates that mentoring regularly occurs in private settings, which chimes with my presentation of poetry mentorship as a hidden practice in this thesis' introduction.

¹¹⁶ Two further popular forms of mentoring are the dyad of an academic supervisor to a poet completing a creative writing BA, MA, or PhD manuscript, and an editor working with a poet they are about to publish. These forms are not captured in my mapping sample but appear in interviews and my survey data.

¹¹⁷ Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey*.

tally with responses from mentors themselves, as 97.5% said mentoring was either not at all part of their income or provided very little income. Despite the low cost, mentees frequently report poetry mentorship is not easily accessible, which implies that barriers to entry are more complex than fiscal matters alone. One possible barrier is finding a suitable mentor. My survey data signals that some mentees find one with ease, while others find it extremely difficult.

My mapping sample shows mentoring is most often understood as a dyadic process. For example, all of the independent mentoring took place dyadically. Mentoring by writer-development agencies was slightly more complex in terms of whether one can define it as dyadic. For instance, some schemes, such as the Faber Academy Mentoring Programme and the James Berry Prize featured only dyadic mentorship. By contrast, The Jerwood Arvon Mentoring Programme incorporated group retreats and workshops, Representing Wales included monthly workshops, and Primers and the Disabled Poets Prize hosted celebratory reading events that brought mentoring cohorts together. Such events could be interpreted as facilitating both group and dyadic mentoring. However, all the mentoring provision by writer-development agencies identifies a central mentor-mentee dyad.

Mentorship literature and contemporary accounts of mentorship further illustrate the dyad as the most popular way of viewing mentorship and also expand this by detailing that the dyad is comprised of a senior and junior party. For instance, the Oxford English Dictionary defines a mentor as:

a person who acts as guide and adviser to another person, esp. one who is younger and less experienced. Later, more generally: a person who offers support and guidance to another; an experienced and trusted counsellor or friend; a patron, a sponsor.¹¹⁸

Here, mentorship is presented as taking place between two parties; moreover those parties consist of one who is more experienced and one who is less experienced, a dynamic Jennifer Harrison et al.¹¹⁹ and the majority of the scholars in *The SAGE Handbook of Mentoring* echo.¹²⁰ This dynamic continues in the traditional model of poetry mentorship, where a more experienced poet edits or workshops a less experienced poet's work. A famous example of traditional mentorship is Ezra Pound's suggested cuts to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.¹²¹ More

¹¹⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, 'Mentor, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.) <https://oed.com/dictionary/mentor_n> [accessed 30 October 2023].

¹¹⁹ Harrison, Dymoke, and Pell, 'Mentoring Beginning Teachers in Secondary Schools', p. 1054.

¹²⁰ *The SAGE Handbook of Mentoring*, ed. by David Ashley Clutterbuck and others (SAGE Publications, Limited, 2017) <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/soton-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4822341>>.

¹²¹ Although it should be noted that Pound's suggested edits are an extreme example of a mentor's influence. A. Walton Litz, 'The Waste Land Fifty Years After', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 2.4 (1972), pp. 455–71 (p. 455), JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30053202>> [accessed 17 February 2025].

contemporary examples include Rachael Allen and Will Harris,¹²² or Mimi Khalvati and Seni Seneviratne.¹²³ My mapping sample illustrates that the pairing of a senior and junior poet remains common across the UK. For instance, all of the mentors providing mentoring services independently have published a text, with only two (Vicky Morris and Sallyanne Rock) having published a pamphlet and the majority having published at least one, if not multiple, collections. Additionally, all of the independent mentors have received prize recognition. For instance, Katharine Towers, Helen Mort, Pascale Petit, and Em Strang have either won or been shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney Prize for Best First Poetry Collection, T.S. Eliot Prize, Costa Award for Poetry, Forward Prize, Eric Gregory Award, Keats-Shelley Poetry Prize, Laurel Prize, Roehampton Prize, Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize and Ledbury Munthe Prize for Best Second Collection. These credentials position the mentors as well-established and senior poets, and thus implies that mentees are likely to be less-established.

Traditional, hierarchical dyadic mentorships usually focus on the formal elements of poetry, supporting mentees to acquire and refine their technical skills and knowledge, often to achieve publication. For example, 89.9% of survey respondents said their mentorship focused on improving the writing itself, 90.8% said they engaged in mentoring to pursue a career in poetry (including ‘to develop a literary craft, perhaps with the ambition of publication’) and 75% of mentorships in my mapping sample emphasised publication as a goal.¹²⁴ To achieve this ambition, mentors usually textually analyse and provide feedback on a set of poems—possibly a whole pamphlet or collection. The mentor may additionally provide comments on the shape of the overall manuscript or the mentee’s approach to poetry, providing prompts, exercises, or lists of other texts to read that may help the mentee develop in a particular skill. For instance, I self-organised a mentorship to develop an idea for a pamphlet between May 2022 and July 2023 with the mentors, Alice Willitts, Cheryl Moskowitz, Jessica Mookherjee, and Sarah Mnatzaganian. Granted, this mentorship had multiple mentors all focusing on one mentee, which is atypical for poetry mentorship. Nevertheless, the developmental tools we used were representative of most formal poetry mentoring. I circulated poems via email for critique ahead of each mentoring session, and received feedback and textual analysis on the poems. Here, I will provide an example of a poem before and after input from my mentors. Figure 8 depicts my poem, ‘its bridal veils of water’, as it stood before critique.¹²⁵

¹²² Joanna Nissel and others, ‘Conference Report: Poetry & Care’, *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 15.1 (2024), doi:10.16995/bip.11688.

¹²³ Bernardine Evaristo and Daljit Nagra, *Ten: New Poets* (Spread the Word, 2010), p. 88.

¹²⁴ Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey*.

¹²⁵ This poem began in a group workshop led by David Caddy (April 2023), who had provided analysis and secondary reading to inspire responses themed on ‘The Anthropology and Experience of Water’.

its bridal veils of water

Imagine that marriage first requires water.

There are already many rituals of liquid consecration.

The baptism: heaven promised in a shallow stone pool,
the pathway pouring through the baby's fisted-snail scrunch.

The Mikvah: the monthly submersion in living water,
now contained (at least in the UK) in teal mosaic and filtration grates.

I reimagine the hush as we saturate, strange flowers blooming.
There's a sluicing –not of dirt, but of tiredness, of ache.

For an hour we forsake the bills piling on the sideboard,
lagoon Outlook's incessant, synthesised marimba.

We are resting before the next phase,
insisting on white space.

Researchers say the human form, technically, cannot feel wetness.
It is, instead, a translation of the change in temperature

and if I lay entirely still in a lake dredged by sunlight,
I will know what it is to be without this world's gravity.

I don't know if I believe in god but if I'm going to pledge myself
to one person for the rest of my life, why should it not begin with this?

The water holding my warm, pickerel body up to the sky,
the blue space of what I have always been.

The title is a quotation by Nathaniel Tarn.

Figure 8: 'its bridal veils of water' As Submitted

In response to this poem, the mentors fed back that there were some images that seemed inconsistent with the watery theme, such as 'strange flowers blooming', 'the baby's fisted-snail scrunch' (both intertextual references), and the fifth stanza in its entirety. There were also

phrases that the mentors found distracting such as the reference to ‘living water’, which I intended to be a reference to the Mikvah’s connection to a natural water source but instead conjured images of microorganisms living in the water for the mentors. One of the largest suggested changes was to remove the ‘we’ from the fifth and sixth stanzas. I had intended this to invoke a sense of collective but the mentors argued that this was an incongruous shift from the intimacy of the poem and the piece would be better served without it. I adhered to all of these comments in my next draft; I cut the fifth and sixth stanzas entirely, and rewrote particular images to improve their clarity or alignment to the watery theme, as outlined in Figure 9.

its bridal veils of water

Imagine that marriage first requires water.

There are already many rituals of liquid consecration.

The baptism: heaven promised in a shallow stone pool, **Refined image**
the pathway pouring through the newborn’s scrunched body.

The Mikvah: a monthly undamming **Rewritten stanza**
from water that has journeyed through soil and root, through sky.

For this bridal veil, I take the hush of submersion. **Adjusted layout**

There’s a sluicing –not of dirt, but of tiredness, of ache.

**Two stanzas
removed**

.....
Researchers say the human form, technically, cannot feel wetness.
It is, instead, a translation of the change in temperature

and, maybe, if I lay entirely still in a lake dredged by sunlight,
Added word I will know what it is to be without this world’s gravity.

I don’t know if I believe in god but if I’m going to pledge myself
to one person for the rest of my life, why should it not begin with this?

The water holding my warm, pickerel body up to the sky,
the blue space of what I have always been.

The title is a quotation by Nathaniel Tarn.

Figure 9: ‘its bridal veils of water’ After Editing, Annotated

Textual analysis, feedback, and critique, summarised by the verb, ‘workshopping’, is commonplace in poetry mentorship, and is central to formal mentorship. For example,

workshopping featured in several mentorships discussed during interviews for this project, such as Sophie Dumont and George Szirtes' mentorship.¹²⁶ Workshopping also appeared in public-facing accounts, like Dzifa Bension and Pascale Petit's mentorship during the 2021-22 Jerwood Compton Poetry Fellowship.¹²⁷

Since poets and mentors often identify the formally-focused process of workshopping as a core part of mentoring, this implies the dominant understanding of mentorship is not only dyadic, but formal. Yet my research implies that there are other approaches to consider. For instance, the poet Elvire Roberts reflects that, in poetry mentorship, 'there needs to be a sense of growth and journey for the mentee, or mentees', a definition that leaves scope for a range of formal and non-formal outcomes for mentoring.¹²⁸ Mentorship literature likewise offers open-ended definitions of the effect of mentoring. For example, Hass and White note that a mentor 'consciously strives to help another person learn',¹²⁹ while Kaplowitz says 'A mentor is anyone who enhances, enriches, and encourages the professional development of another member of the profession.'¹³⁰ Learning and professional development may then be key outcomes of mentoring, although for poetry we may supplement 'creative' or 'artistic' for professional.¹³¹ Learning and artistic development, or Roberts' term 'growth', are, however, quite vague.¹³² To elucidate what mentoring might do for poets, I included a question about what poetry mentors consider the measures of success for poetry mentorship in the survey for this project. I outlined thirteen possible positive outcomes for poetry mentorship (Figure 10), which cover increased poetic skill or achievement, and improved emotional development that may or may not be linked to the mentee's identity as a poet.

¹²⁶ Sophie Dumont, 'Poetry Mentee Interview', September 2022.

¹²⁷ Jerwood Arts, *The Gift of Mentoring or How to Nurture a Poet*.

¹²⁸ Elvire Roberts, 'Poetry Mentee Interview', August 2022.

¹²⁹ Hass and White, 'Mentorship Task Force Report, Professional Development Committee, ARLIS/NA', p. 50.

¹³⁰ Kaplowitz, 'Mentoring Library School Students--A Survey of Participants in the UCLA/GSLIS Mentor Program', p. 219.

¹³¹ For further analysis of the usages and controversies around the term, professional, in a poetry context, see Chapter Two.

¹³² Roberts, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

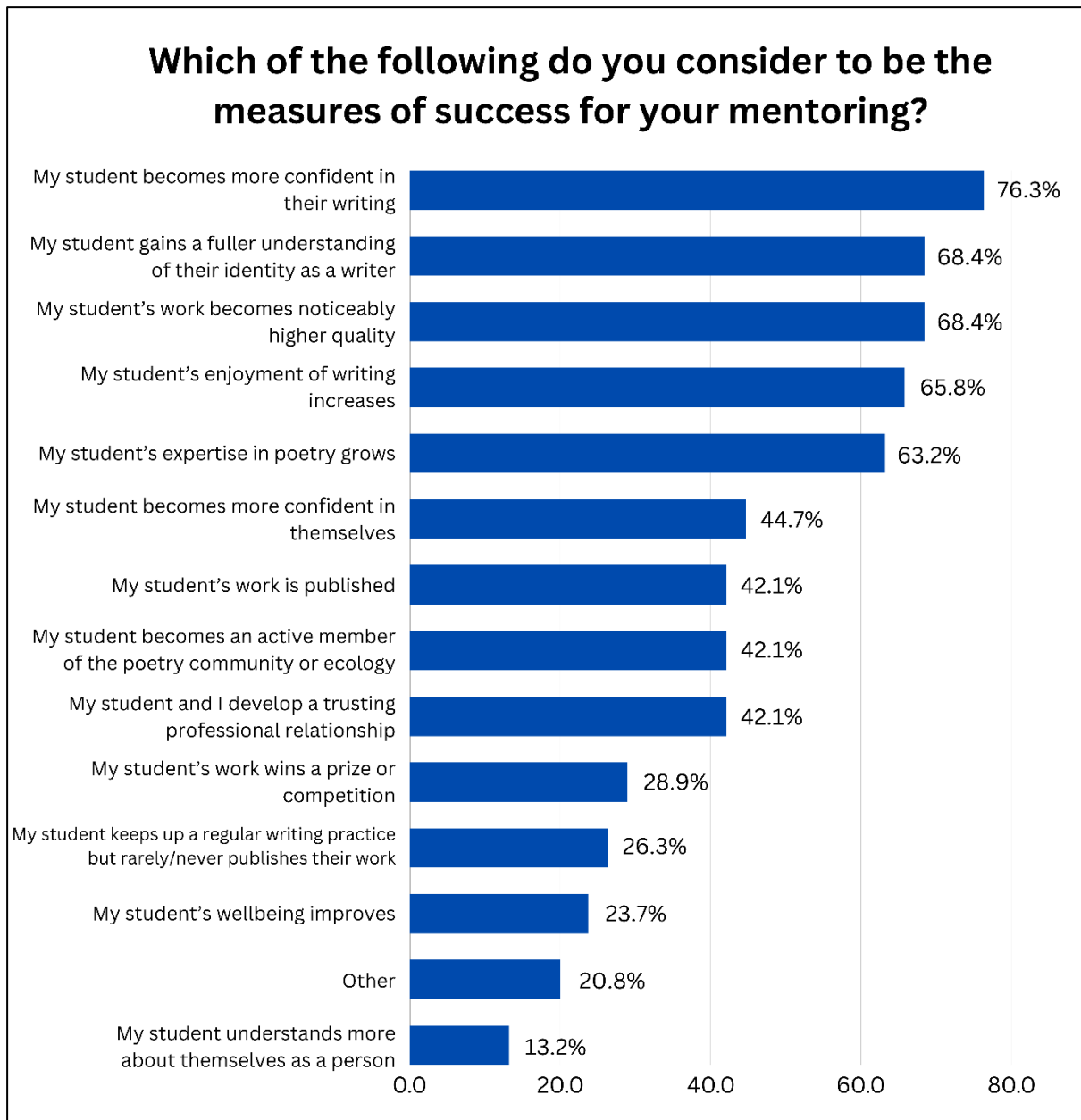


Figure 10: Measures of Success from Mentor-Mentee Project Survey

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
My student becomes more confident in their writing	76.3%
My student gains a fuller understanding of their identity as a writer	68.4%
My student's work becomes noticeably higher quality	68.4%
My student's enjoyment of writing increases	65.8%
My student's expertise in poetry grows	63.2%
My student becomes more confident in themselves	44.7%
My student's work is published	42.1%
My student becomes an active member of the poetry community or ecology	42.1%
My student and I develop a trusting professional relationship	42.1%

My student's work wins a prize or competition	28.9%
My student keeps up a regular writing practice but rarely/never publishes their work	26.3%
My student's wellbeing improves	23.7%
Other	20.8%
My student understands more about themselves as a person	13.2%

Table 5: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 10

The survey responses illustrate that contemporary poets believe mentorship works towards a range of outcomes, although mentors generally prioritise learning technical skill or development directly related to poetry over more holistic benefits. In other words, while formal emphases are dominant, they are not the sole province of poetry mentorship.

The potential outcomes of mentoring are significant, not simply because they establish and simultaneously challenge the primacy of formal approaches, but also because they point towards the types of figures who conduct mentoring. For instance, if one prioritises enjoyment as an outcome—as 65.8% of mentors did—one may argue that anyone can provide the validation, encouragement, or inspiration that can increase enjoyment in poetry practice. In this case, a poetry mentor could shift from someone with professional experience of poetry and include non-specialist figures who may not necessarily engage with even the most central tenets of poetry mentorship, like workshoping poems. Therefore poetry mentors who deprioritise the formal could include colleagues, therapists, life coaches, casual acquaintances, or even public figures. The OED's definition of a mentor reflects this, stating that related terms such as a counsellor, friend, patron, or sponsor can be used interchangeably with a mentor.¹³³ Like Judith Butler's concept of words having a 'citational legacy' that references their past meanings, when these overlapping terms become synonymous with mentoring, the general understanding of mentoring begins to incorporate their definitions as well, ultimately blurring the term.¹³⁴ As a result, one might conclude that poetry mentoring, like mentoring in a more general context, remains a hazy term. However, my research indicates that scholars and poets largely see poetry mentoring as being conducted by another poet, such as Kaplowitz' assertion that mentors are 'another member of the profession',¹³⁵ and Clare Shaw and Angela Cheveau's reflections on poetry mentorship across independent contexts and structured programmes like the Jerwood/Arvon Young Poets Prize and Writing Chance, which regularly

¹³³ Oxford English Dictionary, 'Mentor, n.'

¹³⁴ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (Routledge, 1997), p. 99.

¹³⁵ Kaplowitz, 'Mentoring Library School Students--A Survey of Participants in the UCLA/GSLIS Mentor Program', p. 219.

embody the traditional master-apprentice dyad.¹³⁶ Some poets expand the figure of the mentor further and include poets from the past in this category. For example, on the Verse Mentors podcast, Andrew McMillan speaks about the confidence and sense of permission to write that Thom Gunn's poetry gave him, spurring on his practice without ever having to know him personally.¹³⁷ Subsequently, a poetry mentor is a relatively elastic term that encompasses larger a range of potential figures the more holistic the mentoring itself becomes, but poets generally concur the term refers to experienced poets.

Yet, if poetry mentorship's outcomes correspond with who mentors might be, then we must acknowledge that we cannot know what a poetry mentorship will ultimately achieve and entail, which renders it impossible to exactly delineate who conducts poetry mentorship. The process of poetry mentorship is unknowable because of its entanglement with the subconscious and unconscious. For instance, Russell P. Warhurst and Kate Black's mentoring analysis states,

what "meets the eye" in mentoring, such as knowledge acquisition and skills development, is only part of the story. A significant but as yet neglected part of the story is [...] the conscious and unconscious meaning-making process occurring within mentoring relationships as both mentors and protégés strive to gain self-understanding and to construct an acceptable sense-of-self, a sense of "I."¹³⁸

Put simply, poetry mentorship may consciously aim to facilitate learning or poetic development but an unconscious process also takes place that is beyond our control, which can extend to influence the mentee's sense of self. My survey data reinforces this idea. Figure 10 shows that mentorships may result in publication, improved work, but they may also influence a mentee's confidence, wellbeing, or their understanding of themselves as a person. Overall, poetry mentorship's entanglement with the unconscious means its affects may unpredictably span both technical excellence and holistic matters. It is partially because of this unpredictability that the broad range of figures listed above, such as a friend or counsellor, may for some poets constitute a poetry mentor.

¹³⁶ Clare Shaw and Angela Cheveau, "Choosing Someone You Trust with Your Words Is the Most Important Thing You Can Do. It Is Also the Most Valuable." *The Poetry Mentoring Relationship*, Substack, Shaw and Moore, 29 March 2025 <https://open.substack.com/pub/kimmoore30/p/when-the-student-is-ready-the-teacher?r=1tl2qi&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&showWelcomeOnShare=false> [accessed 4 April 2025].

¹³⁷ *What Do Poets Know?*, hosted by Will May, Verse Mentors (n.d.), episode 3 <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/2ML9d2z0r22qUIF7qRzRBy?si=27da75f962a84b09>> [accessed 2 December 2022]. Relevant sections begin at 6:14 and 22:40

¹³⁸ Russell P. Warhurst and Kate Black, 'Meaning in Mentoring: More Than Meets the Eye/"I"', *Human Resource Development Review*, 18.3 (2019), pp. 349–75 (p. 350), doi:10.1177/1534484319853102.

Even in a more traditional context, namely a dyad of more-and-less experienced poet technically developing a parcel of poems, poetry mentorship remains unpredictable because its teaching methods usually involve the reading, analysis, and interpretation of poems — processes that cannot be wholly precalculated because they engage the subconscious and unconscious mind. For instance, many of the mentors and mentees interviewed for this project describe learning through suggested reading.¹³⁹ The process of reading, analysing, and interpreting poems is described by Roger Seamon and Nigel McLoughlin, with Seamon emphasising the unconscious and McLoughlin the subconscious. Seamon theorizes that poems are constructed leaving deliberate gaps for the reader's mind, that are bridged by rapid associations led by the subconscious, resulting in the understanding of a poem being in-part driven by the less-than conscious mind.¹⁴⁰ As such, the way readers interpret poems, the messages they receive from them, is not entirely within either their control or the author's. McLoughlin expands the subconscious' involvement to the *construction* of poems and their interpretation. He contends:

no poet can know the entirety of their own meaning because of the plethora of subconscious influences and processes that go into the making of the text. They may be intuitively aware of some influences and processes that they are consciously unable to articulate. The poet may proceed by the same interpretive mechanism as the reader in order to tease out the various possible meanings in the text.¹⁴¹

Further writers and scholars present the writing process as involving the subconscious and unconscious, with Malcolm Bradbury adopting a Freudian unconscious in his conceptualisation.¹⁴² Daniella Jancsó also notes, 'It is a matter of course for poets that an artistically accomplished poem is shaped at least partly by forces which are not under conscious control'¹⁴³ and 'there is not a single noteworthy poem in the twentieth century which would depict the creative process as a wholly calculable operation'.¹⁴⁴ In short, a mentor may intend for the mentee to learn specific lessons or techniques from either reading or writing a poem but this cannot be guaranteed since composition and interpretation are not wholly

¹³⁹ For example, Harriet Tarlo emphasises reading as a vital part of development. David Caddy also details Charles Olson providing reading lists to his mentees, of which his bibliography for Ed Dorn was later published. Harriet Tarlo, 'Poetry Mentor Interview', October 2022; David Caddy, 'Poetry Mentor Interview', September 2022; Charles Olson, *A Bibliography On America For Ed Dorn*, 3rd edn (Four Seasons Foundation, 1964).

¹⁴⁰ Roger Seamon, 'Guided Rapid Unconscious Reconfiguration in Poetry and Art', *Philosophy and Literature*, 20.2 (1996), pp. 412–27 (p. 415), doi:10.1353/phl.1996.0077.

¹⁴¹ Nigel McLoughlin, 'Writing Poetry', in *A Companion to Creative Writing*, ed. by Graeme Harper, 1st edn (Wiley, 2013), pp. 40–55 (p. 47), doi:10.1002/9781118325759.ch3.

¹⁴² Malcolm Bradbury, 'Introduction', in D. Brande, *Becoming a Writer* (Macmillan, 1996), pp. 12–13.

¹⁴³ Daniella Jancsó, *Twentieth-Century Metapoetry and the Lyric Tradition*, Anglia Book Series (De Gruyter, 2019), p. 13.

¹⁴⁴ Jancsó, *Twentieth-Century Metapoetry and the Lyric Tradition*, p. 27.

governed by the conscious mind.¹⁴⁵ It can never be known if the mentor will definitively influence the poems the mentee produces, and a mentor's influence may only be traced in retrospect. Subsequently, even traditional models of mentorship are relatively unpredictable, which lends itself to diffuse understandings of mentorship's facilitators and outcomes, and, as I will continue to argue across this thesis, questions whether mentoring can ever be purely formal.

1.2.3 Poetry Mentorship in This Thesis: Expanding Poetry Mentorship Through Multiplicity and Interconnectedness

Especially in light of mentorship's variousness and unknowability, I must identify what I refer to as poetry mentorship in this thesis. I say, *refer to* rather than *define*, since the research indicates that poetry mentoring as a whole is too vast a category to be fully investigated in a single thesis, and to attempt to narrow this definition would exclude relevant practices from this field of study. Instead, I will simply choose particular types of poetry mentorship on which to focus. These types will be what I *refer to* as poetry mentoring, whilst maintaining an understanding that poetry mentoring scholarship may address further forms of mentoring. In this research, poetry mentoring indicates a relationship between a dyad or multiple parties that results in learning and development in the art of poetry, which may or may not be made manifest through the production of poems, and may also result in more holistic forms of development such as increased wellbeing.¹⁴⁶ I particularly focus on: formalised mentorship schemes hosted by an organisation or established independently (addressed in my mapping sample—see Appendix G); informal one-to-one relationships, such as peers workshopping each other's poems; creative writing university courses or similar shorter-term courses lasting at least three months, such as those run by The Poetry School and the like; and workshop groups and collectives.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Although Hélène Aji remarks that Ezra Pound's pedagogy involved the concept of a superior interpretation he would steer his students towards. Hélène Aji, 'The Common Pedagogy of the Uncommon: Building Aesthetic Community from the Ezuniversity to Black Mountain College and Beyond', in *Modernist Communities Across Cultures and Media*, ed. by Caroline Pollentier and Sarah Wilson (University Press of Florida, 2019), pp. 68–86 (p. 72).

¹⁴⁶ I detail poetry mentoring incorporating holistic elements across Chapters Two and Three.

¹⁴⁷ The requirement for courses to last a minimum of three months reflects that mentorships typically span larger periods of time, such as Poetry Ambassadors (ten months), London Library Emerging Writers Programme (one year), and Genesis Emerging Writers Programme (one year), as well as one mentorship organiser's stipulation that 'to qualify as a mentor, [the mentorship] needs to be extended'. ArtfulScribe, 'Poetry Ambassadors', ArtfulScribe, 2021 <<https://artfulscribe.co.uk/blog-category/poetry-ambassadors>> [accessed 27 February 2024]; The London Library, 'Emerging Writers Programme', London Library, 2025 <https://www.londonlibrary.co.uk/about-us/ll-emerging-writers?mc_cid=32c7357622> [accessed 24 February 2025]; Jewish Literary Foundation, 'Genesis Emerging Writers Programme', Jewish Literary Foundation, 22 December 2023 <<https://jewishliteraryfoundation.co.uk/programmes/genesis-emerging-writers-programme>> [accessed 27 February 2024]; Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview', 2022.

One extremely common form of poetry mentorship that I choose not to focus on is the mentorship between a poet and their reader, including the reading of other poets' work, both contemporary and historic. One could argue that these mentorships, which Brett Millier describes as 'passive mentoring' and I refer to as text-based mentorships, ascribe to the main conventions of poetry mentorship, namely that they are a dyadic relationship that takes place between a more experienced poet (via their poetry) and a less experienced mentee (the reader).¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, they represent an enormously common way that poets learn, as Millier implies in her analysis of Arielle Greenberg and Rachel Zucker's *Women Poets on Mentorship: Efforts and Affections*,¹⁴⁹ 'Over and over poets describe finding the opening of possibility in [reading] the work of an older female poet'.¹⁵⁰ Despite—and in some ways because of—their significance for so many poets, I chose not to focus on text-based mentorships and instead prioritise types of mentorship that have one of the other widely acknowledged characteristics of mentoring, a relationship.¹⁵¹ For instance, Martine Liautaud notes that 'At its core, mentoring is a relationship between the mentor and the mentee.'¹⁵² The OED defines a relationship as 'A connection formed between two or more people or groups based on social interactions and mutual goals, interests, or feelings.'¹⁵³ The American Psychological Association notes that social interaction 'involves reciprocal stimulation or response between two or more individuals.'¹⁵⁴ Since the mentor cannot be stimulated or respond to the mentee—especially if one is reading a historic author who has been dead for centuries—and the relationship is formed between a mentee and the poetry as mentor rather than the author themselves, this type of mentorship is distinct from those on which I focus on a semantic level. Elvire Roberts comes to the same conclusion: 'I don't see Sylvia Plath as my mentor; I see her as inspiration [because] I see a mentor as an active relationship.'¹⁵⁵

Some of the forms of mentoring on which I focus believe mentoring takes place dyadically between a more experienced mentor and less experienced mentee but I also wish to challenge that convention by including forms that reject this premise, namely workshop groups, collectives, and peer workshopping. In these types of mentorship, poets may have no obvious

¹⁴⁸ Millier, 'Mentoring and the Female Poet's Voice', p. 118.

¹⁴⁹ Greenberg and Zucker, *Women Poets on Mentorship: Efforts and Affections*.

¹⁵⁰ Millier, 'Mentoring and the Female Poet's Voice', p. 118.

¹⁵¹ Twelve of the contributors to *The Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring* define mentoring as a 'mentoring relationship'. Allen and Eby, *The Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring*, pp. ix–xvi.

¹⁵² Martine Liautaud, *Breaking Through: Stories and Best Practices from Companies That Help Women Succeed* (Wiley, 2016), p. 15.

¹⁵³ Oxford English Dictionary, *Relationship*, n. (Oxford University Press, July 2023), Oxford English Dictionary <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8740593721>>.

¹⁵⁴ APA Dictionary of Psychology, 'Social Interaction', American Psychological Association, 2023 <<https://dictionary.apa.org/social-interaction>> [accessed 9 November 2023].

¹⁵⁵ Roberts, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

sense of hierarchy between them. For instance, Daniel Kramb describes the members and founders of the collective Malika's Poetry Kitchen (MPK) all receiving critique from each other, with no one person holding all of the wisdom.¹⁵⁶ Through placing these types of mentorships in my focal group, I aim to broaden notions of poetry mentorship to include group formations. I also aim to complicate the notion that one poet can be objectively more experienced than another, as if experience were a linear scale. Instead, these mentorships present a more realistic image of the poet as a complex and multifaceted being with numerous technical and non-formal skills and experiences, including lived experience, any of which may help another poet develop their practice. For instance, poets and mentorship scholars note how choosing a mentor with common characteristics or who comes from a similar background can aid the mentorship, with Margo Vreeburg Izzo and LeDerick Horne¹⁵⁷ describing this in the context of hidden disabilities, Helen Colley on gender,¹⁵⁸ class, and 'disaffected' youth,¹⁵⁹ and Millier and McMillan above in the context of sexuality.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, a poet who is extremely skilled in one form of poetry may not be skilled in another and may seek a peer mentor who has different expertise to them. The latter is the approach taken by MPK and The 57 Collective (a collective based on MPK) in their workshopping of poems, where each members took turns leading sessions in their speciality or area of interest. One could argue that this simply presents a nuanced form of a hierarchy, given there is still a relationship in which one poet has more expertise than the others. While this critique is valid, these collectives complicate the notion that one poet can objectively be better overall, and instead honours the complexities of the knowledges and skills a poet can contain. Shifting to this view of poets contributes to another of my overarching contentions across this thesis, which is to intervene against seeing poetry mentorship as purely formal.¹⁶¹

Yet, poets associate mentorship more with dyadic structures than group ones. For instance, when distributing the communications tools for this project, such as social media posts and information sheets, several poets expressed confusion over whether they could take part because they were not sure if workshop groups or non-dyadic peer mentorships could be

¹⁵⁶ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁷ Margo Vreeburg Izzo and LeDerick Horne, *Empowering Students with Hidden Disabilities: A Path to Pride and Success* (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co, 2016), p. 84.

¹⁵⁸ Helen Colley, 'Righting Rewritings of the Myth of Mentor: A Critical Perspective on Career Guidance Mentoring', *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 29.2 (2001), pp. 177–97 (p. 3), doi:10.1080/03069880020047120.

¹⁵⁹ Helen Colley, 'Engagement Mentoring for "Disaffected" Youth: A New Model of Mentoring for Social Inclusion', *British Educational Research Journal*, 29.4 (2003), pp. 521–42 (pp. 536–37), JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1502193>> [accessed 31 October 2023].

¹⁶⁰ Millier, 'Mentoring and the Female Poet's Voice', p. 118; May, *What Do Poets Know?* Relevant sections begin at 6:14 and 22:40

¹⁶¹ See Chapter Four for non-hierarchical and non-dyadic mentorship.

considered mentoring. This uncertainty once again indicates the dyad is the most recognised form of mentorship, an idea mentorship studies reflects. For instance, the original mentorship between Telemachus and Athena (wearing the guise of Mentor) in *The Odyssey* is dyadic,¹⁶² and Hass and White's literature review reveals the dyadic formula remains mentorship's most prevalent model: 'Most, but not all, of the literature suggests that the relationship works best between two individuals, rather than a group.'¹⁶³ In the context of poetry specifically, Joey Frances recently issued a call for papers that positions Sam Solomon's notion of 'lyric pedagogy',¹⁶⁴ 'a practice of reading poetry in a closed student-teacher dyad' as popular in UK poetic study.¹⁶⁵ Frances describes the dyad as part of a broader Western tradition of 'individualised models of writing and reading' that 'frame [the act of writing poetry] in narrow individualist-expressive terms.'¹⁶⁶ Accordingly, the majority of contemporary formal mentorship schemes in the UK create dyads rather than groups, such as The Complete Works,¹⁶⁷ Genesis Emerging Writers Programme,¹⁶⁸ Primers (Nine Arches Press),¹⁶⁹ Dynamo (Writing West Midlands),¹⁷⁰ and The Poetry School.¹⁷¹

Meanwhile, poetry collectives and workshop groups represent another common form of poetry support in the UK. In November 2023, the Poetry Society listed 115 official workshop groups associated with their Poetry Stanza scheme¹⁷² and the Poetry Kit listed eighty-one (a mixture of affiliated and unaffiliated groups), which suggests that hundreds, possibly thousands, of workshop groups and collectives exist in the UK.¹⁷³ Moreover, Malika Booker

¹⁶² Hass and White, 'Mentorship Task Force Report, Professional Development Committee, ARLIS/NA'; Colley, 'Righting Rewritings of the Myth of Mentor'; Carol A. Sommer, Panagiotis Markopoulos, and Shana L. Goggins, 'Mentoring Master's Level Students: Drawing Upon the Wisdom of Athena as Mentor in Homer's *Odyssey*', *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 26.1 (2013), pp. 1–12, doi:10.1080/08893675.2013.764049; A. Gottesman, 'The Authority of Telemachus', *Classical Antiquity*, 33.1 (2014), pp. 31–60, JSTOR, doi:10.1525/ca.2014.33.1.31; Dario Sambunjak and Ana Marušić, 'Mentoring: What's in a Name?', *JAMA*, 302.23 (2009), pp. 2591–92, doi:10.1001/jama.2009.1858.

¹⁶³ Hass and White, 'Mentorship Task Force Report, Professional Development Committee, ARLIS/NA', p. 51.

¹⁶⁴ Samuel Solomon, *Lyric Pedagogy and Marxist-Feminism: Social Reproduction and the Institutions of Poetry*, Bloomsbury Studies in Critical Poetics (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 29.

¹⁶⁵ Joey Frances, 'CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: Towards a Collective Poetics', *The Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 10 January 2024 <<https://poetry.openlibhums.org/news/666/>> [accessed 30 January 2024].

¹⁶⁶ Frances, 'CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: Towards a Collective Poetics'.

¹⁶⁷ The Complete Works, 'The Complete Works Poetry Home'.

¹⁶⁸ Jewish Literary Foundation, 'Genesis Emerging Writers Programme'.

¹⁶⁹ Nine Arches Press, 'Primers'.

¹⁷⁰ Writing West Midlands, 'Dynamo'.

¹⁷¹ The Poetry School, '1-2-1 Tutorials, Manuscript Assessment and Mentoring', Poetry School, 2024 <<https://poetryschool.com/1-2-1/>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

¹⁷² The Poetry Society, 'Poetry Society Stanzas – The Poetry Society', Poetry Society, n.d. <<https://poetrysociety.org.uk/membership/poetry-society-stanzas/>> [accessed 9 November 2023].

¹⁷³ The Poetry Kit, 'Poetry Groups and Workshops', Poetry Kit, 2023 <https://www.poetrykit.org/list_wshps.htm> [accessed 9 November 2023].

wrote a guide to setting up a writing collective, which implies these activities happen regularly enough to warrant advice on their design.¹⁷⁴ Finally, the term ‘poetry workshop’ appeared or was actively discussed in almost every interview I conducted for this project, signalling they are a standard part of poetry culture. These non-dyadic settings do the work of sustaining creative practice, as this survey response depicts: ‘participation in groups [...] has been [...] sustaining, and has generated new writing’.¹⁷⁵ As this thesis will show, non-dyadic settings also enact transformations upon their members similarly to dyadic mentorship. I therefore frame poetry groups and collectives as non-dyadic forms of mentorship and include them in my focal group because of their prolificness and impact, and also to intervene against narratives at the level of culture and scholarship that privilege the individual and present mentoring as only a dyadic practice—effects I will expand upon later in this chapter and across this thesis.

To foreground the rest of this chapter’s deconstructions of the dyad, and also to complete this section’s portrait of mentorship, I turn now to poetry mentoring’s pedagogies. Poets and mentors tend to use ‘poetry mentoring’ to refer to both mentoring and coaching practice.¹⁷⁶ Traditional mentorship literature often separates the two. For instance, Harrison et al. outline that coaching ‘has a more specific focus upon particular tasks, skills or capabilities’ and is less aligned with the more intimate manifestations of mentorship, such as friendship or counselling.¹⁷⁷ Jonathan Passmore et al. add that coaches differ from mentors in that coaches do not need to have expertise in the mentee’s area of focus.¹⁷⁸ The coach also does not direct the path of study; instead, the coach uses the Socratic method¹⁷⁹ of asking questions to ‘unlock[...] people’s potential to maximise their own performance. [Moreover, coaching] is helping them to learn rather than teaching them’.¹⁸⁰ Overall, coaching has slightly less hierarchy than mentoring, is more student-led, and may be conducted by non-experts.

Poetry mentoring, however, adopts teaching tools from both practices. For instance, Teitler recommends practices that draw on coaching’s Socratic method in her writings on The Complete Works poetry mentorship scheme. She does so by advocating for a practice of poetics, citing Robert Sheppard’s definition of poetics as ‘the active questioning [...] about how

¹⁷⁴ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, pp. 106–10.

¹⁷⁵ Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey*.

¹⁷⁶ A rare exception was the Writing East Midlands’ 2023–24 Momentum programme, which offered separate coaching and mentoring sessions. Writing East Midlands, ‘Momentum’.

¹⁷⁷ Harrison, Dymoke, and Pell, ‘Mentoring Beginning Teachers in Secondary Schools’, p. 1056.

¹⁷⁸ *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Coaching and Mentoring*, ed. by Jonathan Passmore, David B. Peterson, and Tereza Freire (John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p. 5.

¹⁷⁹ Jonathan Passmore and Annette Fillery-Travis, ‘A Critical Review of Executive Coaching Research: A Decade of Progress and What’s to Come’, *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 4.2 (2011), pp. 70–88, doi:10.1080/17521882.2011.596484.

¹⁸⁰ John Whitmore, *Coaching for Performance: A Practical Guide to Growing Your Own Skills*, People Skills for Professionals, Reprinted (Nicholas Brealey, 1993), p. 10.

does, how should, how could, art be made. [Which] is a way of letting writers question what they think they know.’¹⁸¹ Teitler theorises that ‘poetics is a way for the writer to understand what they are doing and to plan their future course.’¹⁸² Teitler’s conceptualisation of poetics is thereby similar to the Socratic method since it is a reflective, questioning practice that enables the mentee to drive the direction of their development.

The original mentorship in *The Odyssey* foregrounds Teitler’s adoption of coaching techniques in mentoring, since Athena and Telemachus’ mentorship likewise combines characteristics from both practices. For instance, when Athena outlines her intentions towards Telemachus, she encapsulates commonly-held beliefs about mentoring:

I will go to Ithaca to rouse
the courage of his son, and make him call
a meeting, and speak out against the suitors
who kill his flocks of sheep and longhorn cattle
unstoppably. Then I will send him off
to Pylos and to Sparta, to seek news
about his father’s journey home, and gain
a noble reputation for himself.¹⁸³

Here, Athena fulfils contemporary mentorship’s emphasis on an expert mentor: as goddess of wisdom, she has expertise in all things. She also holds a position of power in the relationship and lays out a specific mission for him in a classic mentoring dyad. However, when Athena speaks directly to Telemachus, she seems to employ the Socratic method. Rather than controlling his method to achieve his goal, she encourages Telemachus to reflect on how to steer his own course: ‘You must consider / how best to drive these suitors from your house’.¹⁸⁴ Additionally, Telemachus’ epithet, his ‘essential quality or characteristic’, is thoughtfulness. This epithet centralises coaching’s Socratic method in the narrative and indicates this method was an important aspect of the mentorship.¹⁸⁵ The original mentorship, therefore, combined characteristics that scholarship today positions as belonging to separate practices. This suggests that poetry mentorship holds more truly to the original model of mentoring in terms of its teaching methods, since this began in a fluid place that predated a distinction between coaching and mentoring. Together, *The Odyssey* and Teitler’s account also signal that coaching scholarship remains relevant to this study.

¹⁸¹ Robert Sheppard, *The Necessity of Poetics* (Shearsman Books, 2024), p. 86.

¹⁸² Nathalie Teitler, ‘Resources’, *The Complete Works*, 21 August 2016
<<https://thecompleteworkspoetry.wordpress.com/resources/>> [accessed 18 April 2022].

¹⁸³ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by Emily R. Wilson (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2018), p. 108.

¹⁸⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey*, p. 113.

¹⁸⁵ Homer, *The Odyssey*, p. 6.

1.3 Delving Beneath the Dyad: Romantic Single Authorship, Individualism, and Power in Mentoring Relationships

As Solomon's work on lyric pedagogy suggests, dominant conceptions of poetry mentorship tend towards dyadic models built upon understandings of poetry practice that prioritise the individual and isolate poets from wider ecological contexts.¹⁸⁶ Therefore, to augment poetry mentorship beyond only the dyad and situate mentoring within the poetry ecology, I must challenge such understandings. In this final section of Chapter One, I will elucidate the history of individualist and isolationist approaches to poetry, particularly around Romantic single authorship. I will reveal how the Romantic legacy still affects poets' and scholars' conceptualisations of poetry writing and mentoring practice today—such as mentoring's power dynamics. Through interrogating these histories and legacies, I open mentoring to multiplicity and interconnection.

As I detailed at the start of this chapter, by the height of the Romantic period, authorship in the UK had come to be understood as an individual process in a kind of 'dominant mythology'; Westbrook and Ryan's research expands upon this, locating single authorship's origins in the legal landscape of the early eighteenth century.¹⁸⁷ They trace the myth's rise to the decline of patronage, in favour of the author holding the rights over their own work. Patronage, as Barbara Gold outlines, had been prevalent 'for as long as literature and art ha[d] existed',¹⁸⁸ but was, as Robert Kaufman illustrates, inherently unequal, since one of its parties held the puppet strings through holding the purse strings.¹⁸⁹ In 1710, the Statute of Anne changed the face of publishing by giving increased legal power to the writer and transferred ownership of the work from the patron to the writer themselves. In doing so, poets became not simply creatives but creators. Westbrook and Ryan describe this shift, stating the writer became 'an originator, one who no longer produced texts as a cog in a publication machine, but instead created them as an *author*'.¹⁹⁰ Michel Foucault portrays this move as 'a privileged moment of individualization'.¹⁹¹ In short, The Statute of Anne gave the writer authority. This is reflected in the etymology of the word, author, as Tina Managhan and Dan Bulley outline: 'The words 'author' and 'authority'

¹⁸⁶ Solomon, *Lyric Pedagogy and Marxist-Feminism*, p. 29.

¹⁸⁷ Westbrook and Ryan, *Beyond Craft*, p. 87.

¹⁸⁸ 'Introduction', in *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome*, ed. by Barbara K. Gold (University of Texas Press, 1982), pp. xi–xx (p. xi), doi:10.7560/746312-002.

¹⁸⁹ Robert R. Kaufman, 'The Patron-Client Concept and Macro-Politics: Prospects and Problems', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 16.3 (1974), pp. 284–308 (p. 285), doi:10.1017/S0010417500012457.

¹⁹⁰ Westbrook and Ryan, *Beyond Craft*, p. 91.

¹⁹¹ M. Foucault, 'Authorship: What Is an Author?', *Screen*, 20.1 (1979), pp. 13–34 (p. 14), doi:10.1093/screen/20.1.13.

share an etymological root in the Latin *augere*, meaning [...] to originate'.¹⁹² But the statute came with a caveat; it solidified in law that, in order to be an author, a writer must have 'sole authorship'.¹⁹³

Writing culture shifted in response; it 'demonised plagiarism and valorised individuality'.¹⁹⁴ A major manifestation of this individuality was the reframing of the source of creativity. Rather than external influences of the patron or the 'neo-Augustan tradition' that favoured the 'effects of education or art' (which we might read as an ecologically-situated model of creative development and production),¹⁹⁵ the start of the Romantic period saw increased belief in writing as stemming from the poet and their muse, which eighteenth-century specialist Betty Rizzo describes as 'theories of the original genius'.¹⁹⁶ For instance, creative writing psychologist, R. Keith Sawyer, notes that the poet as an individual figure gained 'a privileged spiritual status' in the period,¹⁹⁷ and Anne DeLong describes Mary Shelley's emphasis on a 'divine muse' as the source of poetic creation.¹⁹⁸ Some may consider the muse as separate to the writer, which complicates the notion of a single author. However, research from scholars such as Rizzo and multidisciplinary writer and lecturer, Michelene Wandor, point towards the muse as an extension of the writer's self. Rizzo achieves this through describing the muse or genius as synonymous with one's inner nature,¹⁹⁹ and Wandor by using the terms, muse, genius, and inspiration, interchangeably.²⁰⁰ Resultantly, the muse can be read as an externalisation that represents poets' creativity. This externalisation also suggests the Romantic model of authorship distorts the original Odyssean dyad by replacing the mentor with the muse/genius, thus solidifying the supremacy of poet as creator and isolating their practice from a wider poetry ecology. With this centralised poetic source, poets in the Romantic era hoped their newfound independence would allow them to 'recover the fire of Homer' and produce better pieces of literature, since they could now draw from their inner 'nature', rather than submit to outside influences.²⁰¹ Such valorisation of the single author resulted in an anxiety in writing culture,

¹⁹² Tina Managhan and Dan Bulley, 'What Is an Author? Critical Reflections on Authors and Authority in Critical Security Studies – Introduction', *Critical Studies on Security*, 10.3 (2022), pp. 111–18 (p. 112), doi:10.1080/21624887.2022.2185856.

¹⁹³ Westbrook and Ryan, *Beyond Craft*, p. 92.

¹⁹⁴ Westbrook and Ryan, *Beyond Craft*, p. 91.

¹⁹⁵ Betty Rizzo, 'The Patron as Poet Maker: The Politics of Benefaction', *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 20.1 (1991), pp. 241–66 (pp. 241–42), doi:10.1353/sec.2010.0220.

¹⁹⁶ Rizzo, 'The Patron as Poet Maker', pp. 241–42.

¹⁹⁷ R. Keith Sawyer, 'Writing as a Collaborative Act', in *The Psychology of Creative Writing*, ed. by Scott Barry Kaufman and James C. Kaufman, 1st edn (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 168, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511627101.

¹⁹⁸ Anne DeLong, *Mesmerism, Medusa, and the Muse: The Romantic Discourse of Spontaneous Creativity* (Lexington Books, 2012), p. 133.

¹⁹⁹ Rizzo, 'The Patron as Poet Maker', pp. 241–42.

²⁰⁰ Wandor, 'Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1', p. 115.

²⁰¹ Rizzo, 'The Patron as Poet Maker', pp. 241–42.

since writers risked financial and intellectual-reputational ruin should their works not originate solely from their own mind.²⁰²

Westbrook and Ryan contend that this anxiety survives today, and writing culture and scholarship ‘insists on a performance of solitary authorship even while the writing process, by nature, involves collaboration’,²⁰³ a conclusion Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford,²⁰⁴ Jack Stillinger,²⁰⁵ and Nicholas Boterf echo in their respective papers on authorship.²⁰⁶ This performance was modelled by major Romantic figures such as Wordsworth and Coleridge. For instance, Wordsworth’s preface to *Lyrical Ballads* prioritises the image of poetry emanating from the self in his ‘oft-quoted definition of poetry’²⁰⁷ as ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.’²⁰⁸ Despite his assertion, scholars such as Tim Fulford and Polly Atkin note that *Lyrical Ballads* was actually a collaboration between Wordsworth and Coleridge,²⁰⁹ and Melissa Bailes comments the Romantic poets regularly drew on other texts.²¹⁰ Yet the Romantics’ semi-collaborative practice still insists on the muse as source, resulting in a individualistic and isolated narrative of the writing process. Francis Gilbert and Vicky Macleroy note that Wordsworth’s model of authorship ‘still holds a powerful sway over the popular imagination regarding the writing process’.²¹¹ Accordingly, contemporary poets’ writings on their craft as well as interviews for this project demonstrate that poets still feel the influence of Romantic conceptions of poetry production. For instance, many poets I interviewed depict writing in Romantic terms, such as ‘it’s about the spark of Muse and where it takes you’.²¹² Another interviewee speaks about gathering inspiration

²⁰² Westbrook and Ryan, *Beyond Craft*, p. 94.

²⁰³ Westbrook and Ryan, *Beyond Craft*, p. 92.

²⁰⁴ Lisa Ede and Andrea A. Lunsford, ‘Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship’, *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 116.2 (2001), pp. 354–69, doi:10.1632/pmla.2001.116.2.354.

²⁰⁵ Jack. Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius.*, 1 online resource (270 pages) (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. v, WorldCat.org <<https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=272348>>.

²⁰⁶ Nicholas Boterf, ‘Placing the Poet: The Topography of Authorship’, in *Authorship and Greek Song: Authority, Authenticity, and Performance*, Mnemosyne Supplements. Monographs on Greek and Latin Language and Literature, Volume 402 (Brill, 2017), p. 80.

²⁰⁷ DeLong, *Mesmerism, Medusa, and the Muse*, p. 1.

²⁰⁸ Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 307.

²⁰⁹ Tim Fulford, ‘Coleridgean Contributions’, in *The Cambridge Companion to ‘Lyrical Ballads’*, ed. by Sally Bushell, 1st edn (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 49–65 (p. 49), doi:10.1017/9781108236300.006; Polly Atkin, ‘Collaboration, Domestic Co-Partnery and Lyrical Ballads’, in *The Cambridge Companion to ‘Lyrical Ballads’*, ed. by Sally Bushell, 1st edn (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 32–48 (p. 32), doi:10.1017/9781108236300.005.

²¹⁰ Melissa Bailes, *Questioning Nature: British Women’s Scientific Writing and Literary Originality, 1750-1830* (University of Virginia Press, 2017), pp. 119–24.

²¹¹ Gilbert and Macleroy, ‘Different Ways of Descending into the Crypt’, p. 256.

²¹² Anonymous, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’.

on walks alone, in a highly Wordsworthian manner,²¹³ much like Eavan Boland, who recounts being exposed to the Romantic poets as a young person and emulating them by wandering alone in hopes of the muse descending.²¹⁴ Thus, literary scholarship's perpetuation of the Romantic author results in pressure on writers to emulate this model. As Westbrook and Ryan summarise:

while authors must reach out to others in order to produce creative writing, they may simultaneously feel [...] that they must take credit for the contributions of others or even deny the involvement of other writers who essentially served as co-authors.²¹⁵

The Romantic solo author also affects scholarship on creative writing education through the belief that creativity should not—or perhaps cannot—be externally influenced, whether by a wider ecology or a specific mentor. For example, Mary Oliver believes ‘the poem requires of the writer not society or instruction, but a patch of profound and unbroken solitude’,²¹⁶ and Wandor adds that such viewpoints indicate that the ‘spectres of the grand triumvirate Muse/Genius/Inspiration’ haunt creative writing in university settings.²¹⁷ R. Keith Sawyer notes that Western Cultures, despite popularising creative writing as a university discipline, particularly emphasise an individual model of poetic production that questions the notion of poetry education: ‘They believe that creators work best when they are alone and unconstrained by convention or institutions. They believe that creations emerge, essentially fully formed, in a sudden flash of insight.’²¹⁸ ²¹⁹ Gilbert and Macleroy concur, stating ‘The argument goes: if writing is a “spontaneous” activity then clearly there’s little craft involved; masterpieces are either born fully formed or not.’²²⁰ Sawyer traces the history of this belief to Romantic ideas of authorship: ‘Many of us think of writing as the private, personal expression of a person’s very private inner vision. But these beliefs about writing are myths that are based in our culture’s individualist assumptions about how creativity works.’²²¹ Writing scholarship and culture therefore presents a Romantic, individualist notion of authorship that centralises the poet as source, which jars with educational and otherwise supportive systems that can be seen as antithetical to this model.

²¹³ Anonymous, ‘Poetry Mentee Interview’, 2022.

²¹⁴ Eavan Boland, *Journey with Two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet* (Carcanet, 2011), p. 18.

²¹⁵ Westbrook and Ryan, *Beyond Craft*, p. 92.

²¹⁶ Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook*, 1st ed (Harcourt Brace & Co, 1994), p. 117.

²¹⁷ Wandor, ‘Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1’, p. 115.

²¹⁸ Sawyer, ‘Writing as a Collaborative Act’, p. 167.

²¹⁹ Similar beliefs are also prevalent in Germany. Joanna Nissel, ‘Solitary Poets in Germany and the UK’, *Writing in Education*, no. 90 (Winter 2023), pp. 25–28 (p. 27) <<https://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/wie-editions/editions/issue-90-winter-2023.html>>.

²²⁰ Gilbert and Macleroy, ‘Different Ways of Descending into the Crypt’, p. 256.

²²¹ Sawyer, ‘Writing as a Collaborative Act’, p. 166.

1.3.1 An Emerging Counterculture of Collaborative Authorship and Mentoring as the Site of Conflict Between Opposing Ideas of Authorship

Meanwhile, as the critical tones of Sawyer, Gilbert and Macleroy, Wandor, Westbrook and Ryan in my analysis above allude, more recent literature intervenes against Romantic single authorship and sets up less individualistic models of writing, either through critique or explicitly offering new models. For instance, these scholars, as well as Stillinger,²²² Boterf,²²³ and Ede and Lunsford present writing practice as ‘inherently collaborative’.²²⁴ These two notions of authorship—individualist and collaborative—signal the potential challenge of poetry mentoring: mentorship risks breaching the integrity of the single author through the influence of the mentor on the mentee, and yet the process of mentoring is somewhat collaborative since it invites a second party to shape a poet’s development. As such, poetry mentorship deals with two opposing notions of authorship simultaneously. Poetry mentorship studies may therefore act as a bridge between the two.

Contemporary mentors and mentees’ accounts illustrate that both models of authorship are at play in poetry mentorship, since they suggest mentorship must walk a fine line between instructing the mentee and ensuring the mentee directs the mentorship. For instance, mentees regularly reflect their mentors guided them in unexpected ways that challenged their preconceptions, such as trying new styles of writing.²²⁵ One mentee recounts their mentor suggesting they try performing to a musical backing track, which broadened their conceptions of what their practice could incorporate.²²⁶ Elvire Roberts says, ‘Harriet [Tarlo] was able to steer me towards poets and forms that could be my role models, to challenge me, to discuss feminism in poetry and how poetry might tackle issues of gendering.’²²⁷ Such interventions are in-keeping with a less Romantic notion of authorship since they involve active input from another poet. In these examples, the mentors’ approaches were highly beneficial to the mentees’ practices.

Conversely, mentees also feel concerned about the power mentors hold, particularly in the context of a core mentoring method: workshopping. This suggests mentees may have felt their integrity as a single author was at risk since the poem could be considered, as Stillinger put it, ‘a collaborative product’, which, despite being ‘an extremely common phenomenon’, belies

²²² Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*, p. v.

²²³ Boterf, ‘Placing the Poet: The Topography of Authorship’, p. 80.

²²⁴ Ede and Lunsford, ‘Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship’, p. 335.

²²⁵ Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey*.

²²⁶ Anonymous, ‘Poetry Mentee Interview’.

²²⁷ Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey*.

the notion of the author as an individual person.²²⁸ One can interpret mentees as expressing this concern through the language of a loss of individuality and agency. For instance, three poets I interviewed, who all prefer to remain anonymous, raise concerns over mentorship becoming too controlling, at the expense of the mentee's voice and agency. One poet recounts their experience with their mentor, noting that it took several sessions with them before they felt comfortable enough to reject some of their suggested changes.²²⁹ They mention this was particularly because they esteemed and respected the mentor, and felt they could not question their advice until the two had developed more of a rapport.²³⁰ In addition, an organiser of poetry mentoring programmes warns that becoming 'over-dependent on your mentor's approval [...] gets a bit unhealthy. [There is] a risk that you start writing things to please your mentor'.²³¹ Finally, one of these poets experienced mentorship within Higher Education (HE), and they, along with multiple respondents to this project's survey,²³² find HE's power dynamics worrying since the mentor marks their work, which essentially imbues the mentor with the power to deem the mentee successful or not, placing additional pressure on the mentee to make suggested changes to their work.²³³ Sue Dymoke and Jane Spiro document this effect in their paper on the conflicts between poetry practice and academic practice, noting participants often demonstrate a 'sense of being compelled to write in a particular way for academic purposes.'²³⁴ Additionally, the fact that these poets only feel comfortable voicing such concerns anonymously is significant. For instance, if the mentor was substantially influential and the resultant work is collaborative, this would compromise the integrity of the single author. Therefore, the fact that the mentees ask for their accounts to be anonymised implies the presence of individualistic notions of authorship because it suggests they do not want their work to be seen as collaborative to any degree.

However, one cannot conflate collaborative authorship and a controlling mentorship. Mentoring risks sliding into the latter particularly when the mentor is widely esteemed or otherwise holds a position of power that enables them to coercively shape mentees' poetry in ways that feel untrue to their practice; this engages mentees in a collaboration to which they do not truly consent. As the examples of the anonymous mentor who suggested a musical backing track and Tarlo illustrate, mentees may be more comfortable when mentors offer ways of

²²⁸ Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius.*, p. v.

²²⁹ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

²³⁰ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

²³¹ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

²³² Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey.*

²³³ Janelle Adsit also alludes to this effect. Adsit, *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing*, p. 130.

²³⁴ Dymoke and Spiro, 'Poet-Academics and Academic-Poets: Writing Identities, Practices and Experiences within the Academy'.

challenging mentees or shaping their work but do not enforce them. Overall, these anonymous accounts demonstrate tension surrounding mentoring's power balances, suggesting competing ideas of authorship are at play in the mentoring process.

These competing notions ask poetry mentorship to simultaneously influence and not influence. Mentors and mentees engage in a somewhat collaborative process, while still presenting the mentee as the ideal single author. My interview with poet and mentor Rishi Dastidar neatly encapsulated this tension. When we discussed mentees anxiety over acknowledging their mentors for fear the work may not be considered entirely theirs, Dastidar responded:

I understand the impulse for that thought and feeling. [But] that betrays people who haven't necessarily been through the mill long enough to actually realise that their voice only comes through the reading and regurgitating and the writing of lots of different other writers and poets. Of course, there will be plenty of poets who are, bluntly, not good enough to escape their influences, and so the mentor's imprint is upon them. But then, [there are] also the imprints of the people who inspired them to start writing.²³⁵

Through his picture of poets developing by engaging with the voices and styles of other poets, Dastidar depicts authorship in poetry as inherently involving collaboration. This idea is echoed in Boterf's analysis of Foucault and Barthes, who he states, 'have reminded us, even if a work is penned in isolation by a single person, the work is still shot through and through with the ideological power structures of the society that the author inhabits.'²³⁶ Yet, Dastidar also describes the need to 'escape' the influence of one's mentors, which illustrates the legacy of the single author through the requirement to establish a distinct writerly identity. Moreover, his statement that it is *experienced* and *high quality* poets that will be able to establish such a distinct voice further supports the idea that individuality is still greatly valued in contemporary writing culture, since individuality delineates the best writers. By presenting both these pressures on writers, Dastidar suggests mentorship needs to hold up both ideas of authorship at once.

Dastidar then went on to portray the mentorships of Malika's Poetry Kitchen (MPK) and Roddy Lumsden as examples of successful mentorships precisely because they both shape the poet and are not overly controlling of them. For instance, he describes MPK's strengths in focusing on what the collective's members want to do and not having 'an imposition of style [...] of a right, [...] kitchen-way of writing.'²³⁷ Here, poetry mentorship is not so controlling as to

²³⁵ Dastidar, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

²³⁶ Boterf, 'Placing the Poet: The Topography of Authorship', p. 80.

²³⁷ Dastidar, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

produce facsimiles of the mentor, but allows the mentees' voices to flourish. Dastidar reinforces this idea through his description of the late Roddy Lumsden, a 'very well loved poet and mentor figure to many' known for his informal approach to mentoring—as noted by his mentee, Jon Stone,²³⁸ Will May,²³⁹ and multiple survey respondents.²⁴⁰ Just as MPK created no distinct style, Dastidar says Lumsden engendered a certain 'Roddy playfulness in some people' but his mentoring was not controlling enough to produce 'a Roddy school' of writing, which Dastidar cites as a testament to Lumsden's 'gift' as a mentor, 'as someone who was able to ring out the unique things in all those people he worked with.'²⁴¹ Dastidar adds,

That's ultimately what a good mentor is—it's the ability to hone in on that thing that makes you, *you*, as a writer, and then actually go—*how do we make that flower and flourish in the best possible way?*²⁴²

The poetry mentor, Heidi Williamson, describes poetry mentorship similarly in an interview with her mentee, Kostya Tsolakis, stating, 'In the past [in their mentorship] we've talked about ownership. [...] When you're working with people editing [...] it's their poem. They need to make the decisions.'²⁴³ Together, Dastidar and Williamson's accounts of what makes a good poetry mentor articulates striking a balance between influencing the work and allowing the mentee's voice to flourish in a manner that feels true to their individual identity as a writer. Poet, Richard Hugo, articulates exactly this in his writing primer, stating that through his teachings,

I am, without wanting or trying to, telling you to write like me. But I hope you learn to write like you. [...] I hope I don't teach you how to write, but how to teach yourself how to write. [...] You'll never be a poet until you realise that everything I say [...] may be right for me, but it is wrong for you.²⁴⁴

In short, to be a legitimate poet, mentees must have authority over their own practice, only taking the teachings which feel right for them, resisting the influence of the mentor to maintain their individuality. Brett Millier echoes this when she states, 'whatever mentoring is or could be, it is the task of the poet of genius eventually to cast it off.'²⁴⁵ These accounts help us locate poetry mentorship as the place where competing ideas of authorship are at play.

²³⁸ Jon Stone, 'Not the Magician's Apprentice: On Roddy Lumsden and "Informal" Mentorship', unpublished paper delivered at Poetry and Mentoring Symposium (8 October 2021).

²³⁹ May, 'Extract from the Draft Manuscript of "Poetry and Mentoring", Forthcoming with Liverpool University Press'.

²⁴⁰ Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey*.

²⁴¹ Dastidar, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

²⁴² Dastidar, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

²⁴³ Heidi Williamson and Kostya Tsolakis, 'Heidi Williamson and Kostya Tsolakis In Conversation', unpublished paper delivered at Poetry and Mentoring Symposium (8 October 2021).

²⁴⁴ Richard Hugo, *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing*, First published as a Norton paperback (W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), p. 3.

²⁴⁵ Millier, 'Mentoring and the Female Poet's Voice', p. 124.

To return to my analysis earlier in this chapter on mentoring's teaching tools, these competing ideas of authorship offer another explanation of how the term coaching has become near-synonymous to mentoring in a poetry context. Coaching typically uses the Socratic method. The coach asks their client questions, which allows the client to figure out for themselves what they would like to do next. In doing so, the client is in control of the trajectory of their own development; Hugo neatly summarises this in his hope for poets to teach themselves how to write.²⁴⁶ Coaching therefore honours the Romantic concept that poetry production is rooted in the self, while also inviting another party into the poetry practice.

1.4 Chapter Conclusion

Rosaline Ambler-Alderman's ecologically-informed poetry analysis outlines:

the notion of interconnection may [...] remind us of quite how instrumental our own activities are and how much our works and processes are not simply imbricated within the works and processes of an external environment, which implicitly entails a dangerous conceptual dualism, but actually constitute it even as it constitutes us.²⁴⁷

A foundational aspect of this chapter has been to contest the conceptual border between poet and environment. I have presented ecological models to depict poets' environment, a domain of relationships joining parts. In making explicit the mass of relationships between parts in the ecology, these models encapsulate the extent to which poetry mentoring is emmeshed within the poetry ecology—it is 'not simply imbricated' with ecology but is one of the elements that constitutes it.²⁴⁸ Ambler-Alderman also points out that ecology 'constitutes us'.²⁴⁹ Through the transmission of resources, my ecological models document how ecological parts influence one another and how this influence enables them to engage in poetic processes like production, education, and reception, amongst others. Specific to mentoring, this chapter has provided the theoretical framework for how mentoring shapes poets, providing them with resources, skills, and expertise, as well as how mentoring enables them to build further connections in the ecology. As such, my ecological models make visible the impact of mentoring beyond the mentorship itself. They call into question the notion that poetry writing and mentoring can be considered in ways that isolate them from 'external' influence. Instead, mentoring practice is inextricable from the ecology.

²⁴⁶ Hugo, *The Triggering Town*, p. 3.

²⁴⁷ Rosalind Sarah Rachel Ambler-Alderman, 'Poetry on the Edge of Chaos: The "Ecosystem" and the "Ecotext"' (University of Southampton, 2017), pp. 74–75 <<https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/415938/>> [accessed 28 March 2025].

²⁴⁸ Ambler-Alderman, 'Poetry on the Edge of Chaos: The "Ecosystem" and the "Ecotext"', p. 75.

²⁴⁹ Ambler-Alderman, 'Poetry on the Edge of Chaos: The "Ecosystem" and the "Ecotext"', p. 75.

To begin intervening against mentoring as solely formal and dyadic, I set up the term, poetry mentoring. My comparison of how mentorship has been understood across disciplines and examples of poetry mentorship in the past thirty-five years has unearthed a longstanding vagueness around both. Poets and scholarship usually sees mentoring as a formally-focused, dyadic relationship between an expert poet and less experienced mentee, typically involving workshopping the mentee's poems. Yet poetry mentorship is a broad field that can be conducted by a range of figures and work towards various technical and holistic outcomes. I therefore delineated specific forms of mentoring on which I focus. In practical terms, this focal group ensures this doctoral project remains focused and achievable within the timeframe. On a theoretical level, the focal group challenges normative notions of mentorship, since it includes both dyadic and group models, as well as mentorships encompassing both formal and non-formal matters.

I have suggested it is necessary to interrogate individualism and isolationism to open mentorship towards multiplicity and interconnection. Chapter One has laid the foundation for the interrogation by detailing that the dominant ways of conceptualising poetry writing practice, poetry mentoring practice, and existing as a poet in the UK today tend to be individualist and isolationist, particularly at the level of scholarship. Using these foundations, I continue to challenge such narratives in subsequent chapters. In terms of the specific aspects of individualism and isolationism established in this chapter, manifestations include the continued primacy of the Romantic notion of authorship, which sees writing as an individual practice happening in isolation, literally, as well as conceptually understood as isolated from external influences since it stems from the inner genius. Another example lies in poets and organisations perceiving themselves as isolated or poorly connected long after they have become well-established and embedded in the poetry ecology. Moreover, individualism and isolationism affect mentoring's teaching methods, since the Romantic figure of the writer contributes to an anxiety that the mentor could overly influence the mentee, thus risking the integrity of single authorship. As a result, coaching tools that prioritise the mentee's autonomy become part of poetry mentoring, which also reflects tools used in the original Odyssean dyad. While individualism and isolationism are dominant, my research also gestures to an emerging counterculture that understands poetry writing and learning in more interconnected and collaborative ways, as seen in the notion of writing ecologies and in models of writerly development and authorship that acknowledge external influences. This counterculture provides a critical predecessor and precedent for my argument to broaden understandings of mentorship. My research builds on this by continuing to intervene against notions of solitariness

and by locating poetry mentorship as a site of conflict between these two ways of understanding poetry writing practice.

Overall, this chapter has addressed questions of perception and definition. Poetry mentoring, poetry writing practice, and the poetry ecology—how might we, and how do poets and scholars, see or define these? How might such understandings correspond with experience? As such, there is a slight phenomenological tilt to this chapter, aiming towards articulating ‘basic structures of [poets’] experience and understanding’ with a particular emphasis on those processes most relevant to poetry mentoring, and exploring the ‘difference between the things we are aware of and the contents of our awareness of them’.²⁵⁰ In raising the phenomenological in Chapter One, I can continue this line of exploration in subsequent chapters. Throughout the thesis, I repeatedly question existing understandings of poetry mentorship in order to articulate that it is not only dyadic, formal, and neither is it separate from the poetry ecology. Phenomenology is especially pertinent to Chapter Two’s elucidation of differing beliefs about mentorship’s approaches and emphases, which I will now commence.

²⁵⁰ Taylor Carman, ‘Foreword’, in M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (Routledge, 2012), pp. 9–18 (pp. 9–10), doi:10.4324/9780203720714.

Chapter 2 Poetry Mentorship as Multimodal and Communal Across Mainstream and Experimental Contexts

In her history of twentieth-century poetry, Daniella Jancsó describes poets' tendency to think about poetry practice in distinct ways, creating binaries or opposites, and, eventually, enemies:

The first thing that catches the eye on any number of 'maps' of twentieth-century poetry is therefore a border that cuts across the landscape, dividing the terrain into two parts. In normative discourses of modern poetry, this demarcation line is often construed as a trench and accordingly, one speaks of the 'poetry wars', of two hostile camps that have now been fighting each other for over a hundred years. [...] For all the variation in the naming of the opponents, critics of widely differing persuasions tend to settle on an antithesis of sorts: avant-garde vs. mainstream, innovative vs. traditionalist, experimental vs. formalist, impersonal vs. personal and, perhaps most notoriously, difficult vs. accessible. [...] binary divisions are distorting at best, unserviceable at worst.¹

Ways of supporting a poet's practice are likewise framed in an disaggregating manner. For instance, Michelle Cross (summarised by Lindsay Drager) designates definitive categories such as pedagogies 'focusing on [...] the publishing industry (commercial pedagogy), [and] literature's genres (literary pedagogy)'.² Michelene Wandor likewise groups pedagogies into binaries, positing 'The writing-as-therapy approach, [and] the training-of-great writers approach.'³ While of course different approaches exist, my research suggests thinking in such separate and potentially binary categories is, in Jancsó's words, distorting. Rather than prioritising single and/or separate emphases, instead, it is more fruitful and accurate to think about different approaches to poetry practice and their supportive mechanisms as overlapping, as having shared characteristics that can exist in different combinations.

Using this approach, in this chapter, I investigate a range of further practices that poetry writing and mentoring incorporate, expanding the notions of poetry mentoring from Chapter One. This investigation takes place in two parts. First I attend to a spectrum of approaches to poetry writing, whether they align with approaches to poetry mentorship, and how poets, mentors, and scholars conceptualise the interplay between approaches. In doing so, I demonstrate that mentoring extends beyond formal or single emphases. Secondly, I examine

¹ Jancsó, *Twentieth-Century Metapoetry and the Lyric Tradition*, pp. 3–12.

² Drager, 'Against "The End": The Art Studio as Template for the Creative Writing Classroom', p. 82.

³ Wandor, 'Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1', p. 120.

how mentoring differs in the context of experimental poetry and contend that these differences can open mentoring to include communal models. I analyse the political impulses beneath mentoring in mainstream and experimental contexts, ultimately unearthing a political dimension to the rise of dyadic poetry mentoring. Across this chapter, I draw on spatial language to depict writing and mentoring as more than a purely formal dyad by gesturing to their multifaceted natures; I use terms including layering, overlapping, weaving, integrating, entwining, braiding, and merging. I will now describe the potential layers of these practices in more detail.

2.1 Part One: Broadening the Modalities of Poetry Writing and Mentoring Beyond Solely Formal

At poetry's heart are its formal elements that comprise the poem itself, such as line break, metre, titling conventions, layout, stanzas, punctuation, form, etc. Texts that support the development of a poetry practice cover these at length, such as the poetry primers and writing guides by John Lennard,⁴ Helena Nelson,⁵ Jo Bell and Jane Commene,⁶ Jeffrey Wainwright,⁷ Matthew Sweeney and John Hartley Williams,⁸ Michael Baldwin,⁹ Glyn Maxwell,¹⁰ David Constantine,¹¹ and Fiona Sampson.¹²

However, technical skill is only one layer of poetry practice. As the presence of resources like happiness in my ecological models from Chapter One allude, one must also consider the realm and role of emotion in poetry production and education. There are three distinct manifestations of this I wish to raise: the poem, the process, and the pedagogy.¹³ Poetry scholarship treats the entwinement of formal, technical skills and emotion differently across these three levels. The first may be easily dismissed because of its ubiquity: namely that poems can be highly emotional artefacts;¹⁴ they can express emotion, provoke an emotional response

⁴ John Lennard, *The Poetry Handbook: A Guide to Reading Poetry for Pleasure and Practical Criticism* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁵ Helena Nelson, *How Not to Get Your Poetry Published* (HappenStance, 2016).

⁶ Bell and Commene, *How to Be a Poet*.

⁷ Jeffrey Wainwright, *Poetry: The Basics*, 2nd edn (Routledge, 2011).

⁸ Matthew Sweeney and John Hartley Williams, *Writing Poetry* (Teach Yourself, 2003).

⁹ Baldwin, *The Way to Write Poetry*.

¹⁰ Maxwell, *On Poetry*.

¹¹ Constantine, *Poetry*.

¹² Fiona Sampson, *Poetry Writing: The Expert Guide* (Robert Hale, 2009).

¹³ Which one might align with the reader, the poet, and the mentor, respectively.

¹⁴ Philip N. Johnson-Laird and Keith Oatley, 'How Poetry Evokes Emotions', *Acta Psychologica*, 224 (2022), pp. 1–12 (p. 1), doi:10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103506; Belinda Jack, 'Poetry and Emotion', *The Lancet*, 391.10122 (2018), pp. 732–33 (p. 732), doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(18)30265-4.

in a reader,¹⁵ which creative writing education scholar, Meera Atkinson, notes is ‘part of [writing and reading’s] appeal and importance.’¹⁶ The formal characteristics of the poem work towards representing and/or complexifying the emotion of the poem’s content, particularly in the case of lyric poetry.¹⁷ For instance, Karen Simecek describes lyric poetry as ‘poetry that is expressive and relies on the formal features of the work and the effects they produce.’¹⁸

The second level I wish to discuss is how the process of *writing* poetry engages with the emotions. This may include the poet expressing their emotions through writing a poem, or the poet coming to a greater sense of understanding surrounding a personal experience or topic through the act of writing. Jo Bell alludes to this kind of practice when she remarks, ‘Poetry, like other art forms, is one way to try and make sense of our lives.’¹⁹ Poets operating like this may engage in poetry with the ambition to develop their thoughts, feelings, and ideas—to nourish the inner self and process their emotions. This is hardly a ground-breaking description in the context of creative writing as a therapeutic tool. What I discuss is the concept that poetry writing practice which aims towards high quality, publishable, or otherwise serious literary ambitions can likewise involve emotional and personal processes that impact the poet. For instance, Kim Moore describes re-experiencing some of the incidents of male violence the poems in her prize-winning collection, *All the Men I Never Married*,²⁰ drew from during the composition process: ‘as I was writing [I] “sent” myself back there’.²¹ This implies the act of writing likewise causes poets to engage with the emotional sphere alongside the technical one, perhaps through reliving a past experience. Through this writing process, Moore came to understand the ‘dark and upsetting’ side of experiences she had previously ‘laugh[ed] off’.²² Liz Berry describes a similar experience while writing her collection, *The Republic of Motherhood*, reflecting on writing as ‘a safe way to explore those really difficult, painful, taboo feelings’.²³ While for Moore and Berry this emotionally-engaged writing practice has led them to emotionally process and explore in a

¹⁵ Johnson-Laird and Oatley, ‘How Poetry Evokes Emotions’, p. 10; Karen Simecek, ‘Beyond Narrative: Poetry, Emotion and the Perspectival View’, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 55.4 (2015), pp. 497–513 (p. 512), doi:10.1093/aesthj/ayv041.

¹⁶ Meera Atkinson, ‘The Case for Trauma-Informed Creative Writing Teaching’, *New Writing*, 20.3 (2023), pp. 330–47 (p. 342), doi:10.1080/14790726.2022.2149810.

¹⁷ Pirjo Lyytikäinen makes a case for experimental poetry to be analysed in a similar fashion. Pirjo Lyytikäinen, ‘Interpretation and Emotion Effects in Literature: Reading Contemporary Experimental Poetry’, in *Translation and Interpretation: Practicing the Knowledge of Literature*, ed. by Raul Calzoni, Di Blasio, and Greta Perletti, 1st ed (V&R Unipress, 2022), pp. 39–48 (pp. 40–41).

¹⁸ Simecek, ‘Beyond Narrative’, p. 497.

¹⁹ Bell and Commane, *How to Be a Poet*.

²⁰ Kim Moore, *All the Men I Never Married* (Seren, 2021).

²¹ Lenni Sanders and Kim Moore, ‘Interview with Kim Moore’, Poetry Business, 22 March 2021 <<https://poetrybusiness.co.uk/2021/03/22/interview-with-kim-moore/>> [accessed 29 January 2025].

²² Sanders and Moore, ‘Interview with Kim Moore’.

²³ Romalyn Ante and Liz Berry, ‘Holding Dialect up to the Light: Romalyn Ante Interviews Liz Berry’, *Harana Poetry*, 1.2 (2019) <<https://www.haranapoetry.com/interview-liz-berry>> [accessed 28 October 2024].

positive sense, Matt Bryden recounts engaging in a similar process to more negative effect. In an interview with poet Rachel Lewis, he details writing about the stillbirth of his daughter in his 2023 collection, *The Glassblower's House*, 'It's almost as if by writing about these things and telling them in your own way you can imagine that you're above them, that you've mastered them. But not really. They're still alive.'²⁴ These three accounts imply that poetry writing practice, particularly when the poetry engages with deeply personal topics, can simultaneously work towards creating high quality poetry and activate emotional processes concerning the poet themselves.

Yet research on how to support poets' development often separates these layers. For instance, for Wandor, creative writing pedagogies can either focus on literary ambitions, or therapy, not both at once. She critiques 'writing-as-therapy' because it 'overvalues' the person at the expense of the quality of the work, which presents the practices as working against each other rather than symbiotically.²⁵ In 2005, prolific poet, publisher, and curator, Nancy Kuhl, wrote on the divide between these two approaches in her essay, 'Personal Therapeutic Writing vs. Literary Writing'. Through evoking a boxing match in 'vs.', the essay's title clearly alludes that writers perceive formal and emotional approaches to practice antagonistically. In this essay, Kuhl recognises the potential for creative writing to emotionally support writers but questions its place within serious literary practice:

Clearly, writing is a great way for many to deal with difficulties in their lives and gain helpful insight into their emotions and experiences. Private journal and diary writing, however, differs dramatically from literary writing [...] solace and self-discovery cannot be the goals of a productive literary creative writing workshop.²⁶

She goes on to state that this is because of a risk of a lessened quality of work, similar to Wandor. Kuhl does acknowledge a relationship between the two practices: 'The public writing [a term Kuhl uses to describe writing that aims towards quality and publication] produced in workshops *can* begin where private writing [writing that supports the writer emotionally] leaves off'.²⁷ Gregory Light proposes a similar trajectory, offering 'Releasing' as the first stage of writer-development, a practice that 'provides a kind of personal "therapy" and or self-knowledge'.²⁸

²⁴ Rachel Lewis, 'Writing about Grief and Loss with Matt Bryden', *A Poet's Work*, 24 November 2024 <https://open.substack.com/pub/apoetswork/p/writing-about-grief-and-loss-with?r=1tl2qi&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email> [accessed 25 November 2024].

²⁵ Wandor, 'Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1', pp. 119–20.

²⁶ Nancy Kuhl, 'Personal Therapeutic Writing vs. Literary Writing', in *Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom: The Authority Project*, ed. by Anna Leahy, New Writing Viewpoints (Multilingual Matters, 2005), 1, pp. 3–12 (p. 4).

²⁷ Kuhl, 'Personal Therapeutic Writing vs. Literary Writing', p. 5.

²⁸ Gregory Light, 'From the Personal to the Public: Conceptions of Creative Writing in Higher Education', *Higher Education*, 43.2 (2002), pp. 257–76 (p. 268), doi:10.1023/A:1013728500652.

Light, like Kuhl, presents writing practices that involve some element of inward-looking, personal or emotional process, as aligned with beginner writers, the early drafting stage, and should be left behind before a work may become a serious, high quality literary creation. Light explains how this viewpoint has come to exist, noting that it is rooted in the resistance to creative writing as an academic discipline on the grounds that it is ‘not “serious” and encourages self-indulgence’.²⁹ It is striking that deeply emotional poetry collections are still praised for avoiding being ‘self-indulgent’, such as in Rupert Loydell’s review of Mike Ferguson’s *Dark and Tender Principles* to name just one example.³⁰ Gillian White notes that the shame attached to highly personal works is based on a ‘caricatured figure of the Romantic lyric [...] defined as unmitigated individualistic subjectivism, self-absorption, leisured privilege, and ahistoricism.’³¹ Based on this model, mentorship, particularly in workshop contexts, splits technical, formal, or otherwise critical study, from expressive, emotional, and personal practice. Don Bialostosky describes this, critiquing academia for emphasising ‘symbol-hunting and theme-identifying’ in the close analysis of poems, since it ‘alienate[s] students from potentially shareable feelings and attitudes in poems’.³²

Accounts of contemporary creative writing pedagogy imply a disconnect in the contemporary UK poetry ecology between the ways that poems and poetry practice operate, and the ways poetry is taught. Poetry education often splits personal, emotionally-engaged practices and formal, technical, or otherwise critical approaches. However, some educators and mentors are starting to move towards more multiplicitous approaches that integrate both.³³ For example, Glenn Clifton’s arguments for the importance of ‘critical-creative literacy’ in the creative writing workshop note this kind of hybridity ‘emphasiz[es] the crucial role of critical thinking in student self-development without making that critical thinking seem external to the creative impulses that motivate writing’.³⁴ Yet, overall, pedagogical approaches iterate a dichotomy between formal excellence and personal or emotional engagement. My research illustrates that incorporating multiple approaches better reflects the nature of poetry and poetry writing practices, building a bridge to span the disconnect between the poem and poet, and pedagogy.

²⁹ Light, ‘From the Personal to the Public: Conceptions of Creative Writing in Higher Education’, p. 260.

³⁰ Rupert Loydell, ‘Dark and Tender Principles by Mike Ferguson (Gazebo Gravy Press)’, *Tears In The Fence*, 21 September 2023 <<https://tearsinthefence.com/2023/09/21/dark-and-tender-principles-by-mike-ferguson-gazebo-crazy-press/>> [accessed 30 January 2025].

³¹ Gillian White, *Lyric Shame: The “Lyric” Subject of Contemporary American Poetry* (Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 5, doi:10.4159/harvard.9780674736313.

³² Don Bialostosky, *How to Play a Poem* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), p. 70.

³³ I explore further examples in Chapter Three’s analysis of poetry mentoring and therapy.

³⁴ Glenn Clifton, ‘Critical-Creative Literacy and Creative Writing Pedagogy’, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 91.1 (2022), pp. 51–66 (p. 63), doi:10.3138/utq.91.1.04.

However, formal and personal are only two possible emphases for mentoring. To properly deconstruct the idea that mentoring is a solely technical practice, I will now outline a larger range of approaches, the tensions around them, and possible ways they can intersect.

Formal and personal layers of poetry practice can entwine differently across writing communities. One possible outcome is an amateur poet, meant in a non-disparaging sense as one who simply enjoys writing poetry; as one writing facilitator for the Arts Council England ‘Creative Writing in Schools’ project (2015-2018) noted: ‘it’s just about picking up a pen and enjoying the experience.’³⁵ Here, in the words of clinical psychologist and poet, Arthur Lerner, ‘the focus is on the person not the poem.’³⁶ Another related practice is writing-for-wellbeing — popular across the UK, and widely supported by workshop groups such as those led by facilitator, Joanna Barnard. Interdisciplinary researchers, Reinekke Lengelle and Katrin Den Elzen, define writing for wellbeing as ‘a supportive, effective, and beneficial medium that fosters self-awareness and self-understanding, emotional regulation, adaptation to loss and transformation of distress, personal growth and post-traumatic growth.’³⁷ Writing for wellbeing is closely aligned with, and indeed, overlaps with, poetry that concerns the more directly therapeutic processes I referred to earlier, which poets Celia Hunt and Fiona Sampson describe ‘as a means of gaining insight into oneself, of coping with difficult emotional or psychological problems, or as a way of dealing with difficult life experiences such as emotional traumas, illnesses, ageing and death.’³⁸ Many studies have evidenced poetry’s potential to be used in this way, such as Christina Thatcher’s research on writing’s power to process grief and anxiety for those bereaved due to addiction.^{39 40} One mentor, who wished to remain anonymous, spoke about their mentoring practice as ‘not really that interested in poetry as a career’ but rather the healing and transformative effects of writing.⁴¹ From the amateur poet, to writing for wellbeing and therapeutic methods of writing, there are an array of approaches to poetry practice that

³⁵ Millard and others, *Creative Writing in Schools - Executive Summary*, p. 2.

³⁶ Nicholas Mazza, *Poetry Therapy: Theory and Practice* (Brunner-Routledge, 2003), p. 5.

³⁷ Reinekke Lengelle and Katrin Den Elzen, *Writing for Wellbeing: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Routledge, 2023), p. 23, doi:10.4324/9781003248026.

³⁸ Celia Hunt and Sampson, Fiona, ‘Introduction’, in *The Self on the Page: Theory and Practice of Creative Writing in Personal Development*, ed. by Celia Hunt and Fiona Sampson (Kingsley, 1998), pp. 9–18 (p. 10).

³⁹ Christina Thatcher, ‘In Dialogue: How Writing to the Dead and the Living Can Increase Self-Awareness in Those Bereaved by Addiction’, *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 86.2 (2022), pp. 434–56, doi:10.1177/0030222820976277. Christina Thatcher, ‘Whys and What Ifs: Writing and Anxiety Reduction in Individuals Bereaved by Addiction’, *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 18.1 (2023), pp. 2–15, doi:10.1080/15401383.2021.1924097.

⁴⁰ Hunt, Sampson, and Thatcher’s work indicates positive outcomes to therapeutically-engaged poetry practice, but the outcomes can also be negative. Emily Berry, for instance, discussed how her own practice and Lucie Brock-Broido’s inflicted emotional harm. Emily Berry, ‘Further Injury: Surviving Poetry’, *Too Little / Too Hard*, 1.1 (2023) <<https://tlth.co.uk/furtherinjury>> [accessed 4 July 2024].

⁴¹ Anonymous, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’.

focus on the development of the person alongside, and sometimes over, the formal development of the writing.

Such kinds of practice have roots in the writer's notebook, which itself sprang from journalling practice. Writers and poets throughout history have famously used journals as a reflective space to support their literary endeavours. Virginia Woolf,⁴² Rainer Maria Rilke,⁴³ and Dorothy Wordsworth⁴⁴ are three such examples, with Woolf noting the importance of 'writing [...] as self-expression'.⁴⁵ The journal, however, was usually expected to be shared amongst the writers' contemporaries. In more recent writing-education research, journalling practice has been reconceptualised as writers using a private notebook to support their writing. For instance, the famous children's author, David Almond, advocates for the messy and generative space of the notebook as a useful tool to encourage a regular writing practice.⁴⁶ Writer and writing practice researcher, Vicky Adams, utilised the notebook with a group of beginner writers, observing its effectiveness in a variety of capacities, including reflection, reassurance, and archiving.⁴⁷ Some approaches to poetry may build from this 'notebooking' practice, offering an approach to writing that is reflective and not necessarily aimed towards publication, since the writing has the freedom to be messy and unformed and may therefore be hard to interpret for an external reader—in the words of Kim Etherington, 'When viewed through a healing lens, we are not required to have a complete or coherent story'.⁴⁸ In this way, poetry practices that more explicitly engage in the emotional or personal realms may refigure the public-facing writer's journal as nourishing the inner self first and foremost.⁴⁹

⁴² Virginia Woolf, *Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf* (2013).

⁴³ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Diaries of a Young Poet*, trans. by Edward A. Snow and Michael Winkler (W.W. Norton, 1998).

⁴⁴ Erin Lafford, 'Dorothy Wordsworth and the Writing of Resolve', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 51.3 (2022), pp. 207–24, doi:10.1093/camqtly/bfac024.

⁴⁵ Wandor, 'Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1', p. 116.

⁴⁶ David Almond, 'Get a Notebook - A Response from David Almond', *Dare to Write Library*, 2018 <<https://daretowrite.org/library/author-responses/david-almond-get-a-notebook/>> [accessed 2 March 2023].

⁴⁷ Vicky Adams, 'Blank Pages: The Role(s) of the Notebook in Creating Wellbeing During a Series of Creative Writing Workshops', *Writing in Practice*, 1.1 (2015) <<https://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/wip-editions/articles/blank-pages-the-roles-of-the-notebook-in-creating-wellbeing-during-a-series-of-creative-writing-workshops.html>> [accessed 31 January 2023].

⁴⁸ Kim Etherington, 'Researching, Writing, and Publishing Trauma Stories: Learning from Practice', *The Lapidus International Research and Innovation Community Journal*, 1.1 (2020), pp. 62–85 (p. 77) <https://lapidus.modulostudio.co/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/LIRIC_Journal_1-1.pdf#page=9> [accessed 29 October 2024].

⁴⁹ Although it should be noted that the writer's notebook has not been universally transformed to a tool for personal development. Writers such as Katrin Den Elzen see the notebook as essential in developing serious literary works. Katrin Den Elzen, 'Narrative Renewal: Investigating the Practice of Writing a Grief Memoir Through the Lens of the Practitioner-as-Research', *The Lapidus International Research and Innovation Community Journal*, 1.1 (2020), pp. 42–61 (p. 56) <https://lapidus.modulostudio.co/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/LIRIC_Journal_1-1.pdf#page=9> [accessed 29 October 2024].

Given that the writing may be hard for an external reader to understand and the poet may never intend to share their words, support for these practices may not consider publication as an end goal; by contrast, writer-development theories, research on writing practice, and primary evidence from mentoring today usually features publication as a core ambition. For instance, the models by David Ian Hanauer⁵⁰ and Peter Sansom feature forms of sharing as the final stages of development.⁵¹ In *Literary Rebels*, Lise Jaillant sets out three main educational models for writers since the 20th century—the ‘Informal mentorship model’, the ‘Creative Writing programmes’ model, and the ‘Radical individualism’ model—all of which work towards becoming ‘a published writer’.⁵² Nine Arches Press situates publication as a pinnacle in their Instagram post announcing the eighth round of the Primers mentoring scheme. The very first line, designed to quickly grab the attention of prospective mentees and thus indicating desirability, reads, ‘Guide your poems into print!’.⁵³ Likewise, poetry mentor, Suzannah Evans, describes prospective mentees approaching her because they ‘want to publish their work’, which implies a publication-centric journey is common within contemporary UK poetry mentoring.⁵⁴ The survey issued for this project reinforced this conclusion, since 79% of respondents said they engage in mentoring ‘to develop a literary craft, perhaps with the ambition of publication’.⁵⁵

Poets who aspire towards formal excellence often use publication as a metric of success and quality. Jaillant’s research suggests this by featuring the status of ‘Published Writer’ as the final stage of development, which alludes that publication acts as a marker to indicate that a poet has reached a certain skill level.⁵⁶ Creative writing degree courses concretise this by making this scale explicit in their marking criteria. For instance, the 2017/18 handbook for Bath Spa University’s MA in creative writing stated, ‘Creative work achieving Distinction level marks [...] is essentially of publishable quality’.⁵⁷ This is a localised example. On a national scale, Elizabeth Forbes examines the function of creative writing HE courses, stating: ‘the objectives

⁵⁰ David Ian Hanauer, *Poetry as Research: Exploring Second Language Poetry Writing* (John Benjamins Pub. Co, 2010), p. 10.

⁵¹ Although Sansom affords a degree of cynicism about whether publication really equates to success and offers alternate ways of sharing work, such as at a writing workshop, he concludes by emphasising that ‘publishing for most of us is really about getting your work in magazines and, ultimately, in a book’, and that ‘publishing is essential’. Peter Sansom, *Writing Poems* (Bloodaxe Books, 1994), p. 10.

⁵² Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 233.

⁵³ Nine Arches Press, ‘Primers Volume Eight: Guide Your Poems into Print!’, Instagram, 23 May 2025 <https://www.instagram.com/ninearchespress/p/DJ_2MZxs4TK/> [accessed 28 May 2025].

⁵⁴ Suzannah Evans, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’, July 2022.

⁵⁵ Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey*.

⁵⁶ Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 233.

⁵⁷ Bath Spa University, ‘Master of Arts in Creative Writing Student Handbook 2017-18’, Bath Spa University, September 2017, p. 19.

for creative writing programmes are about helping writers to [...] improve their writing'.⁵⁸ Forbes does not outright mention publication, here, but Jaillant's research completes the picture, expanding on what improving the writing means in concrete terms. She comments that the university writing workshop in its varying forms aims to help its students 'get their foot on the literary ladder' and its success stories are those whose work was published, such as Kazuo Ishiguro, Rose Tremain, and Ian McEwan.⁵⁹ This implies a journey in which improving the writing is only the middle step, and publication is the final one. Donald Hall, in his 1983 essay on ambition in poetry, summarises this journey: 'Publication stands in for achievement—as everyone knows, universities and grant-givers take publication as achievement'.⁶⁰ In this way, publishing is seen as an affirmation of writerly improvement, that formal textual strategies have achieved excellence. This explains why Forbes' writer-development model notes receiving recognition via publishing is important to a writer's sense of self—because being published affirms their identity as a real writer.⁶¹ The poet, Chris Rice, illustrates this in his poem, 'Tadpole Song', in which the speaker sees his poem in print and thinks, 'I am, at last, a *bona fide* poet'.⁶² Success for poets aspiring to technical excellence is therefore concretised via publication.

Achieving a sense of success in these two broad camps of approaching poetry practices are, respectively, external and internal processes. In formally-ambitious writing practices, success is often awarded externally by the publisher and is externally visible through the publication itself and the publication credit in the poet's biography, should they choose to cite it.⁶³ For poets prioritising personal development, success relates to whether the poet feels the writing process has benefitted them in some capacity. Success is thereby an internalised process that can only be granted by the poet themselves. If publication takes place, it can serve, as described by Etherington in her study of publishing a group anthology of trauma-writing, as a way of finding community, empathy, closure, and of validating the feelings and experiences articulated in the poem through the power of reader-as-witness.⁶⁴ While the publication itself may be externally visible, the extent to which the poet feels that publication has benefitted them is still an internal matter.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Forbes, 'Multiple Facets of the Developing Writer', *New Writing*, 14.2 (2017), pp. 265–74 (p. 270), doi:10.1080/14790726.2017.1290661.

⁵⁹ Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 15.

⁶⁰ Donald Hall, 'Poetry and Ambition', *The Kenyon Review*, 5.4 (1983), pp. 90–104 (p. 91), JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4335418>> [accessed 29 October 2024].

⁶¹ Forbes, 'Multiple Facets of the Developing Writer', p. 272.

⁶² Chris Rice, 'Tadpole Song', *Atrium*, 25 October 2024 <<https://atriumpoetry.com/2024/10/25/tadpole-song-chris-rice/>> [accessed 25 October 2024].

⁶³ This statement may be less applicable to some radical and/or experimental poets whose practices are formally ambitious but may not seek external validation in the same way.

⁶⁴ Etherington, 'Researching, Writing, and Publishing Trauma Stories: Learning from Practice', pp. 77–79.

When poets write to achieve both formal excellence and some kind of personally-oriented benefit (such as healing), publication performs multiple functions at once. This may transpire positively, such as if a poem published in a reputable magazine affirms the poem's technical skill and also validates the poet through an empathetic readership. However, since personally-engaged notions of success are non-binary (one may feel ambivalent about whether they have benefitted from the writing and publication of the poem) and subjective (a poet may change their mind about this), this can leave poets with layered practices having a much more complicated notion of whether they feel their practice has been successful.⁶⁵ For instance, Faber and Faber poet and editor of *The Poetry Review*, Emily Berry, questions whether writing about extremely raw personal topics was beneficial for her wellbeing, regardless of the poems' formal excellence.⁶⁶ Overall, then, the more layered one's practice becomes, the more complicated and multidimensionally a poet may feel about their practice, since it engages multiple notions of what writing practice should or could look like.

Publication as a marker of progress also speaks to another dimension of poetry practice, which is the controversial notion of poetry practice as a kind of career. Poets and critics have referred to poetic practice using the language of work for decades; for example, M.P. Ryan's 1980 doctoral thesis refers to the trajectory of poetic development as a career.⁶⁷ But since the 1990s, the use of such terminology has taken on a more politicised tone. As J.T. Welsch's account of contemporary poetry culture details, the rise of professionalised language took place concurrently with neoliberalism,⁶⁸ which led 'to every area of activity being construed as a competition for resources and market share', including creativity itself and idea generation.⁶⁹ At this point, culture shifted towards treating poets as commercial beings under the flag of entrepreneurship⁷⁰ —and it is notable that entrepreneurship is one of four central, cross-cutting themes in the Quality Assurance Agency's 2024 subject benchmark for the teaching of creative writing in Higher Education, which indicates its proliferation particularly in university settings.⁷¹ As Welsch notes, since the introduction of the poet-entrepreneur concept, there has been renewed and widespread concern that professionalization and capitalist commercialisation could corrupt the quality and artistic integrity of poetry. Professional or careerist approaches to

⁶⁵ The diffuse transference of abstract resources in my immersed ecological model (Chapter One) provides an apt visualisation of these non-binary and subjective outcomes of mentoring.

⁶⁶ Berry, 'Further Injury: Surviving Poetry'.

⁶⁷ Ryan, 'Career Patterns Among Contemporary British Poets', pp. 2–10.

⁶⁸ See later in this chapter for more investigation of neoliberalism's influence on poetry.

⁶⁹ Welsch, *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem Press, 2021), p. 5.

⁷⁰ Welsch, *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem Press, 2021), p. 190.

⁷¹ The Quality Assurance Agency, *Subject Benchmark Statement for Creative Writing (2024)*, Subject Benchmark Statements (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2024), p. 1 <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/sbs/sbs-creative-writing-24.pdf?sfvrsn=8601b481_4> [accessed 2 July 2024].

poetry are considered controversial, then, as they liken the personal, artistic, and intellectual process of poetic enquiry to a series of desirable, productively-exploitable attributes such as one might find on a LinkedIn profile. In this context, the writer's biography and publication history risks being reframed as a CV like any other profession, and the definition of poet shifts from simply one concerned with words to a practitioner forced to commercialise the poem. Such commercialisation goes against the Romantic understanding of poetry as an artform rooted in originality, authentic and genuine expression, in favour of mass production in service to trends in audience tastes and the associated selling potential. As Susan Rosenbaum summarises: 'a Wordsworthian practice of sincerity [...] succumbs to the commodification of art and experience', which is a 'moral threat' for poets.⁷² In essence, a professionalised approach contravenes the ethos of poetry itself.

Such a view fails to acknowledge that poets have always required financial support. Wordsworth was able to fund his practice through 'mainly [...] rents generated by family legacies'⁷³ and W.B. Yeats was sustained by patron Lady Gregory.⁷⁴ Robert Burns' income was perpetually low and his work was funded via a subscription model.⁷⁵ Ezra Pound had the patronage of Margaret Cravens⁷⁶ and his practice was later supported by his wife's annuity.⁷⁷ Yet the legacy of poetry's separation from money continues. Peter Riley articulates this in an interview with Ella Griffiths. In response to Griffiths' question about Riley 'pursu[ing] a career' in poetry, he replies, 'You just write. I've never believed in "promoting yourself" as a poet; [...] I've sought publication and participated in kindred enterprises from time to time, that's all.'⁷⁸ Rather than self-promotion, or engaging in poetry activities tactically to advance his reputation or esteem, Riley prioritises 'kindred' activities, activities that resonate with his spirit or ethos. In

⁷² Susan B. Rosenbaum, 'Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading' (University of Virginia press, 2007), p. 23.

⁷³ Sara Martín Alegre, 'Cool and Uncool Authors (On William Wordsworth)', *The Joys of Teaching Literature*, 4 March 2019 <<https://webs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre/2019/03/04/cool-and-uncool-authors-on-william-wordsworth>>; Wallace W. Douglas, 'Wordsworth as Business Man', *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 63.2 (1948), 2020/12/02 edn, pp. 625–41, Cambridge Core, doi:10.2307/459431.

⁷⁴ James Pethica, 'Patronage and Creative Exchange: Yeats, Lady Gregory and the Economy of Indebtedness', in *Yeats and Women: Yeats Annual No.9*, ed. by Deirdre Toomey (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1992), pp. 60–94 (p. 60), doi:10.1007/978-1-349-11928-8_3.

⁷⁵ Philip Butcher, 'Robert Burns and the Democratic Spirit', *Phylon (1940-1956)*, 10.3 (1949), p. 265, doi:10.2307/272397; Poetry Foundation, 'Robert Burns', Poetry Foundation, 1 July 2025 <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robert-burns>>.

⁷⁶ *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, ed. by Ira Nadel, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 267.

⁷⁷ Daniel Clifton, 'Dorothy Shakespear Pound, 87, Widow of Poet, Dies in England', Archives, *The New York Times*, 11 December 1973 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1973/12/11/archives/dorothy-shakespear-pound-87-widow-of-poet-dies-in-england-frequent.html>> [accessed 21 July 2025].

⁷⁸ Ella Griffiths, 'Interview: Peter Riley', Varsity Online, 11 October 2012 <<https://www.varsity.co.uk/culture/4899>> [accessed 27 June 2024].

the contemporary poetry ecology, Sarah Brouillette recounts that writers must walk a line between such conceptions of artistic production, stating that they are ‘figured contradictorily by creative-economy rhetoric, as at once newly valuable to capitalism and romantically honorable [sic] and free.’⁷⁹ It is this tension that underpins the controversy over understanding poetry in careerist or professionalised terms.

The language poets and scholars use to describe poetic development is symptomatic of this tension since ‘professional’ more commonly refers to formal poetry skills rather than those which are more in-keeping with the notion of poetry as a career. For instance, Jaillant describes formal skills as the focus of courses by The Poetry Society and Arvon at their conceptualisation, but she does so by utilising the term, professional.⁸⁰ She cites a 1999 *The Times* article in which Lottie Moggach describes an Arvon course: ‘you don’t have to think about the day job, or calling the plumber, or explain to impatient families that your “scribbling” is important to you.’⁸¹ Jaillant comments that this environment ‘allowed students to take their writing seriously and to position themselves as would-be professionals.’⁸² The Arvon mentees here, despite engaging in a practice to boost their formal ability, are conceptualised as professionals. Indeed, by taking their writing seriously and engaging in a more advanced formal practice, this moves the students from an amateur practice to one that focuses on a career—in other words, a profession.⁸³ In referring to formal skills by the term, ‘professional’, the contemporary UK poetry ecology repurposes careerist language in an artistic context. Yet there are skills within the poets’ repertoire that may be more immediately recognisable as aiding their career development, capabilities that enable poets to interact with the wider infrastructures of poetry, such as: how to contact a literary magazine, knowledge of suitable publishers, how to financially support a poetic practice with a portfolio career or second job, or self-marketing skills like social media and networking. In avoiding referring to these types of skills by the term, professional, poets reinstate the boundaries of what poetry practice means, placing the emphasis on the art rather than auxiliary skills that influence how art is platformed and

⁷⁹ Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy* (Stanford University Press, 2014), pp. 10–11, doi:10.1515/9780804792431.

⁸⁰ Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, pp. 203–04.

⁸¹ Lottie Moggach, ‘Words Don’t Come Easy’, *The Times*, 6 March 1999, p. 15 (p. 15).

⁸² Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 200.

⁸³ There is also a gendered dimension to the discussion around professionalisation in terms of women’s practices being taken seriously. For instance, Moggach’s point on justifying poetry practice to one’s family evokes the domestic labour often imposed upon women, as does Stephanie Hirtenstein (who I mention later in this chapter) having to coordinate her writing schedule in response to her family. Both these accounts suggest a sense of domestic labour being in competition with poetic practice for these women poets. Moggach, ‘Words Don’t Come Easy’; Stephanie Hirtenstein, ‘And Just Then the Whole Family’s Home All Day’, *The Great Margin*, 12 October 2020 <<https://daretowrite.org/writers-at-home-and-in-isolation/and-just-then-the-whole-family-s-home-all-day/>> [accessed 22 October 2024].

circulated. Overall, then, focusing on a formal practice is often what the poetry ecology defines as a professional poet.

There are also contexts in which these two realms merge and blur: these largely pertain to publication and prizes. When situated within the perspective of poetry as a career, being published and/or winning a prize can function as an indicator that a poet is progressing in their career. For example, Imogen Wade, upon winning the 2023 National Poetry Competition and having her poem shared on one of the largest platforms available in UK poetry, said ‘It marks an important transition point in my career as a poet.’⁸⁴ Yet, as I already noted in this chapter, publication can also function as an indicator of quality. As such, in the context of publications and prizes, the language of the professional can face two ways, indicating both formal excellence and progression in one’s career. Wandor evidenced this when she characterised her status as a ‘professional writer’ when one could also describe her accumulation of multiple publications and prize wins as being a successful formal poet.⁸⁵ Subsequently, in addition to applying the term professional towards artistic understandings of poetry practice, the poetry ecology also creates moments of equivocation in which both senses are used simultaneously.

Poets’ and facilitators’ use of the word ‘professional’ in these multiple ways suggests a tension between poetic practice as a craft and capitalist commercialisation encroaching upon that practice. Their usage also seeks to reinstate the formal emphasis’ primacy by creating a definitional blur of what the term, professional, means. Any use of the term professional becomes inextricably entwined with the formal elements of poetry, the art itself, rendering the kinds of professional skills I outline above, almost parasitic in that they cannot exist without the art, yet poetry can well exist without activities like marketing. As Lewis Hyde’s ethnographic analysis puts it, ‘Only one of these is essential: a work of art can survive without the market’.⁸⁶

Some facilitatory skills are already accepted as being part of a poet’s practice, such as cultivating an awareness of the publishing landscape and how publication processes, such as pamphlet submissions, occur. These are widely covered in poetry primers—directly so in texts by Peter Finch,⁸⁷ Janine Hall Gailey,⁸⁸ and Robert Lee Brewer—⁸⁹ perhaps because of the emphasis many practices place on publication, as described above, and since most of UK

⁸⁴ The Poetry Society, ‘Could You Join the National Poetry Competition Winners?’, Instagram, 1 November 2024 <<https://www.instagram.com/p/DBYt7s3CQo1/>> [accessed 5 November 2024].

⁸⁵ Wandor, ‘Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1’, p. 112.

⁸⁶ W. Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (Vintage, 2019), p. xxxii.

⁸⁷ Peter Finch, *How to Publish Your Poetry*, 4th Edition (Allison & Busby, 1998).

⁸⁸ Janine Hall Gailey, *PR for Poets: A Guidebook to Publicity and Marketing* (Two Sylvias Press, 2018).

⁸⁹ Robert Lee Brewer, *Poet’s Market 34th Edition: The Most Trusted Guide to Publishing Poetry* (Writer’s Digest Books, 2021).

poetry publishing happens without the intermediary of an agent —especially in a poet’s early career.⁹⁰ To facilitate payment, many poets are set up as self-employed, and I recognise the importance of navigating freelance careers by including knowledge aligned with CPD as a resource in my ecological model. Yet, CPD opens the gates to two more contentious skillsets: marketing and networking. Despite sounding far removed from poetry practice, these are essential in the context of UK poetry publishing. For instance, once a publisher accepts a text for publication, many presses, particularly smaller ones, have little capacity to support the text’s wider sharing. Much of a text’s marketing falls upon the poet themselves, including: finding reviewers, creating social media posts, and acquiring performance slots at reading events and literary festivals.⁹¹ The extent to which a poet feels prepared to do this may be predicated on access to poetry networks and contacts, meaning the circulation of a text is bound up with networking. For poets disinterested in publication, networking still enacts an important part of how they experience poetry practice, since it affects how poets feel a sense of community, connected to other poets, or, their sense of being ‘at home’ in the poetry ecology.⁹² Shifting to reconceptualise these skills as part of poetry practice, therefore, may risk dismantling the linguistic walls that protect against commercialisation and situate writing as the heart of poetry practice, but it may, too, better elucidate what being a poet in the UK today can involve.

Continuing with adjacent aspects that support writerly practice, practical and material factors are another dimension of poetry that I wish to acknowledge as part of my exploration of poetry writing and mentoring practices in this thesis. These factors may include, for example, coordinating one’s writing day, deadlines, and finding suitable environments or timings in which to write, referred to in the QAA 2024 Benchmark as ‘managing [the] self, [and] time’.⁹³ For some, time-management may mean a regular routine. For instance, Troy Cabida describes often writing ‘early drafts [...] on the tube to and from work via my Notes app’ and ‘find[ing] the evening time the best time to edit’.⁹⁴ For others, like Fran Lock, ‘To talk about a ‘routine’ makes no sense to me because life does not allow for such a thing. The rhythms of my work are unpredictable.’⁹⁵ Coordinating a writing day may be more akin to making space for chaos than a rigid structure,

⁹⁰ Duncan Forbes, ‘No Poetry’, *Royal Literary Fund*, 13 June 2016 <<https://www.rlf.org.uk/posts/no-poetry/>> [accessed 29 October 2024].

⁹¹ To greater or lesser extents depending on the publisher.

⁹² See Chapter Four for more on poetry communities and the Introduction for ecology as home.

⁹³ The Quality Assurance Agency, *Subject Benchmark Statement for Creative Writing (2024)*, p. 25.

⁹⁴ Jack Westmore and Troy Cabida, ‘Meet the Poets: Troy Cabida’, *Seaford Review*, 5 February 2025 <https://open.substack.com/pub/seafordreview/p/meet-the-poets-troy-cabida?r=1tl2qi&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email> [accessed 11 February 2025].

⁹⁵ Fran Lock, ‘Fran Lock – T.S. Eliot Prize Writers’ Notes’, *Poetry School*, 14 November 2023 <<https://poetryschool.com/theblog/fran-lock-t-s-eliot-prize-writers-notes-hyena/>> [accessed 2 July 2024].

and even Cabida expresses a wish for more consistent uniformity in this regard, ‘I wish I could say I have a more scheduled and regulated time frame in which I start my poems, but I find that rarely happens with work and other life responsibilities always in the way.’⁹⁶ The temporal circumstances of a writer’s practice can be evident in the texts themselves, which Philip Coleman and Sarah Hesketh drew attention to in their 2023 conference presentations at the University of Plymouth. Coleman spoke to the long poems of John Berryman and the extent to which the support of his wife enabled the production of these poems through, amongst other methods, offering him vast stretches of time in which to write.⁹⁷ Christina Rossetti, by contrast, had fragments of time frequently interrupted by caring responsibilities, translating to shorter-form work.⁹⁸ Frank O’Hara’s *Lunch Poems* are another example of time constraints resulting in shortform poetry.⁹⁹ The temporal constraints under which a poet writes can therefore characterise their writing practice, both in terms of when it occurs and manifestations in the text itself.

In terms of other material factors, in 2007-2009, *The Guardian* shone a light on the places in which writers write through their *Writers’ Rooms* series,¹⁰⁰ echoing Woolf’s iconic mantra of requiring a room of one’s own to be able to write at all.¹⁰¹ This material aspect of writing practice has only grown more omnipresent since the global Covid-19 pandemic, which saw the settings of poetry practice fundamentally altered, as documented by Paper Nations’ *The Great Margin* project.¹⁰² Some writers who preferred to write alone found themselves around people and noise; Stephanie Hirtenstein, for example, in response to her family being at home all day, shifted to writing very early in the morning at her kitchen table.¹⁰³ Conversely, some who wrote in groups or public spaces such as libraries and cafes—such as Cleo Henry, who describes ‘a total inability to write at home’—could no longer access them in person, if at all.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, online writing groups, festivals, and reading series exploded, creating communities that continue to exist beyond social distancing restrictions, resulting in new digital and hybrid planes

⁹⁶ Westmore and Cabida, ‘Meet the Poets: Troy Cabida’.

⁹⁷ Philip Coleman, ‘On “The Care & Feeding of Long Poems”’, unpublished paper delivered at Poetry and Care (September 2023).

⁹⁸ Sarah Hesketh, ‘“Occupations and Interruptions” The Poetry Workshop for Carers’, unpublished paper delivered at Poetry and Care (September 2023).

⁹⁹ Frank O’Hara, *Lunch Poems*, Pocket Poets Series, Expanded 50th Anniversary edition (City Lights Books, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ The Guardian, ‘Writers’ Rooms’, The Guardian, 2009 2007

<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/writersrooms>> [accessed 10 July 2023].

¹⁰¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, Penguin Modern Classics (Penguin Books, 2020).

¹⁰² I was Creative Producer for this project.

¹⁰³ Hirtenstein, ‘And Just Then the Whole Family’s Home All Day’.

¹⁰⁴ Jack Westmore and Cleo Henry, ‘Meet the Poets: Cleo Henry’, *Seaford Review*, 29 January 2025 <<https://www.seafordreview.com/p/meet-the-poets-cleo-henry>> [accessed 30 January 2025].

for poetry practice.¹⁰⁵ Beyond the lockdown period, poets may likewise find themselves able or unable to access ideal conditions for poetry composition for a plethora of reasons including socio-economic, psychological, logistical, or medical factors. Since these practical and material factors have such a bearing on poets' ability to write at all, as well as the form in which their poetry appears, I draw attention to them, here, to include them within the understanding of how poets develop their craft, which I explore in this thesis.

On political ambitions for poetry, as noted in my introduction, poetry and politics' entwinement is long-documented, as is its overlaps with other approaches, epitomised by the slogan, the personal is political. Poetry education, however, has been conceptualised and read in a range of political frameworks that debate the place of politics within educational support for poets. For instance, Hazel Smith emphasises the importance of equipping writers to be able 'to infuse [political] ideas into their writing at a technical as well as a thematic level'.¹⁰⁶ Gholnecsar E Muhammad put this into practice in her research, which used writing to help women of colour 'openly write about their lives to draw meaning of their identities', to articulate and understand their identity in a political sense, exploring the social oppression that informs their experiences.¹⁰⁷ Whereas Paul Dawson describes the creative writing workshop as avoiding political engagement, stating that the workshop is

not necessarily founded on a concept of the literary as a site of withdrawal from politics and society, but neither is the main function [...] to interrogate the theoretical and cultural status of literature.¹⁰⁸

Instead, the workshop's function is to apply the principles of successful texts to 'the aesthetic improvement of student manuscripts.' Patrick Bizarro posits one potential reason for workshops' side-stepping of politics. He states that on a pedagogic level, 'students often come

¹⁰⁵ See events such as the Stay-at-Home! Literary Festival, Sheaf Poetry Festival, Eventbrite's catalogue of past online launch events from Nine Arches Press, Verbose Manchester, or Café Writers, the latter of which began in November 2020 and continues today in digital and in-person formats. C. J. Cooke, 'Stay-At-Home! Online Literary Festival', Carolyn Jess Cooke, 12 April 2020 <<https://carolynjesscooke.com/projects/stay-at-home-online-literary-festival/>> [accessed 28 January 2025]; Suzannah Evans and Genevieve Carter, 'Sheaf Poetry Festival 2020', Sheaf Poetry Festival, 1 April 2023 <<https://sheafpoetryfestival.com/2020-archive/>> [accessed 28 January 2025]; Nine Arches Press, 'Nine Arches Press Eventbrite', Eventbrite, 2024 <<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/nine-arches-press-4624582045>> [accessed 28 January 2025]; Verbose Manchester, 'Verbose Manchester Eventbrite', Eventbrite, 2023 <<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/verbose-manchester-30434093752>> [accessed 28 January 2025]; Café Writers, 'Café Writers Eventbrite', Eventbrite, 2024 <<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/cafe-writers-31620920791>> [accessed 28 January 2025].

¹⁰⁶ Hazel Smith, 'Emerging from the Experiment: A Systematic Methodology for Creative Writing Teaching', *New Writing*, 3.1 (2006), pp. 17–34 (p. 27), doi:10.2167/new229.0.

¹⁰⁷ Gholnecsar E. Muhammad, 'Inducing Colored Sisters of Other Places to Imitate Their Example: Connecting Historic Literary Societies to a Contemporary Writing Group', *English Education*, 47 (2015), pp. 276–99 (p. 277).

¹⁰⁸ Paul Dawson, 'What Is a Literary Intellectual? Creative Writing and the New Humanities', *Cultural Studies Review*, 9.1 (2003), pp. 161–79 (p. 162), doi:10.5130/csr.v9i1.3590.

to view teachers who advocate one political view or another as intrusive and, thus, resist those teachers' pedagogies altogether', hindering the overall success of the workshop.¹⁰⁹

However, other critics of the creative writing workshop offer more macrocosmic reasons. Marcelle Freiman notes the study of creative writing can be deeply 'political; it recasts prevailing social, historical and political structures';¹¹⁰ therefore university workshops can avoid engaging with politics because of its potential to disrupt the status quo on a grander scale.¹¹¹ Alexandria Peary's review of Janelle Adsit's *Towards an Inclusive Creative Writing* expands on this, stating,

Craft conversations are not benign how-to-do chats [...] but are normative forces, [and can ultimately] police students' tastes, intention, and affect, marginalising certain aesthetics (and students)—[including] political or activist intent'.¹¹²

Peary's review chimes with the ethos of the 2018 Race Poetry and Poetics Conference (RAPAPUK), which rejected attempts to 'return poetry to discussions of newness and of craft' that are inaccurately framed as being racially neutral.¹¹³ In the words of Chinua Achebe, 'Language is not neutral. It's very much a political tool. It's charged with prejudices. So a poet who says "I'm not in politics" is not being realistic.'¹¹⁴

These accounts refer largely, though not exclusively, to the university creative writing workshop. Within dyadic poetry mentoring outside of university contexts, my interviews suggest a range of approaches to addressing politics. For example, out of thirty-one interviews, fourteen poets explicitly referenced politics. Since I did not mention the term outright in my interview questions, some leeway must be given to acknowledge that other questions were the focus of our discussion. Yet, given that only three spoke to political issues for more than a couple of sentences, this suggests interviewees tend to frame mentoring in terms of their first-hand experience, rather than political or structural concerns, which creates distance between politics and the mentor. Instead, mentors commonly attend to politics via indirect methods. For instance, mentors regularly discussed recommending wider reading as part of their mentorship,

¹⁰⁹ Patrick Bizarro, 'Mutuality and the Teaching of the Introductory Creative Writing Course', in *Creative Writing Pedagogies for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Tom C. Hunley and Alexandria Peary (Southern Illinois University Press, 2015), pp. 94–138 (p. 101).

¹¹⁰ Marcelle Freiman, 'Crossing the Boundaries of the Discipline: A Post-Colonial Approach to Teaching Creative Writing in the University', *TEXT*, 5.2 (2001), pp. 1–12 (p. 8)
<<https://textjournal.scholasticahq.com/article/35793.pdf>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

¹¹¹ Universities are also bound by the 1986 Education Act, which requires a code of conduct to ensure freedom of speech, which pressurises the possibility of politically influence one's students.

¹¹² Bizarro, 'Mutuality and the Teaching of the Introductory Creative Writing Course', p. 397.

¹¹³ Azad Ashim Sharma, "'Race Poetry and Poetics UK 2": Queens College, Cambridge, 26th to 27th October 2018', *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 11.1 (2019), p. 3, doi:10.16995/bip.1442.

¹¹⁴ Chinua Achebe in *The Bloodaxe Book of Poetry Quotations: Contemporary Quotations on Poets and Poetry*, ed. by Dennis O'Driscoll (Bloodaxe Books, 2006), p. 170.

which can work towards cultivating a political awareness —especially if the mentor recommends politically, thematically, and formally diverse texts. Yet, since these concepts are posed by another, the mentor remains distanced from overt political influence. Further, as dyadic mentoring sessions typically focus on the mentee’s poems rather than critically discussing the reading material, the teaching practices of dyadic mentoring enable the mentor to frame their support in personal terms, rather than political ones. However, some mentors take a more explicitly political approach, such as David Caddy, who encourages mentees to socio-politically contextualise their work, paying attention to the history of poetry that their work engages with and potentially extends.¹¹⁵ Anthony Ezekiel Vahni Capildeo is another more directly political mentor, particularly in relation to the political potential of the mentorship itself. For instance, they detail putting forward ‘emergent people who would not otherwise be seen’ for opportunities, to ‘equalise’ others ‘misusing their privilege to create these old boys networks’ which Capildeo describes as witnessing frequently.¹¹⁶ Capildeo also encourages their mentees to think critically about the opportunities afforded to them. They say, ‘I like to be [the kind of mentor] who keeps talking about things like time and money’, which speaks to ensuring mentoring on a larger scale works towards equality of access and opportunity by shaping mentees to politically analyse the events of their development in addition to their poetry.¹¹⁷

Overall, none of these accounts deny that politics informs the process of learning to write poetry; yet the current framing of educational and mentoring support for poets results in politics being unevenly addressed. Zooming out, at the level of ecology-wide practice, there is a disconnect between the undisputed political potential of poetry and the methods that support its production.

2.1.1 The Multimodality of Poetry Writing and Mentoring

So far in this chapter, I have deconstructed binary and oppositional discourses around what poetry writing and mentoring entails, and elucidated a greater range of modalities, spanning technical, personal, practical, professional, and political. Crucially, I have illustrated the multimodality of poetry writing and mentoring —they involve not simply one or two emphases, but numerous layers. I posit that the motivations, ambitions, approaches to, and characteristics of poetry intersect, merge together, braid. I wish to add one final aspect, which is that a poet’s modality of practice is in constant flux. Harkening back to Daniella Jancsó: ‘Often the style of an author changes significantly in the course of [their] career, frustrating attempt to attach a single

¹¹⁵ Caddy, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’.

¹¹⁶ Anthony Ezekiel Vahni Capildeo, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’, August 2022.

¹¹⁷ Capildeo, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’.

label to [their] achievement.’¹¹⁸ Although some poets may stick to roughly the same mode of practice for long periods, it can morph between poets’ different projects, or perhaps even more frequently, from poem to poem. Viewed in this way, poetry practice becomes far more intricate and nuanced and offers different understandings of what being a poet can mean and to what poetry mentorship can pertain. To repurpose Dominic Hand’s analysis of Peter Larkin’s rhizomatic poetry, broadening the modalities of poetry practice shifts the understanding of poetry ‘towards more symbiotic, multidirectional fabrics [and] does not present a multiplicity of [practices] as purely discrete either, but rather blurs their attendances across thresholds of contact.’¹¹⁹

Embracing multimodality abandons any notion that poetry mentoring relates only to formal, technical elements, and instead figures mentoring as addressing multiple processes, fields, understandings, and ambitions simultaneously.¹²⁰ It is with this view that I address real-world examples poetry mentoring more directly in Chapter Three. Before this analysis, however, I will further open definitions of poetry mentorship by examining how mentoring differs in the context of experimental poetry.

2.2 Part Two: [ExperiMentoring, or] Mentoring for Experimental Poets

At the start of this chapter, I contended that experimental poetry may offer further ways of conceptualising poetry mentoring practice.¹²¹ Some twenty years ago, the avant-garde poet, Craig Dworkin, argued ‘for a mode of teaching that itself has learned from [avant-garde, radical, experimental] literary innovations’.¹²² For Dworkin, this was essential to prevent experimental literature from being ‘taught with an inadequate pedagogy’, leading such literature to be ‘familiarized, domesticated, inoculated, neutralized, and counteracted’.¹²³ Instead, he posited a

¹¹⁸ Jancsó, *Twentieth-Century Metapoetry and the Lyric Tradition*, pp. 3–12.

¹¹⁹ Dominic Hand, ‘Reforesting the Rhizome: Peter Larkin’s “Roots Surfacing Horizon” (2008)’, *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 12.1 (2020), p. 15, doi:10.16995/bip.1944.

¹²⁰ Multimodality also allows poetry writing and mentoring to take into account practices less commonly associated with a serious, formal study of poetry, such as writing for wellbeing.

¹²¹ True to my advocacy of layered, multimodal ways of seeing poetry practice, experimental is not a binary term to mainstream but a porous and overlapping one. This also echoes Victoria Sheppard’s observation that the ‘distinction between expressive and experimental poetries’ is an unstable one. Victoria Sheppard, ‘Contesting Voices: Authenticity, Performance and Identity in Contemporary British Poetry’ (University of Southampton, 2006), p. 1 <<https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/466145/>> [accessed 24 June 2025].

¹²² Craig Dworkin, ‘Opinion: Mycopedagogy’, *College English*, 66.6 (2004), p. 603 (p. 604), doi:10.2307/4140742.

¹²³ Dworkin, ‘Opinion: Mycopedagogy’, p. 609.

theory of ‘mycopedagogy’.¹²⁴ Utilising the rhizomatic structure of mycelium, mycopedagogy involves a flat hierarchy between mentor and mentee, echoing ‘collaborative, feminist, critical, and Rogerian [pedagogies], to name a few’.¹²⁵ Dworkin also aligns mycopedagogy with the unknown, stating, ‘To have nothing to teach, and to be teaching it, that too is pedagogy.’¹²⁶

Dworkin, Professor English at the University of Utah, speaks, here, in relation to teaching within universities. But how does this apply to poetry mentoring as a broader category occurring both inside and outside of institutional spaces? Does poetry mentoring already enact this symmetry between pedagogy and form?

In the latter half of this chapter, I take up Dworkin’s strategy to ‘extrapolate’ from the ‘examples of the poems themselves’ and explore the relationship between textual strategies and devices in contemporary experimental poetry and mentoring for experimental poets, also referred to as ExperiMentoring.¹²⁷ I identify a departure from individualism and isolationism, leading to mentoring models that reject the dyad in favour of communal mentoring which occurs diffusely within a larger ecology. In doing so, this research moves beyond narratives of ‘the individual poet as a lonely genius’ and further shifts our understanding of mentoring towards interconnection and multiplicity.¹²⁸

To unearth the relationship between mentoring for experimental poets and experimental poetry, I must first answer: what does experimental poetry mean in the twenty-first century? Experimental is an umbrella term that encapsulates various movements and styles, prefigured across the twentieth century (Figure 11).

¹²⁴ Dworkin, ‘Opinion: Mycopedagogy’, p. 603.

¹²⁵ Dworkin, ‘Opinion: Mycopedagogy’, p. 609.

¹²⁶ Dworkin, ‘Opinion: Mycopedagogy’, p. 610.

¹²⁷ Dworkin, ‘Opinion: Mycopedagogy’, p. 609.

¹²⁸ Epstein, *Beautiful Enemies*, p. 28.

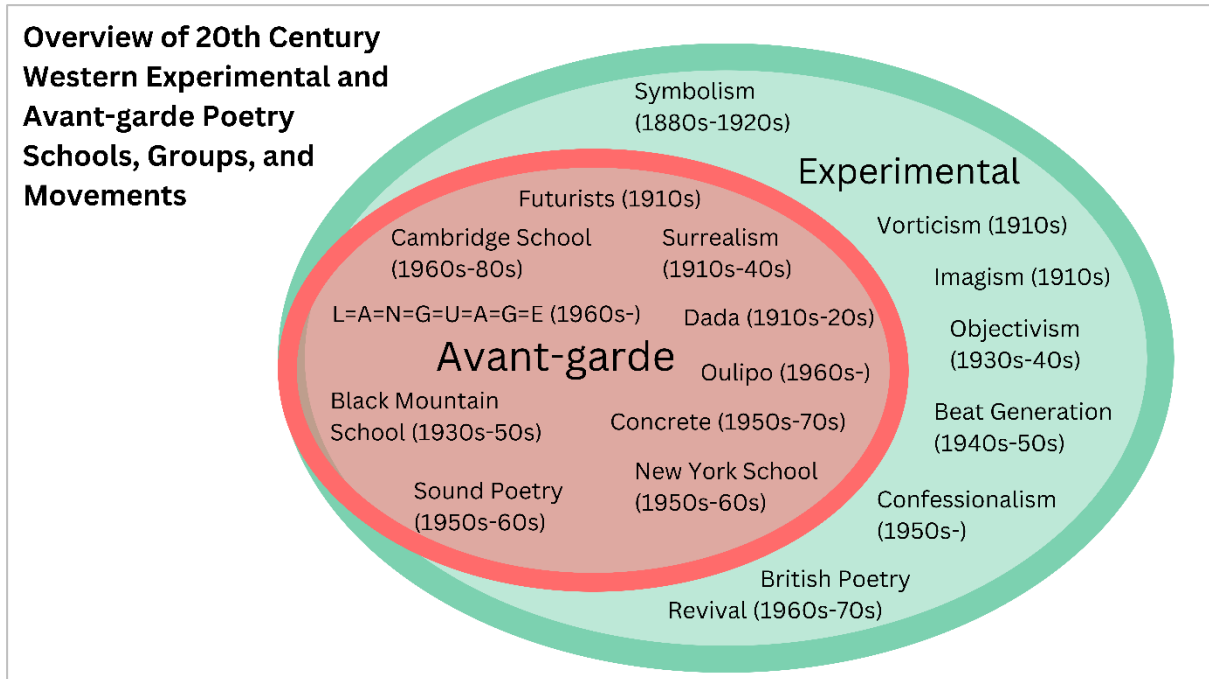


Figure 11: Overview of 20th Century Western Experimental and Avant-garde Poetry Schools, Groups, and Movements

However, experimental is not a static term, as poet and scholar Marjorie Perloff notes, since experimental techniques cannot remain cutting-edge forever.¹²⁹ Yet, given that the twentieth century's explosion of experimentation still influences—or, in the cases of Language and Oulipo, continues into—twenty-first century poetry, it is worth observing where their poetic techniques and approaches occur in contemporary poetry to arrive at an up-to-date definition.

I turn first to an approach that does not belong to simply one or two movements, but characterises much of experimental poetry as a whole: multivalence. As poet and scholar Harriet Tarlo describes, wider twentieth century experimental practice is often characterised by its 'provisionality, a refusal to tell a simple story or resolve into a single meaning, and its clearly related exploration of experimentation with language'.¹³⁰ For instance, Tarlo documents the shared traits of twentieth century experimental UK poets, including Caroline Bergvall, Helen Kidd, Geraldine Monk, Wendy Mulford, Maggie O'Sullivan, Frances Presley, Elaine Randell, Carlyle Reedy, Denise Riley and Fiona Templeton.¹³¹ She illustrates which specific devices these poets used to achieve provisionality, such as options 'whether to read from left to right or in three columns running down the page, or even whether to read more randomly, from the centre

¹²⁹ Marjorie Perloff, 'Avant-Garde Tradition and Individual Talent: The Case of Language Poetry', *Revue Française d'Etudes Américaines*, 103.1 (2005), pp. 117–41 (pp. 131–32), doi:10.3917/rfea.103.0117.

¹³⁰ Harriet Tarlo, 'Provisional Pleasures: The Challenge of Contemporary Experimental Women Poets', *Feminist Review*, 62.1 (1999), pp. 94–112 (p. 95), doi:10.1080/014177899339207.

¹³¹ Tarlo, 'Provisional Pleasures', p. 95.

outwards' in Carlyle Reedy's poem, 'Indigo'.¹³² Further shape-oriented (i.e. concerning the visual layout of the poem) techniques include 'Susan Howe's lines printed over and across each other [and] Bergvall's use of graphics'.¹³³ Many of these techniques are still being built upon today. Three instances of poetry that can be read in multiple directions from 2023 include Paul Stephenson's collection, *Hard Drive*,¹³⁴ Russell Evans' poetry comics exhibition at the University of Plymouth,¹³⁵ and benjamin cusden's shape and diagram poem 'lue lo' in Issue 78 of *Tears in the Fence*.¹³⁶ Tarlo also notes that experimental writings may challenge the idea of the poem in its entirety, citing Rachel Blau DuPlessis' practice of referring to her poems as drafts, which questions whether a poem can ever be finished.¹³⁷ A contemporary example of this is the collaborative pamphlet *Siblings* by Jay Bernard, Mary Jean Chan, Will Harris, and Nisha Ramayya, which features a front cover with a mistake crossed out rather than removed, which brings to mind a draft copy of a text rather than a polished final version.¹³⁸ Other characteristically experimental 'textual strategies'¹³⁹ include the way that '[Fanny] Howe plays with simple diction and sentence structure to flummox our linguistic expectations', which can create a multivalent dialogue between the expected linguistic outcome and its subversion.¹⁴⁰ Provisionality, then, remains one of the characteristic approaches of experimental poetry in the twenty-first century.

In the case of Language poetry, contemporary experimental practice has widely adopted its strategies, meaning that its once-movement-specific techniques now characterise a broader range of experimental practices. These techniques are described by poet Redell Olsen. She states that, in 'early issues of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*', poets utilised 'methodological approaches to writing that highlighted the ideologically and politically saturated material of language itself', which may include poetic techniques such as 'procedural writing, uses of found material, parataxis, rejection of narrative, and fragmentation'.¹⁴¹ Such techniques may be found in a range of experimental poetics in recent decades. For example, my own poem, 'Now More Than Ever' is composed entirely of found material from social media, arranged in a parataxical structure that

¹³² Tarlo, 'Provisional Pleasures', pp. 96–97.

¹³³ Tarlo, 'Provisional Pleasures', p. 97.

¹³⁴ Paul Stephenson, *Hard Drive* (Carcanet Press, Limited, 2023), pp. 41, 146.

¹³⁵ Russell Evans, 'Poem Brut #143 – Krang and Other Poetry Comics', *3am Magazine*, October 2022 <<https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/poem-brut-143-krang-and-other-poetry-comics/>> [accessed 1 February 2024].

¹³⁶ benjamin cusden, 'Lue Lo', *Tears in the Fence*, no. 78 (Autumn 2023), p. 49 (p. p.49).

¹³⁷ Tarlo, 'Provisional Pleasures', p. 98.

¹³⁸ Jay Bernard and others, *Siblings* (Monitor Books, 2024).

¹³⁹ Redell Olsen, 'Strategies of Critical Practice: Recent Writing on Experimental and Innovative Poetry by Women; A Review Essay', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 33.2 (2008), pp. 371–87 (p. 374), doi:10.1086/521559.

¹⁴⁰ Tarlo, 'Provisional Pleasures', p. 97.

¹⁴¹ Olsen, 'Strategies of Critical Practice', p. 374.

utilises slashes to mimic collage.¹⁴² Further examples of language-based techniques include employing ‘the associations of words, the aura of words around a word, and often, by quoting or parodying the language of culture that surrounds us, explor[ing] how language creates us’, as used by Bergvall.¹⁴³ In 2023, Cat Chong, a student of Redell Olsen’s, similarly applies associative language in *712 Stanza Homes for the Sun*. Chong uses the aural and semantic associations of the word ‘pip’ to create a journey through the tension-filled landscape of Covid-era Singapore from the perspective of a chronically-ill speaker: ‘a poetics of pips that knows how long I have left — to plant or search for soil — a kinship to acknowledge the land — [...] I have no interest in weapons or their complicity’.¹⁴⁴ Here, Chong contrasts the short, sharp sound of the ‘pip’ that emerges from radiation meters and guns with the meaning of a pip as a seed, creating a kinder, rhizomatic kinship to the land. Despite adopting these techniques, neither Chong nor myself are typically defined as Language poets, which illustrates that the wider category of experimental may encapsulate techniques from the Language movement.

Overall, I characterise experimental poetry as poetry that utilises strikingly unconventional or surprising textual strategies that produce complex pieces of writing offering a certain provisionality or multivalence that invites multiple interpretations, described by Tarlo as poetry in which ‘the possibility of multiple readings persists’.¹⁴⁵ As Olsen and Perloff reference, these may be closely entangled with political or ideological intentions, bringing them closer to avant-garde. I also wish to add that such innovations may be achieved through repositioning the poet’s chosen language so that it becomes more alien to them, thereby allowing the poet to circumvent unconscious habits and traditions to bring forth striking and unusual textual techniques or effects. This addenda builds upon Tarlo’s theory of how Language poets achieve their innovations. She describes them journeying to the state of the ‘newly born woman’ theorised by Hélène Cixous, a figure which has ‘return[ed] to the pre-linguistic *chora* [meaning state of being] or can even exist on the edge of the semiotic (pre-linguistic) and symbolic (post-language) state’,¹⁴⁶ which Tarlo likens to the ‘moment of language acquisition’ as a child.¹⁴⁷ I suggest that this is applicable to experimental poetry more broadly: in reinstating a level of alienness to language, poets can come at poetry from a fresh perspective, creating innovative strategies and combinations of text that fulfil Ezra Pound’s maxim to Make it New.

¹⁴² Nissel, *Guerrilla Brightenings*, p. 11.

¹⁴³ Tarlo, ‘Provisional Pleasures’, p. 104.

¹⁴⁴ Cat Chong, *712 Stanza Homes for the Sun* (Broken Sleep Books, 2023), p. 11.

¹⁴⁵ Tarlo, ‘Provisional Pleasures’, p. 97.

¹⁴⁶ A state theorised by Julia Kristeva.

¹⁴⁷ Tarlo, ‘Provisional Pleasures’, p. 100.

2.2.1 Poetry Mentoring as Communal: Symmetry Between Experimental Poetic Devices and Mentoring for Experimental Poets

My research points towards a relationship between the techniques a poet uses and how they are mentored. For instance, in the twenty-first century, it is extremely common for mainstream poets to adopt the lyric and confessionalist 'I', in which the 'I' is a specific person—often closely aligned with the poet themselves—'epitomized by Sylvia Plath'.¹⁴⁸ Likewise, as I established in Chapter One, the UK is characterised by a 'lyric pedagogy' that often sees mentoring taking place in 'a closed student-teacher dyad'.¹⁴⁹ There is, therefore, a symmetry between the dominance of the single lyric 'I' in mainstream poetry and the narratives of the individual that characterise mentoring for these poets. This suggests a similar symmetry could exist in experimental poetry, ultimately offering new, perhaps less dyadic or isolated, understandings of mentorship.

Further historical context of twentieth century experimental innovations on the 'I' deepens this line of questioning, particularly the feminist contexts behind the rise of the lyric and confessional 'I'. For instance, in the post-war period, the 'Anglo-American tradition of the masculine (or ostensibly genderless) voice', popularised in the Romantic and Modernist movements, was dominant.¹⁵⁰ Womanhood was seen as a contradiction to poetic authority and, as Brett Millier recounts, many women poets felt 'so anxious about the apparent conflict between speaking aloud as a poet and remaining appropriately "feminine" that she [wrote] her own disappearance.'¹⁵¹ As such, the emergence of the lyric and confessional 'I' represented a 'way to rhetorical authority by reshaping the generic idea of "poet" to include specifically female voices and concerns.'¹⁵² Across the mid-century, it became 'a charged site of public utterance'¹⁵³ that 'seemed to exemplify the 1970s feminist slogan "the personal is political"' by opening up the authority figure of the writer to include women and—to a lesser extent until feminism became more explicitly intersectional in the twenty-first century—people of colour.¹⁵⁴ While this obviously represents an important political shift towards equality, Olsen notes that the attention held by the 'wave of politicized lyric writing by women had the effect of rendering invisible other feminist strategies of contemporary and modernist writing'.¹⁵⁵ Millier and Tarlo

¹⁴⁸ Olsen, 'Strategies of Critical Practice', p. 379.

¹⁴⁹ Frances, 'CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: Towards a Collective Poetics'.

¹⁵⁰ Millier, 'Mentoring and the Female Poet's Voice', p. 119.

¹⁵¹ Millier, 'Mentoring and the Female Poet's Voice', p. 119.

¹⁵² Millier, 'Mentoring and the Female Poet's Voice', p. 119.

¹⁵³ Linda A. Kinnahan, *Lyric Interventions: Feminism, Experimental Poetry, and Contemporary Discourse* (University of Iowa Press, 2004), p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ Olsen, 'Strategies of Critical Practice', p. 375.

¹⁵⁵ Olsen, 'Strategies of Critical Practice', p. 375.

likewise note that more experimental types of writing were neglected by critics.¹⁵⁶ These experimental poetries often opted for different innovations on the masculine ‘I’, such as the ‘I’ as ‘we’ frequently adopted by Adrienne Rich,¹⁵⁷ which followed ‘Julia Kristeva’s theory of the “subject-in-process”, or series of “selving[s]” as opposed to singular self’,¹⁵⁸ resulting in a ‘pluralized notion of selfhood’.¹⁵⁹ Perloff implies that avant-garde movements also had a greater interest in a plural ‘I’, due to their links to ‘group formations’.¹⁶⁰ Another common invention on ‘I’ that has been critically overlooked, as Linda Kinnahan describes, is the banishment of ‘I’ altogether, commonly adopted by avant-garde poets to achieve a sense of collectivisation,¹⁶¹ including many but not all Language poets.¹⁶² Across the twentieth century, then, experimental practices produced various ‘I’s, which could be absent, individual, and multiple, yet the individual ‘I’ has been most widely adopted.¹⁶³

The poetry ecology has paid greater attention to lyric strategies that privilege the individual ‘I’, while alternate strategies that attend to the collective or interconnectedness also quietly flourish. My research alludes the same is true for poetry mentoring. Mentoring for experimental poets is more hidden, and offers innovative models that have less emphasis on the individual, such as rejecting the dyadic structure of lyric mentoring. For instance, amongst the pool of interviewees I spoke to in 2022, there was only one experimental mentor-mentee pairing: Harriet Tarlo and Elvire Roberts.¹⁶⁴ The low representation of experimental poets in my interview set implies that ExperiMentoring does not regularly take place dyadically. The settings of experimental mentorships also imply a rejection of dyadic models, since experimental mentoring takes place in experimentally-oriented MA programmes at the universities of Royal

¹⁵⁶ Tarlo, ‘Provisional Pleasures’, p. 99; Millier, ‘Mentoring and the Female Poet’s Voice’, p. 117.

¹⁵⁷ Millier, ‘Mentoring and the Female Poet’s Voice’, p. 121.

¹⁵⁸ Tarlo, ‘Provisional Pleasures’, p. 99.

¹⁵⁹ Tarlo, ‘Provisional Pleasures’, p. 99.

¹⁶⁰ Perloff, ‘Avant-Garde Tradition and Individual Talent’, p. 117.

¹⁶¹ Kinnahan, *Lyric Interventions*, p. xiii.

¹⁶² Olsen, ‘Strategies of Critical Practice’, p. 382.

¹⁶³ Of course, there are further factors at play which have pushed the lyric ‘I’ to the foreground. One such force is mainstream publishers’ emphasis on accessibility, as noted by poets Anthony Anaxagorou and Rachael Allen. For instance, Allen traced this emphasis to an anti-intellectual middle class elite who make up the UK publishing industry and whom engender ‘the patronising mythos of the “general public”’ that posits a general reader cannot cope with the intellectual rigour of experimental work. Tarlo refutes the viewpoint of the publishing elite, stating that experimental work is not necessarily difficult, ‘just *demanding*’. Anaxagorou adds that it is because of this demanding nature that ‘poetry which is working on a more technical, academic or experiential level’ has been neglected in favour of confessional poetics, since in ‘a late-capitalist economy’, ‘commodities are valued by how easily they can be consumed rather than how they can be negotiated by the reader’. Rachael Allen, ‘Difficult and Bad’, *Too Little / Too Hard*, 1.2 (2023) <<https://tlth.co.uk/difficultandbad>> [accessed 2 January 2024]; Anthony Anaxagorou, ‘Poetry, A Late Economy’, *Too Little / Too Hard*, 1.1 (2023) <<https://tlth.co.uk/poetryalateeconomy>> [accessed 2 January 2024]; Tarlo, ‘Provisional Pleasures’, p. 98.

¹⁶⁴ This mentorship took place during a programme by Writing East Midlands. Tarlo, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’; Roberts, ‘Poetry Mentee Interview’.

Holloway, Sussex, and Birkbeck, which operate via groups. Moreover, there are no experimentally-oriented mentorship schemes by writer development agencies, which usually set up dyads.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, the scholarship on experimental poetry movements, schools, and groups detailed above suggests a rejection of dyadic models of mentoring, since it rarely mentions mentoring at all.¹⁶⁶ This implies experimental poets may not use the term mentoring, perhaps because their methods of supporting and educating poets do not match traditional conceptions of mentoring, leading to the sense that mentoring is less applicable to them.

In 2024, I conducted additional interviews with contemporary experimental poets to further elucidate how they conceptualise mentoring, namely Cat Chong, Kat Sinclair, and three who wish to remain anonymous. These interviews strongly support the notion that experimental poets conceptualise poetry mentoring in multiplicitous ways situated within an ecology. For instance, Kat Sinclair responds:

I do not feel I have had so much of a formal one-on-one mentorship, but have rather been mentored collectively by a community of poets. [...] I have been inspired by my peers, and have deep respect for many individuals who have generously responded to my work, but the sense of mentorship is more diffuse than that. It lies in the group, in a constant state of osmosis.¹⁶⁷

Cat Chong replies similarly,

To me, mentorship has been a praxis aligned with guidance from someone with more experience, a form of solidarity and advice. I think I consider mentorship as a communal practice outside the formal architectures of academic or institutional mentorship schemes; [...] I don't consider mentorship a necessarily linear structure.¹⁶⁸

Chong completed an MA at Royal Holloway, University of London, yet describes mentoring as taking place outside the seminar room. They say, 'Of course everyone around RHUL's Poetic Practice course also mentors each other through collaborations, discussions on work, shared platforms, and publications.'¹⁶⁹ For Chong, this 'has resulted in [...] academic funding for publishing creative work, departmental prizes, introductions to more senior poets, platforms at academic and creative conferences, advice on further funding, public endorsements of published work, and invitations to international literary festivals'.¹⁷⁰ Chong's account provides a

¹⁶⁵ Although some schemes included an experimental mentor on their roster, such as Poetry London and Anthony Ezekiel Vahni Capildeo.

¹⁶⁶ For instance, in Kinnahan's entire book, the term mentor is only used once, in a footnote identifying Adrienne Rich as a mentor of Kathleen Fraser. Mentoring does not appear in Perloff or Tarlo's articles. Kinnahan, *Lyric Interventions*, p. 231.

¹⁶⁷ Kat Sinclair, 'Poetry Mentee Interview', 2024.

¹⁶⁸ Chong, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

¹⁶⁹ Chong, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

¹⁷⁰ Chong, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

helpful overview of what a multiplicitous, ecologically-situated form of mentoring could consist of and achieve. Furthermore, an anonymous poet adds,

On the question of mentoring - I've never been mentored, and in my mind tend to associate it with more mainstream spaces [...] For me the more important thing broadly has been poetry communities/collectivities - and that's where I think many experimental poets have got support and sometimes feedback, and the freedom to share.¹⁷¹

I also spoke to another anonymous experimental poet who expressed anxiety over whether their responses would be useful because 'the truth is, I'm not sure that I do feel I have been mentored in a way that fits under any of your useful (and broad) rubrics.'¹⁷² From Sinclair's emphasis on a group oriented form of mentoring that diffuses like osmosis, to Chong's description of mentoring as a communal practice, and finally anonymous' communities and collectivities, these accounts illustrate that experimental poets' learning and supportive processes happen in multiplicitous and ecologically-situated ways —with multiple mentors, a fluid hierarchy if one exists at all, and far less structure both in terms of final goal(s) and also in terms of how the mentoring takes place. In addition to broadening our understanding of the mentoring beyond dyads and ecological isolation, these models of ExperiMentoring have such radical differences from mainstream dyadic mentoring that some may not use the term at all.

An email exchange between myself and a prolific experimental poet further reinforces these significances. This poet actually declined to be interviewed because they felt they had *not* been mentored. Instead, they directed me to accounts of experimental poetry communities as documentation of learning and supportive processes, which heavily implies a kind of mentoring fostered through a collective poetry ecology rather than dyadically. The two accounts they directed me to were *Cusp: Recollections of Poetry in Transition* edited by Geraldine Monk,¹⁷³ and *Clasp: Late-Modernist Poetry in London in the 1970s* edited by Robert Hampson and Ken Edwards.¹⁷⁴ These texts detail poetry communities in the mid-late twentieth century as 'rhizomatic'¹⁷⁵ networks, whose 'interconnectedness'¹⁷⁶ was fostered by sites where experimental poets came together, which are described by Stephanie Burt¹⁷⁷ as 'nodes, hinges,

¹⁷¹ Anonymous, 'Experimental Poetry Mentee Interview'.

¹⁷² Anonymous, 'Experimental Poetry Mentee Interview'.

¹⁷³ *Cusp: Recollections of Poetry in Transition*, ed. by Geraldine Monk (Shearsman Books, 2012).

¹⁷⁴ *Clasp: Late-Modernist Poetry in London in the 1970s*, ed. by Robert Hampson and Ken Edwards (Shearsman Books, 2016).

¹⁷⁵ Hampson and Edwards, *Clasp*, p. 11.

¹⁷⁶ Monk, *Cusp*, p. 12.

¹⁷⁷ Here, Burt builds on Caroline Levine's scholarship into networks, which, in turn, draws from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.

[and] hubs'¹⁷⁸ of 'overlapping and heterogeneous [literary] networks'.¹⁷⁹ For twentieth century experimental poets, these included 'the small press publishing network and the alternative or specialist bookshops',¹⁸⁰ and writing groups such as 'RASP (run collectively by Paul Brown, Ken Edwards and Allen Fisher), and Robert Sheppard's Thursday evening meetings at his home in Tooting Bec', among others.¹⁸¹ If such informal, social, and nebulous forms of support are the sites that greatly informed the development of the unnamed established experimental poet, then this indicates ExperiMentoring happens via community-oriented, non-dyadic methods, which might include a variety of events and activities.

Less explicitly experimental poets reflect they take part in and value similar supportive activities (such as poetry readings, writing groups, festivals, and other poetic events with a social component) but do not call them mentoring as frequently. For instance, in response to the interview question, 'Do peer networks support your growth as a writer as much as mentorships?', Moyra Tourlmain emphasises the value of writing groups and reading events,¹⁸² as does Sarah Hemings, who says attending a Stanza group, peer workshopping, and online courses gave her 'an injection of energy and motivation'.¹⁸³ Carrie Etter praises poet-friends and online communities for their 'cheerleading', adding such peer networks help her thrive.¹⁸⁴ These accounts demonstrate that poetry activities themselves are relatively analogous regardless of the specific poetic specialism. Yet, the language poets use to describe mentoring differs, with less actively experimental poets preferring to frame nebulous forms of support under labels like networks.

One could argue that my phrasing of the question set up mentoring and peer networks as two different practices, which could have led the interviewees to describe them in such terms. While I cannot rule this out entirely, some poets used the question to explicitly consider the difference between poetry networks and poetry mentoring. For instance, one poet—who wishes to remain anonymous—observes that networks' supportive and encouraging nature can do much of the same work as mentoring.¹⁸⁵ Morag Kiziewicz, alternatively, identifies that peer networks support her 'in a different way' to mentoring.¹⁸⁶ She reflects that the networks at festivals and events enable an extended form of workshopping, with the poem being refined

¹⁷⁸ Stephanie Burt, 'Networks with Benefits', *College Literature*, 47.1 (2020), pp. 213–29 (p. 214), doi:10.1353/lit.2020.0012.

¹⁷⁹ Burt, 'Networks with Benefits', p. 213.

¹⁸⁰ Monk, *Cusp*, p. 8.

¹⁸¹ Hampson and Edwards, *Clasp*, p. 11.

¹⁸² Moyra Tourlmain, 'Poetry Mentor/Mentee Interview', September 2022.

¹⁸³ Sarah Hemings, 'Poetry Mentee Interview', May 2022.

¹⁸⁴ Etter, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹⁸⁵ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor and Mentee Interview', 2022.

¹⁸⁶ Morag Kiziewicz, 'Poetry Mentee Interview', September 2022.

each time it is performed, perhaps with new meanings unearthed by the larger audience. Despite Kiziewicz's assertion that they are different, by presenting such networks as having a similar function to workshop groups, both Kiziewicz and the anonymous poet present mentoring and networks as relatively similar. Sarah Hemings' distinction is more significant. Ruminating on her mentorship with Fiona Benson as part of a scheme by Dialect, she concludes that mentoring is 'a much purer process, really, and it gives you so much more. And I think mainly that's to do with the structure of mentoring and it being focused on the individual and their individual goals.'¹⁸⁷ In terms of my influence on the interviewees, these three accounts suggest that the poets were not so led by my phrasing of my question that they artificially delineate between networks and mentoring.

The three poets' remarks concurrently evoke a potential language difference between experimental and mainstream poets concerning what counts as mentoring or networking, since each has a slightly different poetic style. Anonymous and Kiziewicz tend to combine lyric, environmental, and experimental practice, whereas Hemings is more firmly seated in confessional poetry. The three poets' attitudes to mentoring broadly correlate to their styles. Hemings has a narrower definition of mentoring that focuses on the individual and dyad. Meanwhile, the more experimental poets are open to non-dyadic notions of mentoring through highlighting the permeability between mentoring and networks. Kiziewicz and Anonymous' openness to the non-dyad is fitting, given that two defining features of experimental poetry I identified at the start of this section are a plurality of 'I' and the provisionality of language. Accordingly, experimental poets can have a broader definition of mentoring that incorporates multiple mentors and mentees (multiple 'I's').¹⁸⁸ The provisionality of language is mirrored in the variety of activities that experimental poets may also describe as mentoring, which are contested and open to interpretation. Meanwhile, mainstream poets are more likely to define poetry mentoring in narrower terms.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Hemings, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

¹⁸⁸ There will, of course, be exceptions and outliers to this general pattern that are beyond the scope of this study. For instance, one interviewee said group mentorship was less effective for them due to their neurodiversity. Since this interview represents far too small a sample size to draw reliable conclusions, a further study on poetry mentorship for neurodiverse poets would be worthwhile. Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

¹⁸⁹ Another symmetry lies in Chapter One's ecological models. ExperiMentoring's diffuseness and interconnection is well-aligned with the water ecology model, whereas mainstream poets prefer more structure, as in my early (non-immersed) ecological models. We might then conclude that these ecological models underpin the different ways in which mainstream and experimental poets tend to see mentoring.

2.2.2 Underlying Political Impulses: Political Dimensions to the Rise or Rejection of Dyadic Mentoring in Experimental and Mainstream Poetry

The question remains: *why* do mentoring practices for experimental poets compared to their more mainstream counterparts differ? My research indicates that the political and ideological layers beneath these two —admittedly enormous, blurry, and overlapping— camps differ, and this underlying impulse has shaped mentoring provision to prioritise the dyad. As a result, there is a political dimension to the rise of dyadic poetry mentoring.

As my earlier analysis of the tensions surrounding the term ‘professional’ signalled, mainstream poetry has felt the encroaching influence of neoliberalism in the last few decades. For example, Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith argue that, since the 1990s, ‘neoliberalism [has] inflect[ed] literary culture’.¹⁹⁰ Yet it is difficult to pinpoint exactly *how*, since neoliberalism is a ‘polymorphous’¹⁹¹ term, interpreted variously as an ‘economic project’, a ‘pro-business secular faith’, and ‘a political rationality’.¹⁹² It operates across ‘the economic, the political-ideological, the sociocultural, and the ontological’, resulting in a ‘definitional complexity facing any contemporary attempt to deploy neoliberalism as a critical or analytic term’.¹⁹³ Here I employ it in the political sense after Wendy Brown, who ‘conceives neoliberalism as [...] “extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action” [...] refigure[ing] the human as human capital.’¹⁹⁴ In short, for me, neoliberalism refers to seeing poets and their art in terms of their selling potential, a phenomenon referred to by J.T Welsch.¹⁹⁵

Neoliberalism particularly inflects mainstream poetry and this manifests in its dyadic forms of mentorship. Dyadic mentoring has two main neoliberal aspects: first, it emphasises selling texts; second, it also sells the poet themselves. In regard to the former, dyadic mentoring most often works towards creating a book for publication, as I discussed in Chapter One and expand on in Chapter Three. The focus on publication inflects the mentoring process with neoliberalist values since the aims of mentoring are thereby about creating a commodity to sell to a publisher, who themselves is engaged in selling. Once the text itself has been created, the identity of the poet is sold along with the text itself, and mentoring is a key facilitator of this

¹⁹⁰ *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*, ed. by Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), p. 4.

¹⁹¹ Huehls and Smith, *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*, p. 1.

¹⁹² Huehls and Smith, *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*, p. 2.

¹⁹³ Huehls and Smith, *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁴ Huehls and Smith, *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*, p. 2; Wendy Brown, ‘Neo-Liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy’, *Theory & Event*, 7.1 (2003), doi:10.1353/tae.2003.0020.

¹⁹⁵ Welsch, *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem Press, 2021), p. 5.

process. Mentoring becomes involved in selling the poet's identity through mentors providing reviews on the inner or back covers of pamphlets or collections, which can be read as a final act in the mentoring process. Alexis Weedon asserts that the book cover 'is a prelude to the sale and consumption of a work',¹⁹⁶ and Corinne Kratz states the cover is a persuasive tool to help the reader 'decide whether to buy or read it'.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, mentors' book reviews can be interpreted as a marketing tool. They function by co-opting the mentor's reputation and esteem to confer market value on the mentee. Mentor reviews use the identity-currency of one poet to guarantee the quality of another, almost like the guarantor on a loan, thereby encouraging audiences to buy the text. One can observe this in Will Harris' 2020 debut collection, *RENDANG*.¹⁹⁸ The back cover features a review from his mentor from The Complete Works programme's third round, Sarah Howe, with 'Winner of the T.S. Eliot Prize' beneath her name.¹⁹⁹ The review stamps the book with the approval of an esteemed writer, ratified by a significant prize win that ensures even those unaware of Howe will respect her recommendation. The significance of Howe endorsing *RENDANG* as opposed to any other well-esteemed writer is that audiences may assume Howe influenced Harris through mentoring, suggesting that Harris was imbued with her brilliance even if, as I established in Chapter One, mentors may not always be significantly influential in reality. Accordingly, dyadic mentoring sells the identities of both mentor and mentee via a kind of literary genealogy.

Conversely, one could argue that Howe's review sells *RENDANG* itself, not Harris' identity, given that she details the qualities of Harris' work, such as 'these poems are as loving as they are contemplative, passionate in their political commitments'.²⁰⁰ I contend that both forms of selling are taking place. For instance, Howe's descriptions are not solely of the work but of Harris himself: 'You would struggle to find a keener mind [...] than Harris's'.²⁰¹ Secondly, using Sarah Howe's name and accreditations on the cover as opposed to an anonymous review establishes the importance of poetic identity and authority, and, given its location within the cover-as-marketing-tool, thereby positions identity as something being sold. This effect is exacerbated by the publisher's decision to preface Howe's review with a Poetry Book Society quotation that describes Harris as 'one of the most important young poets in the UK', which

¹⁹⁶ Alexis Weedon, 'In Real Life: Book Cover in the Internet Bookstore', in *Judging a Book by Its Cover: Fans, Publishers, Designers, and the Marketing of Fiction*, ed. by Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody (Routledge, 2016), p. 117.

¹⁹⁷ Corinne A. Kratz, 'On Telling/Selling a Book by Its Cover', *Cultural Anthropology*, 9.2 (1994), pp. 179–200 (p. 184), JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/656239>> [accessed 28 August 2024].

¹⁹⁸ Will Harris, *RENDANG* (Granta, 2020).

¹⁹⁹ Harris, *RENDANG*.

²⁰⁰ Harris, *RENDANG*.

²⁰¹ Harris, *RENDANG*.

solidifies the value placed on Harris rather than solely *RENDANG*.²⁰² As a result, the mentor's review sells the mentee's identity along with the text.

In the context of Howe and Harris' mentorship, there are obviously other factors at play as to why the mentorship was placed in centre-stage in this way. The Complete Works programme arose out of essential calls for poetry publishing to diversify following the ground-breaking report, *Free Verse*, which 'revealed that less than 1% of poetry books published in Britain [were] by black and Asian poets'.²⁰³ As a result, the emphasis on Harris' identity can be seen as a breaking down of the 'doors' of publishing 'gatekeepers', a claiming of a stake in the UK poetry publishing landscape, and recognition of the quality of poets of colour.²⁰⁴ Simultaneously, it is also important to note that in response to *Free Verse*, influential poets and facilitators including 'Ruth Bothwick, [Arvon Foundation]; Matthew Hollis, [Faber]; Fiona Sampson, [then] editor of *Poetry Review*; Patience Agbabi, poet; Daljit Nagra, poet [...]; Emma [Hewett, Director of Spread the Word] and [Bernardine Evaristo]', met to discuss how they might address the state of the publishing landscape and get recognition for diverse poets.²⁰⁵ Their answer was dyadic mentoring with an 'established poet'.²⁰⁶ Because influential figures in the poetry ecology see dyadic mentoring as facilitating recognition of an individual, this implies that dyadic mentoring has a particular emphasis on the creation of the individual and their identity, which, when co-opted by the wider structures of neoliberalism, expands that emphasis to selling the individual.

To return to the mentor-review, *RENDANG* is by no means an exception; mentor-reviews regularly sell the poet's identity, indicating that dyadic mentoring is often used as a neoliberalist marketing tool. For instance, mentors provide cover reviews on Ellora Sutton's *antonyms for burial*,²⁰⁷ Marjorie Lotfi's *The Wrong Person to Ask*,²⁰⁸ Kaycee Hill's *Hot Sauce*,²⁰⁹ Katharine Stansfield's *Playing House*,²¹⁰ James Davey's *How to Parallel Park*,²¹¹ and Caleb Parkin's *Wasted Rainbow*.²¹² In all of these reviews, the author remains connected to the desirable quality being advertised, either by owning the desirable quality or being it. For instance, John

²⁰² Harris, *RENDANG*.

²⁰³ Evaristo and Nagra, *Ten*, p. 11; *Free Verse: Publishing Opportunities for Black and Asian Poets*, (Spread the Word, 2005) <<https://www.spreadtheword.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Free-Verse-Report.pdf>> [accessed 23 February 2022].

²⁰⁴ Evaristo and Nagra, *Ten*, p. 16.

²⁰⁵ Evaristo and Nagra, *Ten*, p. 15.

²⁰⁶ Evaristo and Nagra, *Ten*, p. 15.

²⁰⁷ Ellora Sutton, *Antonyms for Burial* (Fourteen Publishing, 2022).

²⁰⁸ Marjorie Lotfi, *The Wrong Person to Ask* (Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2023).

²⁰⁹ Kaycee Hill, *Hot Sauce* (Bloodaxe Books, 2023).

²¹⁰ Katherine Stansfield, *Playing House* (Seren, 2014).

²¹¹ James Davey, *How to Parallel Park* (V. Press, 2018).

²¹² Caleb Parkin, *Wasted Rainbow* (Tall Lighthouse, 2021).

McCullough praises ‘Sutton’s vigorous, fiercely imagined poems.’²¹³ John Glenday praises that ‘[Lotfi] brilliantly illustrates the little tragedies of global politics’.²¹⁴ Aviva Dautch praises Hill’s ‘lyric imagination’.²¹⁵ Phillip Gross praises ‘the unmistakeable thrill of Katherine Stansfield’s poetry’.²¹⁶ Carrie Etter, in the mildest manifestation of connecting the poet’s identity to the work, simply praises ‘Davey’s poetry’²¹⁷ and ‘Parkin’s poetry’, before mostly referring to the characteristics of the poems themselves.²¹⁸ In these examples, the author either *is* or *owns* the device or quality being described, which sells the author’s identity as much as the text since ownership renders these qualities an extension of the author, as if the author is a kind of commercial brand. In this way, mentor-reviews work towards neoliberalist selling of the author themselves.

The neoliberalist impulse of dyadic mentoring is both external and internal. For instance, one interviewee said their publisher pressured them to ask for a cover review by their prize-winning mentor because the mentor’s renown and association with the book would help sell it.²¹⁹ This account implies the publishing industry tends to view mentoring in neoliberal terms. Equally, the dyadic structure also contains neoliberalist ideas internally, creating the pre-conditions for neoliberalism to take hold. For instance, the dyadic structure emphasises the production of individual identity, based on Romantic notions of authorship that locate the poet as the sole source of creation. This model of authorship is replicated in the figure of the neoliberalist entrepreneur. Cultural production scholar, Sara Malou Strandvad, notes the similarity, remarking that the Romantic genius is similar to the neoliberalist entrepreneur due to their ability to ‘create [sic] *ex nihilo*’, meaning out of nothing or solely from themselves.²²⁰ In addition, Joseph Pilotta states, ‘Entrepreneurship within neoliberalism is based on a philosophy of individualism’.²²¹ Neoliberalist entrepreneurship and dyadic mentoring therefore both emphasise narratives of the individual. This narrative can be easily commodified, since it creates a single main character whose story can be easily told and sold to audiences.²²²

²¹³ Sutton, *Antonyms for Burial*, p. 3.

²¹⁴ Lotfi, *The Wrong Person to Ask*.

²¹⁵ Hill, *Hot Sauce*.

²¹⁶ Stansfield, *Playing House*.

²¹⁷ Davey, *How to Parallel Park*.

²¹⁸ Parkin, *Wasted Rainbow*.

²¹⁹ Anonymous, ‘Poetry Mentee Interview’.

²²⁰ Sara Malou Strandvad, ‘From Gung Ho Heroes and Their Tragic Counterparts to Catalyst Characters’, *Artivate*, 11.2 (2022), pp. 1–16 (p. 7), JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48731441>> [accessed 4 September 2024].

²²¹ Joseph J. Pilotta, ‘The Entrepreneur as Hero?’, in *Neoliberalism, Economic Radicalism, and the Normalization of Violence*, ed. by Vicente Berdayes and John W. Murphy (Springer International Publishing, 2016), pp. 37–52 (p. 37), doi:10.1007/978-3-319-25169-1_4.

²²² See my exploration of narrative theory’s role in representing and selling poetry mentorship in Chapter Three.

Subsequently, due to a shared interest in individualism, the dyad is primed to become a neoliberalist structure.

Overall, from the intent to publish a book to the marketing of both book and poet identity, neoliberalism therefore permeates the most common form of mentoring for mainstream poets. Many poets and mentors may decry this statement, but Huehls and Smith provide both explanation and solace. They state, ‘markets frame but do not determine the subjects acting within them. The market does not require specific economic pursuits, political commitments, or ideological beliefs; it only requires our presence, our being in and of it’.²²³ Likewise, poets do not need to support neoliberalism to be affected by it.

In contrast, ExperiMentoring is less focused on selling, either through producing a book or through marketing it, which suggests its underlying political impulse is more radical and left wing. For instance, none of the experimental poets I interviewed described engaging in multiplicitous mentoring with the ambition to create a single text, and instead frame mentoring as ‘a form of solidarity and advice’ rather than focusing on production.²²⁴ Through the absence of a product to sell, multiplicitous mentoring immediately distinguishes itself from neoliberalism and resists capitalist notions of productivity.²²⁵ In addition, the marketing that the mentor-review enacts in dyadic mentoring cannot be replicated within multiplicitous mentoring because, in the words of Kat Sinclair, ‘the sense of mentorship is more diffuse than that’.²²⁶ The lineage involves multiple figures in tangled, hidden, and undefined methods and, because of this, cannot be traced or narrativized so simply, nor easily commodified in review form. The complexity of creating a narrative from multiplicitous mentoring is intensified since there is no explicit hierarchy like within dyadic mentoring.²²⁷ The multiplicitous structure of mentoring therefore resists commodification at both the levels of poetry and poet, rendering ExperiMentoring less influenced by neoliberalism.

²²³ Huehls and Smith, *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*, p. 9.

²²⁴ Chong, ‘Poetry Mentee Interview’.

²²⁵ Described by the sociologist Alessandro Gomes Enoque as the ‘permanently unlimited productive flows’ of the “civilised capitalist machine”, a term from Deleuze and Guattari’s germinal text, *Anti-Oedipus*. Alessandro Gomes Enoque, ‘Perspectives on Guilt in Modern Capitalism: A Dialogue Between Deleuze-Guattari and Walter Benjamin’, *Cadernos EBAPE.BR*, 21.4 (2023), pp. 2–15 (p. 8), doi:10.1590/1679-395120220166x; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, with Michel Foucault, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Reprinted (Continuum, 2012), p. 35.

²²⁶ Sinclair, ‘Poetry Mentee Interview’.

²²⁷ Which, through the lack of hierarchy itself, is a manifestation of a more left-wing ideology such as socialism or communism.

2.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has sought to widen the scope of poetry mentorship beyond the isolated dyad and the solely page itself. Almost twenty years ago, Victoria Sheppard's study of contemporary British poetry adopted a similar approach, positing

a rejection of poetry as a self-sufficient cultural form, and an emphasis instead on its interdependence with other discourses and artistic disciplines, ranging from the visual arts, performance and music to narrative and history.²²⁸

Sheppard's research concerns artistic interdisciplinarity and analysis of the finished poem rather than its construction—or the development of the poet themselves. Nevertheless, her method of 'drawing on or collaborating with other genres, media or disciplines' speaks to the formulation of multimodality I established across this chapter, which suggests that poetry writing and mentorship can attend to a multitude of skills and approaches simultaneously.²²⁹ Applying a multimodal understanding enables both writing and mentoring to become more layered and nuanced, and enables the recognition of a wider range of practices, such as those involving professionally facilitatory skills or wellbeing techniques. Accordingly, this chapter likewise rejects notions of self-sufficiency in favour of interconnection with many disciplines and discourses. Multimodality bridges a gap in scholarship that has long conceptualised poetry writing as multidimensional in this way—although to a lesser extent than multimodality advocates— but largely disaggregates approaches to poetry mentorship.

This chapter's attentions towards mentoring for experimental poets, ExperiMentoring, further expands our notions of poetry mentorship away from the dyad. My investigation reveals a symmetry between textual strategies and devices in contemporary experimental poetry and how ExperiMentoring takes place. For instance, the rejection of the individual lyric 'I' is echoed in non-dyadic forms of mentorship. Experimental poetry's provisionality of language appears in these non-dyads often being less formalised and more nebulous than traditional understandings of mentorship, involving activities some interpret as outside the definition of mentoring. Both these symmetries shift away from the isolated and individualist Romantic notion of authorship through adopting more collective, community-based, and co-productive structures of poetic development. In short, mentoring becomes less dyadic and more ecologically-interconnected.

²²⁸ Sheppard, 'Contesting Voices: Authenticity, Performance and Identity in Contemporary British Poetry', p. 3.

²²⁹ Sheppard, 'Contesting Voices: Authenticity, Performance and Identity in Contemporary British Poetry', p. 3.

However, poets working in more mainstream traditions actually engage in similar activities to experimental poets but less often call them mentoring. This language difference signals experimental poets have a less restricted definition of mentoring. To encapsulate the contributions ExperiMentoring has made to our understanding of poetry mentorship, I draw on Jacob Korg's research on ritual and experiment. Instead of ritual, which 'every society [uses] to organize and clarify patterns of behaviour', and ultimately gain a sense of 'some control over the course of nature', experiment and experimental poetry 'corresponds to the method and philosophy of scientific experiment', as something delving into the unknown.²³⁰ ExperiMentoring is true to that spirit. It is characterised by a certain comfortableness in the unclear and untraceable, opening the possibility for mentoring as a whole to embrace a lack of control through adopting less formalised structures.

In the final part of Chapter Two, I investigated the political impulses beneath ExperiMentoring and mentoring in more mainstream contexts. I demonstrated a link between neoliberalism and individualism and isolationism, made manifest in the ways the dyad—the structure most associated with mentoring in mainstream poetry—is externally and internally inflected by neoliberalism. By contrast, non-dyadic and nebulous forms of mentoring common in ExperiMentoring resist neoliberalism, indicating that the political emphases beneath the forms of mentoring differ. Taking account of the political context in which mentoring occurs therefore enhances our understanding of mentoring by revealing a political dimension to the primacy of poetry mentoring as dyadic, once again illustrating that poetry mentorship cannot be extricated from its wider social and cultural contexts.

Moving to the ecology at scale—by departing from poetry mentorship as a solely a dyadic, formally-focused practice in favour of a range of forms and approaches that can be employed fluidly and simultaneously, this research may enable more mentoring practices to be recognised and, in turn, support a wider range of poets.

The multimodal, non-dyadic, and interconnected ways I have broadened mentorship in Chapter Two will inform the rest of my research. Without these, I could not unpick the differing and layered notions of writerly success or mentoring in emotionally-engaged settings in Chapter Three. My analysis of political impulses also paves the way to recount mentorship's entwinement with political and cultural shifts in the arts and funding landscapes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Chapters Three and Four. Moreover, ExperiMentoring's communal forms of mentoring feeds into Chapter Four's investigation of non-dyadic mentoring.

²³⁰ Jacob Korg, 'Ritual and Experiment in Modern Poetry', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 7.1 (1979), pp. 127–46 (p. 127), JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3831116>> [accessed 14 July 2025].

Chapter 2

Here, non-formal approaches play a significant role, which Chapter Two's multimodality enables me to trace.

Chapter 3 Multimodal Poetry Mentorship as Interconnected with the Poetry Ecology

3.1 The Preoccupation with Publication-Centric, Formal Notions of Success

What is a successful poet—what does success mean or look like? Does it leave room for the multimodality of poetry practice? Further, how do notions of success affect multimodality in poetry mentoring?

Measures of success for poets are the source of some debate in Jo Bell and Jane Commane's popular writing primer, *How to Be a Poet*, which suggests poetic success is a complex concept. For instance, Bell contends that 'For many of us, "success" means the visible success of prizes, publications and public reputation.'¹ Indeed, in the book's opening chapter, Bell uses awards to quantify the quality of hers and Commane's mentoring: 'we have helped hundreds of people to write like their best selves, and there is a stream of award-winning work from the poets we've worked with to prove it'.² However, Bell also re-evaluates these metrics, commenting, 'These rewards are precious and encouraging [...] but the kind of success we should pursue most actively is rather different.'³ Felicia Rose Chavez expands on what those kinds of success could be, such as developing empathy for others.⁴ Bell and Chavez's advocations for different measures of success implies that publications and prizes may be widely valued, but that the poetry ecology has a complex relationship with notions of external recognition or esteem.

This complex relationship plays out in reflections by prolific poets and mentors, Stephen J. Fowler, Andrea Brady, and Nathalie Teitler. Fowler, for instance, said, 'any profession, especially those outside of the market,' is rife with 'a massive, weighty, often silly, set of traditions' that 'one just has to ignore'.⁵ He connects this to how he sees success for his own practice, adding,

I don't want to be financially successful, or well known, or succeed in the metrics commonly defined in our culture. But I want to eat life. I want to

¹ Bell and Commane, *How to Be a Poet*, p. 151.

² Bell and Commane, *How to Be a Poet*, p. 151.

³ Bell and Commane, *How to Be a Poet*, p. 151.

⁴ Chavez, 'Decolonising the Curriculum with Felicia Rose Chavez'.

⁵ Stephen J. Fowler and Alice Willitts, 'Interview with Stephen J Fowler', *Magma Poetry*, no. 78 (Autumn 2020), pp. 20–25 (p. 23).

work at creative things everyday, grow as a human being, be more, do more, get to more contentedness.⁶

Fowler prioritises more holistic metrics of success like regularly engaging in creativity, personal growth, and wellbeing over those metrics most commonly advocated in poetry culture, such as prestige. Andrea Brady clarifies that prestige, under capitalism, can mean publication with a major publishing house, yet distances herself from such notions by reflecting they seem antithetical to the ways of building community that she has been involved with as a poet across her life.⁷ Furthermore, Teitler, in a near-identical strategy to Bell, both rejects publication-centric success metrics and uses them to highlight the success of *The Complete Works*. At a live online event celebrating the *Mapping the Future* anthology, Teitler recounts that

in the first round [of the programme] the goal was to get major press collections. By the end of the first round, I realised that was really harmful to the poets to put that as the centre thing so by the second round it was in the contracts that the goal was to find your voice as strongly as possible—we took the pressure off publishing.⁸

Yet, earlier at the same event, Teitler notes the success of the scheme in terms of publications and prizes, which, by that time, included forty collections, three Forward Prize wins, two T.S. Eliot Prizes, and two Ted Hughes Awards.⁹ Overall, Bell, Chavez, Fowler, Brady, and Teitler have varying approaches to success. Some disaggregate them into categories and reject some notions, while others, albeit uneasily, adopt multiple metrics simultaneously.

I repeat my earlier question: what are the implications for multimodality in poetry mentoring? To consider this, I return to mentoring's significance on an ecological scale. As Janelle Adsit observes, 'Creative writing, understood as a discipline and a culture that extends beyond academe, is a set of organizations and discourses that teach writers how to achieve a life that is aligned with its own constructs'.¹⁰ Further, 'to get my golden ticket to belonging [as a writer] [...] meant demonstrating a worldview and taste that would be accepted'.¹¹ In other words, creative writing education shapes writers to believe in sanctioned shapes of authorship, and delegitimises those who do not conform, an effect Chavez also remarks upon.¹² If poetry

⁶ Fowler and Willits, 'Interview with Stephen J Fowler', p. 23.

⁷ Andrea Brady and others, 'Q&A from Panel III: Poetics of Resistance in Performance', unpublished paper delivered at Poetry Off the Page, Around the Globe: Advances in Poetry Performance Research (13 June 2025).

⁸ Speaking Volumes and *The Complete Works*, *Mapping the Future: In Conversation*.

⁹ Will May and I raised this point in a conference paper. Will May and Joanna Nissel, 'Performing the Mentor', unpublished paper delivered at Poetry Off the Page, Around the Globe: Advances in Poetry Performance Research (13 June 2025).

¹⁰ Adsit, *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing*, p. 15.

¹¹ Adsit, *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing*, pp. 5–6.

¹² Chavez, 'Decolonising the Curriculum with Felicia Rose Chavez'.

mentorship, as a form of writing education, has the potential to instil ideas of successful authorship within its mentees, what ideas about authorship does mentorship perpetuate? Does mentoring hold space for the multimodality of poetry practice? These are some of the central questions of Chapter Three.

Across this chapter, I continue to expand poetry mentoring beyond purely or singularly formal approaches by applying Chapter Two's multimodality to specific settings and contexts for poetry writing and mentoring. I explore how poets, mentors, scholars, and poetry organisations combine or disaggregate various approaches to writing and mentoring practice, and detail the potential ramifications and significances of these choices, both for mentoring itself and for the poetry ecology at scale. Chapter Three ultimately evidences that poetry writing and mentoring are multimodal practices regardless of whether they are recognised as such. Moreover, by tracing mentoring's impact beyond the discrete dyad to the overall ecology, this research provides real-world examples of the webs of connection between mentoring and the ecology outlined in Chapter One's ecological models, and once more illustrates that poetry mentoring is deeply imbricated with the poetry ecology.

I begin at a macrocosmic scale, linking poets' and scholars' notions of successful writers and mentoring to the dominant conceptualisation of authorship in the UK. As I have begun to establish in this chapter's introduction, poets and scholars have nuanced and complicated understandings of success. However, this chapter will show that they commonly ascribe to publication-centric notions of success aligned with seeing authorship in purely formal terms, colluding with broader individualist and isolationist understandings of writing and mentoring practice. This research enhances our understanding of poetry mentorship in two ways. My excavation of individualism and isolationism within shapes of authorship and mentoring cast some of the forces that have shaped these practices into sharper relief. Moreover, the complexity surrounding notions of success evidences that poetry writing and mentoring can encompass multiple approaches concurrently.

I then apply multimodality at a closer proximity, homing in on particular mentorships themselves. I further elasticise notions of poetry mentorship by observing spaces where formal practice and emotionally-engaged approaches interact, and mentors' varying strategies to separate or intersect the two. My research reveals that, while some settings—like writing for wellbeing groups—actively acknowledge that both are at play, the same is true in settings that purport to focus purely on the formal, such as university classrooms. In fact, the twenty-first century emphasis on identity and trauma has increased engagement with personal and emotional approaches to poetry. However, scholarship around mentorship often maintains the focus on solely formal approaches, resulting in an increased risk of inadequate support—a risk

that is exacerbated for marginalised mentees. Through these applied investigations, Chapter Three concretises that non-formal approaches play an active role in mentoring simultaneously alongside formal development.

In the final part of this chapter, I return to notions of success at scale. I address mentorship programmes organised by writer-development agencies and publishers—which I refer to as FAB mentoring—and elucidate that scholarship and culture’s formally-focused ideas of a successful poet mould the provision FAB mentorships offer, particularly via prize culture. I also look towards the wider ecological significance of FAB mentoring by examining how these programmes, in turn, affect the wider poetry ecology. By establishing that mentoring has a reciprocal impact with the poetry ecology, Chapter Three introduces another way in which poetry mentoring is deeply interconnected with the poetry ecology.

Before I begin my analysis, I wish to frame the forthcoming chapter with a reminder of Chapter One’s immersed ecological model, since it is integral to seeing poetry mentorship as ecologically enmeshed. The model’s resource-transmitting relationships provide the framework through which influence and reciprocity take place. Moreover, the model’s fluidity and dynamism captures the osmotic movements of abstract, hard-to-quantify resources. This representational capacity is key to our understanding of mentorship’s ecological interconnection in Chapter Three because the abstract resource, prestige, is a core currency of prizes and success. Therefore we must comprehend how prestige moves in the ecology to understand the interweaving between poetry mentoring and the ecology, thus intervening against notions of mentorship as a discrete practice.

To start this chapter in earnest, I will now further trace what poets, scholars, and mentors consider to mark a successful poet and successful poetry mentorship.

3.1.1 Publication-Centric, Formal Notions of Success as Represented in Survey Data and Poems Themselves

The introduction to this chapter began to evoke a sense of poets and mentors recognising different success metrics but that publications and prizes remain the most respected indicators. This respect suggest a preoccupation with formal notions of success since publication-centric outcomes are aligned with formal approaches to writing and mentoring. To interrogate this contention, I turn now to the survey issued for this project. This data offers additional insight into poets and mentors’ relationships with external recognition and esteem.¹³

¹³ See Appendix A for all survey statistics.

When asked which measures of success mentors apply to their mentoring, their answers varied (Figure 12).

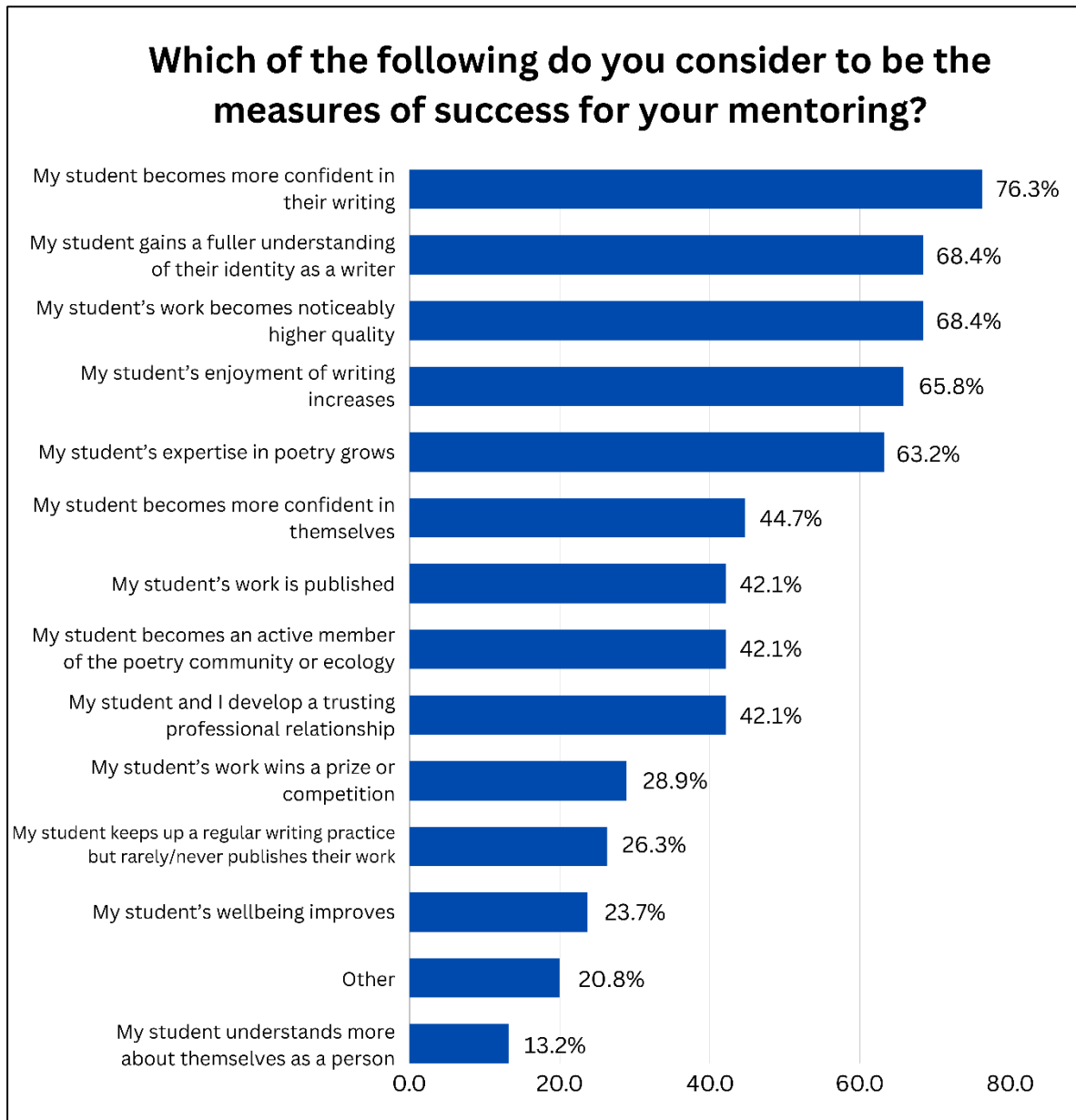


Figure 12: Measures of Success from Mentor-Mentee Project Survey

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
My student becomes more confident in their writing	76.3%
My student gains a fuller understanding of their identity as a writer	68.4%
My student's work becomes noticeably higher quality	68.4%
My student's enjoyment of writing increases	65.8%
My student's expertise in poetry grows	63.2%
My student becomes more confident in themselves	44.7%
My student's work is published	42.1%

My student becomes an active member of the poetry community or ecology	42.1%
My student and I develop a trusting professional relationship	42.1%
My student's work wins a prize or competition	28.9%
My student keeps up a regular writing practice but rarely/never publishes their work	26.3%
My student's wellbeing improves	23.7%
Other	20.8%
My student understands more about themselves as a person	13.2%

Table 6: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 12

The most popular answers were factors that work towards a stronger formal practice such as 'My student becomes more confident in their writing' (76%), 'My student's work becomes noticeably higher quality' (68%), or 'My student gains a fuller understanding of their identity as a writer' (68%). The least popular were outcomes that manifest outside the poem, such as improved wellbeing (20.8%) and a sense of inner understanding (13.2%). Yet, mentors did not choose publication or prize-wins as a measure of success nearly as often; these only scored 42% and 29%, respectively. One may argue mentors are unlikely to say they engage in mentoring to win prizes —this would reduce mentoring to a shallow transaction. Nevertheless, these statistics imply that some mentors prioritise intrinsic poetic development over externally-granted validations of that quality.

However, it is also important to consider the demographics of those who took part in this survey. Of the forty-one mentors who responded, only two had affiliations with the kind of widely-esteemed and formalised mentoring services that could be considered part of the poetry establishment. Most were independent services run by poets who had no more than one collection published and no major prize wins. The sample also includes mentors who focused on wellbeing. Therefore the survey represents mentors acting from outside formal structures that emphasise publications and prizes, and may therefore have greater freedom to deprioritise them as measures of success. Additionally, as I discussed in Chapter Two, a range of recent literary culture scholarship note the rise of prize culture as a measure of literary worth, such as Hall,¹⁴ Forbes,¹⁵ Wallas,¹⁶ Hanauer,¹⁷ Sansom,¹⁸ and Jaillant.¹⁹ Likewise, J.T. Welsch²⁰ and

¹⁴ Hall, 'Poetry and Ambition'.

¹⁵ Forbes, 'Multiple Facets of the Developing Writer'.

¹⁶ Graham Wallas, *The Art of Thought* (Jonathan Cape, 1926).

¹⁷ Hanauer, *Poetry as Research*.

¹⁸ Sansom, *Writing Poems*.

¹⁹ Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*.

²⁰ Welsch, *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem Press, 2021), p. 45.

Millicent Weber describe prizes as a major way in which the poetry ecology awards value.²¹ Accordingly, many poetry mentorship programmes, such as Primers,²² GROW,²³ and Poetry Ambassadors, conclude in the publication of an anthology.²⁴ With this literature in mind, perhaps my survey data instead signifies a dissonance between the reality of poetic practice for many practitioners, which emphasises development of the craft itself, and the assumed common culture, which privileges publications and prizes. Weber's research gestures towards this phenomenon. She posits that prizes conferring prestige is a simplistic notion and individuals have complex feelings about prizes, variously distancing themselves from or taking part in them.²⁵

Contemporary poems on prizes and competitions support this notion, since they largely disparage prize culture as a metric of value in the poetry ecology, which demonstrates both its proliferation and the complex relationships poets and mentors have with conceptualisations of success. For example, Denise Riley conjures a tense atmosphere in her poem, 'Prize Cultures', in which a poet 'is battling another highly-regarded poet for the prestigious annual *Northern Vaunter*', and a mentor is considered desirable due to their prize wins: 'Her Under-18 prize includes mentoring by that radical poet who won a coveted *Silkiest Text*.'²⁶ Meg Cox's 'My Friend the Prize-Winning Poet' includes a speaker who, in response to her friend winning a competition that she too entered, exclaims bitterly that 'I had to say I was delighted for her' and lies to her about having read the winning poem.²⁷ The speaker's jealousy shows, and sends up, a poetry ecology filled with bitterness as a result of the pressure under which prize culture places poets. For instance, at no point does Cox's speaker acknowledge the winning poem is actually deserving; in fact her vitriol in 'I won't be fucking reading it' speaks to the opposite.²⁸ Bebe Ashley's poem 'Give Me a Lifetime of Promises', likewise questions whether prizes equate to quality, asking whether the 'arts administrators'²⁹ of an unspecified prize or funding opportunity make decisions based on 'buzz words or the truth'.³⁰ Fleur Adcock, too, highlights the changing metrics by which judges use to adjudicate poetry competitions. Her poem concludes by

²¹ Millicent Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, New Directions in Book History (Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 26, doi:10.1007/978-3-319-71510-0.

²² Nine Arches Press, 'Primers'.

²³ Dialect, 'GROW Mentoring', Dialect, 17 January 2024 <<https://www.dialect.org.uk/grow-mentoring>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

²⁴ ArtfulScribe, 'Poetry Ambassadors'.

²⁵ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, p. 26.

²⁶ Denise Riley, *Lurex* (Picador, 2022), p. 11.

²⁷ Meg Cox, *A Square of Sunlight* (Smith|Doorstop Books, 2021), p. 65.

²⁸ Cox, *A Square of Sunlight*, p. 65.

²⁹ Bebe Ashley, 'Give Me a Lifetime of Promises', *Bath Magg*, no. 8 (December 2021) <<https://www.bathmagg.com/bebeashley/>> [accessed 13 February 2024].

³⁰ Ashley, 'Give Me a Lifetime of Promises'.

emphasising the subjectivity of prizes: ‘There is only one prescription for [a masterpiece]: it’s got to be good.’³¹ Ali Whitelock’s ‘so she’s not my friend and runs a fish & chip shop’, similarly finishes by using the metaphor of food to highlight the subjectivity of what constitutes quality: ‘she loves her food that way / you should love it too’.³² Finally, Joe Luna’s poem ‘NO ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS’ highlights that the ‘rubrics of funding bodies’ are ‘state-sanctioned’, emphasising that quality itself is not a neutral term, but informed by generations of exclusionary taste arbitration and canon-making.³³ Overall, these contemporary poets’ portrayal of prize culture manifesting within the poetry ecology underscore that at institutional, scholarly, and cultural levels, prizes are widely considered to be a key metric of value. By contrast, poets at an individual level may disagree and see success multimodally but, nevertheless, often feel the imposing presence of formal measures of success.

3.1.2 Implications of Seeing Success in Formal Terms for Poetry Mentoring and Writing, and Their Surrounding Cultures

Privileging publications and prizes as measures of success prescribes a solely formal shape of authorship as the sanctioned model, the implications of which I explore across this next part of Chapter Three. In this section, my analysis reveals the pressure poetry culture and scholarship exerts on mentoring to focus on formal aspects. To bring into sharper relief some of the forces that led to purely formal mentoring becoming dominant, I will excavate the individualism and isolationism within shapes of authorship. Finally, I conclude this section by gesturing toward a burgeoning multimodality in poetry mentoring.

The first consequence of publication-centric measures of success I wish to raise is that they limit the number of poets who can be considered successful, which negatively impacts mentoring. For example, publication becomes increasingly difficult and competitive as poets submit larger parcels of work, from individual poems through to collections. Therefore, especially because many prizes apply to full collections rather than smaller works, few poets receive the accolades that designate them as successful poets. If not many poets can achieve success, this creates considerable potential for mentoring to fail. As a result, a certain despair and cynicism about whether the practice is even worth engaging in sometimes emerges. Jaillant comments on this phenomenon in the university setting, in which it is exacerbated due to high tuition fees. She cites lecturers in creative writing and writers who all disparage HE courses, particularly in the context of novel-writing. For example, Hanif Kureishi calls them ‘a waste of

³¹ Fleur Adcock, *Selected Poems* (Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 115–16.

³² Alison Whitelock, *And My Heart Crumples like a Coke Can* (Wakefield Press, 2018), pp. 45–46.

³³ Joe Luna, *Old News* (Slub Press, 2023), p. 21.

time’,³⁴ and Lionel Shriver adds ‘very few of your students will go on to publish anything more than their phone number.’³⁵ Shriver’s addition signals that these writers disparage creative writing due to their ideas of a successful writer. Some writers view the mentoring practice in Higher Education as pointless because it rarely results in published works. While these accounts relate primarily to prose fiction, poet, August Kleinzahler, applies this phenomenon to poets as well; Jaillant describes that he ‘openly dismis[s] creative writing programmes as shams designed to lure young and naïve would-be writers’.³⁶ Overall, Jaillant presents a phenomenon in which people are invited to chase a dream of being a published writer, when the likelihood of such an eventuality is slim, resulting in mentors becoming disheartened and potentially quitting.³⁷

Poetry culture and scholarship’s prioritisation of publication and prizes as measures of success also shapes who conducts mentoring, particularly in a Higher Education context. For instance, writing education scholar Kelly Ritter outlines that creative writing courses commonly adopt star pedagogy.³⁸ Predicated on the model of the master and the apprentice, star pedagogy necessitates a prestigious —quantified by publications and prizes— author as the mentor, with students hoping to learn from their expertise.³⁹ Patrick Bizarro observes, ‘The star system, upheld at most universities [...] asserts curiously that the best known and most well-published authors are, in fact, the best teachers of writing.’⁴⁰ Subsequently, the poetry ecology’s notions of success influence who conducts mentoring.

At the same time, emphasising external validations of quality over teaching expertise as qualifications for mentors upholds an individualist conceptualisation of authorship. This is because star pedagogy posits that learning takes place by one individual passing the flame of genius to another individual. Sieja-Skrzypulec notes that when creative writing courses were introduced in Poland, a similar belief that reinforced the Romantic notion of single authorship manifested. She recounts two main pedagogical approaches, one that focused on craft and

³⁴ Alison Flood, ‘Creative Writing Professor Hanif Kureishi Says Such Courses Are “a Waste of Time”’, *The Guardian*, 4 March 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/04/creative-writing-courses-waste-of-time-hanif-kureishi>> [accessed 17 March 2025]; Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 229.

³⁵ Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 228; Jenefer Shute, ‘Lionel Shriver by Jenefer Shute’, interview with Lionel Shriver, 1 October 2005 <<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/lionel-shriver/>> [accessed 17 March 2025].

³⁶ Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 229.

³⁷ Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 228.

³⁸ Kelly Ritter, ‘Ethos Interrupted: Diffusing “Star” Pedagogy in Creative Writing Programs’, *College English*, 69.3 (2007), pp. 283–92, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472210>> [accessed 1 February 2023].

³⁹ Moore and Meekings, *The Place and the Writer*, p. 152.

⁴⁰ Patrick Bizarro, ‘Reading the Creative Writing Course: The Teacher’s Many Selves’, in *Colors of a Different Horse: Rethinking Creative Writing Theory and Pedagogy*, ed. by Wendy Bishop and Hans A. Ostrom (National Council of Teachers of English, 1994), pp. 234–47 (p. 242).

‘presenting useful strategies’ to achieve effects in the writing, which was considered a kind of ‘heretic’ practice that would never result in high quality literature, and a second that embraced the concept of the Romantic genius.⁴¹ With this paradigm, the mentee simply listened to the mentor’s discussions about poetry; any genuine poets would supposedly be able to learn using this model, as if activating writerly qualities that were innate and could not be taught. The latter frames poetic development in a way that upholds Romantic single authorship since poetic development stems from within the mentee rather than the mentor’s influence and presents an individualist conceptualisation of poetry practice.

While the binary in Sieja-Skrzypulec’s research is rather extreme, UK poetry mentorship commonly adopts star pedagogy, which is underpinned by a similar understanding of authorship rooted in innate genius, thus implying Sieja-Skrzypulec’s account is somewhat applicable to this study. Star pedagogy can be traced across the poetry ecology. For instance, Arvon places their facilitators at the heart of their marketing. When advertising each course on their website, Arvon places large images of the facilitators at the top of each course webpage, which, together with the facilitators’ names, take up more than half of the initial screen with which the reader is initially presented.⁴² The facilitators also have their own webpages dedicated to author biographies (which present records of publication and prizes), while the course content has only a single paragraph, which signals the facilitators’ significance to the Arvon courses. Put simply, the courses are sold using the currency of their facilitators’ influence, quantified by their publications and prize wins. Publishing houses, too, use the individual to sell their books, as evidenced by my analysis in Chapter Two of the function of cover reviews as a marketing tool. Moreover, the central graphic for Broken Sleep Books’ announcement of their 2023 publications is simply a list of names, rather than book titles or the content of those titles,⁴³ echoing Andrew Duncan’s sentiment that the poetry ecology has a ‘habit of passing around poets’ names, rather than names of styles and techniques’.⁴⁴ Overall, then, scholarship that frames published and/or prize-winning poets as the most successful also positions these writers as the best mentors through star pedagogy and contributes to an emphasis on the individual across the poetry ecology.

⁴¹ Hanna Sieja-Skrzypulec, ‘Teacher Lore and Pedagogy in Creative Writing Courses in Poland’, in *The Place and the Writer: International Intersections of Teacher Lore and Creative Writing Pedagogy* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), pp. 143–58 (pp. 152–53)

<<http://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/the-place-and-the-writer-international-intersections-of-teacher-lore-and-creative-writing-pedagogy>> [accessed 15 November 2021].

⁴² Arvon, ‘Online Writing Week: Poetry - Creeping Up on Joy’, Arvon, 2023 <<https://www.arvon.org/writing-courses/courses-retreats/online-writing-week-poetry-joy/>> [accessed 13 February 2023].

⁴³ Broken Sleep Books, ‘Introducing Our 2023 Line-Up’, Twitter, 15 November 2022 <<https://twitter.com/brokensleep/status/1592515448842878976>> [accessed 8 February 2023].

⁴⁴ Andrew Duncan, *The Failure of Conservatism in Modern British Poetry* (Salt, 2003), p. 25.

Narrative theory provides a concurrent explanation: humans tend to understand stories through character archetypes. Two of the most well-known narrative theories, The Hero's Journey (Joseph Campbell)⁴⁵ and Character Archetypes (Vladimir Propp),⁴⁶ articulate how stories—globally, and across millennia—operate using set roles, which, as Nasim Afsari and Shamsoddin Royanian outline, enact 'predictable patterns or functions'.⁴⁷ Propp, for instance, establishes 'seven character types and functions [...]: the villain, donor or provider, helper, princess, dispatcher, hero or victim and false hero'.⁴⁸ Campbell theorises similarly, but particularly identifies 'a mentor/helper/protector', whose function is to 'connect the hero with the resources needed to continue the journey'.⁴⁹ In terms of how poetry mentoring opportunities are disseminated or advertised, to explain what the opportunity entails, the mentorship-providers must tell the story the protagonist (i.e. the mentee) will undergo during mentorship. The mentor's role is obviously pivotal and must feature in the narrative. However, it is difficult to encapsulate pedagogies or poetic attributes one seeks to enhance in a single social media post, poster, or article. By contrast, prizes and publications quickly convey quality. Subsequently, the impact of mentorships can be summarised by the mentor's achievements, leading to centralising their prowess. The poetry ecology's emphasis on the individual detailed above may therefore be underpinned by broader understandings of narrative.

Poetry culture and scholarship's narrow definition of success alludes to wider cultures of isolationism in the poetry ecology, which become apparent when one traces the impact of publication and prizes compared to the broader spectrum of measures of success. To explain, publication and prizes tend to be of most value to other poets, whereas broader measures of success, such as those chosen least frequently in Figure 12, have more potential to create benefits unrelated to the poetry world. For instance, when a poet publishes a poem or larger text, that poetry enters the ecology and begins transmitting resources to both the reader of the work and its author.⁵⁰ The poem may transfer resources like inspiration or knowledge about a particular subject or poetic form to the reader, or the experience of having one's work read and

⁴⁵ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

⁴⁶ Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, Publication / Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics, 10, 2nd Edn (University of Texas Press, 2013).

⁴⁷ Nasim Afsari and Shamsoddin Royanian, 'Folk Narratology: Propp's Improved Actants and Functions', *American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences*, 13.1 (2015), pp. 87–93 (pp. 88–89).

⁴⁸ J. Prinsloo, 'Beyond Propp and Oedipus: Towards Expanding Narrative Theory', *Literator*, 13.3 (1992), pp. 65–82 (p. 67) <<https://literator.org.za/index.php/literator/article/view/771/941>> [accessed 4 December 2024].

⁴⁹ Derek L. Robertson and Christopher Lawrence, 'Heroes and Mentors: A Consideration of Relational-Cultural Theory and "The Hero's Journey"', *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 10.3 (2015), pp. 264–77 (p. 268), doi:10.1080/15401383.2014.968700.

⁵⁰ Darnton, 'What Is the History of Books?', p. 67.

praised, or to see one's work influencing another may transmit confidence to the author. One could argue that a poem or poetry text may be read by anyone, not only poets, and may therefore impact a wider audience. Robert Darnton's Communications Circuit reinforces this idea as it tracks the communications flow of book production, noting that the criticism or praise produced by the reader will ultimately shape the author's next works, and therefore a general readership is an integral part of any writing ecology.⁵¹ Yet Darnton's circuit is more applicable to fiction. For instance, fiction sales earned £362 million in 2021, implying a massive audience, and that there are far more readers of fiction than writers.⁵² By comparison, the contemporary poetry ecology is insular, its audiences, small.⁵³ American poet Dana Gioia implies that poetry's readers are very often poetry writers, scholars, or critics: 'the audience for poetry has declined into a subculture of specialists'.⁵⁴ Caleb Parkin references this phenomenon, citing 2022 discourse in online forums on poetry audiences being comprised of poets, which described 'the same ten poets moving a tenner around between them' by buying each other's books or attending each other's events.⁵⁵ While no quantitative studies into whether UK buyers of contemporary poetry are also writers of poetry have yet been conducted, the sales figures for poetry support Gioia and Parkin's observations.⁵⁶ In 2019, poetry sales were lauded for reaching £12 million, less than 5% of the 2021 fiction market,⁵⁷ with Tom Tivnan describing poetry as 'a closed market'.⁵⁸ This has been the case for some time, as Asha Rogers reflects that poetry has been 'understood by the Arts Council as a high literary form without an audience'⁵⁹ since the post-war period.⁶⁰ The patterns of impact created by poetry publications are thereby more

⁵¹ Darnton, 'What Is the History of Books?', p. 67.

⁵² Tom Tivnan, 'Records Tumble as Nielsen Figures Claim 2021 as the Most Lucrative Year on Record', *The Bookseller*, 21 January 2022 <<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/records-tumble-nielsen-figures-claim-2021-most-lucrative-year-record-1300965>> [accessed 13 February 2023].

⁵³ Vernon Lionel Shetley, *After the Death of Poetry: Poet and Audience in Contemporary America* (Duke University Press, 1993), p. 3.

⁵⁴ Shetley, *After the Death of Poetry*, p. 169.

⁵⁵ Caleb Parkin, 'Poetry Mentor Interview', June 2022.

⁵⁶ A 2022 study noted that over half of young poetry readers were also poetry writers. Yet, since this study concerns under-eighteens, it can only loosely imply the same is true for adults. Aimee Cole and others, *Children and Young People's Engagement with Poetry in 2022* (2022).

⁵⁷ Donna Ferguson, 'Poetry Sales Soar as Political Millennials Search for Clarity', Books, *The Guardian*, 21 January 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jan/21/poetry-sales-soar-as-political-millennials-search-for-clarity>> [accessed 13 February 2023].

⁵⁸ Tom Tivnan, 'Poetry on Course for a Record Year', *The Bookseller*, 11 December 2023 <<https://www.thebookseller.com/spotlight/poetry-on-course-for-a-record-year>> [accessed 18 March 2025].

⁵⁹ Asha Rogers, *State Sponsored Literature: Britain and Cultural Diversity after 1945*, 1st edn (Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 24, doi:10.1093/oso/9780198857761.001.0001.

⁶⁰ Tivnan notes that Instapoets like Rupi Kaur have 'raised the ire of so many in the traditional poetry community'. Since Instapoetry can be read easily by people unfamiliar with poetry, traditional poets' resistance hints at the insularity of poetry culture as it could be read as hostility to those who are not experts and practitioners. Tivnan, 'Poetry on Course for a Record Year'.

insular and isolated than those of fiction, and the benefits of poetry publication will be felt most strongly by other poets who read those publications.

By contrast, broader measures of success may, in addition to supporting formal poetry practice, create benefits unrelated to poetry. As demonstrated in Figure 12, poetry mentorship may support aspects like wellbeing or understanding more about yourself as a person. In my survey, these are valued the least, despite the potential to improve a person's overall life, which suggests that poets do not value as highly those aspects of poetry practice that pertain solely to the poet rather than their poetry. To frame this in terms of impact, poets more often prioritise measures of success that produce resources benefitting poetry as an artform, meaning that the resource flows that take precedent are those that stay within the bounds of the poetry ecology, rather than those that might extend beyond it. This suggests poetry culture and scholarship thinks about authorship in ways that can be inward-looking.

Poetry mentoring, however, may be showing signs of moving towards multimodal conceptualisations of practice that address benefits that can be external to poetry practice. As I established in Chapter Two, mentors and scholars frequently voice concerns that incorporating personally-oriented outcomes of poetry into poetry education risks reducing the quality of the poetry, whereas poets themselves are intimately familiar with how the process of writing poetry regularly engages with the emotional sphere. In the twenty-first century, poetry mentors are beginning to echo the latter. For instance, Joelle Taylor, lead mentor on the Borderlines project, says:

If your poem only works for you, and is not aesthetically arresting, or beautiful or resplendent with extraordinary metaphors, then it's probably something you should keep for yourself. [...] Don't forget to feed the messenger, the carrier of the message.⁶¹

Through adopting the language of sustenance, in 'feed', Taylor presents writing poetry that enables some kind of inner-development for the poet as a vital part of practice. Jo Bell posits a similar viewpoint:

If you aspire to publication, prizes and immortality, that's all well and good but keep your focus on making work. Your private success is the one that will sustain you: the continuing effort to write your own poetry as well as you can, to explore your own experience, to keep developing as an artist. Your project as a poet is to learn, to practise and to accept that every scrumpled draft is another step towards a poem you can be really pleased with.⁶²

⁶¹ Joelle Taylor, 'Interrogating the Self', in *How to Be a Poet* (Nine Arches Press, 2018), p. 92.

⁶² Bell and Commene, *How to Be a Poet*, p. 156.

Bell and Taylor's explicit acknowledgements of emotional practice's value indicate that some poetry mentors recognise more layered practices that challenge existing scholarship on poetry education. However, this does not guarantee mentors integrate these layers into their pedagogical approaches. There are some hints to suggest this may be starting to take place. For instance, in the project survey, while most holistic outcomes of mentoring score lowly, 44.7% of mentors agree 'My student becomes more confident in themselves' is an indicator of successful mentoring. Increased confidence could go on to impact the mentee in a variety of capacities unrelated to poetry —such as their friendships, romantic relationships, or career. If mentors are starting to recognise the wider, holistic benefits of their mentoring practices, this could suggest their understanding of mentorship is becoming less insular and isolationist, and also more multimodal.

To explore mentoring's multimodality in greater depth, I now turn to instances in which mentors and mentees directly step into this overlapping domain, outlining particularly where another field of personal development comes into play: therapy.

3.2 Embracing Multimodality: Merging Formal and Emotionally and/or Therapeutically-Engaged Approaches to Poetry Mentoring

'Words can be a way to make sense of our feelings,' writes author and mental health advocate, Rachel Kelly.⁶³ Poetry practice can involve sharing immensely personal experiences, desires, and opinions, particularly within the confessional tradition. This is why a variety of therapeutic practices use poetry to better express how the writing subject feels, with the hope of exorcising the pain of the experiences⁶⁴ causing them difficulty.⁶⁵ As the poet, Glyn Maxwell, notes: writing poetry can be 'an act of self-healing, a way how not to feel inadequate, empty, forsaken, ill.'⁶⁶

Nicholas Mazza's 2003 study, *Poetry Therapy: Theory and Practice*, traces poetry and therapy's mingled roots to Ancient Greece. He notes that Apollo, through his status as 'dual god of medicine and poetry, has often been referred to as a starting point for the historical

⁶³ Rachel Kelly, *You'll Never Walk Alone: Words To Keep You Company Through The Seasons Of Your Mind* (Yellow Kite, 2022), p. i.

⁶⁴ I define 'Experiences', here, as having perceived or 'observed facts or events' that may be used as 'as a source of information' in developmental processes. Oxford English Dictionary, 'Experience, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.) <www.oed.com/view/Entry/66520> [accessed 9 March 2023]. Andrew B. Barron and others, 'Embracing Multiple Definitions of Learning', *Trends in Neurosciences*, 38.7 (2015), pp. 405–07 (p. 406), doi:10.1016/j.tins.2015.04.008.

⁶⁵ Andreena Leeanne describes this process in her poem 'My poetry is my therapy'. Andreena Leeanne, *Charred: A Survivor Speaks Her Truth to Inspire* (Team Angelica Publishing, 2020), pp. 17–18.

⁶⁶ Maxwell, *On Poetry*, p. 7.

foundation for poetry therapy’, a practice of using poetry within psychotherapy.⁶⁷ By the end of the Ancient Greek era, Aristotle had identified ‘the role of catharsis in affecting an emotional cure’ in his *Poetics*, which remains ‘an important aspect of psychotherapy’ and poetry writing practice today.⁶⁸ Indeed, poetry has a long association with specifically the psychotherapeutic route to achieving wellbeing. The psychoanalyst and writer, Adam Phillips, notes poetry’s involvement at the formation of Freud’s psychoanalytic enquiry, with Freud himself describing poetry as a medium which discovered the unconscious before he formalised its study.⁶⁹ In more recent history, poetry and psychotherapy combined in the 1990s to form social prescribing, where ‘GPs us[e] writing to help with ‘anxious or depressed’ patients’ among other conditions.⁷⁰ Social prescribing continues thirty years later in poetry courses such as those by mid-Wales-based non-for-profit, Radiate Arts.⁷¹ Access to therapy in the UK today, however, is uneven, as Kelly raises, remarking, ‘Yes, you can share your feelings with friends, or a therapist if you are lucky enough to have one. But that may not be possible.’⁷² Her statement rings even truer given the current lengthy NHS wait times for mental health services.⁷³

In such a landscape, with poetry therapy offering potential benefits to wellbeing, to what extent do poetry mentors combine the roles of writing tutor and therapist? I consider this question in the following section. I interrogate how varying mentoring practices embrace multimodality and combine the realms of therapy and technical excellence, or, instead, try to disaggregate them in favour of solely formal models.⁷⁴ On a conceptual level, my strategy builds on the primacy of formal approaches in poetry culture and scholarship —discussed earlier in this chapter— and connects it to what occurs within mentoring relationships themselves. Through unearthing links between ideas in the wider ecology and mentorship directly, my research inherently presents mentoring as deeply interwoven with the wider ecology. Most importantly, this section will provide real-world examples of multimodal mentoring, cementing our understanding of poetry mentoring as a multimodal practice.

⁶⁷ Mazza, *Poetry Therapy: Theory and Practice*, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Mazza, *Poetry Therapy: Theory and Practice*, p. 5.

⁶⁹ Adam Phillips, ‘Psychoanalysis for Poets’, *Salmagundi*, no. 182/183 (2014), pp. 76–97 (p. 79) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43942050>> [accessed 6 March 2023].

⁷⁰ Wandor, ‘Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1’, p. 123.

⁷¹ Radiate Arts, ‘Social Prescribing Courses’, Radiate Arts, March 2023 <<https://www.radiatearts.co.uk/social-prescribing-courses>>.

⁷² Kelly, *You’ll Never Walk Alone*, p. i.

⁷³ Rethink Mental Illness, ‘New Analysis of NHS Data on Mental Health Waiting Times’, *Rethink*, 21 February 2025 <<https://www.rethink.org/news-and-stories/media-centre/2025/02/new-analysis-of-nhs-data-on-mental-health-waiting-times>> [accessed 17 July 2025].

⁷⁴ Here, ‘therapy’ relates primarily to psychotherapy. However, I retain the generalist term ‘therapy’ and signal moments at which I directly reference psychotherapy to reflect that many of the poets were not experts in therapy, and those that had some expertise did not always reference psychotherapy specifically.

3.2.1 Strategies to Negotiate Multimodality: Is it Possible to Separate the Poet from the Poetry in Mentorship?

Across this project's survey and interviews, poets and mentors have a range of beliefs surrounding the overlap between poetry mentoring practice and therapy, with many raising concerns about potential dangers. For instance, mentors Heidi Williamson, Suzannah Evans, and Caleb Parkin note that they, and most mentors, are not trained as therapists. Yet many interviewed mentors report feeling pushed towards acting as one. Several discuss instances where they felt they needed to articulate boundaries within the mentorship to ensure it did not stray too far into a traumatic place, which would be best handled by a professional therapist. Parkin, who has an MSc in Writing for Therapeutic Purposes, talks about mentees bringing poetry 'that's far too raw' to the mentoring session.⁷⁵ In this case he responds with a technique he first learned on his MSc and has since developed in his mentorship practice. He says, for example, 'Listen, I'm a bit concerned that this work might not be something that is ready to be shared at this point, how do you feel about it? [...] Is it okay to talk about? Do you have some support in place?'⁷⁶ He does this in order to avoid 'retraumatising them'.⁷⁷ Retraumatization is a term used variously in the field of psychology. Here it is used to mean 'distress that occurs with the retelling of a trauma narrative',⁷⁸ such as might happen by analysing, discussing, or exploring traumatic events through poetry in a mentorship setting, and which may result in 'traumatic stress reactions, responses, and symptoms [...] that are physical, psychological, or both in nature.'⁷⁹ Evans raises similar concerns to Parkin, describing that 'it's quite accepted, that poets will write about traumatic [things]', yet this becomes dangerous when the person is still processing that trauma and is writing about it concurrently.⁸⁰ Williamson reflects on being faced with this issue:

[Therapy and writing] both look at experience and help people in different ways. But I think it's really important not to get the two confused. So I'm always very careful [and say] "you need to take care of your own mental health and look after yourself. And if you need to go and talk to somebody, go and talk to somebody, because I don't have those professional skills." I know there are people who do both, but that's not me. So I'm very clear that I'll help with the writing.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Parkin, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

⁷⁶ Parkin, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

⁷⁷ Parkin, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

⁷⁸ *Retraumatization*, ed. by Melanie P. Duckworth and Victoria M. Follette (Routledge, 2012), p. 2, doi:10.4324/9780203866320.

⁷⁹ Duckworth and Follette, *Retraumatization*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Evans, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

⁸¹ Heidi Williamson, 'Poetry Mentor Interview', June 2022.

By reasserting the boundary between poet and poem, mentors try to ensure they are not inadvertently acting as a therapist, as well as preventing the mentee from receiving potentially unsuitable support from someone untrained in therapy.

The technique of distinguishing the writing from the poet is a popular choice for mentors. Some adopt it in order to reaffirm the scope of their mentorship to the poetry itself, which echoes T.S. Eliot's sentiment that 'Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry'.⁸² Such mentors may also follow Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' in that they view the writer's intentions for the text as less important than the reader's interpretation of them.⁸³ For instance, in their writings on poetry writing practice, Glyn Maxwell⁸⁴ and David Constantine⁸⁵ respectively note the vital role the reader plays in interpreting a poem, with Don Paterson extending this to state that 'we shouldn't talk about what the poem or line or metaphor or image *means* so much as what meaning it generates', suggesting that the reader ultimately mediates a poem's reception.⁸⁶ Within workshop settings, this often manifests as group critique in which the author of the poem is prohibited from speaking until the end. This replicates how, once the poem is published, the author cannot explain their editorial choices to the reader. The approach of separating the poet from the poetry can thereby sometimes align with purely formal approaches to mentoring.

Other mentors use the technique of separating the poetry from the poet but for more multimodal reasons, acknowledging the potential impact of a poet's emotions on their work. Malika's Poetry Kitchen is one such example. Founder of the collective, Malika Booker, states, 'We trained poets in the art of feedback, encouraging honest and truthful critique centred around the work, not the person.'⁸⁷ She argues that this technique 'enabled writers to feel safe enough to write about things they found difficult or were taboo.'⁸⁸ Poet Carrie Etter used a similar technique in undergraduate poetry dissertation module I undertook at Bath Spa University. Our workshop group was given a list of poetic features (such as choice of title, line endings, etc.) that we could critique in order to give precise and helpful feedback, anchored directly to the writing, and avoiding personal or potentially offensive remarks. Etter's technique shows a pedagogy that pre-empts the potential downfalls of the workshop setting outlined by

⁸² T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Perspecta*, 19 (1982), pp. 36–42 (p. 39), doi:10.2307/1567048.

⁸³ Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, p. 148.

⁸⁴ Maxwell, *On Poetry*, p. 20.

⁸⁵ Constantine, *Poetry*, pp. 7–8.

⁸⁶ Paterson, *The Poem: Lyric, Sign, Metre*, p. 108.

⁸⁷ Rishi Dastidar, and Maisie Lawrence, eds., *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different: Poems from Malika's Poetry Kitchen* (London: Corsair, 2021), p. 108.

⁸⁸ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, p. 108.

the poet and writing pedagogy researcher, Irene Praitis. She states, ‘The workshop model assumes that students have knowledge about writing and about reading creative work’, the kind of knowledge that will enable them to deconstruct and comment on a fellow student’s work effectively from the outset, but that this is not always the case.⁸⁹ Providing guidelines as Etter did may represent a method to overcome this barrier and work towards student wellbeing. As a whole, separating the poet from the poetry in this emotionally considerate way can actually recognise mentoring’s multimodality.

The concept of delivering sensitive yet rigorous critique is hardly new and preventing mentors—and in the case of workshop groups and collectives, other poets in the room that may act as peer mentors—from attacking a person’s character obviously may be beneficial to a mentee’s happiness and overall development. However, it raises the question of whether it is possible to entirely separate the person from the writing, a concept which applies to all forms of mentoring, both group and individual. For instance, an anonymous mentor I interviewed strongly argues: ‘You can’t separate out the two. It’s completely bonkers, one without looking at the other, because they directly feed into each other.’⁹⁰ Wandor details, albeit disparagingly, this viewpoint: ‘after all, if the writing is thought to be expressing the ‘self’, then the ‘self’ will be under scrutiny along with the writing.’⁹¹

One can argue that this may not be true for all mentorships because different types of poetry can be quite far removed from the poet as a person. For instance, poets may create a character who holds vastly different beliefs to themselves, or a narrative that has no relation whatsoever to their life or experiences. These could potentially feel far less personal and more external to the poet if criticised heavily in a workshop setting, whereas if a mentor suggests a lyric or confessional piece based heavily on personal experience has an unlikeable speaker, this could feel much more like, in Wandor’s words, the self is under scrutiny. As poet Keith Jarrett outlines, ‘there’s a fine line between confessional poetry and therapy’.⁹² Clearly, varying forms of poetry practice create different potentials for damage.

Yet, even less personal poetry is the product of—and perhaps demonstrations of—a person’s skill, intellect, and viewpoint. To this end, mentors can never entirely separate the poet from their writing in a critique context, a viewpoint Joelle Taylor summarises: ‘There is an argument that we always write about ourselves no matter our subject matter, and perhaps there

⁸⁹ Irena Praitis, ‘Piece Work: Pedagogical Bricolage in the Creative Writing Classroom’, *New Writing*, 3.1 (2006), pp. 4–11 (p. 4), doi:10.2167/new111.0.

⁹⁰ Anonymous, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’.

⁹¹ Wandor, ‘Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1’, p. 120.

⁹² *The Creative Writing Coursebook: Forty-Four Authors Share Advice and Exercises for Fiction and Poetry*, ed. by Julia Bell and Paul Magrs (MacMillan, 2001), p. 375.

is truth in that.’⁹³ A writer-participant in a study by Forbes agrees more affirmatively, stating, ‘if you dig deep to express things in writing [...] inevitably your identity is part of it [...] it’s who you are, it’s an accumulation of your years.’⁹⁴ A mentor’s critique may therefore always have the potential to bolster or insult an aspect of the mentee themselves and bring positive or negative consequences. For example, 89% of surveyed mentees said the focus of their mentorship was on improving the writing itself, yet 64% reported their wellbeing markedly improved through their mentorships. This illustrates that mentorship, despite whether it intends to focus on the text itself or not, can also impact a poet’s wellbeing, and is always multimodal. Poetry mentors are highly aware of this, as evidenced by the examples of Etter and Booker separating the poet from the poetry to ensure constructive critique, as well as the existence of other techniques for delivering sensitive critique, such as balancing positive and negative comments and talking through possible solutions with the mentee, rather than disparaging a piece and leaving them to determine how to fix it.

The use of separating the poetry from the poet for such holistic, welfare-oriented reasons thereby demonstrates an irony to the technique’s use in a more formally-engaged mentoring practice that focuses on the poetry itself, since the technique seeks to reorient the mentoring practice towards the poem which simultaneously demonstrates that mentors’ words may well create impacts beyond the poem. This points towards a potential fallacy within mentoring practice, which is that mentoring can purely pertain to the formal elements of poetry, the poetry itself, and not the poet. The likelihood of such a fallacy’s existence is reinforced by instances in which poetry mentors damage their mentee’s emotional welfare while purporting they attend only to the poetry and not the poet. For instance, one interviewed mentee, who wishes to remain anonymous, recounts working with an immensely experienced poetry mentor, whose work they admire, and being hurt by their lack of warmth and sensitivity.⁹⁵ The mentee describes being unable to write for around a fortnight after each mentoring session because their confidence had been shaken so much. They state they would not work with that mentor again for this reason. An anonymous respondent to this project’s survey gave a similar example: ‘One mentor, a National prize winner, was actively unhelpful and caused a crisis of confidence.’⁹⁶ Whether the mentors’ lack of care in these examples was due to a concern of becoming too akin to a therapist, poor social skills, or whether they prized honest critique above mentees’ feelings, is unclear. Nevertheless, they illustrate the negative consequences of refusing to recognise

⁹³ Taylor, ‘Interrogating the Self’.

⁹⁴ Forbes, ‘Multiple Facets of the Developing Writer’, pp. 267–68.

⁹⁵ Anonymous, ‘Poetry Mentee Interview’.

⁹⁶ Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey*.

mentoring's multimodality and not taking a mentee's emotional state into account, regardless of whether the mentorship supposedly focuses on the poetry and not the poet.

3.2.2 Inherently Multimodal Spaces: Writing Trauma and Writing for Wellbeing

Poetry mentorship and therapeutic practices overlap in particularly fraught ways when mentees' work concerns traumatic experiences. For instance, Parkin recounts a phenomenon, seen particularly in Higher Education creative writing courses, where students make unsafe disclosures of trauma, potentially putting both mentors' and mentees' mental health at risk. Meera Atkinson's research raises similar concerns, stating,

universities have not engaged with [...] trauma-informed care sufficiently institutionally or notably at the level of teaching and learning. I am unaware of any creative writing programmes that have implemented it systemically, and I rarely hear of individual teachers considering its applicability.⁹⁷

Parkin, however, presents one example of poetry mentorship in HE taking trauma into account in its pedagogical approach, since he was employed to tackle this issue by the Writing Poetry MA run collaboratively by The Poetry School and Newcastle University:

They realised, I think, that there's a really big potential in all MA [creative writing] courses [...] for the encouragement of disclosures in spaces that are not safe. And I think that's what happens. There's a kind of celebration of sharing, very personal, very vulnerable, potentially quite traumatic stuff. But there's not always a consideration of what that will do to both the writer and the listener, because of course, there's vicarious trauma and there's traumatising other people [i.e. the other mentees in the room and potentially the mentor as well]. [...] that needs thinking through in more MA courses.

So some of the work we did was around [...] how you can [give] feedback, about what critique means. Because I think [...] if you share a really vulnerable or traumatic experience, and someone just goes, 'Well, [...] the form is terrible, blah, blah' [...]. So, what really frustrated me is there's this sense of hard-cop or soft-cop. And that's absolute rubbish. You can be really rigorous and really thorough, and you can be really thoughtful and generous and compassionate, and they are not anathema.

It's a hangover from academia as an upper class, straight, white male environment where you build up your own little hoard of stones, and you throw stones at other people, to try and break them down. And we've got to do better than that. And we can. In a properly diverse, genuinely inclusive, HE kind of environment, actually, creative writing critique can be this fantastic, nourishing, really rigorous, really thorough, really

⁹⁷ Atkinson, 'The Case for Trauma-Informed Creative Writing Teaching', p. 330.

compassionate process. And it can be all of those. If we're tooled up to do that.⁹⁸

Parkin's interview and Atkinson's research outline a discord in poetry mentoring. There exists a culture of sharing immensely intimate poetry in poetry mentoring, while pedagogical approaches can avoid addressing said intimacy because they resist multimodality.

Some mentors move away from such pedagogical approaches and integrate care into their practice as mentors, engaging a therapeutic awareness without actively acting as therapists. For instance, Parkin and Williamson pay attention to their client's potential emotional distress by checking whether the mentee wishes to continue when talking about traumatic topics, and suggesting points at which a therapist's care may be more appropriate.⁹⁹ Additionally, for participants who wish to keep writing about difficult topics and are not at a significant risk of becoming retraumatised, Parkin flags to them 'loads of amazing tools [we can use] as poets [to] create some distance and some space from traumatic experiences', such as using certain poetic forms and voices, so that they can still write about their chosen topic in a safer manner.¹⁰⁰

Joanna Barnard's account of mentoring implies that such multimodal shifts in mentoring practice may already be commonplace in a writing for wellbeing context. Barnard is a writer and therapist who offers mainly counselling, a sub-practice of psychotherapy. Barnard has also taken on multiple types of mentoring roles, including one-to-one novel manuscript feedback and prose and poetry workshops for ArtfulScribe, such as their Writing for Wellbeing group and women's writing workshop, So:Write Women. In the wellbeing context, the goals of the mentorship differ from those of the HE workshop. For Barnard,

the measure of what's going well is if everyone's able to share, and comfortable to share. I suppose really that's my main goal. There are goals about creating work, obviously, as well. But the primary goal is always that everybody is at ease, and everyone feels that they're going to be heard.¹⁰¹

The goals of Barnard's wellbeing mentorship focus on the poet themselves rather than the quality of the writing they produce. Despite mentoring an explicitly emotionally-oriented writing practice, Barnard likewise does not act as a therapist: 'There are similarities but it's really important to be clear that they're different.'¹⁰² She details how the role of the wellbeing mentor draws on the training of a therapist, such as having empathy and a non-judgemental

⁹⁸ Parkin, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

⁹⁹ Williamson, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'; Parkin, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹⁰⁰ Parkin, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹⁰¹ Joanna Barnard, 'Poetry Mentor/Mentee Interview', May 2022.

¹⁰² Barnard, 'Poetry Mentor/Mentee Interview'.

approach.¹⁰³ Occasionally in one-to-one sessions, this can extend to private discussions about why a mentee may be struggling with a particular piece due to broader emotional reasons extending beyond the writing itself. Yet this is as far as writing for wellbeing will overlap with counselling practice, for Barnard. She clearly states to her writing for wellbeing groups that ‘although we share things in this room and in this space, this is not group therapy’.¹⁰⁴ The groups function as a vital safe space in which to share experiences the participants explore in their writings but while the groups may release and validate these experiences and boost wellbeing, Barnard cannot take ownership of the participant’s emotional processing in the psychological sense of ‘the modification of memory structures that underlie emotions.’¹⁰⁵ Of course, some participants may find that, through writing, they are able to achieve emotional processing. However, this extends beyond the remit of Barnard’s responsibility. Regardless, Barnard reports seeing her mentees’ confidence skyrocket. Participants who were previously unable to read their work aloud often perform on stage within a few months through the supportive environment created by Barnard’s workshops. This outcome echoes the many studies that have validated the therapeutic benefits a writing for wellbeing practice offers, such as those by Malyn et al.¹⁰⁶ or Zarobe and Bungay, who note engaging in arts wellbeing activities results in ‘increased self-esteem, sense of achievement, empowerment, social skills and promotion of social engagement’.¹⁰⁷ These studies, together with Barnard’s example of mentorship, allude that writing for wellbeing has long abandoned the barrier between formally and personally-engaged ways of approaching mentorship. Furthermore, the ideal outcomes for Barnard’s mentorship, namely a feeling of safety and the freedom to communicate one’s experiences and emotions without judgement, imply that writing for wellbeing also operates using a different shape of authorship, contrasting strongly with the output-centric models of authorship I raised throughout the earlier portions of this thesis.

There are some examples where mainstream mentoring likewise abandons this division and adopts more layered forms of mentoring. In New Writing North’s 2024-25 mentoring programme, A Writing Chance, mentees are paired with an ‘industry mentor and [...] pastoral

¹⁰³ Barnard, ‘Poetry Mentor/Mentee Interview’.

¹⁰⁴ Barnard, ‘Poetry Mentor/Mentee Interview’.

¹⁰⁵ Edna B. Foa and Michael J. Kozak, ‘Emotional Processing of Fear: Exposure to Corrective Information.’, *Psychological Bulletin*, 99.1 (1986), pp. 20–35 (p. 20), doi:10.1037/0033-2909.99.1.20.

¹⁰⁶ Brianna O. Malyn, Zoe Thomas, and Christine E. Ramsey-Wade, ‘Reading and Writing for Well-being: A Qualitative Exploration of the Therapeutic Experience of Older Adult Participants in a Bibliotherapy and Creative Writing Group’, *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 20.4 (2020), pp. 715–24 (p. 722), doi:10.1002/capr.12304.

¹⁰⁷ Leyre Zarobe and Hilary Bungay, ‘The Role of Arts Activities in Developing Resilience and Mental Wellbeing in Children and Young People a Rapid Review of the Literature’, *Perspectives in Public Health*, 137.6 (2017), pp. 337–47 (p. 338), doi:10.1177/1757913917712283.

mentor'.¹⁰⁸ Crucially, the pastoral mentors are not therapists or wellbeing practitioners, but writers. One pastoral mentor, the poet Clare Shaw, details this work, 'Instead of focusing on their written work, I've spent time discussing self-care and wellbeing, helping writers to develop writing routines and to explore career possibilities.'¹⁰⁹ Because Shaw is a poet, their role represents an example of poetry mentorship adopting a layered practice, since the poet provides a multi-dimensional package of support. Shaw's example pertains mainly to a general sense of wellbeing, whereas another mentor, who wishes to remain anonymous, steps more actively into a therapeutic role.¹¹⁰ Here, the mentor adopts a holistic and embodied approach:

For me, it's not just about coming in, sitting and talking and analysing poems and then giving a prompt to write about a poem or even reading somebody else's, reading the mentees' poems and discussing them. That is part of it, of course, but I'm also very interested in what's behind that. What are the intentions of the writer? What trauma is the writer carrying in their body? Some of it known, some of it unknown.

I'm very interested in taking the whole person, not just the brain of the writer. I'm looking very much at what entails this person, what universe is this person, and what do they bring to the table? Because I have this very strong belief, and actually proved through my own experience as well, that we can't separate ourselves out. Who we are cannot be separated out from how we write and what we write, and how free we are on the page and how liberated we are in our creative expression.¹¹¹

Much like Barnard's mentees found confidence through their voices being heard in a safe space, this mentor notes their integrated practice was enormously beneficial to help poets 'really find a sense of authenticity as a creative practitioner.'¹¹² The mentees achieve this through the healing that a more actively therapeutic writing practice provides. The mentor outlines a process in which an authentic voice stems from 'a sense of wholeness'¹¹³ that gives poets 'the power and the depth of body wisdom'¹¹⁴ because it is 'very much tied up with this sense of liberating ourselves from our wounds. Learning how to let go, heal, and process material from our past or present or both.'¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ New Writing North, 'A Writing Chance 2024-25'.

¹⁰⁹ Shaw and Cheveau, "Choosing Someone You Trust with Your Words Is the Most Important Thing You Can Do. It Is Also the Most Valuable." *The Poetry Mentoring Relationship*.

¹¹⁰ Similar to Janelle Adsit's theorisation of an inclusive pedagogy for American MFA programmes. Adsit, *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing*, p. 42.

¹¹¹ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹¹² Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹¹³ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹¹⁴ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹¹⁵ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

There is a risk of misinterpreting this process as suggesting that poets can only access their authentic voice via a good state of mental health and relegating difficult experiences to a distant void. In fact this mentor advocates the opposite: an ongoing process of knowing oneself, incorporating both positive and difficult experiences. They state,

This notion of wholeness [...] needs to be carefully defined because it's not about completion. And it's not about correction [or] being cured. It's about healing. And it's different, [...] I kind of think about it [...] in that sense of the Japanese pottery, Kintsugi, which is when the pot is broken, and it's put back together with gold. So that idea, you know, how do we put ourselves, our broken selves, back together, so that our scars and our brokenness is still part of us, and always will be.¹¹⁶

They contend that, in different ways, '[wholeness] directly affects our writing on the page and on the stage.'¹¹⁷ For the anonymous mentor, it is this healing, this self-knowing, that can liberate poets and give them power as practitioners, a position echoed by bestselling author, Natalie Goldberg, who Wandor describes as believing in a 'wholeness which enables someone to write'.¹¹⁸

The anonymous mentor's practice more actively steps into the role of a therapist. Conversely, many mentors prefer not to take this step. Parkin and Williamson both noted the effectiveness of working with a therapist alongside a poetry practice.¹¹⁹ Poet Celia Hunt likewise recommends having a counsellor or psychotherapist in reserve to be used when required.¹²⁰ During my interview with Barnard, I posited a model where funding could cover the services of both a mentor and a therapist, to which Barnard replied, 'Oh my god, yes please! That would be amazing.'¹²¹ None of these mentors question the role of therapy within a poetry practice, but mentors most often delineate therapy as beyond the bounds of the poetry mentor's responsibility. Even in the context of A Writing Chance, the programme still delineates one mentor to look at the poetry, and one to support the poet more broadly, which signifies a tendency to separate the practices.

¹¹⁶ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹¹⁷ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹¹⁸ Natalie Goldberg, *Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life* (Bantam, 1990), pp. 53–56; Wandor, 'Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1', p. 119.

¹¹⁹ Parkin, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'; Williamson, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹²⁰ Celia Hunt, 'Writing with the Voice of a Child: Fictional Autobiography and Personal Development', in *The Self on the Page: Theory and Practice of Creative Writing in Personal Development*, ed. by Celia Hunt and Fiona Sampson (Kingsley, 1998), pp. 21–34 (p. 33).

¹²¹ Barnard, 'Poetry Mentor/Mentee Interview'.

3.2.3 Signalling an Approach: Awareness of Multimodality as Integral to Effective Mentoring

My research indicates articulating the chosen approach with the mentee before the mentorship begins is important to ensure both parties have ‘a shared understanding of how to achieve the mentee’s objectives’.¹²² For instance, Barnard comments that in her groups, sometimes ‘people feel like they might get some free therapy’ given that she is a trained counsellor; she therefore sets expectations at the beginning of her wellbeing sessions to distinguish them from therapy.¹²³ Parkin describes setting expectations at the start of his mentorships via a process similar to contracting.¹²⁴ He does this even in one-off sessions. For example, Parkin recounted holding a drop in session, wherein he asked the participant whether they wanted critique on their poetry or for their work to be heard, focusing more on the participant’s emotions rather than formal skill.¹²⁵ The articulation takes place to ensure the mentoring matches the mentee’s ambitions. If the approach is not articulated, then the mentee may not receive the support they want, need, or expect. Moreover, a poet’s practice may change throughout their writing life, and, as David Caddy notes, the kinds of practices the mentor wishes to engage with may also shift.¹²⁶ As such, consultation and contracting are likely to be ongoing processes, enabling both the mentor and mentee to express their satisfaction or desire to change any mentoring methods.

It is also important to recognise that contracting cannot guarantee success. This is because the mentee cannot always predetermine what kind of support is best suited to them. The mentor may articulate how their different approaches could benefit the mentee but these may not work out in practice.¹²⁷ Such an eventuality happened in Parkin’s example. The mentee opted to have their work formally critiqued but, afterwards, said they were not sure if they felt better. Parkin suspects this was because they ‘just wanted to be heard, not given critique’.¹²⁸ Therefore the mentee may have benefited from having their ideas listened to, or their experiences validated, or simply some encouragement without any critical element in order to build some confidence, much in the same way that Barnard structures her writing for wellbeing sessions.

¹²² Liautaud, *Breaking Through*, p. 15.

¹²³ Barnard, ‘Poetry Mentor/Mentee Interview’.

¹²⁴ As does David Caddy and an anonymous mentor who responded to the project survey. Caddy, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’; Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey*.

¹²⁵ Parkin, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’.

¹²⁶ Caddy, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’.

¹²⁷ This links to Chapter One’s articulation that poetry mentorship’s impact is unpredictable partially due to its entanglement with the unconscious.

¹²⁸ Parkin, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’.

Parkin's example points to a phenomenon within the UK poetry ecology in which poets behave as if their goals pertain purely to their writing but their writing practice also supports nourishment and growth in other areas, such as emotional processing. This is a phenomenon that extends from writing practice into mentorship practice, with the mentees hoping to achieve holistic goals alongside formal writing development. The anonymous mentor using a layered therapeutic approach marks seeing this in their own mentees:

I've worked with people who come to me with poetic ambition. But actually, they also are using writing for their own sanity, for their own processing of difficult challenges or material that they're working with. So both things are going on.¹²⁹

This project's survey data also suggests that mentees commonly come to mentoring with multiple types of outcome in mind. For instance, 91% of respondents said that they engage in mentoring 'to develop a literary craft, perhaps with the ambition of publication etc.', while 79% engaged in mentoring to 'support [their] wellbeing, learn about yourself, for fun etc.', which suggests a substantial overlap between the types of outcome.¹³⁰

However, mentees may not always fully understand their motivations for mentoring. As Malcolm Bradbury posits, and I explored in Chapter One, 'writing is [...] at once a conscious activity and an unconscious one'.¹³¹ This unconsciousness is critical: the poet may be unaware that their writing—and, by extension, mentorship—extends beyond the writing itself. The integrated mentor describes seeing this lack of awareness in their mentees: 'They might only be aware of the one—i.e. poetic ambition—and sometimes I'll get people coming who are completely closed off from the idea of writing for wellbeing, or writing as a kind of holistic practice'.¹³² This account seems to encapsulate what happened in the example of Parkin's drop-in mentoring session.

Having an inaccurate understanding of the multimodality of one's practice can be problematic. For example, as I discussed in Chapter Two, while experimentally-oriented university courses may not follow this pattern, studying poetry in universities implies a traditional model of authorship: developing formal skills and ultimately leading to publication. Yet that is not always the reality. Instead, educators commonly encourage students to 'write what they know', drawing from personal experience, at which point they are likely to engage in a

¹²⁹ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹³⁰ Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey*.

¹³¹ Wandor, 'Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1', p. 115.

¹³² Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

combination therapeutic or wellbeing practice rather than developing strictly formal skills.¹³³ Wandor critiques this practice as ‘clearly rubbish, at best simplistic, at worst plain stupid or dangerous. While it may appear to help the student to find a way into subject matter, [...] it masks the complexity of the processes involved in imaginative writing.’¹³⁴ Poet Reginald Shepherd reinforces Wandor’s standpoint, adding, ‘Ideally, one writes poetry out of what one doesn’t know, as an act of exploration.’¹³⁵ Some mentors may therefore deliberately teach their students to avoid writing from personal experience. Nevertheless, both Wandor and Shepherd commenting on the practice’s widespread use illustrates how poets are encouraged to ‘write what they know’ in many universities. Once mentees begin doing so, their writing practice may shift towards a therapeutic practice, as the process of writing their experiences and traumas may help process them and—if their work is received well—allow the mentees to feel validated. Shepherd himself describes this, stating poetry about oneself is often ‘about psychological and political affirmation’.¹³⁶

Wider shifts in poetry culture contributed to the move towards such intimate forms of writing in the creative writing classroom, such as the twenty-first century focus on identity. For example, Poet Laureate Simon Armitage reflects, ‘The big subject in writing over the last two decades has been identity’,¹³⁷ a sentiment scholar Jade Thomas echoes: ‘we seem to live in an age where identarian affiliation is increasingly important’.¹³⁸ Bernardine Evaristo critiques the deriding of marginalised poets’ work under the banner of identity: ‘Anyone trying to lump [The Complete Works poets] into the “identity” box is missing the point and imposing a critical cliché onto work that exploded out of that box a long time ago, if it was ever in it.’¹³⁹ Yet, by fighting against the label, Evaristo nonetheless signals its proliferation in poetry culture. The emphasis on identity has manifested in several excellent calls and initiatives supporting underrepresented

¹³³ Dorothea Brande remarks on this practice and Paul Magrs says it is a cliché in creative writing education. Dorothea Brande, *Becoming a Writer* (Macmillan, 1983), p. 111; Bell and Magrs, *The Creative Writing Coursebook: Forty-Four Authors Share Advice and Exercises for Fiction and Poetry*, p. 65.

¹³⁴ Wandor, ‘Creative Writing and Pedagogy 1’, p. 117.

¹³⁵ Reginald Shepherd, ‘The Other’s Other: Against Identity Poetry’, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 42.4 (2003) <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0042.407>> [accessed 3 August 2023].

¹³⁶ Charles H. Rowell, ‘An Interview with Reginald Shepherd’, interview with Reginald Shepherd, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 293 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3299426>> [accessed 20 March 2023].

¹³⁷ Benjamin Law, ‘“Write for the Here and Now”: A Poet Laureate’s Tips for Students’, interview with Simon Armitage, 3 March 2023 <<https://www.smh.com.au/culture/books/write-for-the-here-and-now-a-poet-laureate-s-tips-for-students-20230119-p5cdtr.html>> [accessed 8 March 2023].

¹³⁸ Jade Thomas, ‘Conference Report: Experimental Writing in English (1945-2000): The Anti-Canon, Palace of the Academies, Brussels, 15-16 September 2022’, *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 15.1 (2023), doi:10.16995/bip.10650.

¹³⁹ *Mapping the Future: The Complete Works Poets*, ed. by Karen McCarthy Woolf, Nathalie Teitler, and Bernardine Evaristo (Bloodaxe Books, 2023), p. 19.

poets and critics, such as Ledbury Poetry Critics,¹⁴⁰ the Common People Report,¹⁴¹ and targeted support programmes by a range of writer-development agencies across the UK.¹⁴² In terms of critical acclaim, texts focusing on difficult aspects of vulnerable and marginalised identities have increasingly been recognised, with prizes regularly featuring these poets in the last two decades. For instance, Danez Smith's *Don't Call us Dead*, which explores systemic racism, police violence, and homophobia in America, was a finalist for the National Book Award for Poetry and won the Forward Prize for Best Collection.¹⁴³ Melissa Lee-Houghton's *Sunshine* (2016), addressing sexual abuse, addiction, and poor mental health, was shortlisted for the Costa Poetry Prize, Ted Hughes Award, and won the Somerset Maugham Award.¹⁴⁴ Critics consistently raise the vitalness of writing about such experiences, with Sandeep Parmar describing *Don't Call Us Dead* 'an exalting and longed-for acknowledgment of historical pain'.¹⁴⁵

Despite the importance of these works, the identarian shift has also had more negative consequences, with under-represented poets describing a pressure to write about their identities. Jay Bernard reflects that 'self-narrativisation [...] can often burden racialised writers'.¹⁴⁶ Likewise, Shepherd argues against being pushed to write about his sexuality and ethnicity:

I have always intensely disliked what I call identity poetics, the use of poetry as a means to assert or claim social identity. That has always seemed to me a form of self-imprisonment, neglecting or even negating the possibilities poetry offers not just of being someone else, anyone and/or everyone else, but of being no one at all, of existing (if only for a moment) outside the shackles of identity and definition. [...] It is also constraining, limiting the imaginative options of the very people it seeks to liberate or speak for.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁰ Ledbury Poetry Critics, *Ledbury Poetry Critics 2020 Annual Report: The State of Poetry and Poetry Criticism* (University of Liverpool, 2020) <<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/new-and-international-writing/emerging-critics/ledbury-poetry-critics,2020-annual-report/>> [accessed 31 December 2020]; Alison Flood, 'Ode to Whiteness: British Poetry Scene Fails Diversity Test', Books, *The Guardian*, 24 May 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/may/24/british-poetry-scene-fails-diversity-test>> [accessed 8 March 2023].

¹⁴¹ Katy Shaw, *Common People: Breaking the Class Ceiling in UK Publishing* (2020) <https://northumbria-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/departments/humanities/common-people---katy-shaw/common_people.pdf?modified=20200430161839> [accessed 28 December 2022].

¹⁴² I discuss these in more depth at the end of this chapter, and across Chapter Four.

¹⁴³ Danez Smith, *Don't Call Us Dead: Poems* (Graywolf Press, 2017).

¹⁴⁴ Melissa Lee-Houghton, *Sunshine* (Penned in the Margins, 2016).

¹⁴⁵ Sandeep Parmar, 'Don't Call Us Dead by Danez Smith Review – Hope in Resistance and Rebirth', Books, *The Guardian*, 9 February 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/feb/09/dont-call-us-dead-danez-smith-review>> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁴⁶ Ruth Comerford, 'Sky Arts RSL Writers Award Winners Announced', The Bookseller, 27 October 2022 <<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/sky-arts-rsl-writers-awards-winners-announced>> [accessed 7 April 2025].

¹⁴⁷ Shepherd, 'The Other's Other: Against Identity Poetry'.

In addition to limiting the scope of what marginalised poets can write about in a broad sense, poets also feel an expectation to write about pain. Accordingly, authors today comment on how ‘marginalized writers feel forced to be tour guides for white readers, walking them through the worlds of trauma and violence’.¹⁴⁸ The mid-noughties’ turn towards ‘commercialising someone’s trauma’¹⁴⁹—seen in the rise of misery literature as detailed in articles by Adams¹⁵⁰ and Addley—compounded this effect, placing additional valour on marginalised poets sharing particularly traumatic themes associated with their identities.¹⁵¹ The marketing of books by under-represented poets continues this trend by often centralising painful themes, such as in the online blurbs for both Smith¹⁵² and Houghton.¹⁵³ Poet Rachael Allen encapsulates this overall picture as marginalised poets being ‘simultaneously cynically and vampirically exploited for their identities’.¹⁵⁴

In the context of poetry mentoring, this shift in poetry culture suggests an increased risk of marginalised writers being pushed to—or feeling as if they should—write about traumatic aspects of their identities, which may be unsafe if not properly supported. This risk may be particularly exacerbated in the context of undergraduate poetry students. For instance, most of these mentees are newer and younger writers, as the QAA 2019 creative writing benchmark outlines.¹⁵⁵ Many will have grown up and experienced poetry culture predominantly as it moved to focus on identity, meaning they are likely to see writing about identity-based-trauma as not only commonplace, but potentially an indicator of high quality poetry and wish to engage in it themselves. There are indicators that this effect is taking place, such as Parkin’s account of unsafe disclosure in HE, a survey response which describes universities as focusing on ‘soul

¹⁴⁸ Bryan Washington and others, ‘The Stories Marginalized Writers Tell When They Don’t Center Trauma’, *NPR*, 11 February 2021 <<https://www.npr.org/2021/02/11/967038817/the-stories-marginalized-writers-tell-when-they-dont-center-trauma>> [accessed 8 March 2023].

¹⁴⁹ Imogen Dewey, ‘Readers Are Hungry for Stories About Trauma. But What Happens to the Authors?’, Books, *The Guardian*, 18 November 2022 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/nov/19/readers-are-hungry-for-stories-about-trauma-but-what-happens-to-the-authors>> [accessed 8 March 2023].

¹⁵⁰ Tim Adams, ‘Feel the Pain’, *The Observer*, 29 January 2006 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jan/29/biography.features>> [accessed 8 March 2023].

¹⁵¹ Esther Addley, ‘So Bad It’s Good’, Society, *The Guardian*, 15 June 2007 <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2007/jun/15/childrensservices.biography>> [accessed 8 March 2023].

¹⁵² Penguin Books, ‘Don’t Call Us Dead’, 18 January 2018 <<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/436334/dont-call-us-dead-by-danez-smith/9781784742041>> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁵³ Poetry Book Society, ‘Sunshine by Melissa Lee-Houghton’, Poetry Books, 24 November 2016 <<https://www.poetrybooks.co.uk/products/sunshine-1>> [accessed 7 April 2025].

¹⁵⁴ Allen, ‘Difficult and Bad’.

¹⁵⁵ The Quality Assurance Agency, *Subject Benchmark Statement for Creative Writing (2019)*, Subject Benchmark Statements (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2019), p. 9 <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-creative-writing.pdf?sfvrsn=2fe2cb81_4> [accessed 17 February 2023].

bearing trauma',¹⁵⁶ as well as Roxanne Gay running undergraduate modules dedicated solely to writing trauma.¹⁵⁷ At this point, the mentee is at greater risk of harm should the mentorship not recognise that the mentee's practice extends beyond the formal elements of poetry to the poet themselves. For instance, discussing raw topics may retraumatise the mentee, especially if the poem receives a harsh critique, as Parkin and Evans identified.¹⁵⁸ Some contemporary mentors may support their mentees in this circumstance by incorporating more wellbeing elements, such as Parkin's notion of simply hearing the poetry rather than critiquing it. Other techniques may include steering whole-group critique in a sensitive manner, or moving the critique to a gentler, private setting.

Yet, my research indicates that historic approaches to mentoring did not always provide such emotional support. As one mentor remarks, some poets today reject the idea that literary and personal practices intersect in a multimodal way.¹⁵⁹ Parkin connects this demarcation to older mentoring traditions, approximately 1960s-1980s, that engendered a culture of needling one another to develop thicker skins for 'the real world'.¹⁶⁰ Poets active during this time illustrate the era more positively, yet still separate the formal elements of poetry from personal matters. One anonymous poet recounts an informal one-to-one mentorship with J.H. Prynne as enormously beneficial. It provided them with direction in their career, their first publication opportunities, and strengthened their poetic craft through an understanding 'that poetry had to have intellectual standards'.¹⁶¹ However, when answering questions about whether the mentorship had any personally-oriented impact, such as therapeutic benefits or personal development outside of writing, they answer, simply, 'no'.¹⁶² The mentorship seems to have upheld strict demarcation lines between the poet and the poetry, which aligns with descriptions of Prynne's teaching from both himself and his critics: 'it's my professional business to know the serious ethical shapeliness of real writing when I see it',¹⁶³ and '[Prynne is] fully committed to the intellectual development of his students.'¹⁶⁴ As I will outline in Chapter Four, it was not

¹⁵⁶ Nissel, *Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology: A Survey*.

¹⁵⁷ Monica Lewinsky, 'Roxane Gay on How to Write About Trauma', interview with Roxane Gay, 18 February 2021 <<https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2021/02/roxane-gay-on-how-to-write-about-trauma>> [accessed 8 March 2023].

¹⁵⁸ Parkin, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'; Evans, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹⁵⁹ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹⁶⁰ Parkin, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹⁶¹ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

¹⁶² Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

¹⁶³ Prynne to Diana Athill, 17 November 1964, cited in Louis Goddard, 'J.H. Prynne in Context, 1955–1975' (University of Sussex, 2016), p. 34 <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/83956608.pdf>> [accessed 3 August 2023].

¹⁶⁴ Goddard, 'J.H. Prynne in Context, 1955–1975', p. 42.

uncommon for poetry mentoring in the mid-century to similarly uphold the boundaries of formal and personal.

Despite the efficacy of Prynne's pedagogy, the mid-century's purely formal attitude to mentoring signals a danger for contemporary mentoring that concerns deeply personal and/or traumatic writings. For instance, mentors whose criticism does not take into account the mentee's emotional and psychological state may cause damage. In a group workshop, peer mentors may also contribute to this effect, sanctioned by the mentor's approach. There is evidence that mentorship organisations and scholars are beginning to take steps to prevent such an eventuality, such as Parkin's employment by Newcastle University and The Poetry School, and pastoral mentors on the A Writing Chance programme.

As I have outlined in this chapter section, poets and scholars today hold differing opinions on how mentorship could or should integrate formal and personally-engaged approaches, underpinned by historically separative approaches to mentorship. Moreover, the layers at play in poetry mentorship are not always conscious or articulated. This creates a greater potential risk for poets writing about deeply personal and traumatic experiences, which marginalised poets may be particularly encouraged to do. Overall, the research implies that while poets and scholars widely acknowledge that poetry writing practice is a layered and multimodal process, poetry mentoring upholds more of a division between formal and personal approaches.

3.3 Poetry Mentoring as Inextricably Linked to Ecology: Formalised Mentorship Programmes, Prize Culture, and the Funding Landscape

This final section of Chapter Three intensifies my strategy to surface the links between mentoring and the ecology, thus evidencing their inextricable interconnection. Here, I will investigate how textually-focused value metrics and mentorship schemes shape one another, with particular reference to the influence of prize culture and the funding landscape, which I began to explore earlier in this chapter. As a result, my research will negate any notion that mentoring takes place in isolation from the wider ecology.

I will specifically address formalised (meaning explicitly conceived of and communicated as a mentoring programme, often with a specific logistical and durational structure in mind) application-based poetry mentoring scheme run by a literary organisation, henceforth abbreviated to FAB mentoring. These FAB mentorships are funded programmes that come at no

cost to the mentee.¹⁶⁵ Securing a place is often referred to in terms of winning either a prize that comes with associated mentoring, as in the case of the Women Poets' Prize,¹⁶⁶ or being awarded a place on the scheme, as with the Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Programme.¹⁶⁷ To underpin my analysis, I will draw on Chapter One's mapping sample, which includes twenty-eight FAB schemes (see Appendix G).

The changes that FAB mentorship enact on their mentees point towards the influence of prize culture and the funding landscape on these schemes. Poets, scholars, and educators commonly refer to poetic development through the language of journeys, an effect also seen in poetry mentorship.¹⁶⁸ The term 'writing journey' appears in poetry manuals, such as *How to Be a Poet*,¹⁶⁹ in reflections by poets like Anne Harvey,¹⁷⁰ and in various UK mentoring schemes including those by Poetry London¹⁷¹ and the National Centre for Writing.¹⁷² Mentors themselves also use the language of physical journeying to refer to poetic development. For example, in an interview with The Poetry School, Jane Commane, describes her experience of conducting mentorship, stating, 'There's nothing quite like seeing a way to fixing and polishing a poem, and being able to give new perspectives on someone's writing which helps them to build their confidence as writers and *take the next step* [my italics].'¹⁷³ A host of mentors and organisations likewise use the verb, stepping, as synonymous with the writing journey, such as Momentum (Writing East Midlands),¹⁷⁴ Dynamo (Writing West Midlands and Nine Arches Press),¹⁷⁵ and Made

¹⁶⁵ Although schemes vary in terms of whether adjacent costs will be covered, such as travel and materials.

¹⁶⁶ Rebecca Swift Foundation, 'Women Poets Prize FAQs', Rebecca Swift Foundation, 2022 <<https://www.rebeccaswiftfoundation.org/women-poets-prize/faqs/>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

¹⁶⁷ Arvon, 'Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Programme 2019/20'.

¹⁶⁸ Though some poets may deride the word, journey, due to its clichéd use as a shorthand for development or progress in everything from pop culture to education studies (see Christina Hughes and Malcolm Tight). Poets may also disparage the word because it flattens mentoring into a series of linear steps that, through journey implying a change in location or status, evokes progression in a specific shape. Thus, the writing journey summarises mentoring but also distorts it. Christina Hughes and Malcolm Tight, 'The Metaphors We Study by: The Doctorate as a Journey and/or as Work', *Higher Education Research & Development*, 32.5 (2013), pp. 765–75 (p. 765), doi:10.1080/07294360.2013.777031.

¹⁶⁹ J. T. Welsch, *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem Press, 2021), p. 203.

¹⁷⁰ Anne Harvey, 'Journey into Poetry', *Signal*, 69 (1992), pp. 190–201 (p. 190) <<https://www-proquest-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/journey-into-poetry/docview/1312047792/se-2>> [accessed 22 February 2024].

¹⁷¹ Poetry London, 'Poetry London Mentoring Scheme', Poetry London, n.d. <<https://poetrylondon.co.uk/poetry-london-mentoring-scheme/>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

¹⁷² National Centre for Writing, 'Mentoring', National Centre for Writing, 2024 <<https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/academy/mentoring/>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

¹⁷³ The Poetry School and Jane Commane, 'Primers: An Interview with Jane Commane of Nine Arches Press • Poetry School', Poetry School, 4 August 2015 <<https://poetryschool.com/our-news/primers-interview-jane-commmane-nine-arches-press/>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

¹⁷⁴ Writing East Midlands, 'Momentum'.

¹⁷⁵ Writing West Midlands, 'Dynamo'; National Association of Writers in Education, 'Dynamo Mentoring

to Measure Mentoring (Moniack Mhor).¹⁷⁶ In February 2024, searching the term ‘writing journey’ on Google Scholar resulted in approximately 3,950,000 academic articles containing or relating to the term. On Google’s main search engine, this grows to over a billion results, which indicates the proliferation of the language of journeys for writers and poets both inside and outside the academy.

The act of journeying implies a destination, a goal to strive towards. In less structured, more informal forms of mentoring, this goal may be undefined and evolving; for instance, Tom Hansen notes that for some poets like Richard Hugo, ‘the end of the journey arises naturally from the journeying itself and can never be predetermined before the journey begins.’¹⁷⁷ Rishi Dastidar, similarly reflects that ‘the mentoring relationship starts in a very fuzzy, indeterminant place. It’s really up to [the mentor and mentee], to work out what the expectations are, what the outcomes might be’.¹⁷⁸ For FAB mentorship schemes, the goals can also be somewhat open-ended. For instance, the Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Programme notes part of its work is to help the mentees ‘establish goals and plans’,¹⁷⁹ rather than these being predetermined, an approach echoed by Fawn Press.¹⁸⁰ Additionally, mentors behind FAB schemes by Nine Arches Press and Out-Spoken Press comment on subjective and less quantifiable results of mentorship like higher quality poetry, through language such as ‘polishing’¹⁸¹ the mentees’ poetry and ‘making their poems stronger’.¹⁸² The exact way this higher quality will be achieved is left open, since there is not simply one type of good poetry, and the exact techniques or approaches the poet needs to improve will differ from mentee to mentee. Even official schemes need to provide this flexibility in order to account for a variety of mentees. But FAB schemes also often set out with concrete goals in mind, such as a published pamphlet, collection, or anthology, which set up these mentorships as, in the words of The Poetry School, a journey of ‘steps toward publication’.¹⁸³ Just some examples that follow this model include: The Writing East Midlands

Scheme’, NAWe, 17 April 2017 <<https://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/jobs-and-opportunities/dynamo-mentoring-scheme.html>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

¹⁷⁶ Moniack Mhor, ‘Made to Measure Mentoring’, Moniack Mhor, 2023 <<https://www.moniackmhor.org.uk/writers/made-to-measure-mentoring/>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

¹⁷⁷ Tom Hansen, ‘On Writing Poetry: Four Contemporary Poets’, *College English*, 44.3 (1982), p. 265 (p. 266), doi:10.2307/377014.

¹⁷⁸ Dastidar, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’.

¹⁷⁹ Arvon, ‘Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Programme 2019/20’.

¹⁸⁰ Fawn Press, *Fawn Press Mentorship Scheme – Fawn Press*, n.d. <<https://fawnpress.co.uk/fawn-press-mentorship-scheme/>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

¹⁸¹ The Poetry School and Commune, ‘Primers’.

¹⁸² Anthony Anaxagorou, ‘The Unusual and Unexplained: Workshop with Anthony Anaxagorou’, unpublished paper delivered at Ledbury Poetry Festival (8 July 2022) <<https://www.poetry-festival.co.uk/events/22-61-2/>> [accessed 29 June 2022].

¹⁸³ The Poetry School, ‘1-2-1 Tutorials, Manuscript Assessment and Mentoring’.

Mentoring Scheme,¹⁸⁴ The Complete Works,¹⁸⁵ The Streetcake Prize,¹⁸⁶ the James Berry Prize,¹⁸⁷ the Jerwood/Arvon,¹⁸⁸ Primers,¹⁸⁹ Poetry Ambassadors,¹⁹⁰ and A Writing Chance.¹⁹¹ Some schemes do not publish the writings themselves, yet still aim to ready the mentee for publication, such as those by New Writing North and The Poetry School,¹⁹² Cinnamon Press,¹⁹³ and Fawn Press.¹⁹⁴ Dynamo, for instance, explicitly states, ‘Ultimately, the scheme aims to help writers to develop their work to a publishable standard.’¹⁹⁵ For FAB schemes, then, the end of the writing journey is often at least partially predetermined.

All goals of mentorship can be described as intentions for change. In the example of publication, mentorship results in a finished poem or manuscript. Any change upon the mentee can be seen as enacted at the level of the individual but these changes also have further significance on a wider, ecological level. As I detailed in Chapter One, poets are a type of part that makes up the ecology. Therefore, by changing the poet (such as providing them with skills or publishing their work), mentoring changes a part in the ecology, and thereby changes the ecology itself as well. Some official mentorship schemes design their provision with this wider, ecological change in mind. In 2022, the Out-Spoken Press Emerging Poets Development Scheme, for instance, actively acknowledged that their mentorship will affect the poetry ecology. They state: ‘We hope that this scheme will help create a meaningful practical opportunity to open up access to what may still feel like a “closed shop” sector’, through mentoring underrepresented poets, such as those who had never taken part in another official mentorship scheme or a degree programme.¹⁹⁶ Bernardine Evaristo’s foreword to the twentieth anniversary anthology commemorating The Complete Works (TCW) programme likewise notes the intention to create change at an ecological level. Evaristo sets out a process to achieve this

¹⁸⁴ National Association of Writers in Education, ‘Writing East Midlands Mentoring Scheme’, NAWÉ, 2013 <<https://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/jobs-and-opportunities/writing-east-midlands-mentoring-scheme-2.html>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

¹⁸⁵ The Complete Works, ‘The Complete Works Poetry Home’.

¹⁸⁶ Streetcake Magazine, ‘Streetcake Experimental Writing Prize’, Streetcake Magazine, 2022 <<https://www.streetcakemagazine.com/streetcakeprize.html>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

¹⁸⁷ Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts, ‘James Berry Poetry Prize - Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts - Newcastle University’.

¹⁸⁸ Arvon, ‘Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Programme 2019/20’.

¹⁸⁹ Nine Arches Press, ‘Primers’.

¹⁹⁰ ArtfulScribe, ‘Poetry Ambassadors’.

¹⁹¹ New Writing North, ‘A Writing Chance 2024-25’.

¹⁹² The Poetry School, ‘New North Poets Mentoring Scheme Open for Entries’, *Poetry School*, 15 December 2016 <<https://poetryschool.com/our-news/new-north-poets-mentoring-scheme-open-entries/>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

¹⁹³ Cinnamon Press, ‘Mentoring’, Cinnamon Press, 2024 <<https://cinnamonpress.com/mentoring/>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

¹⁹⁴ Fawn Press, *Fawn Press Mentorship Scheme – Fawn Press*.

¹⁹⁵ Writing West Midlands, ‘Dynamo’.

¹⁹⁶ Out-Spoken Press, ‘Emerging Poets Development Scheme’, Out-Spoken, n.d. <<http://www.outspokenldn.com/epds>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

by supporting poets of colour, ultimately leading to change on a wider scale in the form of ‘poetry from our communities becom[ing] embedded in our society.’¹⁹⁷ Further FAB schemes that are similarly designed with the wider ecology in mind include Representing Wales (Literature Wales)¹⁹⁸ and the Sky Arts and Royal Society of Literature (RSL) Writer’s Award for Poetry.¹⁹⁹ At the theoretical level, these examples demonstrate that some poetry mentorship schemes aspire to affect the poetry ecology both at the level of the individual and on a larger scale.

However, FAB mentorship schemes can also illustrate that poetry mentorship schemes *are affected by the ecology in return*. For example, in the FAB programmes by Out-Spoken Press, TCW, Literature Wales, and Sky Arts/RSL, the organisational teams observed the lack of equality and access in the poetry ecology and responded by designing mentorship schemes that aim to change the situation. In other words, a characteristic of the poetry ecology (in this case systemic inequality resulting in lack of access) has shaped the mentoring services on offer, because the organisers wish to change that characteristic. In this way, mentorship schemes can be seen to enact a cyclical process, described in Figure 13.

¹⁹⁷ McCarthy Woolf, Teitler, and Evaristo, *Mapping the Future*, p. 19.

¹⁹⁸ Literature Wales, ‘About Representing Wales’, Literature Wales, 2023 <<https://www.literaturewales.org/our-projects/representing-wales/about-representing-wales/>> [accessed 27 February 2024]; Literature Wales, ‘Representing Wales 2023-2024 Mentors Announced’, *Literature Wales*, 21 September 2023 <<https://www.literaturewales.org/lw-news/representing-wales-announcing-the-14-acclaimed-writers-who-will-mentor-the-2023-24-cohort/>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

¹⁹⁹ Royal Society of Literature, ‘Sky Arts RSL Writers Awards’, Royal Society of Literature, 20 December 2023 <<https://rsliterature.org/sky-arts-rsl-writers-awards/>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

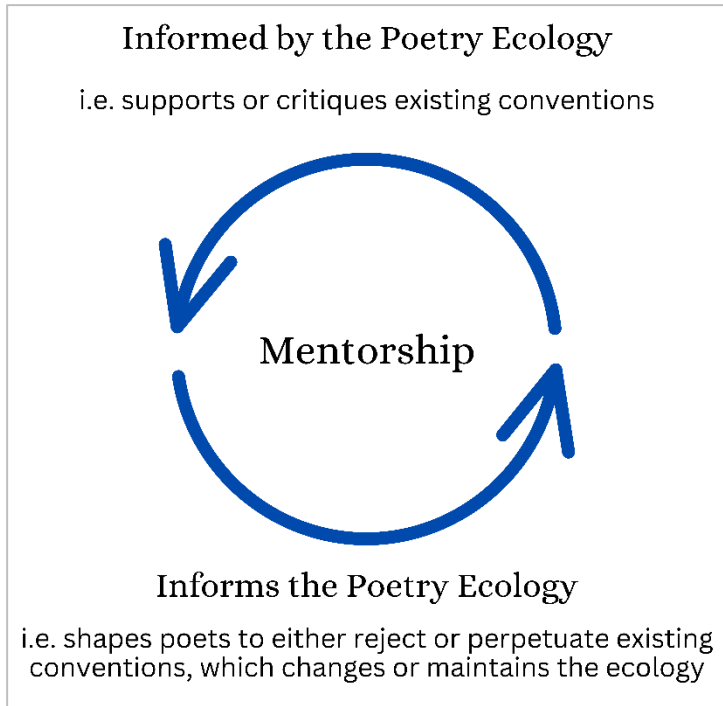


Figure 13: The Reciprocal Impact of Mentoring on the Poetry Ecology

While only some FAB schemes consciously recognise this cyclical process by referencing their impact on the wider ecology, all mentorship schemes enact it.²⁰⁰ Poetry mentoring is thereby inextricable from the poetry ecology.

3.3.1 The Goals of FAB Schemes, Their Relationship to Prize Culture, and Mentoring as Affecting Ecological Change

Working backwards, goals of a mentorship scheme suggest characteristics of the poetry ecology, since mentoring will either change or maintain a characteristic through achieving those outcomes.²⁰¹ In the case of FAB schemes, goals may also illustrate the beliefs of authority figures in the poetry ecology, since FAB schemes are usually instigated by influential poets and organisations. For instance, the design of the scheme will likely replicate the skills and characteristics those authority figures believe poets need in order to succeed, and will therefore depict their conceptualisation of a successful poet. The design of a mentorship may also reveal how authority figures perceive the functioning and qualities of the wider poetry ecology. By

²⁰⁰ Although changing an aspect of the ecology is usually a more conscious and active ambition, mentorships may also replicate and maintain existing characteristics of the poetry ecology. The latter nonetheless depicts how mentorship schemes both affect and are affected by the ecology since maintenance, too, takes inspiration from an existing characteristic.

²⁰¹ Qualities of the wider ecology could be evoked by other aspects of mentorship, such as the application process, the eligibility criteria, the logistical structure of the support, pedagogies, and language employed in promotional or educational material. I focus on goals as these most explicitly demonstrate mentoring's impact.

tracking the goals of poetry mentorship schemes, one can infer the assumptions, biases, and beliefs that characterise the UK poetry ecology.

Earlier in this chapter, I signalled a potential dissonance between the reality of poetic practice and the assumed common culture that prioritises publication as a key measure of success for a poet. The goals of FAB schemes deepen this notion, suggesting prize culture contributes to the sustained emphasis on publication, particularly that of pamphlets and collections, within notions of authorship. For instance, the goals of FAB mentoring are particularly oriented towards publication; 75% of FAB schemes in the sample directly mention working towards publication through the mentorship.²⁰² For example, Writing East Midlands' 2022 website copy surrounding their mentorship programme is particularly illustrative of FAB schemes' emphasis on publication. They use the following text to advertise the programme:

Of the 23 writers who have been awarded year-long mentoring relationships, 90% have subsequently had their work published, [...] and many have cited the Mentoring Scheme as a pivotal step on their journey towards publication.²⁰³

Once again, the language of journeys is engaged to illustrate the end-point of a writer's trajectory: publication. The use of past mentees' publication success in promotional copy designed to attract applicants implies some of the scheme's value lies in its ability to facilitate publishing. Additionally, The James Berry Prize-winner, Marjorie Lotfi, explicitly draws attention to publication as an attractive quality of the prize, asking 'who wouldn't be absolutely over the moon at the prospect of being published by Bloodaxe?'²⁰⁴ In terms of the type of publication FAB schemes aim towards, many prioritise a publishable text, such as a pamphlet or collection.²⁰⁵ The Free Reads Scheme 2023-24 (The Poetry School and The Literary Consultancy), for instance, mentions working towards 'a final assessment of your pamphlet or collection at the end of the process',²⁰⁶ and The Tempest Prize (New Writing North) requires the applicants to be working on a 'collection in progress'.²⁰⁷

²⁰² 73% of all types of mentoring in the sample likewise mentioned working towards publication, which reinforces that mentorship broadly is a publication-centric practice.

²⁰³ Writing East Midlands, 'Mentoring', *Writing East Midlands*, n.d. <<https://writingeastmidlands.co.uk/for-writers/mentoring/>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

²⁰⁴ Sian Bayley, 'Hill, Lotfi and Siegert Win Inaugural James Berry Poetry Prize', *The Bookseller*, n.d. <<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/news/hill-lofti-and-siegert-win-inaugural-james-berry-poetry-prize-1286079>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

²⁰⁵ In one-to-one services, publication is more flexible. For instance, Kym Deyn references her mentees being published in *Bath Magg*, *Butcher's Dog*, and *Poetry London*. Kym Deyn, 'Services', Kym Deyn, 2023 <https://kymdeyn.com/?page_id=58> [accessed 27 February 2024].

²⁰⁶ The Poetry School, 'Poetry School TLC Free Reads Mentoring Scheme 2023-24', *Poetry School*, 28 November 2023 <<https://poetryschool.com/theblog/poetry-school-tlc-free-mentoring-scheme-apply-2023-24/>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

²⁰⁷ New Writing North, 'Tempest Prize Seeks New Queer Voices from across the North', *New Writing*

Including a manuscript as a central goal enables FAB schemes to co-opt the potential value those texts might achieve through prizes and accolades. As Welsch discusses, drawing from James F. English and Claire Squires, literary prizes have the ability to confer value.²⁰⁸ While Squires states that prizes confer value on specific books, I argue they also confer value on the mentorships during which said books were developed.²⁰⁹ Indeed, much like Writing East Midlands utilise its mentees' publications to allude to their mentorship programme's quality — and Jo Bell and Jane Commene use prizes to show the value of their mentorship — other FAB schemes use mentees' prize recognition in the same fashion. The Jerwood/Arvon mentoring programme, for example, cites: '[Richard] Scott's *Soho* (Faber & Faber, 2018) being shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize and the Forward Prizes' Felix Dennis Award for Best First Collection' in their promotional material.²¹⁰ Furthermore, Natalie Teitler describes TCW programme becoming more and more respected and recognised as the poets 'begin to win more prizes [and] publish more collections'.²¹¹ In doing so, these FAB programmes co-opt the value bestowed on its students' work through prizes to demonstrate the value of the mentorships.

Co-opting the value of prizes improves the credibility of the mentorship to future stakeholders, including mentees and, crucially, potential funders and investors. When bidding for funds, mentorship schemes can validate their quality via prize nominations or wins. For instance, Arts Council England's funding guidelines indicates that applicants are encouraged to use prize recognition as evidence of their impact; this applies to both smaller-scale funds, which ask applicants to 'prove the value of what you are doing',²¹² and the National Portfolio Award, in which 'Successful applicants are expected to have a track record of high quality cultural achievement.'²¹³ One interviewed mentee felt the presence of this process in their mentorship: 'I think there was a very definite hope or expectation from my mentorship from the funders that it would result in a publication or more publications.'²¹⁴ Should the mentoring take place in a university context, their funding will be awarded and evaluated using the Research

North, 28 September 2023 <<https://newwritingnorth.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Tempest-Prize-seeks-new-queer-voices.pdf>> [accessed 27 February 2024].

²⁰⁸ Welsch, *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem Press, 2021), p. 45.

²⁰⁹ Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 97.

²¹⁰ Arvon, 'Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Programme 2019/20'.

²¹¹ McCarthy Woolf, Teitler, and Evaristo, *Mapping the Future*, p. 20.

²¹² Arts Council England, *Evaluating Your Project* (Arts Council England, 2018), pp. 1–7 (p. 3) <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Information_sheets_Evaluating_your_project_Project_grants.pdf> [accessed 24 March 2025].

²¹³ Arts Council England, *Guidance for Applicants: Introduction and Essential Information* (Arts Council England, 2016), pp. 1–49 (p. 11) <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Digital_version_NPO_Guidance_for_Applicants_Intro_and_Essential_Info_0.pdf> [accessed 24 March 2025].

²¹⁴ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

Excellence Framework, which also accepts prize wins as an indicator of research quality. For instance, prize recognition was used extensively to evaluate Carol Ann Duffy's 'Talking Across Differences' project.²¹⁵ Across university and industry contexts, then, prize culture pressures FAB schemes to make a manuscript one of its key goals, since the manuscript allows the scheme to accrue prize recognition.

Literary culture scholars detail the financial and politico-cultural preconditions that led to prize culture being valued in this way. For instance, Welsch recounts that the neoliberal commodification of creativity itself in the late 90s and early 00s led 'to every area of activity being construed as a competition for resources and market share.'²¹⁶ In the wake of the 2008 financial crash and through austerity measures since 2010, severe cuts to arts funding swiftly reduced the pot of available cash. In poetry, these conditions combined and manifested in a culture of competitiveness, pushing poets to prove their value in order to access the significantly smaller pool of funds, creating an emphasis on prizes. In Anthony Anaxagorou's words:

The oversubscribed and gladiatorial nature of the poetry business means there has always been a propensity for infighting, envy and toxicity. Now, with such finite alternatives and outlets to gain recognition, the value poets, readers and industry professional place on prizes has increased ten-fold.²¹⁷

Therefore FAB mentoring's manuscript-centric methods are part of a wider neoliberalist tapestry.

The focus on a manuscript necessitates that FAB schemes also focus on mid-career poets, writers with enough experience to have a manuscript underway that can be finished within the pre-determined timeframe of the mentorship, since starting a collection from scratch may take too long.²¹⁸ For instance, many of the FAB schemes talk of polishing, refining, not creating. For instance, Dastidar speaks about working with existing poems as part of Primers 2021.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Carol Ann Duffy, 'Talking Across Differences': *Enabling New Writing from the Multilingual Classroom to the Global Lockdown*, REF Case Study (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2021), pp. 1–5 (p. 2) <<https://results2021.ref.ac.uk/impact/ca73bba6-6f7a-420e-a802-d4ae6e5ae610?page=1>> [accessed 24 March 2025].

²¹⁶ See, also, my exploration of neoliberalism within literary culture in Chapter Two. Welsch, *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem Press, 2021), p. 5.

²¹⁷ Anaxagorou, 'Poetry, A Late Economy'.

²¹⁸ Some may also argue that having a collection underway is a marker that distinguishes poets as ready for mentorship, since, as I have already established, mentorship is often aligned with the mentee having enough experience and confidence to steer their own writing trajectory.

²¹⁹ Primers publishes a three-poet anthology rather than a full collection for each poet. As such, the anthology is not eligible for the same prizes as an individual collection and the scheme does not fit exactly

I don't want arid perfection, I want poems with an inkling that they know they're on to something good, but are shy enough to know that they need to brush their hair a bit more, maybe put on a new suit, to be ready to step out into the world.²²⁰

Dastidar's personification of poetry mentorship connotes a well-worn trope in pop culture: the makeover. Described as 'a major fetish in western cultures in recent years' the makeover trope outlines that with the right clothing or hairdo, the stylist can reveal the beauty that was there all along.²²¹ Crucially, as with Ally Sheedy, Anne Hathaway, Lindsey Lohan, or Sandra Bullock, the makeover trope focuses on women who are already strikingly beautiful and require only small tweaks such as removing their glasses to fit heteronormative beauty standards. Likewise in FAB mentoring, the poems will not be 'arid perfection' but they will not be far off, either.²²² This assumes mentees have several years' experience. For instance, Out-Spoken Press' development scheme defines an emerging writer as someone who has yet to publish a full collection of poetry²²³ and explicitly states, 'The scheme is for poets with a committed writing practice'.²²⁴ By these standards, Caleb Parkin was an emerging poet when he was awarded Bristol City Poet (2020-2022), as was Kathryn Bevis when she was Hampshire's Poet Laureate (2020-21) and was shortlisted for the Forward Prize (2023) for Best Poem.²²⁵ These examples, along with the contextualising backdrop of prize culture, demonstrate FAB mentoring typically focuses on mid-career poets.

In turn, this focus suggests an overall poetry ecology where poets' first steps are supported by other means, such as independent, likely dyadic, mentorships with more flexible timescales or outcomes, or, particularly if they are unable to fund such ventures, perhaps poets often take these initial steps alone. In the case of the latter, under-represented poets will be impacted most since this group faces more barriers to establishing a writing practice. A range of academic research and poets' direct accounts evidence these barriers. For instance, Paper Nations' 2019 'Time to Write' programme offered commissions for under-represented writers to fund the removal of writing barriers, funds that could be spent on expenses such as travel costs, taking time off work, care-leave or childcare, equipment to make writing more accessible for a

into the model of awarding prestige based on a manuscript. However, *Primers* nevertheless demonstrates that mentorship schemes often work with predominantly existing material.

²²⁰ Rishi Dastidar and Nine Arches Press, *Primers: What Is Rishi Dastidar Looking For?*, n.d. <<http://ninearchespress.blogspot.com/2021/04/primers-what-is-rishi-dastidar-looking.html>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

²²¹ Cressida J. Heyes, 'Cosmetic Surgery And The Televisual Makeover: A Foucauldian Feminist Reading', *Feminist Media Studies*, 7.1 (2007), pp. 17–32 (p. 20), doi:10.1080/14680770601103670.

²²² Dastidar and Nine Arches Press, *Primers*.

²²³ Out-Spoken Press, 'Emerging Poets Development Scheme'.

²²⁴ Out-Spoken Press, 'EPDS FAQs', Out-Spoken, n.d. <<http://www.outspokenldn.com/epds-faqs>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

²²⁵ Although the scheme importantly recognises that emerging writers can be poets of any age.

disabled writer, or to attend courses or receive ‘developmental advice’.²²⁶ The 2021 initiative, The Poets’ Hardship Fund, continues this work in a purely poetry context, seeking to support poets who are struggling financially ‘After a decade of punitive austerity and a brutally mismanaged pandemic’.²²⁷ These projects focus on economic barriers, but poets’ account demonstrate barriers can also be socio-cultural. Rachael Allen reflects on academic literary spheres being filled with middle class people who have access to connections, financial resources, and have been told they belonged in these spheres since birth —things she, as a working class person, never had.²²⁸ Alun Hughes and Joanna Barnard likewise speak about becoming poets from a working class perspective, with Hughes noting that ‘white, middle class people still dominate the poetry scene’,²²⁹ and both stating they felt a sense of having to break into poetry scenes populated by these people.²³⁰ These accounts demonstrate the extra layer of difficulty under-represented poets face in establishing a poetry practice.

3.3.2 FAB Mentoring’s Impact on Equality, Diversity, and Access

It may therefore appear as ironic that FAB schemes supporting under-represented poets —such as TCW, Representing Wales, and the Sky Arts and RSL Writer’s Award for Poetry— have a focus on mid-career poets, given these groups have more barriers to establishing their practice. However, as I will now evidence, these kinds of FAB programmes represent an important step in dismantling the normative (i.e. white, able-bodied, male, heterosexual, middle class) values that have characterised the poetry establishment and created some of these barriers. The schemes enact a slow process of change, utilising cultural capital at the heart of their strategy.

For example, one way to increase the poetry ecology’s inclusivity is to change the habitus of influential figures in the poetry ecology. One’s habitus —Pierre Bourdieu’s term for the accumulation of cultural and life experiences— affects which kinds of writing one will perceive as beautiful or high quality.²³¹ Several critics analyse Bourdieu’s work and its relation to its precursor, Kantian aestheticism, to describe this process. Loesburg, for example, states that

²²⁶ Joanna Nissel, ‘Time to Write Commissions for Underrepresented Writers in South-West England – Applications Now Open’, *Paper Nations*, 4 November 2019 <<https://papernations.org/time-to-write-commissions-for-underrepresented-writers-in-south-west-england-applications-now-open/>> [accessed 5 March 2024].

²²⁷ The Poets’ Hardship Fund, ‘Home’, Poets’ Hardship Fund UK, January 2021 <<https://poetshardshipfunduk.com/>> [accessed 5 March 2024].

²²⁸ Allen, ‘Difficult and Bad’.

²²⁹ Alun Hughes, ‘Poetry Mentee Interview’, September 2022.

²³⁰ Barnard, ‘Poetry Mentor/Mentee Interview’.

²³¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, 16 (Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 72, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511812507.

Kantian aestheticism determines what is beautiful or ‘Art’ through,²³² in Bourdieu’s words, ‘a quasi-natural logic’,²³³ which Bourdieu defines as a kind of indescribable instinct:²³⁴ ‘art always contains something ineffable, [...] something which communicates, so to speak, from body to body, i.e. on the hither side of words or concepts, and which pleases (or displeases) without concepts.’²³⁵ This establishes that one views a piece of art (or a piece of writing), through a somewhat illogical, instinctual lens —or, to borrow from Jacques Dubois et al., ‘a kind of instinctive logic’.²³⁶ Jeremy F. Lane explains that Kantian aestheticism dictates that artists and critics determine beauty or high quality art using this instinct. He recounts that Bourdieu rejects this idea, instead arguing that one’s instinct will always be mediated by a range of cultural and life influences, otherwise known as one’s habitus.²³⁷ Put simply, you will bring your own experiences and, sometimes unconscious, biases into your judgement of whether something is beautiful or high quality. As the poet, Jon Stone, puts it: ‘The poem plays a significant role in shaping what we feel, of course, but so do the circumstances in which we read it.’²³⁸

When one group of people has a significant amount of cultural power, their shared habitus influences notions of quality at scale, and can result in perpetuating inequalities. For instance, Bourdieu railed against aestheticism because it maligned art which engaged with political, financial, and societal problems (among others). This allowed the bourgeoisie to maintain their dominance of the arts since they had the means to distance themselves from these problems and to create art which fit aestheticism’s ideals. Lane describes this process:

Bourdieu maintains that the aesthetic, in its classic Kantian formulation as the realm of ‘disinterested’ pleasure, amounts to nothing more than the expression of a typically bourgeois, leisurely, contemplative attitude to the world, contingent upon the bourgeoisie’s distance from the realm of material necessity. Elevated to the level of a supposedly universally communicable experience and hence taken as an objective measure of inherent moral and intellectual worth, the capacity for disinterested aesthetic contemplation can thus serve to naturalize, legitimize, and reproduce existing class divisions and social distinctions.²³⁹

²³²Jeremy F. Lane, ‘Pierre Bourdieu’s Forgotten Aesthetic: The Politics and Poetics of Practice’, *Paragraph*, 27.3 (2004), pp. 82–99 (p. 85), doi:10.3366/para.2004.27.3.82.

²³³ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 13.

²³⁴ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 2.

²³⁵ Here, Bourdieu actually uses the language of Edmund Husserl. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by W. R. Boyce Gibson (Collier, 1972), pp. 309–11.

²³⁶ Jacques Dubois, Meghan Emery, and Pamela Sing, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and Literature’, *SubStance*, 29.3 (2000), pp. 84–102 (p. 101), doi:10.2307/3685563.

²³⁷ Lane, ‘Pierre Bourdieu’s Forgotten Aesthetic’, p. 82.

²³⁸ Jon Stone, ‘On Feeling and Rancour (or What Makes Us So Sure We’re Right About Poetry?)’, *Poetry London*, 8 December 2021 <<https://poetrylondon.co.uk/on-feeling-and-rancour/>> [accessed 12 February 2022].

²³⁹ Lane, ‘Pierre Bourdieu’s Forgotten Aesthetic’, p. 82.

This model holds true in the UK contemporary poetry ecology. As Allen notes, white, able-bodied, male, heterosexual, middle class poets historically dictated what is considered ‘good’ poetry based on their habitus.²⁴⁰ As a result, poetry drawing from cultural and literary traditions and experiences of under-represented poets has often been considered lower quality because the poets did not share the same habitus as those in power, often combining with other sociocultural prejudices and discrimination to disparage under-represented poets’ work. For instance, the poets who formed such change-making programmes as TCW and Malika’s Poetry Kitchen²⁴¹ did so precisely because they felt the poetry establishment never acknowledged their work as good poetry, only Black poetry that was somehow lesser.²⁴² Teitler recounts how during the second round of TCW, an ‘editor of a well-known poetry journal’ commented that they do not publish many Black and brown poets because ‘they do not wish to “dumb down” for their readers’, clearly demonstrating the inherent racism and low opinion the establishment held towards Black and brown poets.²⁴³

To return to FAB programmes’ potential to affect the ecology at scale —FAB schemes that support poets from under-represented backgrounds enact a process of change by altering the habitus of influential poets. Teitler documents this process for TCW, stating that the programme sought ‘to change the poetry landscape’. ‘[G]etting published by the larger poetry presses’ was not ‘the specific goal’, rather, publication and potential prize recognition worked towards change at the ecological level.²⁴⁴ As she states, ‘the [mentored] poets have also become significant figures shaping the UK poetry landscape,’²⁴⁵ including judging prestigious awards, editing major journals, and sitting on boards or organisational committees for well-established writer development agencies.²⁴⁶ Since TCW mentees now hold such influential positions, this implies their more diverse habitus will continue to shape the ecology. This could take place in the form of under-represented poets having more role models that represent them. As noted earlier, for Andrew McMillan, Thom Gunn was such a figure, giving McMillan a sense of permission to write as a gay man.²⁴⁷ McMillan has now partnered with New Writing North to create the Tempest Prize, a FAB scheme focusing on LGBTQ+ writers based in the North of England, which suggests that the process of creating queer role models is ongoing, as does McMillan’s role as co-editor in the 2022 anthology, *100 Queer Poems*.²⁴⁸ In the Tempest Prize

²⁴⁰ Allen, ‘Difficult and Bad’.

²⁴¹ The latter is not a FAB programme but involved several of the same poets as TCW.

²⁴² Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, p. 7.

²⁴³ McCarthy Woolf, Teitler, and Evaristo, *Mapping the Future*, p. 29.

²⁴⁴ McCarthy Woolf, Teitler, and Evaristo, *Mapping the Future*, p. 20.

²⁴⁵ McCarthy Woolf, Teitler, and Evaristo, *Mapping the Future*, p. 21.

²⁴⁶ McCarthy Woolf, Teitler, and Evaristo, *Mapping the Future*, pp. 21–22.

²⁴⁷ May, *What Do Poets Know?* Relevant sections begin at 6:14 and 22:40.

²⁴⁸ *100 Queer Poems*, ed. by Mary Jean Chan and Andrew McMillan (Vintage, 2022).

announcement, he describes having access ‘to a world that brought [LGBTQ+ life] closer’ through books, and that ‘The aim of the Tempest Prize is to put my money where my mouth is, pay forward the good fortune and privilege I’ve enjoyed’.²⁴⁹ McMillan seeks to use his mentoring role to act as a queer role model, opening the way for further LGBTQ+ poets to become influential figures with a diverse habitus drawing on the lived experience of queerness.

Another example of how broadening influential poets’ habitus affects the wider poetry ecology is that under-represented writers’ work becomes accepted by more publishers. As Teitler outlines, in 2023, ‘the figure of Black and Asian poets published by major presses is up to 20%’, and ‘TCW [poets] have made a significant contribution to this figure’.²⁵⁰ While this suggests that TCW’s legacy resides in mentees becoming published, Teitler also outlines how the overarching work of TCW has contributed to the changing demographics of poetry publishing, such as increased critical coverage of under-represented poets work as a result of the Ledbury Poetry Critics scheme, founded by TCW poet, Sarah Howe, in partnership with Sandeep Parmar. TCW thereby contributed to more Black and Asian poets becoming published at both the levels of publication and more open channels for the reception of those published texts. The greater platforming of marginalised poets’ work implies that FAB schemes can enact change by shifting the habitus of those in powerful publishing positions so that they better understand the wealth of insight and artistic traditions that inform the under-represented poets’ work, and view these as high quality—either because they have lived experience of these and/or because they have been exposed to this literature and taught to respect it.

Poetry mentorship, particularly FAB programmes, both affect and are affected by the contemporary UK poetry ecology. This cyclical process enacts mentoring’s deep and inextricable interconnection with, and place within, the ecology. Observing the goals of these mentorships and their intentions for change elucidates characteristics of the poetry ecology, and provides a foundation from which to infer ideas about poetry and poetry mentoring practice held at the cultural, institutional, and scholarly level, which do not always chime with the lived experience of being a poet or poetry mentor. Prize culture and the funding landscape particularly impact FAB mentorship, leading to an emphasis on mid-career poets producing a publishable manuscript, which may not adequately support marginalised poets in the short term, with a view to better supporting them in the long-term by changing the habitus of influential figures in poetry, thus creating a more open and inclusive poetry ecology.

²⁴⁹ The privilege McMillan refers to is more than simply access to books, given that his father is the famous poet, Ian McMillan. New Writing North, ‘Tempest Prize Seeks New Queer Voices from across the North’.

²⁵⁰ McCarthy Woolf, Teitler, and Evaristo, *Mapping the Future*, p. 21.

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

As we have seen across the thesis so far, poetry scholarship and culture tend to conceptualise authorship in purely textual and individualist ways that prioritise publication-centric notions of success. By contrast, in Chapter Three I have shown that poets value a range of outcomes from writing and mentoring, thus building on Chapter Two's introduction of multimodality and evidencing that both practices extend beyond any single focus, formal or otherwise.

In Chapter Two, I noted some scholars raise concerns that mentorship risks lowering the quality of poetry should it extend beyond the page itself. This chapter has sought to argue against such notions, tracing instances where mentors across both dyadic and university settings are beginning to adopt layered mentoring approaches that correspond with the multimodal nature of poetry practice. For instance, the central section of Chapter Three has investigated varying attitudes to therapeutic and wellbeing approaches to mentorship. I have illustrated different ways that mentors can employ therapeutic awareness to prevent mentorships from causing emotional damage. Far from diminishing poetry, these approaches echo Shantanu Anand's statement that 'Safety gives a home to good poetry.'²⁵¹ Yet, this chapter has also demonstrated that while borders between approaches to mentoring have become more permeable in the last two decades, conceptualisations of mentorship largely uphold the disaggregation. In the context of a growing emphasis in the twenty-first century on writing about deeply personal and potentially traumatic subjects and experiences, separative understandings of poetry mentorship may not adequately support contemporary mentees since they do not always acknowledge the significant emotional and psychological engagement this domain of poetry involves. This may be particularly pronounced in Higher Education settings and for marginalised mentees. Overall, I have challenged whether poetry mentoring can ever purely focus on one approach, instead illustrating its multimodal nature through applied examples.

Chapter Three has also portrayed poetry mentoring's interconnectedness with the wider poetry ecology by revealing that separative ideas about authorship connect to multiple wider phenomena: firstly, star pedagogy, the idea that the best mentors are well-published and prize-winning. Secondly, such understandings of authorship can also lead to cynicism about whether mentoring is worthwhile, particularly in universities, due to the rarity of attaining publication and prizes. Thirdly, I trace this model of authorship to an overall emphasis on the individual, as seen in pedagogies based on the Romantic poet and in the marketing of poetry news and mentoring

²⁵¹ Shantanu Anand, 'Keynote: Spoken Word Poetry in India: Witnessing the Rise, One Word at a Time', unpublished paper delivered at Poetry Off the Page, Around the Globe: Advances in Poetry Performance Research (13 June 2025).

opportunities. Publication-centric notions of successful authorship signal a tendency towards isolationism, since they overlook benefits from layered practices that may take place outside of a purely poetry context. In addition to depicting mentoring's linkages with the ecology—in line with my models in Chapter One—these insights also deepen our understanding of poetry mentorship by investigating how individualism and isolationism informed previous, solely textual conceptualisations.

My analysis has put poetry mentoring closely in dialogue with the wider ecology, evidencing that mentoring cannot be fully understood in isolation; instead, it is fundamentally enmeshed within the ecology because the two reciprocally influence one another. For instance, FAB mentoring has the capacity to shape the wider poetry ecology through changing the habitus of influential figures, encouraging them to esteem poetic traditions of under-represented poets. Prize culture and the funding landscape makes it difficult for FAB mentoring to shift publication-centric models of authorship and success. Instead, FAB mentoring has prioritised shifting *who* poets are, rather than *what* poets are.

The findings of Chapter Three enable the final part of my thesis to unfold. For example, realising that non-formal approaches occur simultaneously with formal ones allows me to examine such multimodality in Chapter Four's analysis of non-dyadic mentoring. Pivotal to my final chapter is mentoring and the ecology's the reciprocally influential relationship. This reciprocity underpins my analysis of non-dyadic mentoring's impact on the ecology at scale. As I will detail, non-dyadic mentoring intensifies and extends FAB mentoring's tackling of under-representation, since non-dyadic mentorship is primed to render the poetry ecology more accessible and welcoming to a range of poets and poetries.

Chapter 4 Coming Out of the Kitchen: Non-Dyadic Mentorship as Shaping the Poetry Ecology Towards Generosity and Inclusion

4.1 Introduction

From the literary salon popularised in the eighteenth century,¹ to the workshop groups that exist in academic and informal spaces alike throughout the UK today,² poets have long gathered in groups to share their writings and discuss their poetic endeavours, to ‘fuel [sic] their aesthetic and intellectual energy’, and to learn from each other.³ In the twenty-first century, however, the act of coming together to share poetry and support one another’s growth takes on a more explicit valence of generosity and inclusion. Today, poetry groups and collectives—which I read as forms of non-dyadic mentorship—often focus not only on improving the quality of members’ poetry, but also improving access to poetry, coupled with an ethos of generous giving, often but not exclusively in the form of passing on insights about poetry practice.⁴ For instance, Elizabeth Jane Burnett’s research alluded to groups of poets’ propensity for giving, commenting that they operate ‘through kinship alliances and gift exchanges’.⁵ One example of a group operating in this way is Malika’s Poetry Kitchen (MPK), a collective founded in 2001 explicitly to ‘give back’ and support Black and otherwise underrepresented poets who were not being taken seriously by the poetry establishment.⁶ Non-dyadic mentorships today, in seeking to democratise poetry and embodying a readiness to continue to give, often shape the overall contemporary UK poetry ecology towards more generous and inclusive modes of practice, creating legacies that exist well beyond the group itself. I will explore this effect in this chapter, using case studies of MPK, The 57 Collective, and *Tears in the Fence* workshop group and its surrounding communities. I will detail how these group formations operate, elucidating that non-formal emphases, such as emotional connection and trust, are key to their functioning. In doing so, this chapter continues my overarching intervention against seeing mentorship as relating solely to formal aspects.

¹ Elke Krasny, ‘The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex’, in *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, ed. by Victoria Horne and Lara Perry (Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 147–63 (p. 148); Susanne Schmid, *British Literary Salons of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), p. 2, doi:10.1057/9781137063748.

² See my brief mapping exercise into the potential scale of writing groups in the UK in Chapter One.

³ Krasny, ‘The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex’, p. 154.

⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, *Generosity*, *n.*, *Sense 2.b* (Oxford University Press, December 2024), Oxford English Dictionary <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3890786192>>.

⁵ Burnett, *A Social Biography of Contemporary Innovative Poetry Communities*, pp. 3–4.

⁶ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, p. 106.

Additionally, in exploring the legacies and wider impact of non-dyadic mentorship, I will solidify that poetry mentorship is better understood as deeply interconnected with the poetry ecology.

I chose my three case studies because they each present slightly different characteristics of non-dyadic mentorship. For instance, MPK is a long-established and well-publicised collective with a specific focus on widening participation, and its members' actions that shape the ecology are public-facing and visible. As such, this group is a perfect example of the participatory legacy I explore in this chapter. My second case study, The 57 Collective, is an offshoot of MPK founded twenty years later. Despite the group's newness, it is beginning to show signs of similar lasting impact. The 57's pedagogies —innovated by founder, Alice Willitts— could therefore represent how non-dyadic groups in 2025 may engender a sense of welcoming and generosity. Finally, *Tears in the Fence* is another long-standing example. It straddles concretised and diffuse notions of mentorship, combining a workshop group with a wider roster of activities.⁷ It also does not overtly or explicitly frame itself as a widening participation group. Nevertheless, I will illustrate how *Tears in the Fence* likewise leaves a generous legacy. Together these case studies provide an overview of the shapes non-dyadic mentoring can take and definitively deconstructs the idea that poetry mentoring can only be dyadic.

Moreover, as I will outline in this chapter, many non-dyads are closed groups, meaning that people outside of these groups may know little about them unless they are well-documented, like MPK. However, most non-dyads are relatively undocumented. I have selected The 57 Collective and *Tears in the Fence* since neither has received much mentorship recognition, and I am a member of both. My insider status affords me access to and knowledge about these two groups that would be otherwise harder to unearth. My elucidation of these case studies may thereby speak to wider cultures of non-dyadic mentorship that may exist in hidden spaces.

4.1.1 Broader Context and Historical Precedents for Non-Dyadic Mentoring

Before addressing the case studies in detail, I want to examine the broader context and historical precedents for non-dyadic mentoring to better understand its rise, particularly in its contemporary, more generous and access-facilitating form. Non-dyadic mentorship can be traced back to earlier group literary formations such as the coterie or literary salon, which are

⁷ As *Tears in the Fence* supports both experimental and traditional work, this straddling is true to my contention in Chapter Two that mentoring is more nebulous and osmotic in experimental poetry scenes.

explored by scholars such as Elke Krasny,⁸ Ellen Wiles,⁹ Susan Herbst,¹⁰ Amy Prendergast,¹¹ Antoine Liti,¹² and François Rouget.¹³ Literary salons began in the sixteenth century and reached peak popularity across Europe in the eighteenth century. They were spaces for discussing ideas, literature, art, and politics, often held in a private home and presided over by women.¹⁴ The salon had a strong educational capacity, as Herbst identifies,¹⁵ and operated via ‘the practice of conversation as artwork’,¹⁶ which Krasny describes as a practice ‘at once co-emergent with and co-dependent upon others’, emphasising the extent to which learning and artistic craft moved towards collaborative models in this space.¹⁷ Salons featured a range of social classes, and for this reason, Rouget remarks, ‘openness to the exchange of ideas from members of varying backgrounds’ was particularly important.¹⁸ PhD researcher, Tom White, expands upon this, adding that the exclusivity of the salon, ‘allowed participants to feel and behave in a more liberated manner [and] historically appealed to minorities, like queer people, who often felt restricted by or excluded from broader society.’¹⁹ The ethos of the sixteenth-eighteenth century literary salon, then, had something in common with contemporary non-dyadic mentorship: the salon supported creatives through group collaborative means and offered a degree of safety to under represented groups such as queer people and women.

Yet, during the Romantic period, the salon as collaborative learning space fell from favour. As Krasny conveys, salons were systematically devalued by influential male figures such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who saw women as mentally inferior and decried their power in these spaces.²⁰ Moreover, the co-emergent model of artistic growth and learning, ‘profoundly

⁸ Krasny, ‘The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex’.

⁹ Ellen Wiles, *Live Literature: The Experience and Cultural Value of Literary Performance Events from Salons to Festivals* (Springer International Publishing, 2021), p. 143, doi:10.1007/978-3-030-50385-7.

¹⁰ Susan Herbst, *Politics at the Margin: Historical Studies of Public Expression Outside the Mainstream* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹¹ Amy Prendergast, *Literary Salons Across Britain and Ireland in the Long Eighteenth Century*, Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

¹² Antoine Liti, *The World of the Salons: Sociability and Worldliness in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹³ François Rouget, ‘Academies, Circles, “Salons,” and the Emergence of the Premodern “Literary Public Sphere” in Sixteenth-Century France’, in *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, Forms of Knowledge*, ed. by Bronwen Wilson and Paul Yachnin, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture, 13 (Routledge, 2011), pp. 53–67.

¹⁴ Liti, *The World of the Salons*, p. 4; Prendergast, *Literary Salons Across Britain and Ireland in the Long Eighteenth Century*, p. 4.

¹⁵ Herbst, *Politics at the Margin*, p. 56.

¹⁶ Krasny, ‘The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex’, p. 154.

¹⁷ Krasny, ‘The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex’, pp. 154–55.

¹⁸ Rouget, ‘Academies, Circles, “Salons,” and the Emergence of the Premodern “Literary Public Sphere” in Sixteenth-Century France’, p. 62.

¹⁹ Thomas White, ‘Extract from Queer Space: Poetry and Reparative Practice’ (University of Southampton, 2024), p. 1.

²⁰ Krasny, ‘The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex’, p. 155.

challenge[d] the artist-as-genius position distinguished by the production of art conceived of in isolation and based upon the subject model of the independent individual'.²¹ Susanne Schmid notes this was a particularly male concept, and the English Romantic salon remains 'regrettably under-researched, possibly because the lonely subject often dominates the "mental theatre" of the major Romantic poets, who relished a cult of male solitude'.²² In summary, by the mid-nineteenth century, supportive group spaces for poetry, such as the salon, declined in popularity due to the rise of the author as an individual figure.

Attitudes changed rapidly towards group formations within poetry production in the proceeding twentieth century. As I outlined in Chapter Two, experimental modernist groups, particularly those aligned with the avant-garde, had a greater interest in group formations, with Caroline Pollentier and Sarah Wilson detailing 'continued interest in the name and practice of community in the modernist era'.²³ Some groups, like the Vorticists, came together under a manifesto that described their poetic ambitions, aesthetic, and ethos.²⁴ By the mid-twentieth century, poets moved away from groups united by manifestos, such as the Language poet, Lyn Hejinian, who disavowed such documents.²⁵ Poets were far from solitary during the era; they engaged in poetic dialogues and activity both in person and remotely, yet resisted being referred to as specific groups. Accordingly, groups' titles were often retrospective ones, given by others, such as the Black Mountain Poets²⁶ and The New York School.²⁷ Another key example is The Cambridge School, a late-modernist group associated with the British Poetry Revival and, as Andrew Duncan recounts, were 'immortalised in the anthology *A Various Art* [and] influenced by Objectivism, Marxism, [Charles] Olson, and [Frank] O'Hara'.²⁸ The Cambridge School included poets such as Peter Riley, Wendy Mulford, Andrew Crozier, Veronica Forrest-Thompson, Tim Longville, Douglas Oliver, John Riley, Denise Riley, John James, R.F. Langley, and David Chaloner.²⁹ Several scholars note that poets commonly cited as core members of The

²¹ Krasny, 'The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex', p. 155.

²² Schmid, *British Literary Salons of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, p. 2.

²³ *Modernist Communities Across Cultures and Media*, ed. by Caroline Pollentier and Sarah Wilson (University Press of Florida, 2019), p. 2.

²⁴ 'Manifesto I & II', *BLAST: Review of The Great English Vortex*, 1.1 (1914), pp. 11–44 <https://monoskop.org/images/1/1b/Blast_1.pdf> [accessed 28 January 2025].

²⁵ Srikanth Reddy, 'Beyond the Manifesto: Language Poetry and Lyn Hejinian's The Language of Inquiry', *Poets.Org*, 21 February 2005 <<https://poets.org/text/beyond-manifesto-language-poetry-and-lyn-hejinians-language-inquiry>> [accessed 11 January 2025].

²⁶ The Poetry Foundation, 'The Black Mountain Poets', The Poetry Foundation, n.d. <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/151709/an-introduction-to-the-black-mountain-school>> [accessed 11 January 2025].

²⁷ Peter A. Stitt and John Ashbery, *John Ashbery, The Art of Poetry No. 33*, Interviews, Winter 1983.90 (1983) <<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3014/the-art-of-poetry-no-33-john-ashbery>> [accessed 11 January 2025].

²⁸ Duncan, 'Styles of British Poetry 1945-2000'.

²⁹ Duncan, 'Styles of British Poetry 1945-2000'.

Cambridge School disliked being referred to as Cambridge Poets. Peter Riley, for instance, said that ‘I don’t feel I ever belonged to any school or group of “Cambridge poets”. [...] we were all very different from each other and became more so later on.’³⁰ In his doctoral thesis on Prynne, Louis Goddard documents Andrea Brady concurring,³¹ adding that ‘her rejection of the term [was] typical of the reactions of poets whom [the term The Cambridge School] attempt[ed] to subsume,’³² a phenomenon the poet and critic, Richard Owens, reiterates.³³ The poets’ rejection of the term stemmed from its obfuscating potential. As Alex Latter critiques: ‘the notion of a “school” is unhelpfully reductive: the implied dogmatism of “school” elides the variousness of these poets’ art.’³⁴ Unlike the early twentieth-century’s championing of the group’s shared artistic ambitions, by the mid-late twentieth-century, the individual voice of the poet chafed against group identity.

That is not to say that group activities did not take place. They were simply framed in more individualistic terms. To illustrate: the Cambridge poets engaged in poetic-intellectual exchanges that honed each other’s practice, yet both the poets themselves and critics alike took pains to assert their individual identity. Nigel Wheale, for example, says The Cambridge School used ‘self-publication as a means of encouraging an active interchange of poetry and ideas within a diffuse network of writers and readers’.³⁵ He offers a list of publications that acted as sites of exchange, most notably *The English Intelligencer* (1967-8).³⁶ Correspondence was another extremely important site of exchange for The Cambridge School.³⁷ Sets of letters, such as *The Collected Letters of Charles Olson and J. H. Prynne*, have since been published, containing dialogues of critique and praise such as Olson admiring Prynne’s use of pronouns in ‘Moon Poem’.³⁸ These publications and correspondences represent a kind of proto-peer-

³⁰ Griffiths, ‘Interview’.

³¹ Goddard, ‘J.H. Prynne in Context, 1955–1975’, p. 26.

³² Goddard, ‘J.H. Prynne in Context, 1955–1975’, p. 27.

³³ Richard Owens, ‘Dissociations: The McCaffery-Prynne Debate’, *Paideuma*, 40 (2013), pp. 405–31 (p. 425) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43908212>> [accessed 27 June 2024].

³⁴ Alex Latter, *Late Modernism and The English Intelligencer: On the Poetics of Community*, Historicizing Modernism (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 7.

³⁵ Nigel Wheale, ‘Cambridge School, The’, *The Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry*, 2013 <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199640256.001.0001/acref-9780199640256-e-1383>> [accessed 19 November 2024].

³⁶ Although the associations of these publications with the school is also contested. Emily Witt, for instance, describes the group as having no associated publications, whereas John Wilkinson describes *The English Intelligencer* as ‘the school’s defining early publication’. Emily Witt, ‘That Room in Cambridge’, *Poetry Foundation*, March 2011 <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69662/that-room-in-cambridge>>; John Wilkinson, ‘Community and the Cambridge School’, *Paideuma: Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*, 46 (2019), pp. 343–46 (p. p.344) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48648864>> [accessed 27 June 2024].

³⁷ Latter, *Late Modernism and The English Intelligencer*, p. 8.

³⁸ *The Collected Letters of Charles Olson and J. H. Prynne*, ed. by Ryan Dobran, Recencies Series: Research and Recovery in Twentieth-Century American Poetics (University of New Mexico Press, 2017), p. 173.

mentoring, not entirely dissimilar from the conversation-as-art from the earlier literary salon. However, The Cambridge School's methods of conducting exchanges, by letter and publication, placed a greater emphasis on solo authorship.³⁹ While the literary salon's verbal conversation was difficult to record and track, leading to a blurred sense of whose idea belonged to whom, literary journals list the authors of each creative or critical piece and letters have a definitive author and recipient.⁴⁰ Therefore, written forms of dialogue appeared to present a record of individuals' contributions, upholding a sense of author as solo entity.

In the context of letter-writing, if one takes the view that letters between poets are another site where the single author competed with more collaborative models, this sense of the individual may have been something of a façade. For example, Siobhan Phillips describes letter-writing as 'neither singular nor collective' but rather a 'intersubjective exchange', which evokes two minds whose separateness is permeable.⁴¹ The critical reception⁴² of Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell's correspondence points towards this permeability through illustrating that Bishop and Lowell's poetries were shaped by each others' support, criticism, encouragement, and inspiration.⁴³ Further scholarship on poets' letters negotiate single authorship; Bruce Bawer,⁴⁴ Meghan O'Rourke,⁴⁵ Hugh McIntosh,⁴⁶ and Phillips provide detailed accounts of the

³⁹ The Cambridge School rarely met collectively in-person. One of the few events that brought together large numbers of the school was 'held in MacSweeney's family's cottages at Sparty Lea in Northumberland in the spring of 1967'. *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer*, ed. by Neil Pattison, Reitha Pattison, and Luke Roberts, 2nd Edition (Mountain Press, 2014), p. ii.

⁴⁰ Lilti, for instance, reflects salons had 'no lists of members, no regulations, no minutes'. Lilti, *The World of the Salons*, p. 9.

⁴¹ Siobhan Phillips, 'Elizabeth Bishop and the Ethics of Correspondence', *Modernism/Modernity*, 19.2 (2012), pp. 343–63 (p. 343), doi:10.1353/mod.2012.0043.

⁴² Hugh McIntosh, 'Conventions of Closeness: Realism and the Creative Friendship of Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 127.2 (2012), pp. 231–47, doi:10.1632/pmla.2012.127.2.231; Paul Muldoon, 'Fire Balloons: The Letters of Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop', in *Letter Writing Among Poets: From William Wordsworth to Elizabeth Bishop*, ed. by Jonathan Ellis (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 216–30 <<https://academic.oup.com/edinburgh-scholarship-online/book/30144/chapter/257086515>> [accessed 17 April 2025]; Celeste Goodridge, 'Reviewed Work: Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell by Thomas Travisano, Saskia Hamilton', *The New England Quarterly*, 82.2 (2009), pp. 363–66, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25652018>> [accessed 17 April 2025]; Bruce Bawer, 'Poets and Their Letters | The Hudson Review', *The Hudson Review*, LXII.I (2009) <<https://hudsonreview.com/2013/03/poets-and-their-letters-2/>> [accessed 17 April 2025]; Meghan O'Rourke, 'Turning Pain Into Art', *Culture, The Atlantic*, 18 April 2017 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/05/tragic-muses/521418/>> [accessed 17 April 2025].

⁴³ Sophie Baldock and Phillips refer to the letters as mentorship, although Phillips stated the correspondences also exceeded the role of a mentor. Sophie Baldock, "'Our Looks, Two Looks": Miniature Portraits in the Letters of Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell', *The Review of English Studies*, 71.300 (2020), pp. 528–53 (pp. 536–38), doi:10.1093/res/hgz097; Phillips, 'Elizabeth Bishop and the Ethics of Correspondence', p. 356.

⁴⁴ Bawer, 'Poets and Their Letters | The Hudson Review'.

⁴⁵ O'Rourke, 'Turning Pain Into Art'.

⁴⁶ McIntosh, 'Conventions of Closeness'.

differences between Bishop and Lowell's practices, and establish distinct senses of authorship for each poet, whilst also acknowledging their mutual influence on one another.⁴⁷ In terms of how poets in the mid-late twentieth century conceptualised letter writing and single authorship, Lowell's letters reveal he was particularly concerned with declaring his individuality even when, as Paul Muldoon describes, his work clearly drew on Bishop's letters.⁴⁸ For instance, Lowell wrote his poem 'Skunk Hour' after reading Bishop's 'The Armadillo' but protested it was 'not in [her] voice'.⁴⁹ Lowell likewise warned Bishop when he thought her style was growing imitative of Marianne Moore's, indicating his wariness of external influence.⁵⁰ Towards the mid-late twentieth-century, then, poetry culture saw group activities reframed to maintain the integrity of single authorship, even when poetic production was underpinned by exchanges of knowledge and ideas with an influential community.⁵¹

By the twenty-first century, non-dyadic mentorships acquired another purpose, which took precedent over concerns about single authorship: access. Much like FAB schemes enacting macro-level change on the poetry ecology, which I explored in Chapter Three, non-dyadic mentorships, especially poetry collectives, act as bastions of change. This shift mirrors wider developments in arts culture across the 1980s-1990s, particularly the purpose of arts funding. As Asha Rogers' monograph on the relationship between state funding and diversity shows, major institutions such as Arts Council England 'repackaged artistic culture as a public good and conceptualized its own role as a guardian of aesthetic excellence and universal access'.⁵² Leila Jancovich critiques the efficacy of participatory arts policies but likewise notes the shift that funding organisations made towards participation as a key reason to fund arts activity.⁵³ In Arts Council England's current ten-year strategy, *Let's Create*, the arts are firmly positioned as a facilitator of social good and social change. The strategy begins with an introduction from Chair, Sir Nicholas Serota, and outlines the ambition to 'provide communities in every corner of the country with more opportunities to enjoy culture, and celebrate greatness of every kind', resulting in 'improving the lives of people everywhere'.⁵⁴ The through-line is clear:

⁴⁷ Phillips, 'Elizabeth Bishop and the Ethics of Correspondence'.

⁴⁸ Muldoon, 'Fire Balloons: The Letters of Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop', p. 221.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell, *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*, ed. by Thomas J. Travisano and Saskia Hamilton, 1st ed (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008), p. 230.

⁵⁰ Bishop and Lowell, *Words in Air*, p. 204.

⁵¹ Bawer, 'Poets and Their Letters | The Hudson Review'; O'Rourke, 'Turning Pain Into Art'; McIntosh, 'Conventions of Closeness', pp. 234–42; Phillips, 'Elizabeth Bishop and the Ethics of Correspondence', pp. 345–53.

⁵² Rogers, *State Sponsored Literature*, p. 58.

⁵³ Leila Jancovich, 'The Participation Myth', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23.1 (2017), pp. 107–21 (pp. 107–09), doi:10.1080/10286632.2015.1027698.

⁵⁴ Arts Council England, *Let's Create: Strategy 2020-2030* (Arts Council England, 2020), pp. 1–80 (p. 4) <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-strategy-2020-2030>> [accessed 16 December 2024].

with improved access and participation, quality of life will improve. It is an ethos continued throughout the strategy. In the documents' thirty-five pages of copy, the word 'everyone' appears fourteen times, with a further twenty-one occurrences of 'every' in similar contexts such as 'every one of us' or 'every kind', 'every child', and 'every variety'.⁵⁵ Further, 'social' is used nineteen times, in relation to factors such as social prescribing, social care, and social value.⁵⁶

4.1.2 Intervening Against Heterotopic and Individualist Understandings of Non-Dyadic Mentorship

My research indicates that contemporary non-dyadic mentorships often adopt this participatory ethos, ultimately creating a more accessible, welcoming, and fertile environment for a greater range of people to engage in poetry. To understand the significance of this research, it is important to consider Monica Carroll and Jen Webb's analysis of how spaces for poetry operate. Building on Michel Foucault's term, heterotopia,⁵⁷ they state:

poets simultaneously belong to their local communities and stand outside them. The space they occupy is "other" to the norm; it is a counter-site that operates within but alongside the dominant forms; and it is a (potentially) disruptive operation because [...] poetry has no formal place. Consequently, it tends to operate as a pop-up, disrupting the space of café or bookshop or bar, and then disappearing back into its no-place.⁵⁸

Carroll and Webb's account lends a certain ephemerality to poetry activities. M. Scott Peck concurs, describing a workshop group as a transitory 'short-term community'; he states in 'a weekend workshop, [...] the participants will scatter to the winds' upon leaving.⁵⁹ Indeed, there are few dedicated spaces for poetry; some exist, such as the poetry libraries in London, Edinburgh, and Manchester, but these are spread thinly. Poetry activities like non-dyadic mentoring more often happen in rentable or community spaces, or members' homes. It is therefore hard to argue that such activities are not dependent on transforming existing spaces to suit poets' needs in a heterotopic site of rupture.

Yet I read these encounters as having a lasting impact. Some explorations of heterotopia, such as those by James Faubion and Zoë Skoulding, respectively, make strides towards reading

⁵⁵ Arts Council England, *Let's Create*.

⁵⁶ Arts Council England, *Let's Create*.

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Routledge Classics (Routledge, 2007), p. xix.

⁵⁸ Monica Carroll and Jen Webb, *Creativity in Context: How to Make a Poet*, The Pragmatics of Art (Centre for Creative and Cultural Research with Recent Work Press, 2018), p. 54.

⁵⁹ M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community-Making and Peace* (Arrow, 1990), p. 169.

poetry activities as less ephemeral. These highlight that even while poetry operates by transforming non-poetry spaces, those ruptures remain tethered to their surroundings. As Skoulding outlines:

The poetry performance on the bus is separated from the everyday urban environment, yet as it moves it creates multiple relationships with the city it describes, as incompatible sites are connected through the journey; it also recalls Foucault's example of the boat as heterotopia. Through movement, the poem inverts and suspends the structures of the city while remaining engaged with them.⁶⁰

Faubion theorises similarly in his conceptualisation of heterotopia as an ecology. He speaks of hidden moments 'of transcendence, of transmogrification [that] remained deeply dependent on what went on outside them [...] embedded in a broader urban fabric within which it wove alternatives.'⁶¹ Skoulding and Faubion present a transformation that is contingent and connected with the normative environment. Through these links, poetry activities seem concretised and less ephemeral. I wish to build on these readings further by demonstrating the lasting legacies of non-dyadic mentorship that exist beyond their heterotopic sites' transformation, like Cinderella's carriage back into a pumpkin, to their non-poetic function. These legacies span both the poet and extend into the ecology itself, once again positioning mentoring as an ecologically enmeshed practice.

Additionally, I will illustrate in this chapter how the non-dyad's form, the presence of multiple mentor-mentees, is central to their lasting impact. This intervention is necessary because non-dyadic mentorships tend to be documented in ways that focus on a founding member, organiser, or otherwise designated lead, which does not accurately reflect non-dyadic mentorship's functioning or impact. Nisbett and Walmsley state this effect is common in the arts. They detail an emphasis on charismatic leaders,⁶² both at the level of being in the organisation and the scholarship about it, which centralises the leader's impact above everyone else involved.⁶³ By focusing on the leader, non-dyadic mentorships risk being reduced to a series of dyadic mentorships happening simultaneously. Subsequently, I must challenge leader-centric narratives to assert the validity of non-dyadic forms of mentoring.

⁶⁰ Zoë Skoulding, 'Absent Cities: Text, Performance, and Heterotopia', in *Performing Poetry: Body, Place and Rhythm in the Poetry Performance*, ed. by Cornelia Gräbner and Arturo Casas, Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex and Race, (Brill, 2011), xxiv, pp. 247–62 (p. 255), doi:10.1163/9789401200257.

⁶¹ James D. Faubion, 'Heterotopia: An Ecology', in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. by Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (Routledge, 2008), p. 37.

⁶² After a Weberian conceptualisation of charisma, which is remarkably close to the notion of Romantic genius.

⁶³ Melissa Nisbett and Ben Walmsley, 'The Romanticization of Charismatic Leadership in the Arts', *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 46.1 (2016), pp. 2–12, doi:10.1080/10632921.2015.1131218.

The naming conventions of non-dyads embodies the tendency to prioritise leaders. For example, Malika's Poetry Kitchen directly includes Booker in the title. The possessive implies ownership of the collective and clearly centralises Booker. The fifty-seven of The 57 Collective refers to Willitts' home, which is where the first iteration of the collective used to meet.⁶⁴ This binds Willitts as a lead figure. *Tears in the Fence*, in referring to a magazine which has been under Caddy's leadership for over forty years, likewise highlights Caddy's position as its leader in a slightly oblique fashion. Moreover, the historic example of The Cambridge School denotes its situation within the city and University of Cambridge, but given that the location was in a large part due to Prynne's academic positions at the university, the school's title arguably presents Prynne as the school's lead. Non-dyadic mentorships' naming conventions thereby tend to orient the groups around one key member. The documentation of groups follows a similar pattern. For example, despite some describing a lack of hierarchy to The Cambridge School,⁶⁵ documentation of the group largely presents Prynne as its central node.⁶⁶ In MPK, their twentieth anniversary anthology positions Booker and Robinson as overcoming a series of obstacles to found the collective, yet beyond the group's founding, the members co-lead one another.⁶⁷

Narrative theory underpins why non-dyadic mentorships can be framed in terms of individuals. As I already discussed in this thesis, humans tend to understand narratives through character archetypes and the functions they enact; these are often centred around a protagonist.⁶⁸ Non-dyadic mentorships resist ancient storytelling traditions, since each poet is both mentor and protagonist at once. As such, narratives of non-dyadic mentorships become messy and complicated; the characters' functions are multiple and shared, meaning that an action cannot be ascribed to any one poet. Without the ability to trace an action or effect to a source, these mentorships cannot follow the predictable narrative patterns set out in traditional narrative theory. Rather than present a potentially confusing and unsatisfying story, instead, scholars identify protagonists.⁶⁹ Leaders, organisers, and founders of non-dyadic mentorships make natural protagonists since in addition to coming up with the idea for the groups, they often

⁶⁴ Alice Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview', November 2024.

⁶⁵ Neil Pattison's account of *The English Intelligencer* outlines no lead figure, 'these young writers [...] had not come together in order to earn the approval of a presiding savant'. Pattison, Pattison, and Roberts, *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer*, p. ii.

⁶⁶ Peter Riley, for example, describes Prynne as a magnet 'attracting kindred or unformed spirits to cluster together'. Griffiths, 'Interview'.

⁶⁷ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, pp. 1–22.

⁶⁸ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*; Prinsloo, 'Beyond Propp and Oedipus: Towards Expanding Narrative Theory'; Afsari and Royanian, 'Folk Narratology: Propp's Improved Actants and Functions'.

⁶⁹ Nisbett and Walmsley identify this effect taking place in the context of management literature, which has focused on leaders rather than followers. Nisbett and Walmsley, 'The Romanticization of Charismatic Leadership in the Arts', p. 2.

take on extra roles, particularly at the start of a mentorship. Booker hosted the collective in her kitchen. Willitts and Caddy created hybrid settings for mentorship, such as Zoom rooms and hosting an in-person retreat and festival respectively. All three also organised the logistics of the mentorships. Prynne, via his connections with The University of Cambridge, was able to offer a mimeograph to print *The English Intelligencer*, as well as access to physical spaces.⁷⁰ These acts may also be read as essential to the establishment of the mentorships, thus presenting the centralisation of leadership figures as only fair. Yet, as I will illustrate in this chapter, the impact of non-dyadic mentorships goes beyond the leader. Therefore the documentation of non-dyadic mentorships encourages them to be understood in ways that do not accurately represent the contributions of all its members to both the mentorship sessions themselves or their lasting impact on the poetry ecology towards more generous, open, inclusive, and nurturing modes of poetic practice.

4.2 Three Case Studies: Malika's Poetry Kitchen, The 57 Collective, and *Tears in the Fence* as Non-Dyadic, Multimodal, and Ecologically Embedded

One of the first non-dyadic mentorships to explicitly take up a participatory ethos is Malika's Poetry Kitchen (MPK), founded in Brixton in 2001 by Malika Booker and Roger Robinson. Daniel Kramb's account of the collective's formation firmly situates the mentorship's participatory motivations, recounting the forces of structural inequality in the poetry world Booker and Robinson worked against:

Page poetry – in magazines, newspapers, journals, books – is, in 2001, overwhelmingly white. The shortlists of the Forward Prizes for Poetry: white. The shortlist of the T.S. Eliot. Every editor of every journal of note: white. Almost every one of their pages. [...] Roger is acutely aware that if you are Black, no matter how good you are as a poet, people don't see you. If, every now and again, a door opens to let some people through, it soon shuts again. And if you find yourself on the margins, anywhere outside of it, the *poetry world* can look and feel not just out of reach, but completely impenetrable. [...] Roger feels – painfully, every day – how every structure is against him, and poets like him. Many give up.⁷¹

Kramb, Booker, and Kaddish Morris in *The Observer* shed further light on the history of this exclusionary effect. Morris comments that many Black British poets began by performing their

⁷⁰ Latter, *Late Modernism and The English Intelligencer*, p. 7.

⁷¹ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, pp. 6–8.

work in underground performance-based poetry spaces,⁷² which Kramb describes as ‘the experienced, but unrecorded, experimental, electrifying scene’.⁷³ Yet many poets found that, once they were labelled a spoken word artist, their work was consistently viewed as lower value. As Morris explains, ‘The consensus for a long time seemed to be that “good” poetry was published, “bad” poetry was performed.’⁷⁴ Booker further contextualises the situation, commenting that ‘the literary establishment ridiculed us. They felt that we were only interested in performing, that we were rappers, that our work was not of sufficient quality, and that black bodies like ours had no place at the table.’⁷⁵

Booker, together with Robinson, decided to create a space for these excluded poets, inspired by a recent course by Kwame Dawes.⁷⁶ They gathered poets around Booker’s kitchen table at her Brixton home and began to support one another. This support continues today, albeit no longer in Booker’s kitchen, and takes place on several levels. To give an overview, the sessions focus on rigorous critique that, far from the homogenising labels previously attached to these poets, value each poet’s unique style—as Rishi Dastidar comments in his interview for this project, ‘There isn’t an imposition of a style [...] of a right [...] kitchen way of writing’.⁷⁷ The poets perform together (providing pep talks and logistical run-throughs before said performances, as well as sometimes organising the performances themselves), buy each other’s books, host members at their houses if they need somewhere to stay in order to perform, and promote each other’s work and achievements, among further aspects of the support that exceed the bounds of the page.⁷⁸ MPK’s members have oscillated over the years, but have included: Rishi Dastidar, Karen McCarthy Woolf, Inua Ellams, Jacob Sam-La Rose, Nick Makoha, Warsan Shire, Nii Ayikwei Parkes, Sundra Lawrence, Denise Saul, and Kayo Chingonyi. Jill Abram directed MPK from 2010-2022.⁷⁹ The success of the collective is well documented, including significant prize wins like the 2020 Forward Prize for Best Poem (Booker) and the 2019 T.S. Eliot Prize (Robinson), Shire famously collaborated with Beyoncé, and the

⁷² Kadish Morris and others, ‘Poetic Justice: Black Lives and the Power of Poetry’, Books, *The Observer*, 28 June 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jun/28/black-british-poets-black-lives-matter-linton-kwesi-johnson-grace-nichols-raymond-antrobus-kayo-chingonyi-malika-booker-vanessa-kisuule>> [accessed 23 February 2022].

⁷³ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Morris and others, ‘Poetic Justice’.

⁷⁵ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, pp. 1–2.

⁷⁶ Leanne Ellul, “My Poetics Is Shaped by the Legacy of the Middle Passage”, *Times of Malta* (Valetta), 26 August 2024 <<https://timesofmalta.com/article/my-poetics-shaped-legacy-middle-passage.1097057>> [accessed 14 November 2024].

⁷⁷ Dastidar, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’.

⁷⁸ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, p. 108.

⁷⁹ No new director has been announced, although Booker still supports some sessions. Forward Arts Foundation, ‘In Conversation with Malika Booker’, interview with Malika Booker, 1 July 2023 <<https://forwardartsfoundation.org/in-conversation-with-malika-booker/>> [accessed 22 April 2025].

collective was commemorated through a series of digitised performances,⁸⁰ and a twentieth anniversary anthology: *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different* (2021).⁸¹ MPK has also sprouted branches of collectives internationally.⁸²

MPK members' activities during and after their tenure in the collective focus on the sharing of knowledge and continuing to broaden access to poetry as an artform, which indicates that one of MPK's legacies is an ongoing shaping of the contemporary UK poetry ecology towards inclusive and generous modes of artistic practice. For instance, a striking example of continuing generosity comes from Booker herself. In the final section of *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, Booker includes a step-by-step guide to creating a poetry collective.⁸³ She does not gatekeep the knowledge. Instead, she passes it on to create further supportive communities, embodying the spirit of generosity by facilitating further poetic exchange. Moreover, several MPK poets —Dastidar, McCarthy-Woolf, Booker, Robinson, Peter Khan, Harry Man, Dean Atta, and Peter Raynard— feature in *The Craft: A Guide to Making Poetry Happen in the 21st Century*, a text that shares knowledge about multiple aspects of being a poet, from poetic forms to poetry culture.⁸⁴ Roger Robinson continues to share knowledge in a similar way through self-publishing three poetry guides to date, *On Poetry*,⁸⁵ *On Creativity*,⁸⁶ and *On Form*,⁸⁷ which he describes as being 'part of [his] 2024 mission to get 10,000 people back to creativity'.⁸⁸ Nick Makoha went on to create The Obsidian Foundation, which supports Black writers through an intensive writing retreat with targeted support from senior tutors.⁸⁹ Parkes founded Flipped Eye publishing, a press that emphasises supporting under-represented poets and indeed has gone on to publish multiple MPK members, including Robinson, Shire, and Ellams. MPK members also regularly take on supportive roles (such as mentors, advisors, consultants, and direct organisers) for access-facilitating and developmental programmes. Ellams does so in

⁸⁰ Malika's Poetry Kitchen, 'Too Extra', Malika's Poetry Kitchen, n.d.

<<https://malikaspotrykitchen.com/tooextra/>> [accessed 9 March 2022].

⁸¹ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*.

⁸² Malika Booker and Roger Robinson, 'Malika & Roger', Malika's Poetry Kitchen, 2024

<<https://malikaspotrykitchen.co.uk/malika-roger/>> [accessed 14 November 2024].

⁸³ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, pp. 106–10.

⁸⁴ *The Craft: A Guide to Making Poetry Happen in the 21st Century*, ed. by Rishi Dastidar (Nine Arches Press, 2019).

⁸⁵ Roger Robinson, *On Poetry* (Roger Robinson, 2023).

⁸⁶ Roger Robinson, *On Creativity* (Roger Robinson, 2023).

⁸⁷ Roger Robinson, *On Form* (Roger Robinson, 2024).

⁸⁸ Roger Robinson, 'Get on Form!', letter, 3 January 2025 <<https://us21.campaign-archive.com/?e=07533eb2a3&u=379571f9980e5ad486b924323&id=d73f4a093f>> [accessed 14 January 2025].

⁸⁹ The Obsidian Foundation, 'About', Obsidian Foundation, 2023

<<https://obsidianfoundation.co.uk/about/>> [accessed 17 January 2025].

eleven organisations.⁹⁰ Sam-La Rose ‘has developed spoken word programmes with organisations such as the British Council, the National Theatre, the Arvon Foundation, the Roundhouse, the Barbican, and Apples & Snakes’.⁹¹ Dastidar became Chair of *Wasafiri* and Spread the Word.⁹² Finally, Chingonyi was a judge for #Merky Books’ 2019 New Writers’ Prize for underrepresented writers.⁹³ All of these actions embody the original impulse of MPK, to ‘give back’ and ‘create supportive communit[ies]’, through sharing knowledge about and widening access to poetry.⁹⁴ The sheer scale of the members’ activities implies that involvement in non-dyadic mentoring with an inclusive and generous emphasis shapes poets to create spaces and cultures in which a greater number and variety of poets and poetries thrive. In doing so, the MPK poets shape the contemporary UK poetry ecology towards broader and more supportive modes of artistic practice.

Yet the question remains: How does MPK support its members to shape the poetry ecology towards inclusivity? I contend that both formal and non-formal approaches are key to non-dyads’ transformative potential, and this can be evidenced through the concept of communities of practice. I will start by defining communities of practice, outlining how they shape their members through knowledge-sharing and that non-dyads function similarly. Etienne Wenger et al. define communities of practice as ‘groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.’⁹⁵ My models in Chapter One illustrated that information is a principal way mentoring changes poets; therefore knowledge-sharing renders communities of practice transformative structures. Research by Ailsa Craig,⁹⁶ Erica Fletcher,⁹⁷ and Rachel McCrum suggests there is a link between specifically *poetic* communities of

⁹⁰ Ellams outlines these on his website, and such roles are typical for a former MPK member. Literature Wales, ‘Representing Wales 2024-25 Mentors Announced’; Inua Ellams, ‘About’, Inua Ellams, 2023 <<https://www.inuaellams.com/#about>>.

⁹¹ Poetry Archive, ‘Jacob Sam-La Rose’, Poetry Archive, 2022 <<https://poetryarchive.org/poet/jacob-sam-la-rose/>> [accessed 14 January 2025].

⁹² Wasafiri, ‘People: Rishi Dastidar’, Wasafiri, 2025 <<https://www.wasafiri.org/people/rishi-dastidar/>> [accessed 14 January 2025].

⁹³ Durham University, ‘Staff Profile: Kayombo Chingonyi’, Durham University, 2023 <<https://www.durham.ac.uk/staff/kayombo-k-chingonyi/>> [accessed 14 January 2025].

⁹⁴ Dastidar, *The Craft*, p. 106.

⁹⁵ Etienne Wenger, Richard A. McDermott, and William Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Harvard Business School Press, 2002), p. 4.

⁹⁶ Ailsa Craig, ‘The Practice of Poetry: Identity, Community and Subculture’, in *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (unpublished Ph.D., New York University, 2006), 305281159 <<https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/practice-poetry-identity-community-subculture/docview/305281159/se-2?accountid=13963>>.

⁹⁷ Erica Fletcher, *An Exploration of the London Spoken Word Poetry Community*, published online 2024, 2753917 Bytes, doi:10.26174/THESIS.LBORO.25449853.V1.

practice and disseminating knowledge.⁹⁸ McCrum⁹⁹ and Fletcher, in their respective studies of poets in the Scottish central belt and London, note that communities of practice are sites of knowledge-sharing.¹⁰⁰ Craig points out the sociability of groups facilitates this sharing; she situates the acquisition of knowledge within a social network, ‘as emergent from social interactions’.¹⁰¹ This is in-keeping with the original notion of communities of practice by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger ‘to address apprenticeships and how learning happens in social environments’.¹⁰² Overall, then, communities of practice facilitate knowledge-sharing and perhaps represent a culture of passing on expertise. One can see MPK as a community of practice, particularly when taking into account Fletcher’s articulation of their characteristics:

The first is a domain, or interest, shared by the group. The second characteristic is a community developed through participating in events and conversations, which facilitates learning and fosters relationships. The final characteristic is practice, meaning members must actively practice their interests.¹⁰³

To apply these characteristics to MPK, poetry occupies the space of the shared interest. The collective’s workshops and performances fulfil the requirement to participate ‘in events and conversations’, as well as actively practice this interest.¹⁰⁴ In addition to MPK ascribing to these parameters, all of the case studies do as well. This signifies that communities of practice are a core aspect of how non-dyadic mentorships operate.

The transmission of information described above is likely to contain formal expertise but, as Fletcher articulates, the methods through which that transference takes place relies on non-formal considerations. Within the community of practice’s activities, Fletcher notes four pedagogical dimensions that increase the sense of belonging to that community, thus facilitating poetic development: ‘membership, influence, fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection.’¹⁰⁵ Emotional connection and membership are of particular importance to non-dyadic mentorship. Membership structures dictate who and how many poets are included in the mentorship, as well as how many relationships can be formed between

⁹⁸ Rachel McCrum, ‘The Ties That Bind: Communities of Practice in Grassroots Spoken Word in The Scottish Central Belt’, in *Verbs That Move Mountains: Essays and Interviews on Spoken Word Cultures Around the World*, ed. by Claire Trévien (Sabotage Reviews, 2018), pp. 24–33.

⁹⁹ McCrum, ‘The Ties That Bind: Communities of Practice in Grassroots Spoken Word in The Scottish Central Belt’, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰ Fletcher, *An Exploration of the London Spoken Word Poetry Community*, p. 50.

¹⁰¹ Craig, ‘The Practice of Poetry: Identity, Community and Subculture’, p. 7.

¹⁰² Fletcher, *An Exploration of the London Spoken Word Poetry Community*, p. 45.

¹⁰³ Fletcher, *An Exploration of the London Spoken Word Poetry Community*, pp. 45–46.

¹⁰⁴ Fletcher, *An Exploration of the London Spoken Word Poetry Community*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁵ These pedagogical dimensions are borrowed from David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis. David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, ‘Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory’, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14.1 (1986), pp. 6–23, doi:[https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(198601\)14:1%3C6::AID-JCOP2290140103%3E3.0.CO;2-I](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1%3C6::AID-JCOP2290140103%3E3.0.CO;2-I).

members.¹⁰⁶ Emotional connection elucidates the qualities of those relationships. Since the relationships between members facilitate learning, the membership models and ways of forging emotional connections are key to understanding how non-dyadic mentoring in the twenty-first century engenders wider cultures of participation and generosity. As such, multimodality plays an important role in how non-dyads function and, by extension, their ecological influence.

The way that MPK's membership model facilitates relationships between its members establishes a sense of group identity, and gestures towards its affective potential for the broader ecology. To illustrate MPK's membership structure: MPK has had many members across its tenure, with at least sixty-five documented in its anthology.¹⁰⁷ Within this group is an active set of poets who currently take part in the sessions, and pay £20 per term.¹⁰⁸ Establishing a definitive membership lends definition to the group, and brings with it notions of group identity, collectivity, a sense of a wider whole. Booker references these notions in her introduction to MPK's twentieth anniversary anthology, where she invokes 'the power of the collective' as displayed on Guyanese billboards in her childhood, which featured the national motto of Trinidad and Tobago: '*Together, we aspire together we achieve* [sic]'.¹⁰⁹ Booker and Robinson's membership model increases this sense of power through keeping a semi-consistent membership; rather than a defined sense of cohort comprised of entirely new poets each year, the members of MPK have shifted more incrementally. As such, the webs of relationships formed between members span generations of MPK poets, binding past and present members together even if they did not take part in sessions or performances together. As a result, MPK remains a much larger entity than just those poets taking part in the sessions at any one time, which lends itself to the ability to create change on a wider scale.

MPK's membership structure, its closed borders and definitive membership, may increase the efficacy of its workshops. For instance, reflecting on the group's formation, Booker emphasises members feeling safe to share potentially 'taboo' subjects, which implies this is vital to developing their poetry.¹¹⁰ It is easier to create such feelings of safety and free communication with a consistent membership, as White, drawing on Daniel Tiffany's research, remarks.¹¹¹ Fletcher also notes easy communication and the resultant artistic growth can come

¹⁰⁶ Thus enhancing the sociability of the learning that Craig and Lave and Wenger described above.

¹⁰⁷ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*.

¹⁰⁸ As Willitts describes during our interview, reflecting on a conversation she had with Jill Abram, MPK's logistical lead at the time. Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹⁰⁹ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, p. 108.

¹¹¹ Daniel Tiffany, *My Silver Planet: A Secret History of Poetry and Kitsch*, Hopkins Studies in Modernism (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 207; White, 'Extract from Queer Space: Poetry and Reparative Practice', p. 1.

to exist through ‘a common language’ between members, which allows ‘those in the know to access the community and its resources’.¹¹² MPK’s closed membership may therefore boost the effectiveness of its workshops through supporting feelings of safety and open dialogue. One can also read this atmosphere as symptomatic of trust between the members. In this way, MPK’s closed membership aids trust between the poets. By extension, the membership works towards the second of Fletcher’s dimensions, emotional connection, in the form of trust.

Moreover, the physical setting the collective used in its early years intensifies the sense of trust, safety, and open communication both at the start of MPK and in its current iteration. This is because Booker invited the members into her literal kitchen, which created a sense of intimacy that aided easy dialogue. As Booker says, ‘Because we started in my home people were relaxed in that space.’¹¹³ Rosie Kyrin-White also describes this effect, stating ‘The noun “Kitchen” encapsulates the ethos of this collective, evoking a warm, communal space where poets can serve one another and feast on shared creative goodness.’¹¹⁴ While the group no longer meets in Booker’s kitchen, as Kyrin-White identifies, the notion of being in a kitchen has been absorbed into and is still at play today within the collective’s ethos. The use of the term ‘kitchen’ implies a certain lack of judgement, which members of MPK may not always find in establishment spaces. Perhaps this is because a kitchen is a place of creation. It is not a restaurant, where reviewers can damn the business forever with a bad review. One can make many imperfect creations in a kitchen and these are seen as an important part of developing a skill rather than failure. This suggests the kitchen-inspired ethos may benefit the poets’ development.

Additionally, the characteristics of MPK I have so far recounted concurrently work towards greater inclusivity. For instance, Booker’s establishment of a non-judgemental ‘kitchen’ atmosphere, in addition to emphasising the ability to discuss taboos allude that trust and open communication are of particular importance to the marginalised poets in the collective. Perhaps this trusting dialogue enables them to circumvent the racially and class-coded biases of the poetry establishment that, especially prior to the twenty-first century, saw MPK members excluded from poetic dialogue and the identity of poet. Thus the collective’s membership model and ethos may enable the poets to engage in serious poetic debate without fear of derision and, by extension, increase their sense of legitimacy. Subsequently, censure-free communication

¹¹² Fletcher, *An Exploration of the London Spoken Word Poetry Community*, p. 46.

¹¹³ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*, p. 108.

¹¹⁴ Rosie Kyrin-White, ‘Malika Booker: Breathing New Life into Poetry at UEA’, UEA Live, 16 November 2021 <<https://www.uealive.com/features/malika-booker-breathing-new-life-into-poetry-at-uea/>> [accessed 23 February 2022].

enabled by membership and emotional connection works towards the collective's inclusive ambitions by positioning the members as legitimate poets.

To highlight my thesis-wide ambition to open ideas about mentoring: Chapter Three posited that mentoring and the ecology are thoroughly entwined due to their mutual affect on one another; Chapter Four affirms this as MPK presents a real case of mentoring responding to a need in the ecology and extensively impacting the ecology in return. Chapter Four, thus far, also reinforces the multimodality of poetry mentoring by unearthing that non-dyads consider a range of both formal and non-formal factors. Additionally, my analysis shows that multimodality contributes to seeing mentoring as ecologically-interconnected because multimodality is part of the pedagogy that results in groups' shaping of the wider ecology.

There is, however, another, latent way this chapter positions mentoring as ecologically-situated, relating to Chapter One's immersed ecological model. I contend this model represents how MPK encourages its members to take action and shape the ecology towards inclusivity. To explain, MPK provides its members with many types of resource, spanning knowledge, feelings, and capacities. Yet, an important aspect remains: MPK enables the transference of an *ethos*. It is this generous ethos that stimulates the poets to act. In my immersed model, this ethos would take the form of an abstract resource, and its transference would be diffuse, almost osmotic. The quality of the ethos' movement is significant to note because it offers a visual framework for more fluid—but no less influential—kinds of ecological interconnection. In short, the model captures non-dyads' ecological imbrication, which shifts our understanding of mentorship away from notions of isolation.

4.2.1 MPK's Legacy in Increasing Receptivity to Non-Dyadic Mentoring

The story of MPK is one in which a participatory ethos and literary excellence are not mutually exclusive. This multimodality is significant when considering the difference between how poets in the mid-twentieth century approach the act of belonging to a group compared to twenty-first century poets. As The Cambridge School example earlier in this chapter illustrates, some poets in the preceding period resented being labelled as belonging to a particular school. This is because the term school implies a shared characteristic or aesthetic. As such, the poets may have felt they were being accused of lacking originality to greater or lesser extents; the Romantic notion of original genius was being called into question. As a result, the poets themselves and supportive critics were quick to assert the originality of their approaches to maintain their status as high-quality poets. In the late twentieth century, with the advent of participatory-focused arts funding calls, similar fears emerged regarding a lack of originality. For instance, Asha Rogers recounts the landmark 1989 legal case between Arts Council England and the poet Fiona Pitt-

Kethley over a bursary that was only available to Black writers. Rogers highlights that critics such as David Dabydeen worried ‘performing institutional openness [in the form of funding specific demographics of poets] might lead the Arts Council to privilege uneven work’.¹¹⁵ To augment this picture, consider the history that MPK establishes regarding how Black poets in the era were perceived. Booker’s account details Black poets as being collectively misdescribed as rappers. By grouping all Black writers together under one label, this suggests the attack on Black poets’ quality is rooted in an accusation of a lack of originality. Bernardine Evaristo points towards this when she asserts the poetry of The Complete Works mentees ‘cannot be reduced to a homogenous “Black voice” or “Asian voice”’,¹¹⁶ as did Naseem Khan in 1976, through her objection to a specific ‘Ethnic Arts Committee’ being added to Arts Council England because the idea ‘seems to be based essentially on an illusion: that all ethnic minority arts have a common denominator’.¹¹⁷ The significance, of MPK’s success, then, is that the collective created irrefutable evidence, in the form of major prize wins, of the individuality and originality of Black poets, and that belonging to a group focused on opening access is not in opposition to artistic originality in the manner of the Romantic genius. The latter, we might read as a burgeoning receptivity to multimodal mentoring, as formal excellence and holistic considerations exist concurrently.

Through the work of groups such as MPK, today, there is far less stigma involved in belonging to a poetry collective since, unlike the late-modernist groups, there is less of an assumption that belonging to a group will result in poetry being shaped in a specific way, calling into question one’s originality. In fact, similar to Dastidar’s description of there being no specific ‘kitchen’ way of writing, contemporary non-dyadic mentorships now commonly include group members with wildly differing poetic styles, a phenomenon I will shortly expand upon in relation to The 57 Collective and *Tears in the Fence*.¹¹⁸ As a result, poets regularly acknowledge belonging to a collective or other non-dyadic mentorship. One need only recall that sixty-five past members of MPK opted to be included in their twentieth anniversary anthology,¹¹⁹ indicating that being called an MPK poet has become desirable; moreover, members regularly reference being part of the collective in their biographies.¹²⁰ Another legacy of MPK could

¹¹⁵ Rogers, *State Sponsored Literature*, p. 97.

¹¹⁶ Evaristo and Nagra, *Ten*, p. 15.

¹¹⁷ Naseem Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* (The Commission, 1976), p. 129.

¹¹⁸ Dastidar, ‘Poetry Mentor Interview’.

¹¹⁹ Dastidar and Lawrence, *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different*.

¹²⁰ Wasafiri, ‘People: Rishi Dastidar’; Joolz Sparkes, ‘About’, *Joolz Sparkes*, 2 December 2020 <<https://joolzsparkes.wordpress.com/about-2/>> [accessed 14 January 2025].

therefore be greater respect for the collective, particularly participatory collectives. This legacy also represents a move towards defining mentoring as both dyadic and non-dyadic.

4.3 The 57 Collective

MPK is just one, albeit influential, case of a non-dyadic mentorship taking up the twenty-first century emphasis on inclusion and generosity. How do further non-dyadic mentorships move towards this ethos? Are multimodality and ecological interconnection likewise at their heart? To consider these questions, I now turn to The 57 Collective—one of the UK-based offshoots of MPK—and the dimensions of a community of practice that work towards participatory action and giving, particularly membership and emotional connection.

The 57 Collective is made up of fourteen core poets: Alice Willitts, Chaucer Cameron, Cheryl Moskowitz, Christina Thatcher, Clare Whistler, Elizabeth Lewis-Williams, Elvire Roberts, Hilary Watson, Ilse Pedler, Jane Wilkinson, Jessica Mookherjee, Katherine Stansfield, Rachel Goodman, and myself.¹²¹ Alice Willitts formulated the plan for the collective drawing on a long phone call with MPK's then-lead, Jill Abram,¹²² and invited the poets to take part in September 2021.¹²³ The 57 meets for a two-hour online session once a month, with a break in July and an optional in-person retreat in August, usually at the Ty Newydd Writer's Centre.¹²⁴ Sometimes additional poets are invited to the retreat if there is space at the venue. Poets in this category include: Carol Rowntree Jones, Helen Dewberry, Helen McSherry, and Jenny Pagdin, known as 'Friends of The 57'. They do not take part in the core online sessions but maintain looser connections with the collective, such as being part of a WhatsApp group. Membership for The 57 Collective thereby functions similarly to MPK in that there is a core group and a looser planetary ring of friends orbiting it. Subsequently, The 57's membership model encourages bonds between current, past, and otherwise peripheral members, thus increasing the sense of a group identity and the potential to transmit insights to a greater number of poets, much like MPK.

Another shared characteristic is that both MPK and The 57 Collective's members do not have a homogenous poetic style, which was an intentional choice by Willitts when she selected the group's members.¹²⁵ Elvire Roberts, for instance, is perhaps one of the most experimental

¹²¹ Although Roberts left the core group in 2025.

¹²² Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹²³ Alice Willitts, 'Would You like To...', personal communication, 1 September 2021.

¹²⁴ Other, adjacent activities less relevant at this juncture include: submitting proposals to perform together at festivals, and selling books at the Writer's Centre Norwich Publishing Fair.

¹²⁵ Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

poets,¹²⁶ whereas Clare Whistler¹²⁷ and Cheryl Moskowitz have long roots in performance-based practices involving music,¹²⁸ and Elizabeth Lewis-Williams' work often focuses on narrative.¹²⁹ Ilse Pedler,¹³⁰ Christina Thatcher,¹³¹ and myself have all published texts mostly situated in the lyric tradition and drawing on our own experiences.¹³² Many of the poets share an emphasis on ecopoetry, although even this is not unanimous. Given that MPK explicitly influenced the structure of The 57, the vast formal diversity of its members further demonstrates MPK's legacy in that collectives today comfortably incorporate a range of poetic styles.

The 57 Collective's formally diverse membership also underpins an innovative approach to the sessions themselves, which actively makes transparent different poetic processes and thereby creates the potential for others to engage in that type of practice. For example, like MPK, a different member leads each session. The 57 builds upon this by basing the session on the leading poet's current practice and making the sessions 'generative' rather than critique-based.¹³³ As Willitts outlines, 'It's not a feedback session. It's not a workshop. It's stepping into each poet's studio.'¹³⁴ However, while the sessions involve producing poems, Willitts stipulates that 'they're not prompt sessions either'.¹³⁵ Instead, she describes hoping to create a space where poets

show us around their writing desk. What's on the shelves? What are they thinking about? What are they interested in? What are they puzzled about? [...] if you are grappling with something, if you are puzzled about something—that's interesting, right? If you have all the answers—if you know exactly what you're doing and you're just teaching the rest of us—that's not so interesting to me. I like the co-creation.¹³⁶

The 57 Collective's sessions are an invitation into another poet's practice, a process through which both the session leader and the participants learn; both parties work towards gifting each other that knowledge. Furthermore, since the sessions do not solely focus on critiquing the finished product but examine the writing process leading to poetic production, the free

¹²⁶ Elvire Roberts, *North by NorthNorth* (Fire Leaves Press, 2023).

¹²⁷ See projects in collaboration with operatic performances at Glyndebourne and Longborough Festival. Clare Whistler, 'Clare Whistler: Current and Future Projects', Clare Whistler, 2025 <<https://www.clarewhistler.co.uk/>> [accessed 3 March 2025].

¹²⁸ See Moskowitz's hybrid poetry-music series, All Saints Sessions. Cheryl Moskowitz and Alistair Gavin, 'All Saints Sessions Homepage', All Saints Sessions, 2025 <<http://www.allsaintssessions.uk/>> [accessed 3 March 2025].

¹²⁹ Oxford Centre for Life-Writing, 'Profile: Elizabeth Lewis Williams', University of Oxford, 2024 <<https://oclw.web.ox.ac.uk/people/elizabeth-lewis-williams>> [accessed 3 March 2025].

¹³⁰ Ilse Pedler, *Auscultation* (Seren, 2020).

¹³¹ Christina Thatcher, *How to Carry Fire* (Parthian Books, 2020).

¹³² Nissel, *Guerrilla Brightenings*.

¹³³ Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹³⁴ Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹³⁵ Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹³⁶ Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

exchange of expertise characterising Willitts' pedagogy creates the possibility of further poets undertaking similar practices by equipping them with tools for creative production. While MPK achieves a similar effect through exposing members to a range of practices, Willitts makes the invitation to try new writing styles far more explicit. In doing so, she centralises generosity and widened participation within even formal-facing aspects of her pedagogy. Another way The 57 Collective's membership structure and pedagogy work towards participatory action is that, by adopting a more co-creative model in which members do not need to be experts or can bring topics to the group with which they are having difficulty, poets with varying levels of education or differences in expertise can engage with poetry.

A final aspect of membership that embodies generosity is The 57 Collective's membership payment model, or rather, Willitts' conscious choice to reject a paid model. In MPK, members pay for membership, which Willitts recounts discussing with Abram: 'I remember Jill actually saying, [paraphrased] "you've got to get people to pay even a small amount [...] it could be a token but it's symbolic and it means that they're committed."' ¹³⁷ By contrast, Willitts preferred to found The 57 Collective on 'the generosity of that two way exchange of the commitment to each other to show up and to be led through someone else's practice, [which] is as important as leading the others through your practice.' ¹³⁸ The 57 thereby functions based on gift exchange rather than financial commitment. The significance of taking such practical factors into consideration in the collective's design is three-fold. Firstly, it represents further multimodality. Secondly, poets with low incomes can take part. ¹³⁹ Thirdly, the gift exchange payment model centralises the practice of passing on poetic insights and knowledge, thus characterising The 57 Collective as a whole with a readiness to continue to share knowledge with the wider poetry ecology, increasing its sense of welcoming.

The 57 Collective also addressed another multimodal dimension of the community of practice: emotional connection. When forming the group, Willitts paid particular attention to potential bonds between the members and selected them based on who she felt would 'energetically [...] be really great in a room together.' ¹⁴⁰ Willitts' approach links to Émile Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, 'shared emotional energy that occurs in groups participating in a shared experience[, which] can create feelings of unity and solidarity.' ¹⁴¹ It is

¹³⁷ Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹³⁸ Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹³⁹ This is likely also true for MPK, although is enhanced in the case of The 57 Collective.

¹⁴⁰ Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹⁴¹ Fletcher, *An Exploration of the London Spoken Word Poetry Community*, p. 54; Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, ed. by Carol Cosman and Mark Sydney Cladis, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford University Press, 2008); Tim Olaveson, 'Collective Effervescence and Communitas:

perhaps significant, then, that during both online sessions and the in-person retreat, multiple members of the collective have felt comfortable enough to cry with one another, as it suggests trust and strong emotional connection between the group members. These bonds can be read as vital to increasing the diversity of poetic practice described above because emotional connection underpins the pedagogy of inviting poets into one's practice.¹⁴² For instance, the sessions often focus on ideas-in-development that may relate to both deeply intellectual and deeply personal topics, and may involve exposing flaws in the lead's thinking, gaps in knowledge, or otherwise intimate information. In April 2025, for example, I ran a session reflecting on my recent ADHD diagnosis, the unconscious ways I felt it had influenced my poetry practice, and offered a way of seeing poetry informed by my experience of ADHD. Therefore, trust and emotional connection are paramount to the pedagogy's success because the lead poet must feel very comfortable exposing these vulnerabilities to the other members.¹⁴³ In this way, for The 57 Collective to broaden the spectrum of possible poetry practice for its members, the group also had to adopt a multimodal approach and foster emotional connection.

4.3.1 Interlude: The Importance of Trust to *The English Intelligencer*

One can also view the negative consequences of the absence of trust on the sense of community, through the historic example of those Cambridge School poets involved in *The English Intelligencer*. Craig's research on poetry communities theorises that, in the context of larger groups, 'association need not be friendly to be productive of community.'¹⁴⁴ *The English Intelligencer* seems to have followed this notion, given their emphasis was less on fostering emotional connection and more on fulfilling the needs of the group: 'to engage directly and critically with their [poetic] contemporaries, to find their place in relation with the present, and sought through that engagement to push out towards new encounters.'¹⁴⁵ Achieving such aims rested on dialogues that Latter termed as 'fractious' and antagonistic.¹⁴⁶ This implies emotional

Processual Models of Ritual and Society in Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 26.2 (2001), pp. 89–124, doi:10.1023/A:1020447706406.

¹⁴² Emotional connection also underpins the effectiveness of education broadly, as Shelly J. Schmidt notes and Marilyn Tew extends to relationships between teaching colleagues like the shared mentor-mentee roles of non-dyadic mentorships. Shelly J. Schmidt, 'Embracing and Harnessing the Intimate Connection Between Emotion and Cognition to Help Students Learn', *Journal of Food Science Education*, 18.4 (2019), pp. 87–96 (p. 94), doi:10.1111/1541-4329.12167; Marilyn Tew, 'Emotional Connections: An Exploration of the Relational Dynamics Between Staff and Students in Schools', *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27.1 (2010), pp. 129–42 (p. 140) <https://growinggreatschoolsworldwide.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ECP27_1-Tew.pdf> [accessed 17 April 2025].

¹⁴³ Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹⁴⁴ Craig, 'The Practice of Poetry: Identity, Community and Subculture', p. 249.

¹⁴⁵ Pattison, Pattison, and Roberts, *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Latter, *Late Modernism and The English Intelligencer*, p. 9.

connection was far less important than intellectual debate, since it was this debate that would push the bounds of poetry.

However, trust, as a form of emotional connection, was vital to this intellectual debate, and it was the lack of this trust that would spell the downfall of *The English Intelligencer*. This demonstrates that poetry mentoring is always multimodal, whether participants or documenters recognise said multimodality or not. For instance, instead of close friendships, *The English Intelligencer* functioned via a ‘community of risk’,¹⁴⁷ a term by Prynne that described ‘the reciprocal exchange of trust and risk [that] enables a community to sustain an alternative vision of the world.’¹⁴⁸ A community of risk ‘[sought] to contain the antagonisms of risk without ameliorating them’, meaning that a community of risk inherently involved clashes over differences in belief.¹⁴⁹ Trust was integral to the fearlessness of these spirited debates. Consequently, trust may have acted as the form of emotional connection essential to create a sense of community in this case, since it is through trust that relationships can survive antagonisms; it alludes to a respect underneath criticism, a dialogue between peers who, although they may disagree conceptually, recognise one another as intellectual equals. Accordingly, without trust, the community collapses. This seems to summarise what took place for *The English Intelligencer*, which disbanded after only two years due to increasing disputes. In a 1966 letter, ‘Prynne bemoan[ed] the lack of an “initial measure of trust” among the *Intelligencer*’s readers that would have enabled the community of risk, implying that the community of risk was unsuccessful because of the lack of trust within the group’s foundations.’¹⁵⁰ This example illustrates that emotional connection has long been paramount to a group’s success, although some may prefer to call it respect or trust.

4.3.2 The (Future) Ecological Legacy of The 57 Collective

Although The 57 Collective has only been active for four years, like MPK, its members have continued to practice the ethos of openness and generosity in their wider activities, thus shaping the UK poetry ecology and gesturing towards the future participatory legacy of The 57. For example, the members regularly take on roles such as advisor, committee member, board

¹⁴⁷ J. H. Prynne, ‘Letter to Andrew Crozier’, *The English Intelligencer*, 1st Series, 27 December 1966, pp. 189–91.

¹⁴⁸ Latter, *Late Modernism and The English Intelligencer*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ Latter, *Late Modernism and The English Intelligencer*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁰ Alex Latter, “‘Beyond the Path Itself’: Archive and Text in the Correspondence of Bernard Dubourg and J. H. Prynne”, *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 50.3 (2021), pp. 261–78 (p. 8), doi:10.1093/camqtly/bfab009; Prynne, ‘Letter to Andrew Crozier’.

member or trustee. These include: Christina Thatcher (Literature Wales¹⁵¹ and the National Association of Writers in Education's Higher Education Committee),¹⁵² Jessica Mookherjee (The Poetry Society),¹⁵³ Cheryl Moskowitz (*Magma*),¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Lewis-Williams (The Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research),¹⁵⁵ Willitts (Dialect),¹⁵⁶ and myself (QAA creative writing subject benchmark).¹⁵⁷ The members also conduct targeted support for new and/or vulnerable writers, such as Clare Whistler,¹⁵⁸ myself,¹⁵⁹ Moskowitz,¹⁶⁰ and Thatcher.¹⁶¹ Other participatory roles include Willitts co-founding DIRT, a press publishing collaborative texts that are carbon-positive and plantable,¹⁶² and four members founding *Bending the Arc*, a thrutopian literary magazine.¹⁶³ As referenced in Chapter One, Willitts, Mookherjee, and Moskowitz acted as my mentors, free of charge, in 2022-23. From activities that influence longstanding institutions like The Poetry Society, to sessions supporting people who have never written before, the concurrent and proceeding activities of The 57 Collective's members likewise work towards creating a poetry ecology that supports a range of poets and poetries. Mirroring MPK, The 57 Collective's impact simultaneously enacts its entwinement with the broader UK poetry ecology.

¹⁵¹ Christina Thatcher, 'Trustee Spotlight: Christina Thatcher', *Literature Wales*, 11 November 2022 <<https://www.literaturewales.org/lw-blog/trustee-spotlight-christina-thatcher/>> [accessed 5 March 2025].

¹⁵² Cardiff University, 'Profile: Dr Christina Thatcher', Cardiff University, 2025 <<https://profiles.cardiff.ac.uk/staff/thatcher/>> [accessed 23 April 2025].

¹⁵³ The Poetry Society, 'Trustees', Poetry Society, 2025 <<https://poetrysociety.org.uk/poetry-society-information/about/who-we-are/trustees/>> [accessed 6 March 2025].

¹⁵⁴ Glyn F. Edwards, 'More Than Human: A Poem and Interview from Cheryl Moskowitz', interview with Cheryl Moskowitz, 27 October 2024 <<https://modronmagazine.com/2024/10/27/more-than-human-a-poem-and-interview-from-cheryl-moskowitz/>> [accessed 5 March 2025].

¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth Lewis Williams, 'Committee Member: Elizabeth Lewis Williams', Scar, 2025 <<https://scar.org/members/elizabeth-lewis-williams>> [accessed 3 March 2025].

¹⁵⁶ Willitts, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹⁵⁷ The Quality Assurance Agency, *Subject Benchmark Statement for Creative Writing (2024)*, p. 28.

¹⁵⁸ Although Whistler is credited as a dancer on their website, The Wellcome Trust's Unmapped project involved poetic approaches broadly. The Wellcome Trust, 'Unmapped - The Wellcome Trust, Co-Creativity and Dementia: The Artists', Arcs Studio, 2025 <<https://www.arcsstudio.co/animation/unmapped>> [accessed 5 March 2025].

¹⁵⁹ See Paper Nations particularly. Another recent widening-participant project is an anthology of community writing for the festival, Big Stories Written in Wrexham. Elen Caldecott and Joanna Nissel, 'Big Stories, Written in Wrexham (and the Cloud!)', *Writing in Education*, no. 91 (Spring 2024), pp. 29-30 <https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/216835/1/WiE_Big_Stories_Written_in_Wrexham.docx.pdf> [accessed 5 March 2025].

¹⁶⁰ Edwards, 'More Than Human: A Poem and Interview from Cheryl Moskowitz'.

¹⁶¹ Lukas Wallis, 'My Creative Writing Highlight: Competing in Cardiff Met's Unislam Poetry Team', *CARDIFF MET BLOG*, 1 April 2020 <<https://studentblogs.cardiffmet.ac.uk/my-creative-writing-highlight-competing-in-cardiff-mets-unislam-poetry-team/>> [accessed 23 April 2025].

¹⁶² Alice Willitts, 'DIRT: Plantable Poetry', *Dialect*, September 2024 <<https://www.dialect.org.uk/dirt>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

¹⁶³ Laura Baggaley and others, 'New Thrutopia Magazine Launch', *Bending The Arc*, 21 April 2025 <https://open.substack.com/pub/bendingthearcmagazine/p/new-thrutopia-magazine-launch?r=1tl2qi&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&showWelcomeOnShare=false> [accessed 22 April 2025].

4.4 *Tears in the Fence*

My third and final case study addresses the non-dyadic mentorship associated with *Tears in the Fence* literary magazine, which was established in 1984 and has been edited since that time by founder, David Caddy, in conjunction with various co-editors and associated editors.¹⁶⁴ Before I illustrate the formal and logistical aspects of the magazine, mentorship, and its surrounding activities, it is important to reflect on the interview I conducted with Caddy, wherein he describes his own experience of being mentored:

I was incredibly lucky, when I was about seventeen to nineteen or twenty, to have two really fine mentors. One was a consultant psychiatrist, and the other was a sociologist. And so nothing really to do with literature at the time, but they taught me so much —they freely gave of their time, their enormous knowledge and wisdom. I do feel compelled to pass on, by relay, as it were, [...] what they gave to me. [...] I came from a very modest, poor background, no books in the house [...] plus I was in the slow learner's class. And, from that sort of background, to become an advisor to the government on English studies, there is a story there.¹⁶⁵

The story Caddy gestures toward bears a striking resemblance to the pattern of The 57 Collective and particularly MPK, in which a generous mentor shares their expertise and otherwise supports an under-represented poet, who consequently adopts an ethos of giving back. As this case study will show, *Tears in the Fence*'s non-dyadic mentorship, and its linked activities, extend the relay Caddy referred to, and are founded on a premise of openness and welcoming.

To outline the magazine and mentorship: grounded in an ecofeminist perspective, the magazine publishes both formally traditional and experimental prose and poetry, as well as genre-bending forms that blur these boundaries. While there is no unifying style, the magazine tends to admire socially and intellectually-informed work that invites divergent readings. Such writings may relate to closely-observed local settings or topics, as well as speak to broader issues and histories, often both.¹⁶⁶ *Tears in the Fence* has been lauded by many. For instance, John Kinsella provided a video celebration of the magazine, describing it as 'a vital part of the

¹⁶⁴ Including Harry Seccombe, Sarah Hopkins, Louise Buchler, Richard Foreman, Olivia Tuck, and myself.

¹⁶⁵ Caddy, 'Poetry Mentor Interview'.

¹⁶⁶ See the description of the magazine on their website, and Caddy's account of co-founding the magazine. Tears in the Fence, 'About', Tears in the Fence, February 2023 <<https://tearsinthefence.com/about/>> [accessed 16 February 2023]; Write Out Loud and David Caddy, 'Literary Magazine Tears in the Fence Marks 30th Anniversary with Festival', *Write Out Loud*, 12 September 2014 <<https://www.writeoutloud.net/public/blogentry.php?blogentryid=44269>> [accessed 22 April 2025].

poetry community' that helps 'expand the consciousness about what's being written about'.¹⁶⁷ In addition to the magazine, Caddy convenes a non-dyadic poetry mentorship referred to as 'the workshop group' —although since 2020 there are actually multiple sessions. A group of local poets meet in-person once a month at The White Horse pub, Stourpaine, Dorset, and two further sessions per month take place on Zoom. A regular, core group of poets and writers attend the in-person workshop, consisting of Valerie Bridge, Andrew Henon, Richard Foreman, Morag Kiziewicz, Janet Hancock, Jeremy Hilton, and Lesley Burt. Regular online workshop attendees include: Penny Hope, Sarah Watkinson, Beth Davyson, Mandy Pannett, Huw Gwynn-Jones, Melisande Fitzsimons, Sarah Acton, Jane Wheeler, and Jennifer K. Dick. I attended the in-person workshop between 2016-2018 and have semi-regularly attended the online workshops since their formation. Other poets, such as John Freeman and Gerald Killingworth, have also spanned the in-person and online groups in a similar manner.

Both the online and in-person workshop groups follow a set format, lasting three to four hours. First, Caddy emails regular attendees to invite them to take part, detailing the theme of that month's workshop. When a participant books a place, he sends an essay on the workshop's theme, which includes excerpts from poems spanning multiple eras and traditions.¹⁶⁸ In the period between booking and the workshop (usually two to three weeks), participants write a poem in response to Caddy's paper and the workshop theme as a whole. For both the online and in-person sessions, the workshop begins by discussing the essay and theme and how they resonated with the participants, followed by a break. In the online workshop, the break is around thirty minutes and allows participants to make final tweaks to their poem in light of the discussion. During the in-person workshop, the group orders lunch in the pub and eats together. After the break in both sessions, the groups critique each other's poems.

The membership structure of the *Tears in the Fence* workshop group contains the twenty-first century valence of generosity and inclusion, although perhaps it pronounces this ethos less overtly than in the previous two case studies. For instance, the workshop group costs £30 per session to take part, significantly higher than MPK or The 57. Yet Caddy also builds a social-inclusion policy into the workshop group,¹⁶⁹ offering free bursary places to a range of under-represented writers and writers facing additional barriers to access.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, the *Tears in*

¹⁶⁷ *In Support of Tears in the Fence* - John Kinsella, dir. by John Kinsella (2021)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGgOQJ34ZSU>> [accessed 16 February 2023].

¹⁶⁸ The online workshops are open to the public. New members can join by paying via the *Tears in the Fence* website, at which point Caddy will email them the workshop materials.

¹⁶⁹ Caddy also applies this policy to the magazine's wider roster of activities, such as the annual festival.

¹⁷⁰ David Caddy, 'Online Workshops', *Tears in the Fence*, 2025 <<https://tearsinthefence.com/events/>> [accessed 6 March 2025].

the Fence workshop group is the only case study that operates in-person and online year-round.¹⁷¹ By retaining the online sessions beyond social distancing measures, Caddy widens their accessibility to a variety of groups who cannot take part in the Dorset sessions for physical, medical, financial, or environmental reasons. By offering memberships at reduced costs, as well as online memberships, *Tears in the Fence*'s membership structure thereby contains inclusive ambitions.

The workshop also works towards formal inclusivity by being receptive to a range of poetries. For instance, poets need not write entirely in English, thus providing a space for multilingual poetry that is not currently well-represented in UK publishing. Participants regularly bring multilingual poems to the sessions, such as Beth Davyson, Jasmina Bolfek-Radovani, Hari Marini, Penny Hope, Jennifer K. Dick, and myself. The online membership structure aids the inclusion of multilingual poetry, since it enables poets living internationally to take part, including Davyson, Marini, Hope, and Dick. The workshop group also supports wildly differing forms and styles of poetry, from Freeman's long narrative poems¹⁷² to Burt's prose poems¹⁷³ or Marini's fragmented experimental work.¹⁷⁴ Members comment on the sheer range of poetic styles that the workshop addresses, with Andrew Henon describing Caddy encouraging poets regardless of the tradition in which they work:

I think that's what's so good with David's sessions [...] he's so good at enabling people to go their own way with [their writing]. [Whether] it's the Black Mountain school of poetry, and Merleau-Ponty and all of that stuff around perception where you open out the possibilities within a sentence or within a poem [...] And also because David has covered [everything], from villanelles through to Shakespeare. And he's so good at referencing other poets.¹⁷⁵

A mentee who preferred to remain anonymous adds to this picture, stating, 'he's got a massive amount in his head to share'; they expanded this out to the sense of collective mentorship, stating that 'you also learn equally from the group'.¹⁷⁶ Morag Kiziewicz describes similarly: 'the knowledge there [in the workshop group]. The knowledge base is so extraordinary.'¹⁷⁷ Finally, Henon reflects that the range of poetic styles adds to the sense of confidence engendered in the group because 'there isn't a negativity that puts you down with the work' due to one type of

¹⁷¹ As opposed to The 57 Collective's yearly in-person retreat.

¹⁷² Two poems typical of Freeman's style were published in Issue Eighty. John Freeman, 'Two Poems', *Tears in the Fence*, no. 80 (Autumn 2024), pp. 21–24.

¹⁷³ See Burt's latest collection. Lesley Burt, *When Alice Spins Her Glitterball* (*Tears in the Fence*, 2024).

¹⁷⁴ Hari Marini, 'Erebus', *Tears in the Fence*, no. 73 (Spring 2021), pp. 83–84.

¹⁷⁵ Andrew Henon, 'Poetry Mentee Interview', July 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Anonymous, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

¹⁷⁷ Kiziewicz, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

poetry being prized over another.¹⁷⁸ The workshop group thereby continues the magazine's focus on both traditional and experimental work, resulting in a more receptive and open pedagogical environment. Thus, the structure of who can join the workshop group as well as the group's operational methods embody a participatory ethos.

Members of the *Tears in the Fence* workshop group also go on to shape the poetry ecology towards more inclusive and open ways of practice, which braids the mentorship into the wider ecology as with my first two case studies. Yet, these activities often take place in smaller scale, local settings when compared to the activities stemming from the previous case studies. Henon works extensively across arts organisations¹⁷⁹ in Central South West England, often focusing on vulnerable groups.¹⁸⁰ Other members conduct similar roles, such as Sarah Watkinson in Oxford,¹⁸¹ Mandy Pannett in Sussex,¹⁸² Sarah Acton in Dorset (under the title, *Black Ven*),¹⁸³ and Jennifer K. Dick in Paris.¹⁸⁴

Several members of the workshop group also undertake voluntary roles in *Tears in the Fence*'s adjacent activities, such as their annual festival, which shape the poetry ecology in participatory ways through platforming innovative voices from both new and established poets. The workshop group's additional roles can thereby be read as supporting a greater receptivity to a wider range of poetry. For instance, the festival, like the magazine, includes innovative poetry from across the traditional-experimental spectrum. Multilingual poets also regularly appear on the lineup, such as Maria Stadnicka and Abigail Chabitnoy. Members of the workshop group further support a sense of welcoming for multilingual poetry by providing editorial support for *Tears in the Fence*'s burgeoning press. Began in 2022, it publishes multilingual texts such as Jasmina Bolfek-Radovani's, *Knitting drum machines for exiled tongues*,¹⁸⁵ and *SPIRALS: a Multilingual Poetry and Art Anthology*, edited by Hari Marini and Barbara Bridger.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, the festival features extremely well-established poets like Frances Presley and Geraldine Monk

¹⁷⁸ Henon, 'Poetry Mentee Interview'.

¹⁷⁹ Andrew Henon, 'About', Andrew Henon, 30 June 2021 <<https://andrewhenon.wordpress.com/about/>> [accessed 11 March 2025].

¹⁸⁰ Social Art Library, 'Rain (2014)', Social Art Library, 10 March 2021 <<https://www.socialartlibrary.org/library/to-change-75ntb-ffbj-n5b7h-hw3zw-tp5gp-z3s6z-yn8s-m45cy-ds54y-c9yp4?rq=Andrew%20Henon>> [accessed 11 March 2025].

¹⁸¹ Sarah Watkinson, 'About', Sarah C Watkinson, 1 April 2024 <<https://sarahcwatkinson.wordpress.com/about/>> [accessed 11 March 2025].

¹⁸² Slipstream Poets, 'Members: Mandy Pannett', Slipstream Poets, 1 April 2024 <<https://www.slipstream-poets.co.uk/members/mandy-pannett/>> [accessed 11 March 2025].

¹⁸³ Sarah Acton, 'Home', Sarah Acton, 2024 <<https://sarahacton.co.uk/>> [accessed 11 March 2025].

¹⁸⁴ Ivy Writers Paris, 'About Us (En)', Ivy Writers Paris, 2025 <<https://ivywritersparis.blogspot.com/p/a-propos-about.html>> [accessed 11 March 2025].

¹⁸⁵ Jasmina Bolfek-Radovani, *Knitting Drum Machines for Exiled Tongues* (Tears in the Fence, 2022).

¹⁸⁶ *SPIRALS: A Multilingual Poetry and Art Anthology*, ed. by Hari Marini and Barbara Bridger (Tears in the Fence, 2024).

alongside new voices. Olivia Tuck gave some of her first readings there, and I delivered the 2018 festival's opening address, despite having only begun writing poetry two years prior. Furthermore, the festival regularly includes experienced poets who have not published a collection yet, such as Dzifa Benson, who performed in 2020, four years before her debut collection. Given that many festivals invite poets to read once they have published a pamphlet or collection, platforming poets without this represents a mode of opening access.¹⁸⁷

The workshop group also forms a wider support system for *Tears in the Fence*'s informal intern programme, led by Caddy, which gives new poets experience in the literary world, including editorial, logistical, or marketing roles for the magazine and festival. Interns often also join the workshop group. For instance, I was the first intern for the magazine. I attended the workshop, advised on submissions, built the magazine's advertising, and created communications materials, forming relationships with many members of the *Tears in the Fence* community during this time. Caddy extends similar offers to current interns, but matches the activities to their interests.¹⁸⁸ Olivia Tuck, for example, specialised in advising on magazine submissions and writing reviews, a role Jack Martell continues in 2025, whereas Hamidah Saleem took on organisational roles for the annual festival 2022-24. My involvement in the intern programme led to my first paid role in widening access to creative writing, and I now support interns interested in social media. Tuck has gone on to run the Magdalena Young Poets' Prize,¹⁸⁹ and co-organised (with Circle Writers) the Kathryn Bevis Memorial Prize.¹⁹⁰

While the activities *Tears in the Fence* members take part in are not as publicised or public-facing as some activities emerging from previous case studies, the group likewise leaves a legacy of shaping the contemporary UK poetry ecology in generous and participatory ways, often through targeted and local activities. I have already noted in this chapter that groups' shaping represents ecological linkages; the hiddenness of *Tears in the Fence*'s impact implies that groups remain ecologically linked even when they have a low public profile. Since few groups are as recognised as MPK, *Tears in the Fence* may therefore represent a more common

¹⁸⁷ For example, Benson reflects festival organisers would rarely programme her until she had a book. Moreover, festivals are near-unanimously tied to the publication of a text in Ellen Wiles' research into live literature events. Jerwood Arts, *The Gift of Mentoring or How to Nurture a Poet*; Wiles, *Live Literature*, pp. 146, 15.

¹⁸⁸ Tears in the Fence, 'Mentoring Services', Tears in the Fence, February 2023 <<https://tearsinthefence.com/mentoring/>> [accessed 16 February 2023].

¹⁸⁹ Olivia Tuck, 'Home', The Magdalena Young P, 2020 <<https://themagdalenyoun gp.wixsite.com/themagdalenaprize>> [accessed 6 March 2025].

¹⁹⁰ The Writing School, 'Entry x 1 for The Kathryn Bevis Memorial Poetry Competition', The Writing School, 2025 <<https://thewritingschool.co.uk/entry-x-1-for-the-kathryn-bevis-memorial-poetry-competition>> [accessed 6 March 2025].

shape of mentoring. As a result, my research suggests that non-dyadic mentorship as a whole is a significantly interconnected practice.

4.5 Chapter Conclusion

Across this chapter I investigate non-dyadic mentorship in the twenty-first century, particularly the collective and workshop group forms, consequently affirming the validity of non-dyadic forms of mentorship. My exploration of its historic precedents illustrates that poets and scholars have moved between a range of attitudes to non-dyadic forms of mentorship since the days of the literary salon. Group formations clashed with notions of single authorship and originality at various moments, leading to tension around being defined as part of a group by the mid-late twentieth century. Today, poets more readily acknowledge belonging to a non-dyadic mentorship such as a collective or workshop group. Additionally, twenty-first century non-dyads regularly take on a participatory emphasis, echoing shifts in the funding landscape over the past forty years.

I have suggested that the structural design and pedagogies of all three case studies represent an ethos of giving and openness, and ultimately engender this ethos in their members. MPK pronounces its participatory intent most overtly, given it explicitly supports under-represented poets whose work sometimes draws from traditions less-recognised by the poetry establishment, such as spoken word. By contrast, the 57 Collective and *Tears in the Fence* focus more on expanding receptivity to a range of poetries rather than poets —although the two often go hand-in-hand, such as *Tears in the Fence*'s support for multilingual poets engaging an international community. Nevertheless, all three build a sense of inclusivity and welcoming into their mentorships. Structurally, they offer participatory measures such as bursaries, low costs, or functioning on gift exchange, as well as online or hybrid settings. Moreover, their either closed or otherwise consistent membership model enables the formation of emotional connection and trust between members, resulting in free communication that fosters poetic development. Trust and open dialogue are especially important to poets working in less-recognised traditions, so as not to continue the maligning of their work they may have experienced elsewhere. MPK enhances its welcoming aura through the vehicle of the kitchen, offering a freedom to experiment without judgement. *Tears in the Fence* achieves a similar effect by inviting members to try new styles of poetry, which The 57 Collective augments since its members share burgeoning approaches with one another, inviting each other to experiment with new styles and to work through unresolved difficulties and questions together. My case studies thereby dismantle the idea of mentoring as purely formal by encompassing a range of formal and non-formal needs. Further, they evidence poetry mentoring's entwinement with the

ecology because their design and function responds and plugs gaps in provision in the wider ecology, such as safe spaces for under-represented writers or receptivity to multilingual poetry.

Across this chapter I have moved away from notions of heterotopia and ephemerality. The case studies of Malika's Poetry Kitchen, The 57 Collective, and *Tears in the Fence* demonstrate that poets involved in contemporary non-dyadic mentorships regularly take on further roles that embody a certain generosity. They span mentoring, literary festivals, educational and participatory initiatives, advisory and governance roles, publishing, and outreach work across local and national cultural organisations and contexts. Through these acts, the members pass on expertise, guidance, or otherwise work towards shaping the UK poetry ecology towards welcoming, open, and inclusive modes of practice. As such, non-dyadic mentorship is far from transitory. It has a lasting impact on the wider ecology. In terms of augmenting our understanding of poetry mentorship, non-dyads' long-lasting impact shows not just that mentoring is interconnected to the poetry ecology but that those connections endure. Thus, poetry mentorship is perpetually imbricated with the ecology.

I have sought to address non-dyadic mentorship in terms of the whole group rather than predominantly the leader, which more accurately represents such groups and upholds their status as non-dyadic. For instance, the case studies' pedagogies centre having poets with varying kinds of knowledge and experience in the room, not simply a leader. I also contend that non-dyads' shaping of the poetry ecology is profoundly multiple. The presence of multiple mentor-mentees creates a web of ecological connections between each member. As my ecological models' resource-transmitting relationships depict, members access a range of expertise through these connections, increasing their receptivity to a range of poets and poetries; the welcoming ethos of the mentorship also transmits through these connections. Furthermore, since the case studies operate incrementally changing memberships as opposed to distinct yearly cohorts, connections form between generations of members, allowing receptivity and an overall inclusive ethos to pass to many poets. This means a larger number of poets go on to shape the ecology in participatory ways, as evidenced by the scale of members' activities. It is thereby through multiplicity that non-dyadic mentorship renders the ecology a more nurturing place.

As a whole, this chapter has thereby shifted our understanding of poetry mentorship to a practice that can be both dyadic and non-dyadic, simultaneously formal and non-formal, and that it is always imbricated with the wider poetry ecology —indeed, the more mentorship encompasses non-dyadic configurations, the more obvious mentorship's ecological interconnection becomes.

Conclusion

5.1 Reflection: Returning (to Ecology as) Home

This project's most fundamental intention is to elucidate poetry mentorship for page poets in the UK today. This elucidation is vital because it stands to help poets sustain their practices. Support for poets is thereby a major concern of this research.

With this in mind, I want to reflect on the relationship between ecology and being supported as a poet, as evoked in a recent Substack by JLM Morton, a poet and founder of the writer-development agency and publishing press, Dialect. She notes:

Poetry offers us a way to engage with our intuition, our unconscious, the knowing of the body, the imaginal [...] In these words, we find a way home not through reason alone, but through resonance.¹

Morton's idea of finding home through poetry's resonances brings to mind a notion I raised in the introduction to this thesis, the notion of ecology as home —particularly home as a feeling, something felt. Resonance functions through physical feeling, 'by the synchronous vibration of a surrounding space or neighbouring object'.² When poets speak of poetry resonating, they can mean a sense of recognition, a feeling of 'corresponding [...] response' within the reader —the reader may understand, have direct experience of, or otherwise empathise with whatever they interpret the poem as evoking.³ While Morton speaks largely in relation to reading poetry, the concept of resonance applies to the experience of being a poet in the contemporary UK poetry ecology, too. This is because resonance relies on proximity to facilitate contact with those vibrations and, by extension, proximity to the instigator of those vibrations. In this way, resonance is entwined with one's immersion amongst other beings. In other words, ecology. One's ability to feel these resonances —whether through reading poetry, writing it, sharing it, or engaging in poetry mentoring— depends on one's position and interconnectedness in the poetry ecology.

Resonance bears a striking resemblance to, and can be read as a substitute for, the resources I posited in Chapter One's models of the poetry ecology. These resources are

¹ JLM Morton, 'Songs for the Bones: A Time of Remembrance', Substack, *Source Material*, 29 June 2025 <https://open.substack.com/pub/jlmmorton/p/songs-for-the-bones?r=1tl2qi&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&showWelcomeOnShare=false> [accessed 30 June 2025].

² Oxford English Dictionary, 'Resonance, n.', in *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd edn (Oxford University Press, 2023), doi:10.1093/OED/9474612525.

³ Oxford English Dictionary, 'Resonance, n.'

transmitted via relationships with other ecological parts, and they support poets, enabling them to sustain their practice. Yet a poet's experience of ecology, of being interconnected with and supported by the poetry ecology is slippery and subjective, liable to change. To better understand this unstable experience, the theoretical concept of affordances can be helpful.

First established by James J. Gibson, affordance describes the resources, benefits, or opportunities that environments provide to organisms.⁴ Yet, as Donald Norman theorised, affordances are subjective; an environment may offer many affordances and a person only perceive half of them, or, conversely, may perceive ones that do not exist.⁵ Affordances encapsulate why the poetry ecology may feel unstable. To explain: ecological relationships are a major component of a poet's environment. Yet these relationships may be unclear and subjective in nature; they may ostensibly exist but one cannot definitively know the capacities and potentialities of a relationship. Therefore, the potential affordances available to a poet are not just based on a concrete set of environmental objects, but upon subjective connections.⁶ As a result, poets' environment itself, their home, is not entirely stable. To give a hypothetical, negative example: a mentee pays for a year of mentorship and they establish a good working relationship with their mentor. Later, they ask for more support and the mentor turns them down. The mentee finds that the relationship does not exist as they expected and they feel cut off from an aspect of the poetry ecology. Thus, the unpredictability and subjectiveness of relationships in the ecology can impact the extent to which poets feel like they belong to, are supported by, or are at home in the ecology.

While relationships cannot guarantee a certain resource will be transmitted, effective support nevertheless relies on interconnection with the ecology. To be supported, parts must have relationships with other parts, or know of the other parts' existence in order to form said relationships. A poet's perception and understanding of the ecology therefore impacts their

⁴ James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (L. Erlbaum, 1986); Isis Chong and Robert W. Proctor, 'On the Evolution of a Radical Concept: Affordances According to Gibson and Their Subsequent Use and Development', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15.1 (2020), pp. 117–32 (p. 118), doi:10.1177/1745691619868207.

⁵ Donald A. Norman, 'Affordances: Commentary on the Special Issue of *AI EDAM*', *Artificial Intelligence for Engineering Design, Analysis and Manufacturing*, 29.3 (2015), pp. 235–38, doi:10.1017/S0890060415000232; Chong and Proctor, 'On the Evolution of a Radical Concept', pp. 120–21.

⁶ Gibson originally used affordances only in relation to the physical world. Scholars have since applied it to a multitude of concepts such as literary texts. Peter H. Khost, *Rhetor Response: A Theory and Practice of Literary Affordance* (Utah State University Press, 2018), p. 25; *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of the Possible*, ed. by Vlad Petre Glăveanu (Springer International Publishing, 2022), p. 56, doi:10.1007/978-3-030-90913-0; Andrea Scarantino, 'Affordances Explained', *Philosophy of Science*, 70.5 (2003), pp. 949–61 (p. 951), doi:10.1086/377380; Matti Kangaskoski, 'Affordances of Cultural Interfaces: Reading Print and Digital Poetry in Stephanie Strickland's "V-Project"', *Image & Narrative*, 20.2 (2019), pp. 35–50 (p. 39) <<https://imageandnarrative.be/index.php/imagenarrative/article/view/2127>> [accessed 4 November 2024].

ability to access support. Through increased awareness of the potential capabilities and configurations of mentorship, as well as the poetry ecology as a whole, this research may help mentees and mentors form suitable mentoring relationships and access resources to sustain their practices that such relationships afford them. As Jen Webb and Monica Carroll's study of factors influencing poetic development concludes: 'the conditions for creative excellence are characterised [...] by effective nurturing, and use, of the chains of connection'.⁷

5.2 Conclusion: Thesis Summary and Significance

In Chapter One I began expanding notions of poetry mentorship to include multimodal approaches, non-dyadic formulations, and evidence mentoring's enmeshment with the poetry ecology, by noting that poetry mentoring operates within and through complex, shifting contexts. Via visual models, I demonstrated that poetry mentoring is deeply interdependent on and interconnected with the wider contemporary UK poetry ecology. It both responds to and shapes the ecology at scale, an effect I explicitly explored across Chapters Three and Four in relation to formalised mentorship programmes and non-dyadic models of mentorship. Ecological relationships are therefore pivotal to understanding mentorship. Yet, as the concept of affordances reinforces, these relationships are also difficult to comprehend. Established theorists and doctoral students alike have been confronted with the unknowability and strangeness of ecological relationships, from Timothy Morton's mesh and strange strangers⁸ to Rosaline Ambler-Alderman's doctoral thesis, which highlights 'the impossibility of understanding complex [ecological] connections'.⁹ Accordingly, Chapter One provided a working model of the poetry ecology and mentorship's place and role within that ecology rather than a map or a compendium of possible mentors and relevant organisations. By merit of its immersion in water, my ecological model captures something of the essence of both poetic processes and ecological connection. It seeks to encapsulate the principle of how the ecology functions rather than creating a snapshot of key figures today.

This method for presenting the ecology has offered the two benefits I identified in the introduction to this thesis: the concretisation of parts in the ecology (which some poets and facilitators aim towards in their use of poetry ecology) and ecological theory's dismantling of those parts as distinct, concrete entities. My immersed ecological model balances these two urges, giving a sense of parts in the ecology and the fluid processes that take place without naming real people and organisations. As a result, the model needed no altering before I applied

⁷ Webb and Carroll, 'A Seethe of Poets', p. 12.

⁸ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 15.

⁹ Ambler-Alderman, 'Poetry on the Edge of Chaos: The "Ecosystem" and the "Ecotext"', p. 172.

it to my analysis, and my model's more dynamic understanding of mentorship informed mentoring across the subsequent chapters. Moreover, scholars can likewise apply my model to future studies of poetic production, reception, education, and other such poetic activities.

My decision to create an ecological model typifies the interconnected and pluralistic framework that has been central to this study. This framework was necessary as my research revealed that, beneath the picture of a solely formally-focused mentoring dyad unfolding in isolation from social and cultural contexts, lays an ingrained propensity to see poetry in individualist and isolated terms. This propensity manifests across scholars and parts in the poetry ecology. Through Chapter One's exploration of models for authorship, I established the continued primacy of the Romantic solitary author, which centralises the poet as an individual entity and poetry as the product of their sole genius. Across this thesis, I have investigated how Romantic authorship creates an emphasis on the individual throughout many of the systems and concepts at play in the poetry ecology. As Chapter One suggested, individualist and isolationist impulses extend beyond poets writing alone to a greater sense of 'walling-off', a demarcation of what is and is not relevant to—or counts as— poetry. This can be used to delegitimise certain groups, approaches, or shapes of authorship. Contrary to this separative shaping force, ecological theory often works to dismantle binaries and boundaries that create such disconnection. Ecological theory therefore provided for my research, not just the inspiration for a working model of the poetry ecology, but a framework for reconsidering multiple facets around poetry mentoring in ways that move beyond narratives of solitariness. It has enabled me not just to observe particular phenomena around writing and mentoring but to ask whether individualism and isolationism were at their heart and suggest different ways of understanding poetry and mentorship practice, underpinned by ideas of interconnection and multiplicity.

Chapter One's analysis of mentorship literature and examples of poetry mentorship demonstrated that, while poetry mentorship can be understood broadly, poets, mentors, and scholars typically describe it as the dyad of expert mentor and less-experienced mentee. They also regularly prioritise the formal elements of poetry, the skills developed during the writing and redrafting process, as I first established in my articulation of approaches to mentorship in Chapter Two. In privileging formal elements, poetry mentorship can become walled off from other factors that influence poetic practice and development. I have sought to expand notions of what poetry mentorship is and could be by challenging such isolating impulses across this thesis. In Chapter Two, I offered a view of poetry writing and mentoring that is multimodal and can involve many different approaches, motivations, and outcomes at once. These span formal emphases, but also elements that have long been valued in other contexts but are less regularly considered part of what defines a poet or something that a poetry mentor could foster. Chapter

Three, for instance, investigates the overlaps between formal poetry practice and therapeutic writing and writing for wellbeing. I explore further areas that could be involved in mentorship across Chapters Two and Three, such as political, professional, or practical skills, knowledge, and emphases. In doing so, I open conceptualisations of mentoring beyond formal or singular emphases to a multimodal model. As JLM Morton notes: ‘writing is never only about actual writing [...] we should know by now that creativity takes many routes and forms and speeds.’¹⁰

Chapter Three builds on this opening, focusing particularly on the concurrent existence of multiple approaches to poetry writing and mentoring. To begin, I explored how narratives — particularly in accounts of formal mentoring schemes— focus on metrics of success aligned with formal approaches to poetry writing, namely publication and prizes. This can reinforce the idea that authorship, and mentoring by extension, should mostly be concerned with the text itself and poetry’s formal elements. Mentorship providers often further this idea by placing publication at the heart of mentorship, as I illustrate in this chapter’s analysis of my mapping sample, the promotional copy for mentoring programmes, and the language of ‘writing journeys’. Conversely, my exploration of poetry writing and mentoring’s overlaps with therapeutic and wellbeing practices casts doubt on whether it is possible to focus solely on formal approaches, noting that additional multimodal areas may always be involved, whether unconsciously or explicitly. This was an idea mirrored by the poets I interviewed and surveyed, who expressed complex feelings around what defines success. They valued both publication and a range of outcomes that could be seen in the work they produced and factors manifesting in the poets themselves, such as confidence. As Chapter Three has argued, multimodality reflects the nature of being a poet and writing poetry as poets experience it, and multimodality can be usefully applied to mentoring.

My analysis has revealed additional negative consequences of heightening the importance of publication for mentorship. For instance, Chapter Three outlines that the emphasis on publication and associated prizes can lead to a reduction in mentors’ enjoyment and belief in mentoring, since few mentees ultimately publish critically-acclaimed, prize-winning texts. Publication-centric notions of success can also create a focus on formal elements in mentoring at the expense of other areas, which can lead to inadequate support for mentees who write about traumatic subjects. As I have noted, marginalised and/or vulnerable poets may be particularly at risk in this context. In broadening mentorship beyond existing

¹⁰ JLM Morton, ‘Writer’s Block and Other Mixed Metaphors’, Substack, *Source Material*, 3 July 2025 <https://open.substack.com/pub/jlmmorton/p/writers-block?r=1tl2qi&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&showWelcomeOnShare=false> [accessed 3 July 2025].

prescriptive models, my research may help to allay these weaknesses by reinstating further outcomes to poetry writing and mentoring.

I have also considered mentoring's pedagogical dynamics and power balances, investigating where existing dyadic models collude with the tendency of literary criticism to see authors as individual agents and paint reductive portraits of mentorship. For example, in Chapter One I investigated how, to maintain the integrity of the mentee's single authorship, poetry mentorship enacts a careful balance between shaping the mentee's poems, while retaining their sense of voice. Mentorship therefore often moves towards coaching, which centralises the mentee's agency. While agency is undoubtedly positive, Chapter Three unearthed how this power dynamic links to the Romantic single author through notions of poetic genius and the idea that poetry is innate and cannot be taught. Explicit 'lessons' from mentors about constructing a specific poem may challenge a poet's notion of authorship.

In this way, this study has begun to think about what would happen if poetry was not understood as produced by a single poet. Would mentors have the freedom to be more explicitly influential, not in the sense of controlling, but in the sense of collaboration? While my research has not answered these questions directly, it has gestured towards them by addressing forms of mentorship that have less emphasis on the individual, such as mentoring practices common amongst experimental poets, which I explored in Chapter Three. *ExperiMentoring* can be far more informal, it is less interested in charting lineages of mentorship and identifying a specific mentor, and it can involve drawing from multiple poets and whole communities. These aspects can inform poetry mentoring for any poet, offering models that move away from single authorship, dyads, and towards mentorship as an ecological practice.

This study has also deconstructed existing master-apprentice dyadic models through valuing a wide range of mentoring outcomes and approaches, since this recognises the impact of other figures besides experts on poetry practice. As I detailed in Chapter Three, recognising more kinds of mentor helps to subvert 'star' pedagogy, the widely-adopted notion that prize-winning and published poets are the most suitable figures to conduct poetry mentoring.¹¹ Subverting 'star' pedagogy represents a turn away from narratives of the individual by placing less glamour on the prize-winning poet as an exceptional figure. Moreover, Chapter Two's broadened and multimodal understanding of poetry writing and mentoring positions poets as having a range of different expertise, thus complicating our understanding of whether one poet can be more experienced than another. In practice, mentoring approaches in poetry have long

¹¹ Ritter, 'Ethos Interrupted: Diffusing "Star" Pedagogy in Creative Writing Programs'.

acknowledged a sense of mentors and mentees journeying together and learning from each other. Shifting to multimodal models offers a flatter hierarchy to describe these journeys.

Flatter hierarchies were key to the analysis in Chapter Four, which evidenced group models that often focus on collective expertise, fully abandoning the dyad. Indeed, through my documentation of historic group formations like the salon through to the present day, as well as my analysis of Malika's Poetry Kitchen, The 57 Collective, and *Tears in the Fence* in Chapter Four, I have demonstrated that the non-dyad is also a valid form of mentorship. Moreover, non-formal approaches—such as trust and respect—are central to group mentorship, thus strengthening earlier chapters' advocations to move beyond poetry mentorship as a solely formal practice. Finally, while group activities can be seen as heterotopic, ephemeral, and leader-centric—qualities that are all symptomatic of individualism and/or isolationism—I have illustrated the lasting impact of non-dyadic mentorship on the larger poetry ecology and group formation as fundamental to that impact. Consequently, Chapter Four, from my explicit adoption of non-dyadic models, to utilising both formal and non-formal approaches, and tracing mentoring's responses to and impact on the wider ecology, fully articulates an expanded vision of poetry mentoring.

5.2.1 Some Auxiliary Significances

In addition to the findings above, through detailing more about how non-dyads function and support their members, Chapter Four could enable the creation of more non-dyadic poetry mentorships, and improve existing ones. Moreover, this research could inform non-dyadic mentorships in other forms of poetry, such as performance-based practices, or, indeed, other artforms entirely.

My research as a whole has demonstrated that poetry mentoring acts as a mechanism for transmitting poetry culture,¹² and that mentoring has the affective power to shape the poetry ecology at scale.¹³ These findings reveal how poetry mentoring differs from fiction mentoring. Of course, there are differences within the mentorship itself—such as working on one long-form novel compared to many poems which may not necessarily constitute a collection, or how the critique process might involve reading aloud for poetry in ways it does not for prose—but the most notable difference lies at the ecological level. As I outlined in Chapter Three, audiences for poetry are far smaller than fiction. Unlike readers of fiction, poetry readers are likely to be writers of poetry. Moreover, poets often hold multiple roles related to poetry, such as mentors,

¹² An effect Janelle Adsit refers to, such as 'what a writer looks like—the writer's daily habits, dwelling space, relationship to community, and behaviour'. Adsit, *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing*, p. 15.

¹³ See Chapters Three and Four in particular.

lecturers, workshop leaders, editors, reviewers, board members, or roles operating a charity or writer-development agency. While authors of fiction may similarly have additional jobs relating to writing, poets are also often publishers. Chapter Four has evidenced this through the activities members of my three case studies took on in addition to their practice as poets. In summary, the poetry ecology is much more intimate and interconnected than fiction. Therefore, mentoring's capacity to transmit culture and shape the ecology is far more impactful in poetry than in fiction, since its influence will more easily reach a large proportion of the poetry ecology. Finally, poetry mentoring often responds to developments within the ecology—as I discussed in relation to formalised mentorship schemes in Chapter Three and collectives in Chapter Four. This responsivity ultimately renders poetry mentorship a far more ecologically embedded practice.

5.3 Gaps and Suggestions for Future Research

The research has revealed several avenues for future exploration. The first is a question of how mentoring can best support neurodiverse poets. Since 2020, diagnoses of neurodiversities like autism and ADHD have increased exponentially,¹⁴ leading to increased understanding of the conditions and their access needs.¹⁵ Some poet-scholars have begun to explore neurodiversity

¹⁴ Nick Triggle, 'Greater Awareness behind ADHD Surge, Study Suggests', BBC News, 5 June 2025 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg5vp62dnnro>> [accessed 9 July 2025]; Tobi Thomas, 'ADHD Prescriptions in England Have Risen by 18% Each Year since Pandemic', Society, *The Guardian*, 11 March 2025 <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/11/adhd-prescriptions-in-england-have-risen-by-18-each-year-since-pandemic>> [accessed 9 July 2025]; Muhammad Umair Khan and Syed Shahzad Hasan, 'Socioeconomic Status and Prescribing of ADHD Medications: A Study of ICB-Level Data in England', *BMJ Mental Health*, 28.1 (2025), p. e301384, doi:10.1136/bmjment-2024-301384; National Institute for Health and Care Research, 'Significant Rise in ADHD Diagnoses in the UK | NIHR', National Institute for Health and Care Research, 18 July 2023 <<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/significant-rise-adhd-diagnoses-uk>> [accessed 9 July 2025]; Christine Ro, 'Autism Diagnoses Are on the Rise – but Autism Itself May Not Be', BBC Future, 10 May 2025 <<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20250509-why-autism-diagnoses-are-on-the-rise>> [accessed 9 July 2025]; Jade Eloise Norris, Rebecca Harvey, and Laura Hull, 'Post-Diagnostic Support for Adults Diagnosed with Autism in Adulthood in the UK: A Systematic Review with Narrative Synthesis', *Autism*, 29.2 (2025), pp. 284–309, doi:10.1177/13623613241273073; Amelia Hill, 'What's behind the UK's Increase in Autism Diagnoses?', Society, *The Guardian*, 4 March 2024 <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/04/uk-increase-autism-diagnoses-neurodiversity>> [accessed 9 July 2025]; Lucie Heath, "'I Had No Choice but to Spend £950 on a Private ADHD Assessment Due to Long NHS Waiting Lists'", iNews, 17 May 2023 <<https://inews.co.uk/news/adhd-private-diagnosis-long-nhs-waiting-lists-2344856>> [accessed 10 October 2023].

¹⁵ For instance, women were historically underdiagnosed because of understandings of neurodiversity that were skewed towards men's experiences. Joanna Martin, 'Why Are Females Less Likely to Be Diagnosed with ADHD in Childhood Than Males?', *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 11.4 (2024), pp. 303–10, doi:10.1016/S2215-0366(24)00010-5; Saskia O'Donoghue, 'Women's History Month: Why Is ADHD so Underdiagnosed in Females?', Euro News, 14 March 2023 <<https://www.euronews.com/culture/2023/03/14/womens-history-month-why-is-adhd-so-underdiagnosed-in-females>> [accessed 10 October 2023]; Julia J. Rucklidge, 'Gender Differences in Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder', *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 33.2 (2010), pp. 357–73,

and poetry, such as Hannah Silva and Debris Stevenson,¹⁶ Rachel Carney and Beth Rees,¹⁷ the Hollingdean Poets workshop group,¹⁸ and myself.¹⁹ This suggests the relationship between neurodiversity and poetry writing and mentoring is ripe for investigation.

Mentoring for performance poets is another area for future research, since it likely differs from page-based practice. For instance, the composition of page-poetry usually features written critique; my thesis demonstrates this is also true in page-based mentoring. By contrast, performance poems are often redrafted in response to live events.²⁰ This raises the question of whether mentoring for performance poets likewise adopts live methods. Additionally, recent scholarship reveals poetry practices with even less emphasis on written language, such as Clara Cosima Wolff's work on sign language poetry. This is performed through gesture—a unit of language that is entirely different to written poetry.²¹ How might poetry mentorship work in this context?

There are a number of practical questions on poetry mentoring outside the scope of this study: how to find a mentor, ending a mentorship, and how to navigate the period after mentorship concludes. Subsequent research might also explore mentors' and mentees' complex relationships around acknowledging a mentorship has taken place, the role and influence of money in mentorship, and the identity of the mentor—whether mentors consider themselves writers, mentors, or both, and what that means for how they feel about and approach mentoring. Moreover, since producing my research on unsafe disclosure in Higher Education creative writing seminars, I have discussed this with numerous creative writing academics at conferences and workshops. From these discussions and my research in Chapter Three, it appears this may be another area of hidden knowledge that is commonplace to those who have experienced it, but it is not well documented in academic literature. My research takes some strides towards filling this gap by identifying it at all, but a quantitative and

doi:10.1016/j.psc.2010.01.006; Stephen P. Hinshaw and others, 'Annual Research Review: Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Girls and Women: Underrepresentation, Longitudinal Processes, and Key Directions', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 63.4 (2022), pp. 484–96, doi:10.1111/jcpp.13480.

¹⁶ Moniack Mhor, 'Online Masterclass: Neurodivergent Approaches to Repetition 2 – with Hannah Silva', Moniack Mhor, 2025 <<https://www.moniackmhor.org.uk/courses/2583-online-masterclass-neurodivergent-approaches-to-repetition-2/>> [accessed 9 July 2025].

¹⁷ English: Shared Futures, 'English: Shared Future 2025 Conference Programme', English: Shared Futures, July 2025 <<https://www.englishsharedfutures.org/programme>> [accessed 9 July 2025].

¹⁸ Neurodiversity and poetry writing and analysis arose in discussion at a Hollingdean Poets workshop in June 2025, led by Verity Spott and guest speaker Keston Sutherland. Hollingdean Wednesdays, 'Poetry and Writing Group with Kat Addis and Verity Spott', Hollingdean Wednesdays, 2025 <<https://www.hollingdeanwednesdays.com/poetry-and-writing-group/>> [accessed 11 July 2025].

¹⁹ See my discussion of running a poetry workshop on ADHD in Chapter Four.

²⁰ Dymoke, "Poetry Is Not a Special Club", p. 228.

²¹ Clara Cosima Wolff, 'Literature of the Body: The Interplay of Performance Style and Publication Format in Sign Language Poetry', unpublished paper delivered at Poetry Off the Page, Around the Globe: Advances in Poetry Performance Research (14 June 2025).

qualitative survey on the scope of unsafe disclosure in Higher Education would also be beneficial. This could shape provision and better safeguard creative writing students, especially marginalised and/or vulnerable students.

5.4 Concluding Remarks: Bridging Binaries

The central conflict of this thesis has been between the individual and isolation, and interconnection and multiplicity. Seven years ago, Ambler-Alderman posited that we needed a more interconnected way of approaching the analysis of poetry through the use of ecologies.²² This doctoral study has extended Ambler-Alderman's contention to the analysis of poetry mentoring—and poetry production since this process heavily informs mentoring. My research affirms the value of an ecologically interconnected approach. Through this framework, I have broadened conceptualisations of what poetry writing and mentoring may involve beyond the purely formal, discrete dyad, as well as elucidated poetry mentoring's significance. Yet I have not sought to move our understanding of poetry writing and mentorship to solely interconnected and multiplicitous conceptualisations. Both approaches capture something of the essence of poetry mentoring and writing. As I identified in Chapter One, mentoring may act as a bridge between these binaries since it represents a site of productive conflict between oppositional ways of understanding poetry writing practice. Through this doctoral study, I have sought to construct this bridge by offering more points of crossing.

²² Ambler-Alderman, 'Poetry on the Edge of Chaos: The "Ecosystem" and the "Ecotext"', p. 174.

Appendix A Survey Statistics

Figure 14

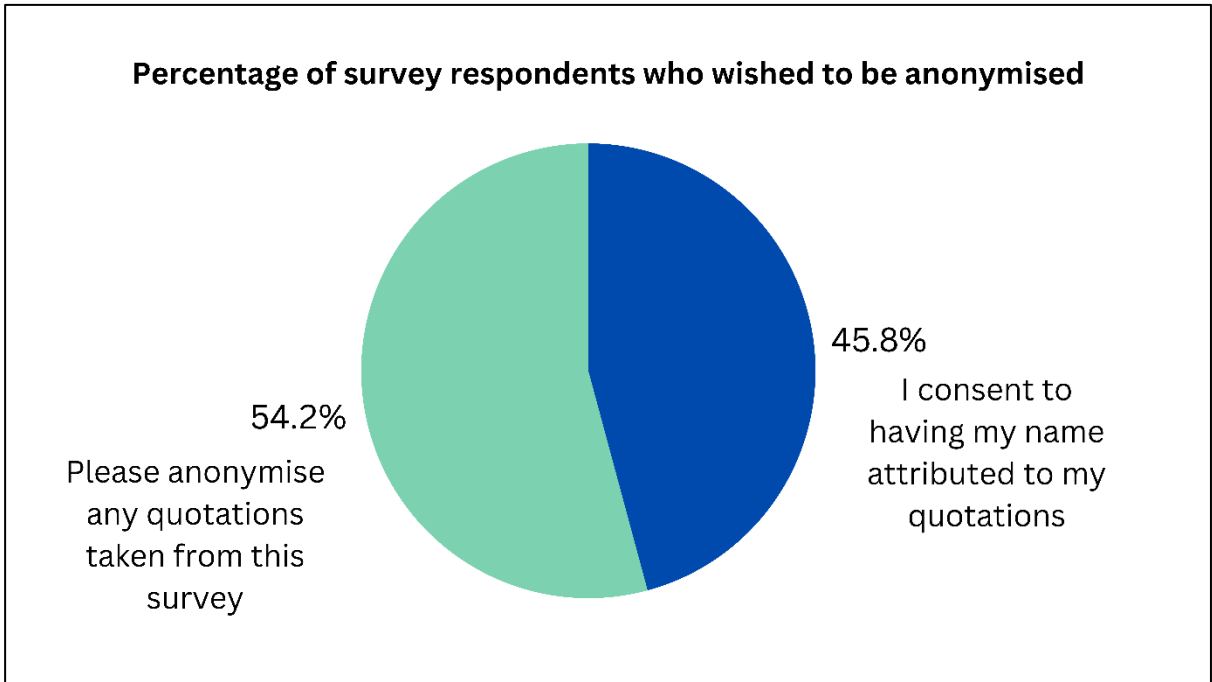
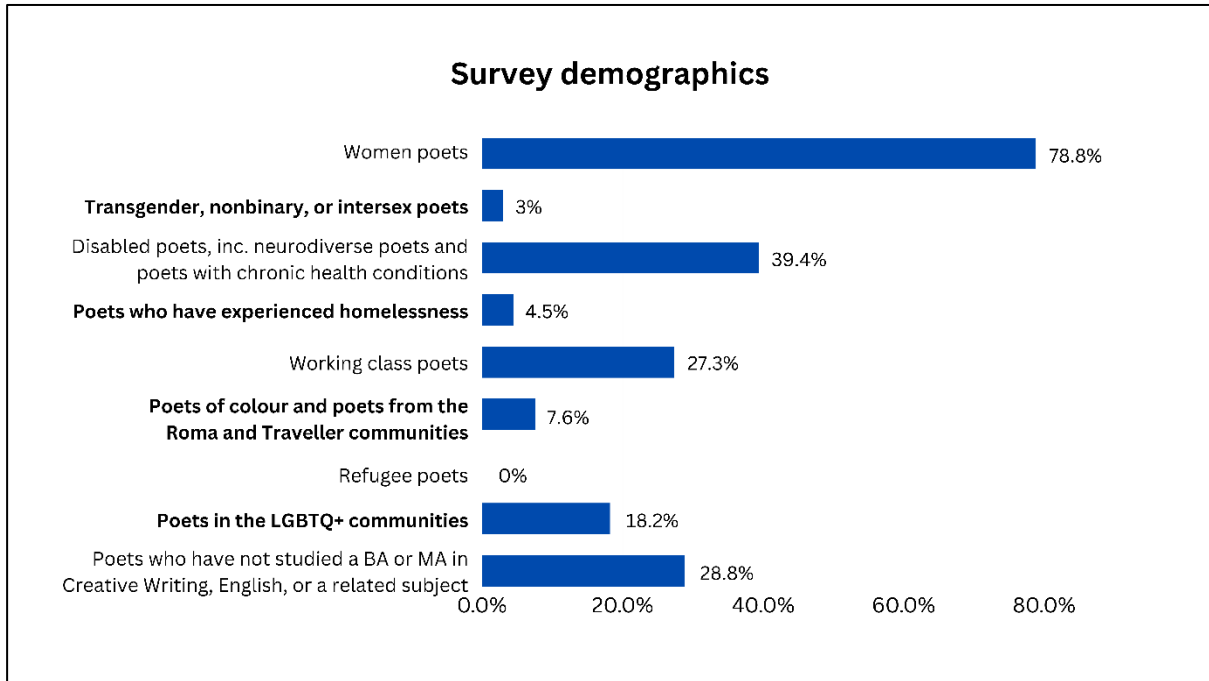


Figure 14: Percentage of survey respondents who wished to be anonymised

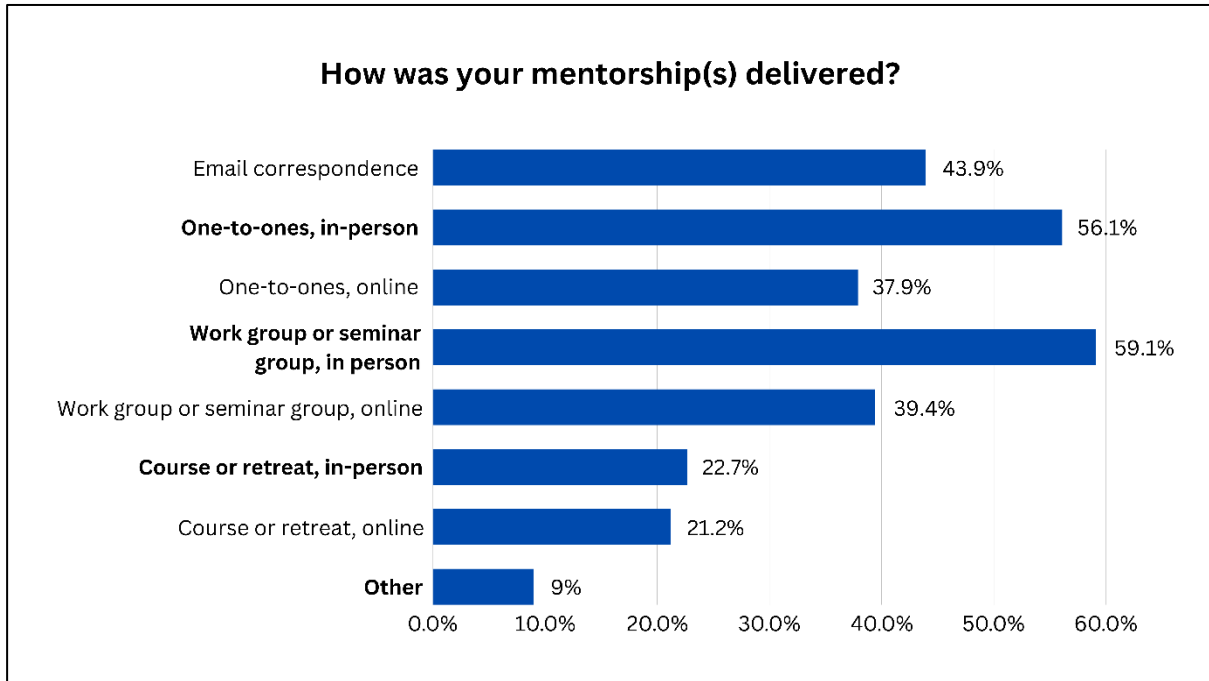
Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
Please anonymise any quotations taken from this survey	54.2%
I consent to having my name attributed to my quotations	45.8%

Table 7: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 14

Figure 15*Figure 15: Survey demographics*

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
Women poets	78.8%
Transgender, nonbinary, or intersex poets	3%
Disabled poets, inc. neurodiverse poets and poets with chronic health conditions	39.4%
Poets who have experienced homelessness	4.5%
Working class poets	27.3%
Poets of colour and poets from the Roma and Traveller communities	7.6%
Refugee poets	0%
Poets in the LGBTQ+ communities	18.2%
Poets who have not studied a BA or MA in creative writing, English, or a related subject	28.8%

Table 8: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 15

Figure 16*Figure 16: How was your mentorship(s) delivered?*

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
Email correspondence	43.9%
One-to-ones, in-person	56.1%
One-to-ones, online	37.9%
Work group or seminar group, in person	59.1%
Work group or seminar group, online	39.4%
Course or retreat, in-person	22.7%
Course or retreat, online	21.2%
Other	9%

Table 9: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 16

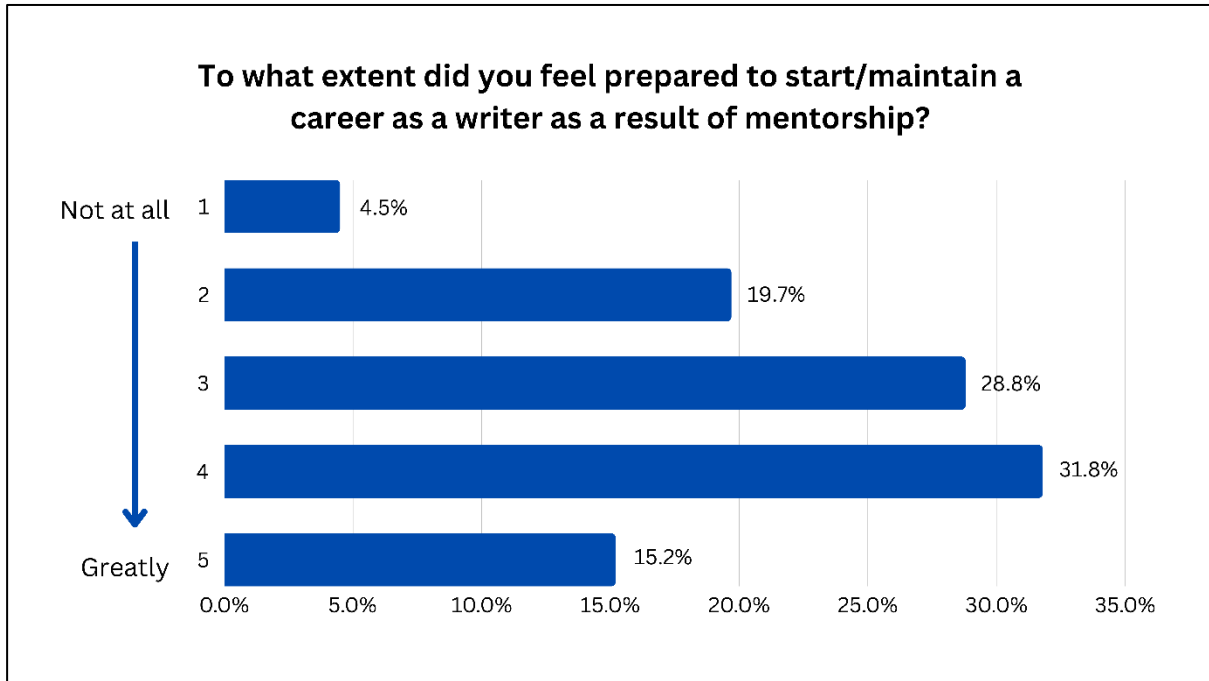
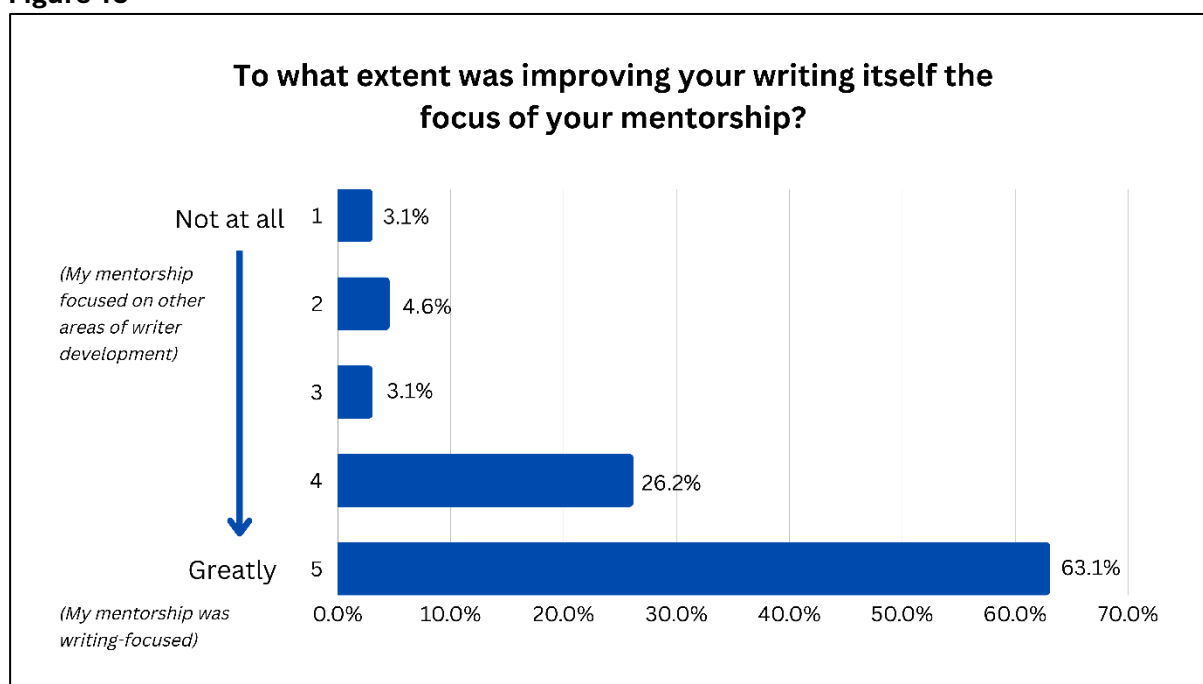
Figure 17

Figure 17: To what extent did you feel prepared to start/maintain a career as a writer as a result of mentorship?

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	4.5%
2	19.7%
3	28.8%
4	31.8%
5 (Greatly)	15.2%

Table 10: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 17

Figure 18*Figure 18: To what extent was improving your writing itself the focus of your mentorship?*

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all – my mentorship focused on other areas of writer development)	3.1%
2	4.6%
3	3.1%
4	26.2%
5 (Greatly – my mentorship was writing-focused)	63.1%

Table 11: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 18

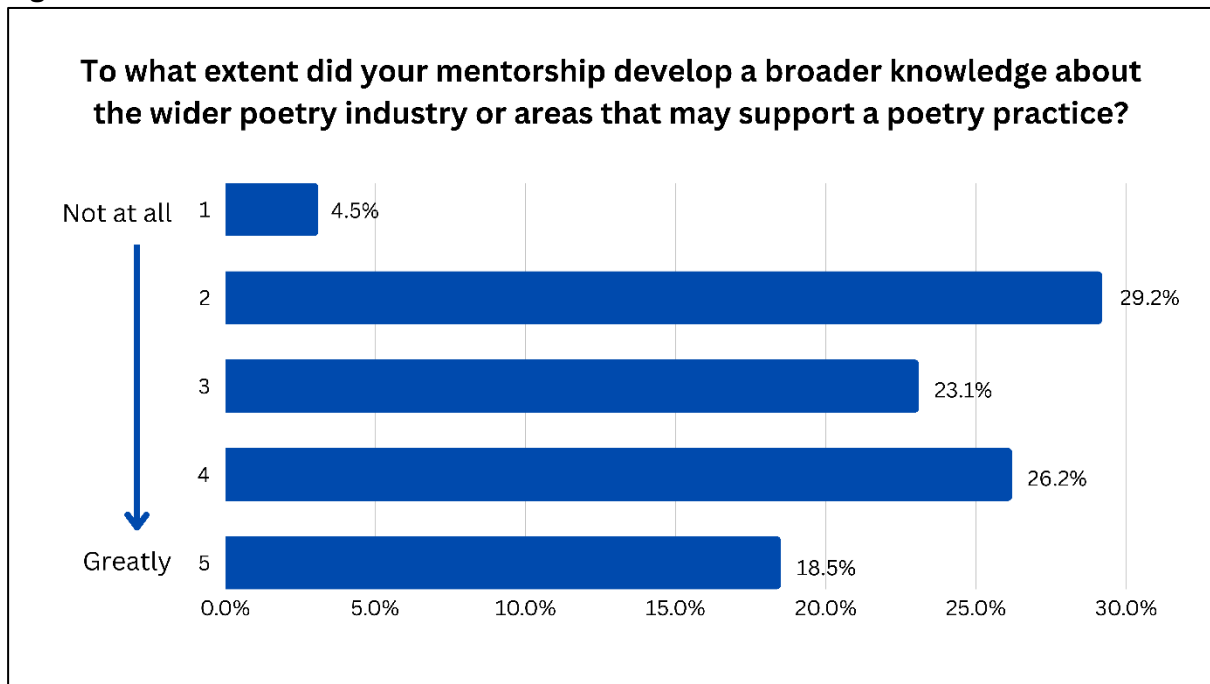
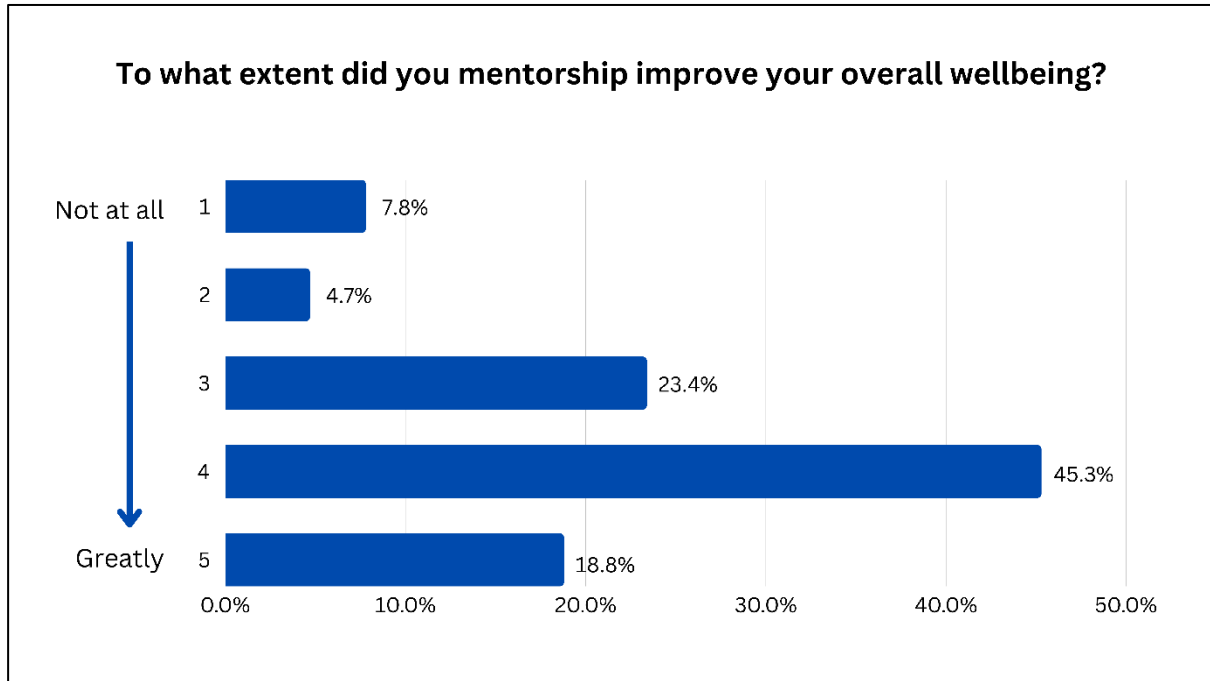
Figure 19

Figure 19: To what extent did your mentorship develop a broader knowledge about the wider poetry industry or areas that may support a poetry practice?

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	4.5%
2	29.2%
3	23.1%
4	26.2%
5 (Greatly)	18.5%

Table 12: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 19

Figure 20*Figure 20: To what extent did mentorship improve your overall wellbeing?*

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	7.8%
2	4.7%
3	23.4%
4	45.3%
5 (Greatly)	18.8%

Table 13: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 20

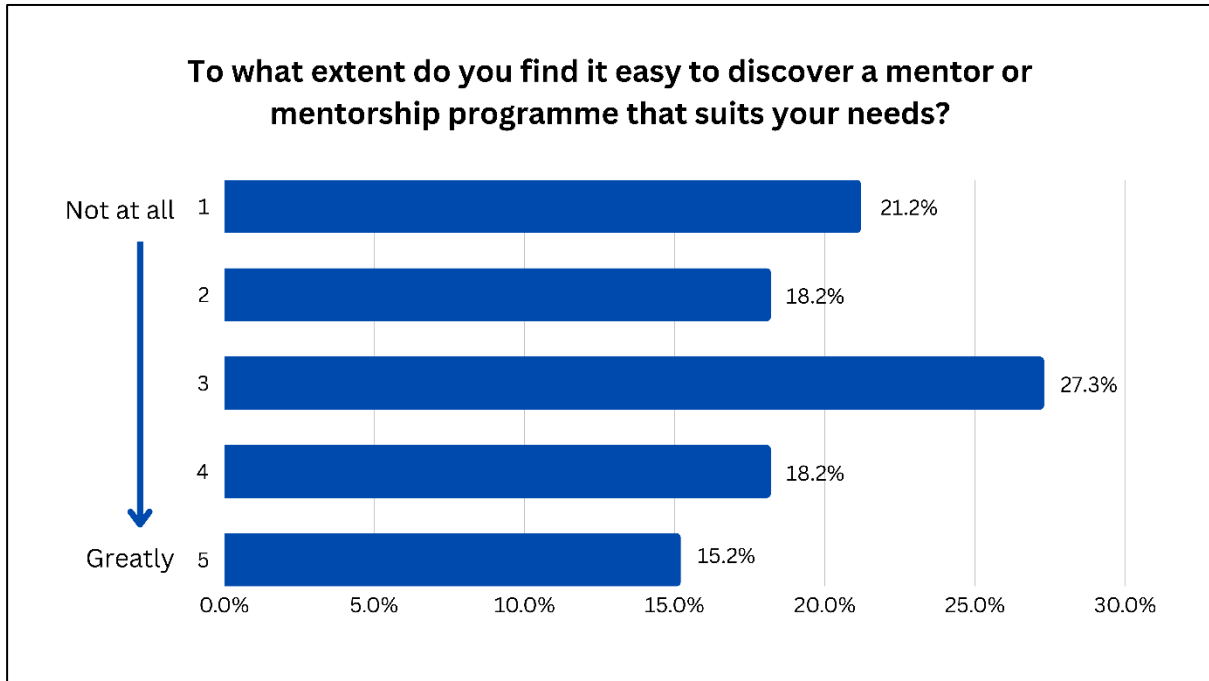
Figure 21

Figure 21: To what extent do you find it easy to discover a mentor or mentorship programme that suits your needs?

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	21.2%
2	18.2%
3	27.3%
4	18.2%
5 (Greatly)	15.2%

Table 14: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 21

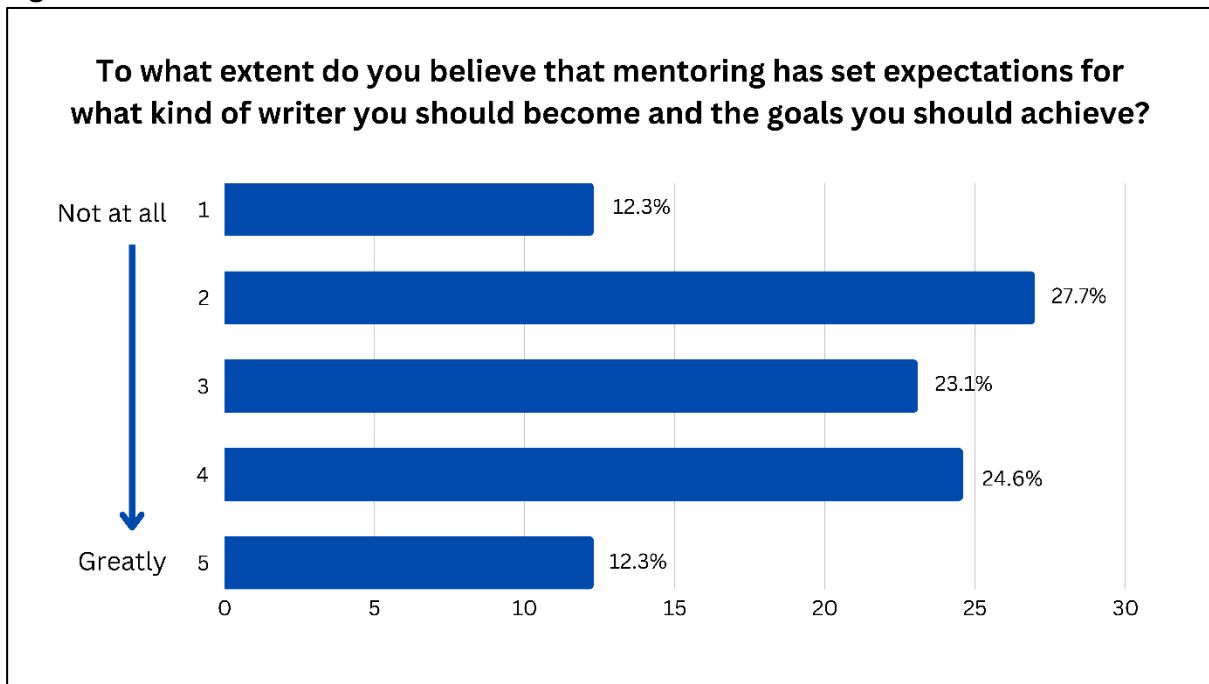
Figure 22

Figure 22: To what extent do you believe that mentoring has set expectations for what kind of writer you should become and the goals you should achieve?

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	12.3%
2	27.7%
3	23.1%
4	24.6%
5 (Greatly)	12.3%

Table 15: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 22

Figure 23

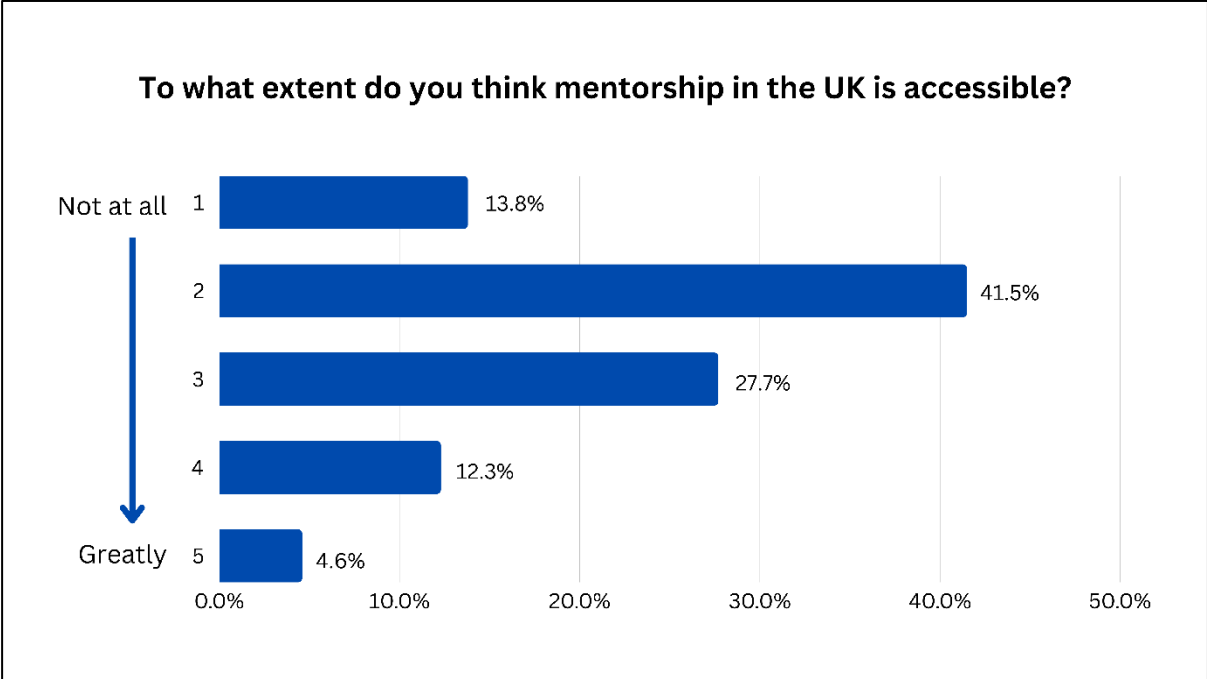


Figure 23: To what extent do you think mentorship in the UK is accessible?

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	13.8%
2	41.5%
3	27.7%
4	12.3%
5 (Greatly)	4.6%

Table 16: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 23

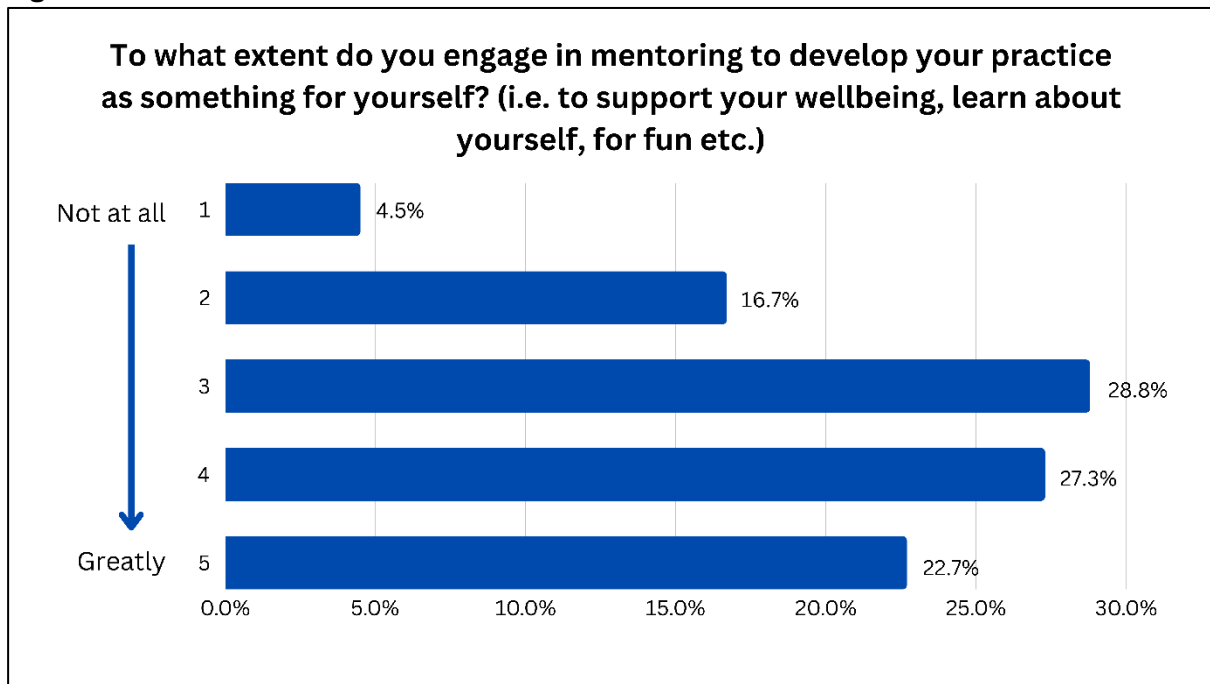
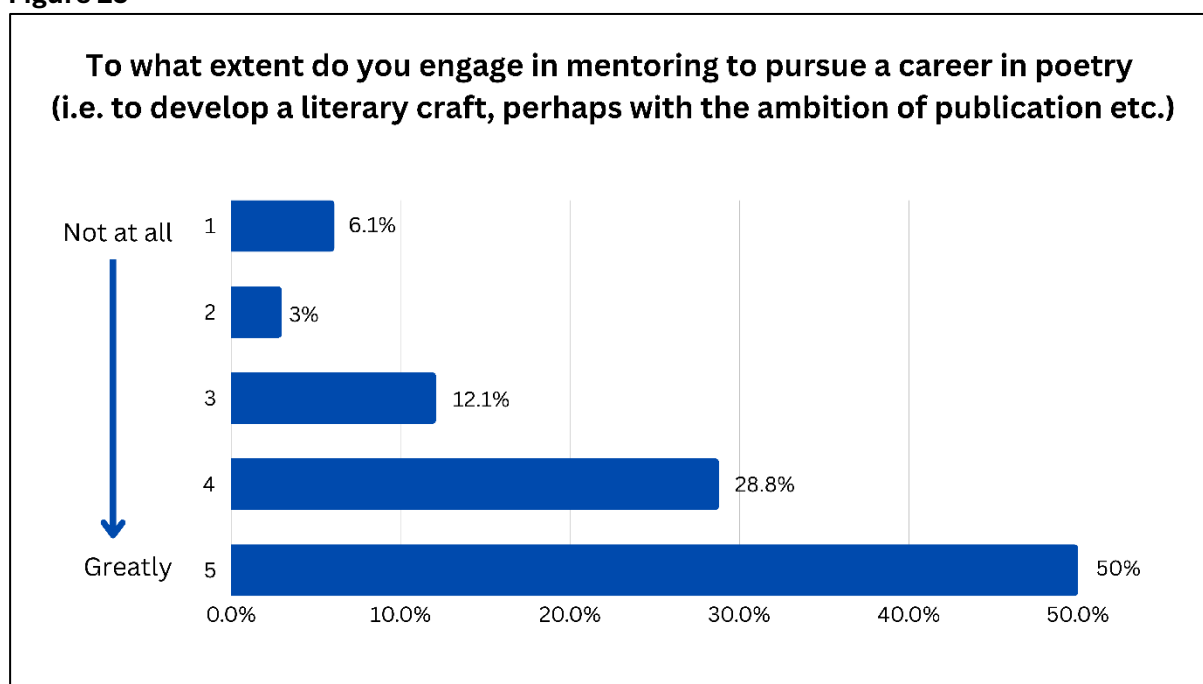
Figure 24

Figure 24: To what extent do you engage in mentoring to develop your practice as something for yourself?

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	4.5%
2	16.7%
3	28.8%
4	27.3%
5 (Greatly)	22.7%

Table 17: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 24

Figure 25*Figure 25: To what extent do you engage in mentoring to pursue a career in poetry?*

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	6.1%
2	3%
3	12.1%
4	28.8%
5 (Greatly)	50%

Table 18: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 25

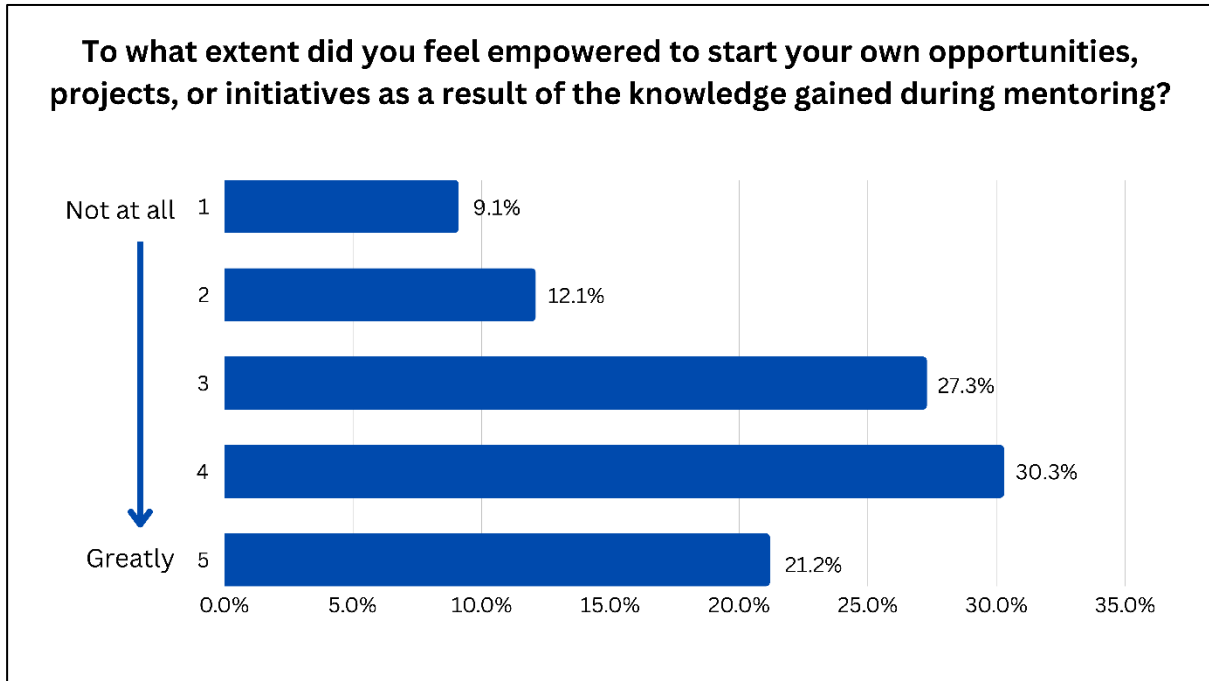
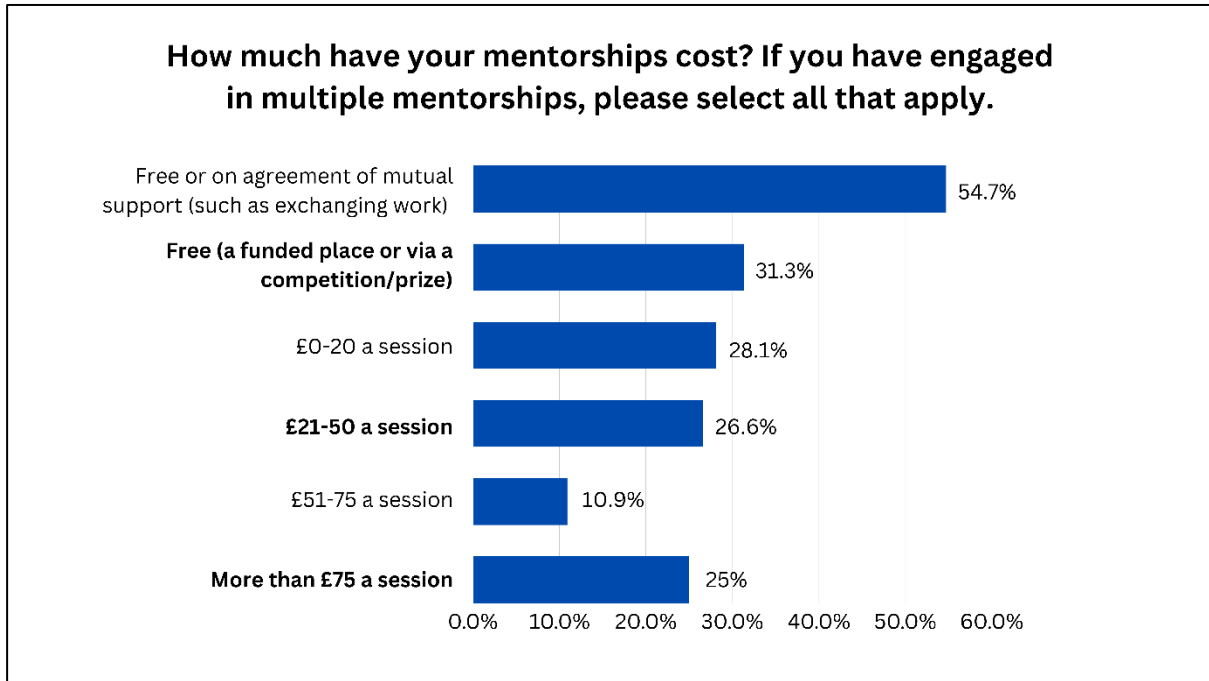
Figure 26

Figure 26: To what extent did you feel empowered to start your own opportunities, projects, or initiatives as a result of the knowledge gained during mentoring?

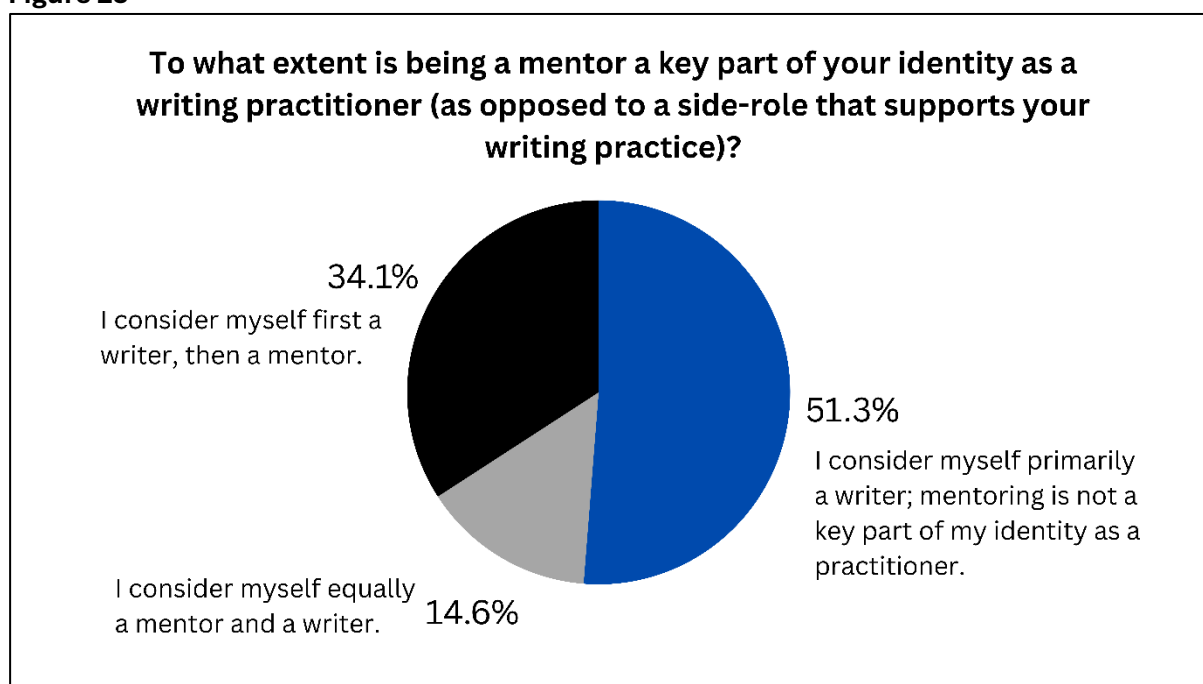
Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	9.1%
2	12.1%
3	27.3%
4	30.3%
5 (Greatly)	21.2%

Table 19: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 26

Figure 27*Figure 27: How much have your mentorships cost?*

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
Free or on agreement of mutual support (such as exchanging work)	54.7%
Free (a funded place or via a competition/prize)	31.3%
£0-20 a session	28.1%
£21-50 a session	26.6%
£51-75 a session	10.9%
More than £75 a session	25%

Table 20: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 27

Figure 28*Figure 28: To what extent is being a mentor a key part of your identity as a writing practitioner?*

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
I consider myself first a writer, then a mentor	34.1%
I consider myself equally a mentor and a writer	14.6%
I consider myself primarily a writer; mentoring is not a key part of my identity as a practitioner	51.3%

Table 21: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 28

Figure 29

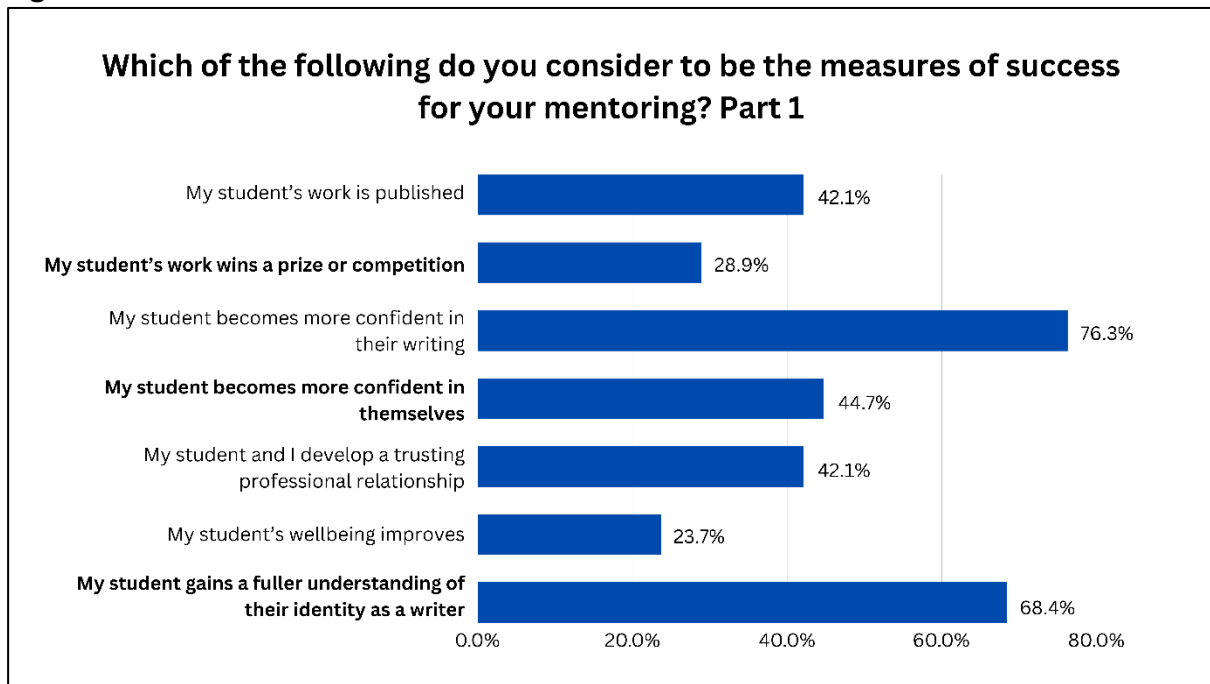


Figure 29: Which of the following do you consider to be the measures of success for your mentoring? - Part 1

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
My student's work is published	42.1%
My student's work wins a prize or competition	28.9%
My student becomes more confident in their writing	76.3%
My student becomes more confident in themselves	44.7%
My student and I develop a trusting professional relationship	42.1%
My student's wellbeing improves	23.7%
My student gains a fuller understanding of their identity as a writer	68.4%

Table 22: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 29

Figure 30

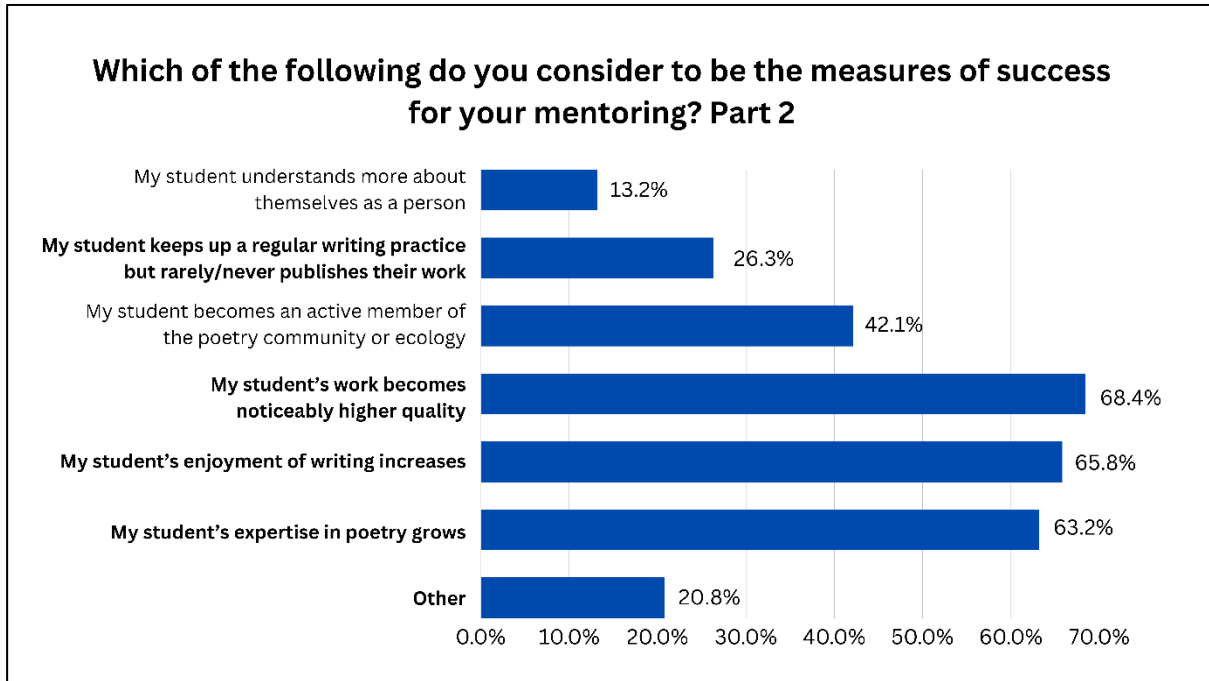
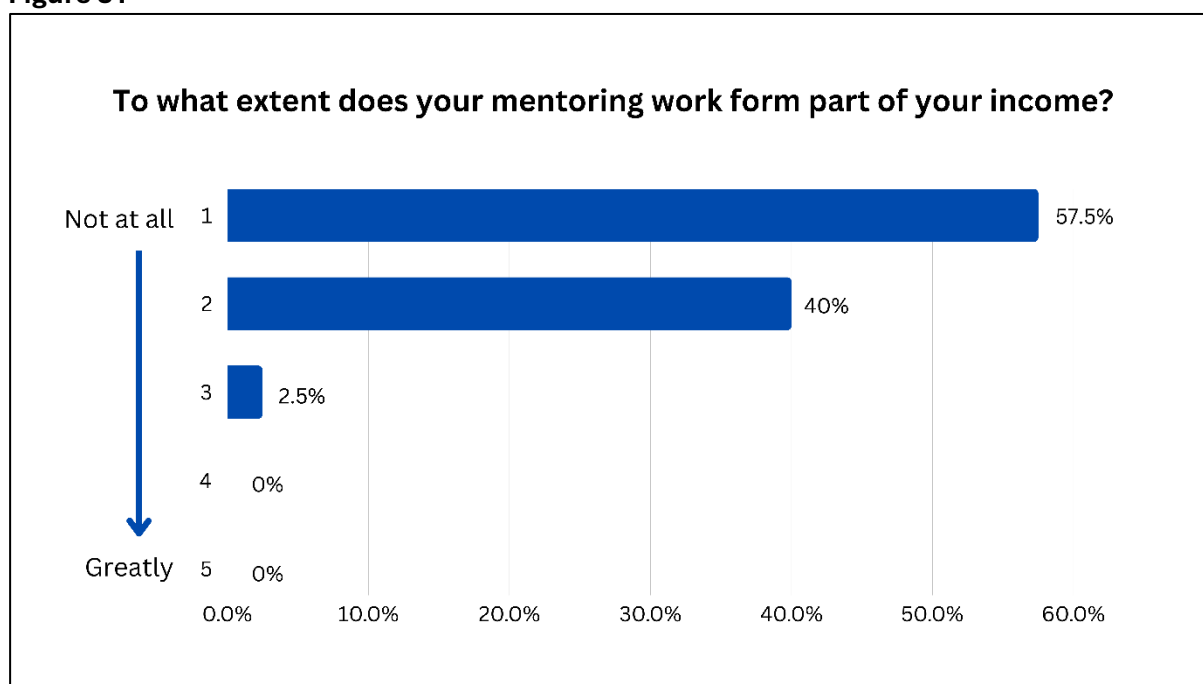


Figure 30: Which of the following do you consider to be the measures of success for your mentoring? - Part 2

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
My student understands more about themselves as a person	13.2%
My student keeps up a regular writing practice but rarely/never publishes their work	26.3%
My student becomes an active member of the poetry community or ecology	42.1%
My student's work becomes noticeably higher quality	68.4%
My student's enjoyment of writing increases	65.8%
My student's expertise in poetry grows	63.2%
Other	20.8%

Table 23: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 30

Figure 31*Figure 31: To what extent does your mentoring work form part of your income?*

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	57.5%
2	40%
3	2.5%
4	0%
5 (Greatly)	0%

Table 24: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 31

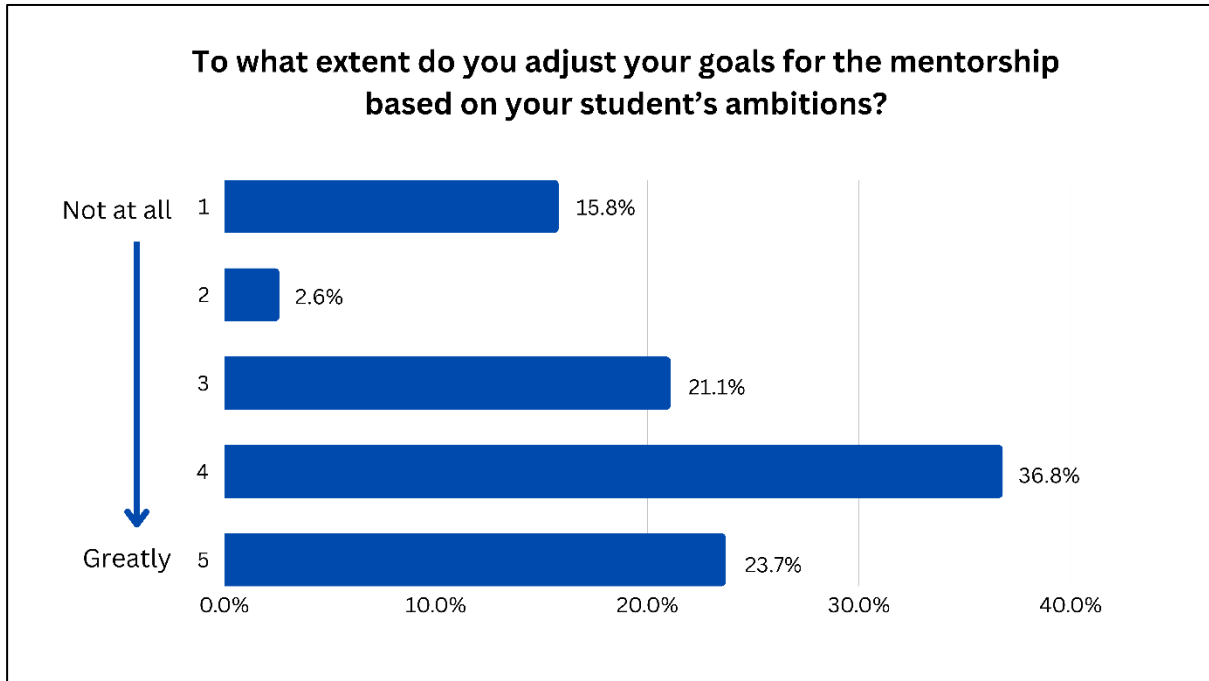
Figure 32

Figure 32: To what extent do you adjust your goals for the mentorship based on your student's ambitions?

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	15.8%
2	2.6%
3	21.2%
4	36.8%
5 (Greatly)	23.7%

Table 25: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 32

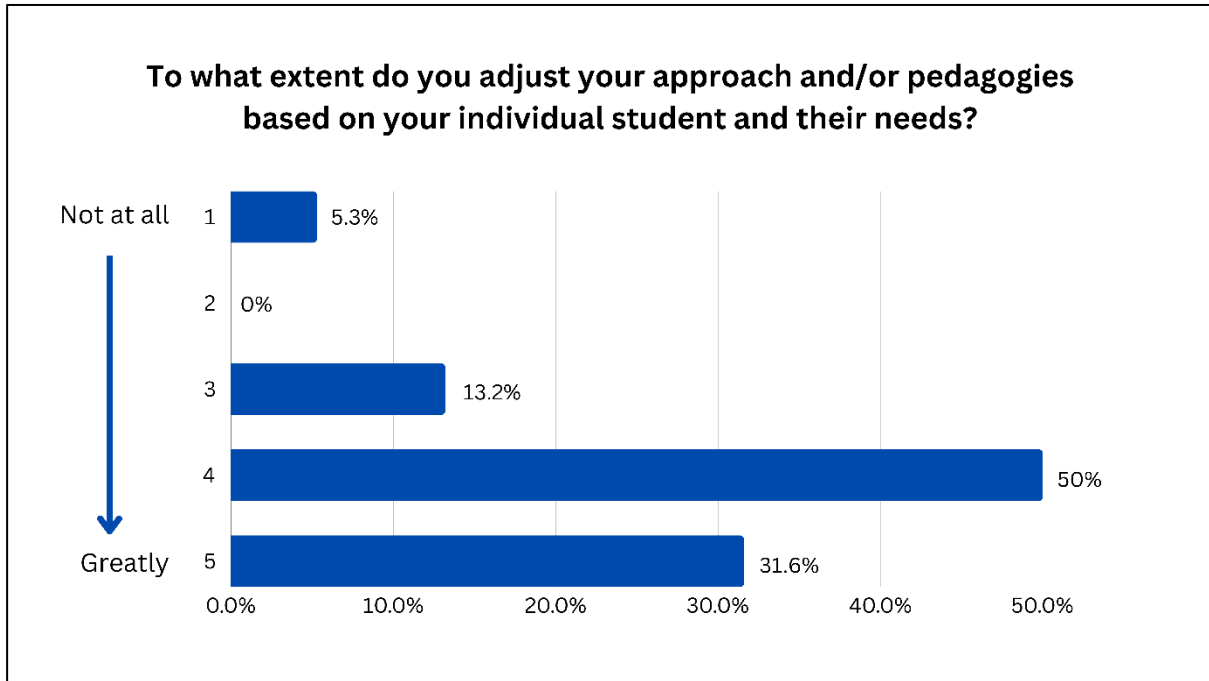
Figure 33

Figure 33: To what extent do you adjust your approach and/or pedagogies based on your individual student and their needs?

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	5.3%
2	0%
3	13.2%
4	50%
5 (Greatly)	31.6%

Table 26: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 33

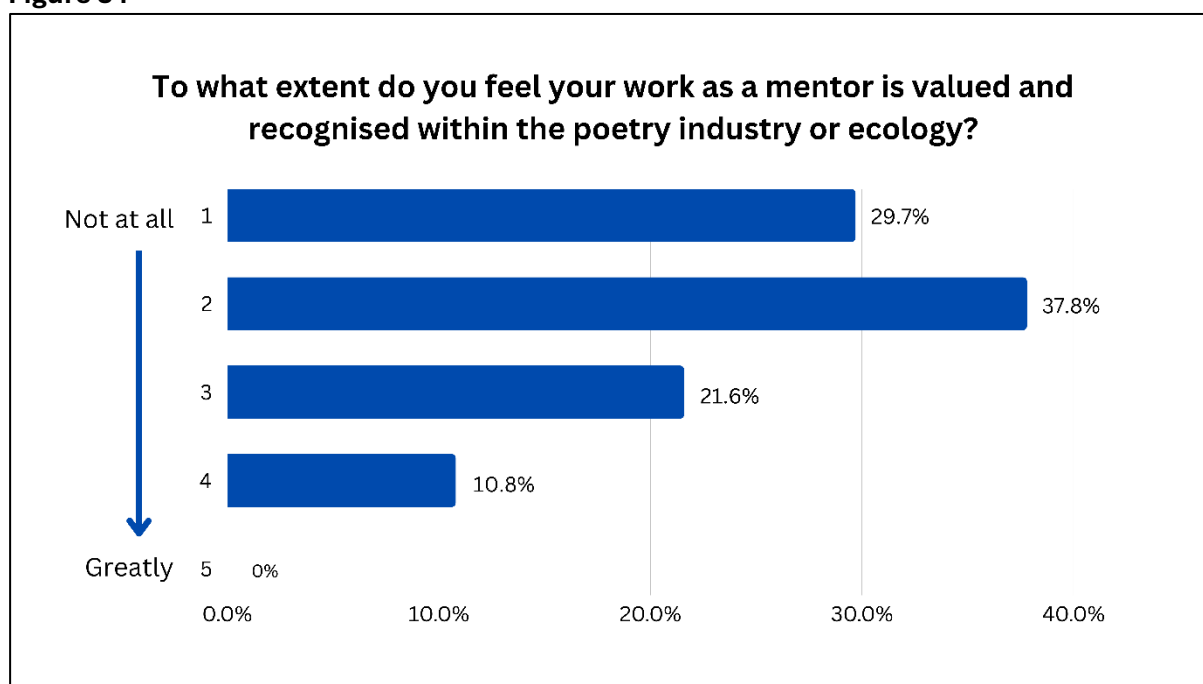
Figure 34

Figure 34: To what extent do you feel your work as a mentor is valued and recognised within the poetry industry or ecology?

Response	Percentage of respondents who selected this response
1 (Not at all)	29.7%
2	37.8%
3	21.6%
4	10.8%
5 (Greatly)	0%

Table 27: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 34

Appendix B List of Interviewees

Many thanks to the poets and mentors who generously gave their time and expertise during interviews for this project:

Joanna Barnard
David Caddy
Anthony Ezekiel Vahni Capildeo
Cat Chong
Rishi Dastidar
Sophie Dumont
Andrew Duncan
Carrie Etter
Suzannah Evans
Simon Everett
Sarah Hemmings
Andrew Henon
Alun Hughes
Morag Kiziewicz
Caleb Parkin
Rhys Pearce
Elvire Roberts
Kat Sinclair
Harriet Tarlo
Moyra Tourlamain
Heidi Williamson

Many thanks also to those participants who wished to remain anonymous.

Appendix C Further Ecology Diagrams

A poet may produce poems, which are also represented as parts in the ecology (Figure 35). Like any other part, these poems have the ability to form a relationship with another part, and resources may be transferred along that relationship.

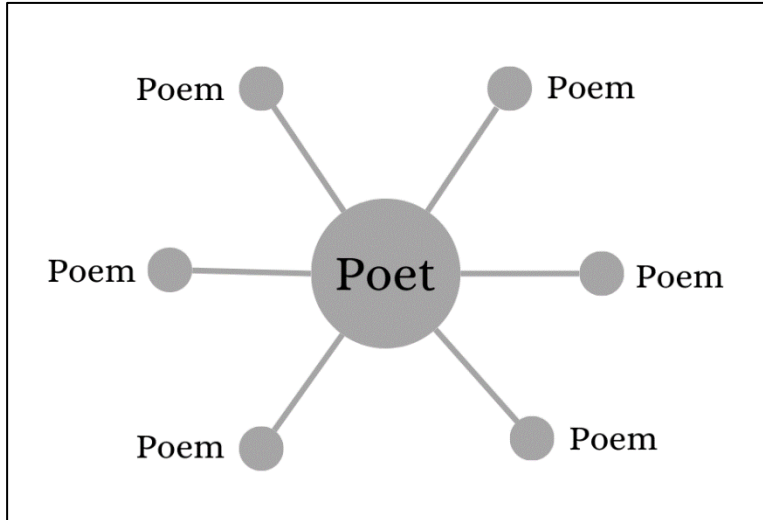
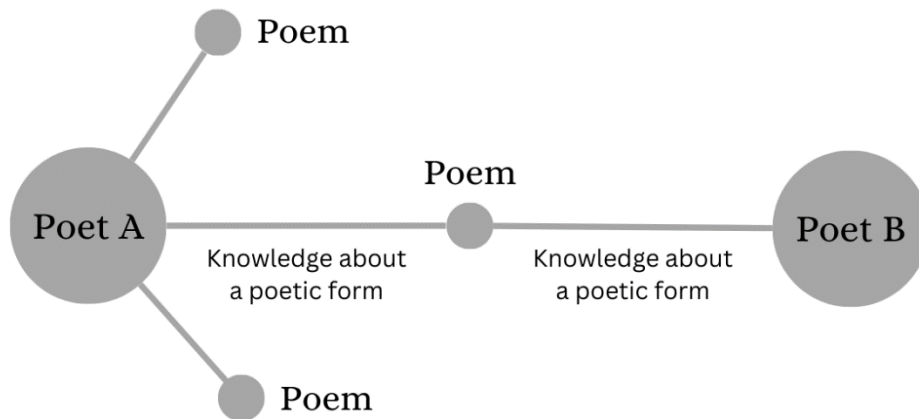


Figure 35: Poet Producing Poems

As illustrated in Figure 36, if a poem is not published, the poem only has the capability to pass resources to the poet. When a poem is published or shared with another reader in any way (such as at an open mic night or in a writing group), a relationship is formed with the reader, and resources may be transferred from the poem to the reader. Figure 37 illustrates how incorporating these additional parts and relationships may be represented in an ecological model. Figure 37 is a more accurate representation of the contemporary UK poetry ecology but since this additional detail does not further the argument in Chapter One, it has been included in this appendix.

If shared with other poets... (via publication or privately)



If not shared with other poets...

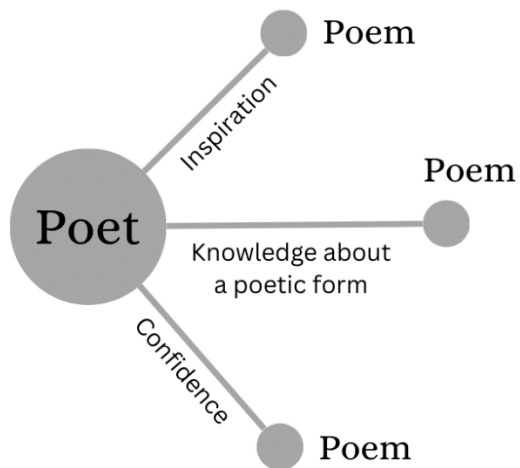


Figure 36: Poems Connecting to Other Parts

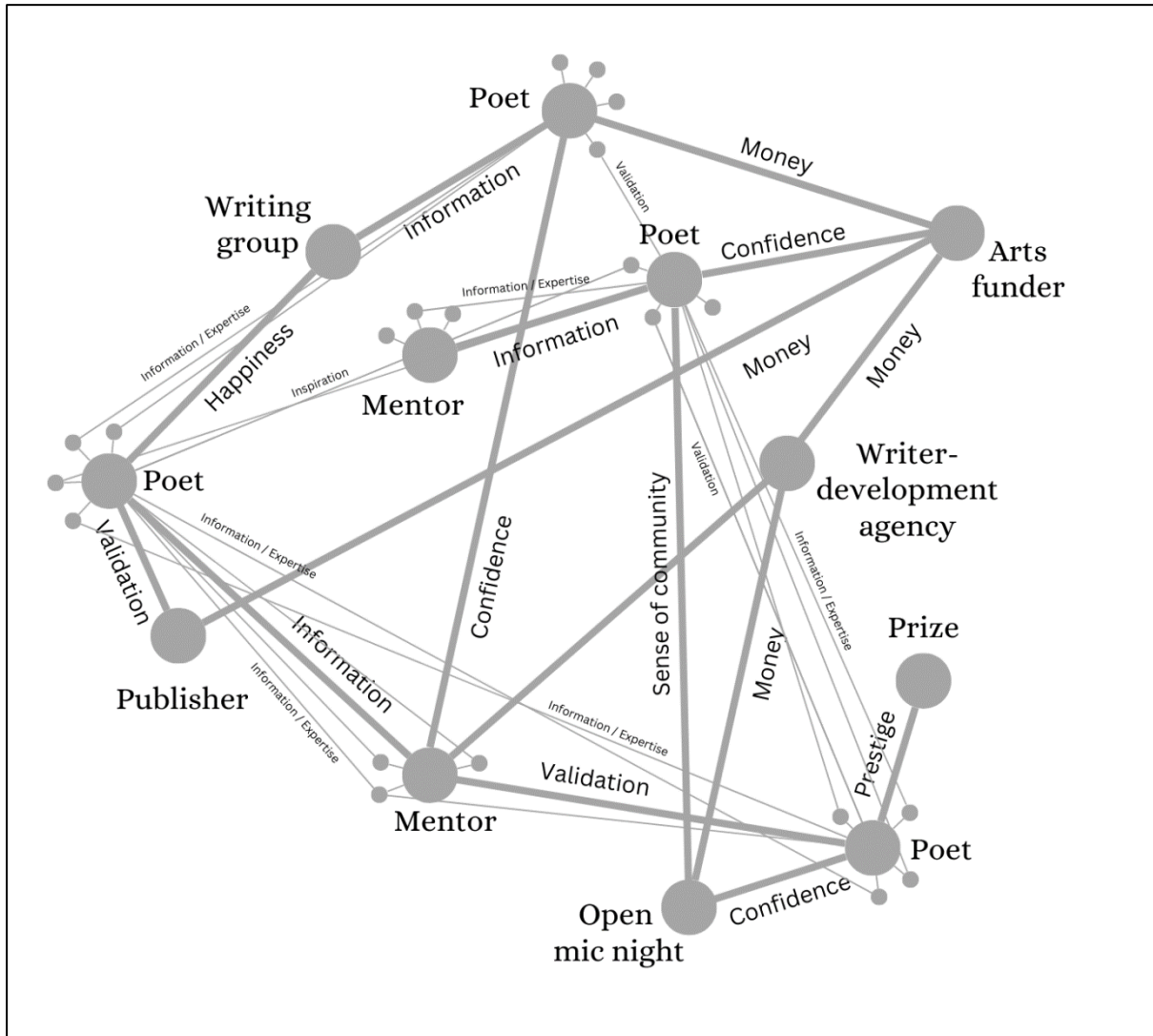


Figure 37: Poetry Ecology with Resources II (inc. poems)

Part	Part is connected to the following larger parts	Resource transferred by the relationship	Part is connected to the # of poems	Poems connect to # many other parts	Resource transferred by the relationship to the poem
Writing group	Poet Poet	Happiness Information	N/A	N/A	N/A
Poet	Writing group Festival Mentor Arts funder	Information Inspiration Confidence Money	4	1	1. Validation
Arts funder	Poet Poet Publisher Writer-development agency	Money Confidence Money Money	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sponsor	Prize	Money	N/A	N/A	N/A

Appendix C

Prize	Sponsor Poet	Money Prestige	N/A	N/A	N/A
Poet	Prize Mentor Open mic night	Prestige Validation Confidence	4	4	1. Information / expertise 2. Validation 3. Information / expertise 4. Information / expertise
Open mic night	Poet Writer- development agency Poet	Confidence Money Sense of community	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mentor	Poet Writer- development agency Poet Poet	Validation Money Confidence Information	3	1	1. Information / expertise
Publisher	Arts funder Festival Poet	Money Money and renown Validation	N/A	N/A	N/A
Poet	Publisher Festival Writing Group	Validation Prestige Happiness	4	4	1. Information / expertise 2. Information / expertise 3. Inspiration 4. Information / expertise
Festival	Publisher Poet Mentor Poet	Money and renown Prestige Community Inspiration	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mentor	Festival Poet	Community Information	3	1	1. Information / expertise
Poet	Mentor Arts funder	Information Confidence	3	2	1. Information / expertise 2. Validation
Writer- development agency	Arts funder Open mic night Mentor	Money Logistical support Money	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 28: Further Description to Enhance the Accessibility of Figure 37

Appendix D Survey Participant Information and Consent Sheets

D.1 Participant Information Sheet - Survey

Study Title: Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology

Researcher: Joanna Nissel (Supervisor Professor Will May)

ERGO number: 69852

You are being invited to take part in the above research study. To help you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide to take part in this research. You may like to discuss it with others but it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

This is a PhD study concerning mentoring practices in UK poetry. The research seeks to discover how poetry is taught to poets, using what methods and pedagogies, and how these mentoring practices shape them as poets and as practitioners. The study also examines how this shaping of poets' identities goes on to influence the wider poetry ecology. To gather the necessary information from contemporary poets and poetry mentors today, the research will involve surveys and interviews with both groups.

This is a collaborative doctoral award funded by the South West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (SWWDTP) in association with business partners, the writer development agency, ArtfulScribe. The main institution for associated with the research is the University of Southampton, with the secondary institution, Bath Spa University. For the purposes of keeping the research achievable within the timeframe, the research concerns page poets over the age of 18 and mentoring from 1970-present day, with a focus on mentoring during 1990-present day.

Why have I been asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate in this research because you have expertise relating to providing poetry mentorship, receiving poetry mentorship, or both. You have been asked to take part in a survey to gather information about your experiences, knowledge, and opinions regarding poetry mentorship.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will complete a 10-15 minute online survey. Your contributions may be included in the final PhD thesis, including quotations. Quotations will be anonymised unless explicitly consent is given. You will be able to anonymise or withdraw any quotations up until the point of submission, which will take place in approximately Autumn-Winter 2024-2025. Chapters from the thesis may be published thereafter in the forms of academic papers or policy reports.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

By taking part in this research, you will help improve the knowledge base surrounding poetry mentorship and how the wider UK poetry ecology operates. The research aims to share this knowledge through the publication of papers and/or public-facing policy reports, creating a number of positive changes for poets today. The research aims for this knowledge to allow poets to better understand and access modes of mentorship that are suitable to their needs; provide a language surrounding mentoring practices and pedagogies that can be used by mentors to hone their mentoring; as well as share key contacts and organisations. The research also aims to articulate how mentoring has shaped our current poetry ecology and how certain expectations, limitations, and assumptions are still shaping the ecology. All of these may impact future funders by giving them more information with which to shape their future calls, guidance, and/or policy.

Are there any risks involved?

There are no risks identified as part of this research.

What data will be collected?

Your name and email address, will be collected as standard. Any additional information you choose to provide is entirely optional. Should you wish to provide this information, a small amount of special category data relating to your ethnic origin and/or sexual orientation may be collected to help augment the picture regarding the experiences of poets from under-represented backgrounds. Information will be securely stored on a networked university drive housed within the University of Southampton's IT systems.

Will my participation be confidential?

Your participation and the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You can opt to have your involvement and/or quotations

acknowledged and contributed to you in the thesis and any subsequent publications, or you may choose to remain anonymous.

Only members of the research team may be given access to data about you for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Members of the research team include PhD Student Joanna Nissel; PhD project supervisors Professor Will May (University of Southampton), Dr Samantha Walton (Bath Spa University), or Matt West (Director of ArtfulScribe); and any applicable auditing or regulatory bodies at the University of Southampton. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

Information will be stored on a University of Southampton laptop and automatically backed up to the university's server and to a secure, encrypted hard drive.

Survey data will be published in the form of aggregated summaries, such as statistics representing the whole dataset, to protect anonymity. Specific quotes will be anonymised unless explicit consent is given. Survey data will be stored in pseudo-anonymised form until the point of submission, whereupon all identifying details (unless permission has been given to identify participants) will be deleted. Data will be securely stored for 10 years after collection.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you want to take part, you will need to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part. This will be issued to you at the same time as receiving this information sheet with instructions on how to return this to the research team.

What happens if I change my mind?

You have the right to change your mind and withdraw at any time until the thesis is submitted, without giving a reason and without your participant rights being affected. If you wish to withdraw, please contact Joanna Nissel on j.f.nissel@soton.ac.uk.

What will happen to the results of the research?

Your personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in the thesis or in any subsequent reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify you without your specific consent.

Where can I get more information?

Please contact Joanna Nissel on j.f.nissel@soton.ac.uk for further information and to ask questions.

What happens if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to Joanna Nissel, j.f.nissel@soton.ac.uk, who will do her best to answer your questions.

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Research Integrity and Governance Manager (023 8059 5058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk).

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of research integrity. As a publicly-funded organisation, the University has to ensure that it is in the public interest when we use personally-identifiable information about people who have agreed to take part in research. This means that when you agree to take part in a research study, we will use information about you in the ways needed, and for the purposes specified, to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>).

This Participant Information Sheet tells you what data will be collected for this project and whether this includes any personal data. Please ask the research team if you have any questions or are unclear what data is being collected about you.

Our privacy notice for research participants provides more information on how the University of Southampton collects and uses your personal data when you take part in one of our research projects and can be found at <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/ls/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf>

Any personal data we collect in this study will be used only for the purposes of carrying out our research and will be handled according to the University's policies in line with data protection law. If any personal data is used from which you can be identified directly, it will not be disclosed to anyone else without your consent unless the University of Southampton is required by law to disclose it.

Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use your Personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose.

For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton are the 'Data Controllers' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about you for 5 years after the study has finished, after which time any link between you and your information will be removed.

To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Your data protection rights – such as to access, change, or transfer such information - may be limited, however, in order for the research output to be reliable and accurate. The University will not do anything with your personal data that you would not reasonably expect.

If you have any questions about how your personal data is used, or wish to exercise any of your rights, please consult the University's data protection webpage (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>) where you can make a request using our online form. If you need further assistance, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer (data.protection@soton.ac.uk).

Data will not be anonymised in its raw form. You will be consulted regarding whether you would prefer for any quotations that appear in the Policy report to be anonymised or not.

D.2 Participant Consent Sheet - Survey

Study Title: Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology

Researcher: Joanna Nissel (Supervisor Professor Will May)

ERGO number: 69852

This is a PhD study concerning mentoring practices in UK poetry. The research seeks to discover how poetry is taught to poets, using what methods and pedagogies, and how these mentoring practices shape them as poets and as practitioners. The study also examines how this shaping of poets' identities goes on to influence the wider poetry ecology. To gather the necessary information from contemporary poets and poetry mentors today, the research will involve surveys and interviews with both groups.

Appendix D

This is a collaborative doctoral award funded by the South West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (SWWDTP) in association with business partners, the writer development agency, ArtfulScribe. The main institution associated with the research is the University of Southampton, with the secondary institution, Bath Spa University. For the purposes of keeping the research achievable within the timeframe, the research concerns page poets over the age of 18 and mentoring from 1970-present day, with a focus on mentoring during 1990-present day.

Further information about the research is available in this information sheet [\[LINK\]](#).

By completing this survey, you hereby confirm and/or consent to the following:

- I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study.
- I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time up until the point of the PhD thesis submission and for any reason without my participation rights being affected.
- I understand that my contributions may be included in the PhD thesis and subsequent reports and publications stemming from the thesis but these will be anonymised unless explicit consent is obtained.

Appendix E Interview Participant Information and Consent Sheets

E.1 Participant Information Sheet - Interviews

Study Title: Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology

Researcher: Joanna Nissel (Supervisor Professor Will May)

ERGO number: 69852

You are being invited to take part in the above research study. To help you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide to take part in this research. You may like to discuss it with others but it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

This is a PhD study concerning mentoring practices in UK poetry. The research seeks to discover how poetry is taught to poets, using what methods and pedagogies, and how these mentoring practices shape them as poets and as practitioners. The study also examines how this shaping of poets' identities goes on to influence the wider poetry ecology. To gather the necessary information from contemporary poets and poetry mentors today, the research will involve surveys and interviews with both groups.

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Why have I been asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate in this research because you have expertise relating to providing poetry mentorship, receiving poetry mentorship, or both. You have been asked to take part in an interview to gather information about your experiences, knowledge, and opinions regarding poetry mentorship.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be invited to take part in a one-to-one interview (approximately 1 hr), regarding your experiences, knowledge, and opinions concerning poetry mentorship. These will take place between approximately May-October 2022. You will have the option of taking part in the interviews remotely (via Zoom or telephone) or in-person. The interview will be recorded via Zoom (including for in-person interviews) and will be transcribed at a later date. Should you wish to expand further on your responses, you can opt for a follow-up interview to be arranged. Your contributions may be included in the final PhD thesis, including quotations. Quotations will be anonymised unless explicitly consent is given. You will be able to anonymise or withdraw any quotations up until the point of submission, which will take place in approximately Autumn-Winter 2024-2025. Chapters from the thesis may be published thereafter in the forms of academic papers or policy reports.

Should you wish, you may also choose to take part in a survey that assesses poetry mentorship on a more national scale. A separate information sheet will be issued regarding this survey.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

By taking part in this research, you will help improve the knowledge base surrounding poetry mentorship and how the wider UK poetry ecology operates. The research aims to share this knowledge through the publication of papers and/or public-facing policy reports, creating a number of positive changes for poets today. The research aims for this knowledge to allow poets to better understand and access modes of mentorship that are suitable to their needs; provide a language surrounding mentoring practices and pedagogies that can be used by mentors to hone their mentoring; as well as share key contacts and organisations. The research also aims to articulate how mentoring has shaped our current poetry ecology and how certain expectations, limitations, and assumptions are still shaping the ecology. All of these may impact future funders by giving them more information with which to shape their future calls, guidance, and/or policy.

Are there any risks involved?

There are no risks identified as part of this research.

What data will be collected?

Your name, email address, telephone number, and whether you are a mentor, mentee, or both, may be collected in order to take part in the interviews. Any additional information provided is entirely optional. Should you wish to provide this information, a small amount of special category data relating to your ethnic origin and/or sexual orientation may be collected to help augment the picture regarding the experiences of poets from under-represented backgrounds. Information will be securely stored on a networked university drive housed within the University of Southampton's IT systems.

Will my participation be confidential?

Your participation and the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You can opt to have your involvement and/or quotations acknowledged and contributed to you in the thesis and any subsequent publications, or you may choose to remain anonymous.

Only members of the research team may be given access to data about you for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Members of the research team include PhD Student Joanna Nissel; PhD project supervisors Professor Will May (University of Southampton), Dr Samantha Walton (Bath Spa University), or Matt West (Director of ArtfulScribe); and any applicable auditing or regulatory bodies at the University of Southampton. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

Information will be stored on a University of Southampton laptop and automatically backed up to the university's server and to a secure, encrypted hard drive.

Interviews will be recorded using Zoom and transcribed using Otter.ai. Anonymised Word Document transcriptions (or transcriptions where explicit consent to identify participants was given) will be archived. Audio files of interviews and any non-anonymised versions or additional documents by which the participants could be identified will be destroyed securely at the end of the project (approximately summer 2025). Data will be securely stored for 10 years after collection.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you want to take part, you will need to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part. This will be issued to you at the same time as receiving this information sheet with instructions on how to return this to the research team.

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<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/ls/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf>

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Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use your Personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose.

For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton are the 'Data Controllers' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about you for 5 years after the study has finished, after which time any link between you and your information will be removed.

To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Your data protection rights – such as to access, change, or transfer such information - may be limited, however, in order for the research output to be reliable and accurate. The University will not do anything with your personal data that you would not reasonably expect.

If you have any questions about how your personal data is used, or wish to exercise any of your rights, please consult the University's data protection webpage (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>) where you can make a request using our online form. If you need further assistance, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer (data.protection@soton.ac.uk).

Data will not be anonymised in its raw form. You will be consulted regarding whether you would prefer for any quotations that appear in the Policy report to be anonymised or not.

E.2 Consent Form - Interviews

Study Title: Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology

Researcher: Joanna Nissel (Supervisor Professor Will May)

ERGO number: 69852

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

	Please initial here
I have read and understood the information sheet (Dated 25/02/2022 Version 1) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study.	
I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time up until the point of the PhD thesis submission and for any reason without my participation rights being affected.	
I understand that my contributions may be included in the PhD thesis and subsequent reports and publications stemming from the thesis but these will be anonymised unless explicit consent is obtained.	
I agree to take part in the interview process for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet; I understand that interviews will be recorded using Zoom will be transcribed in the methods and for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet.	
I would prefer for my contributions not to be anonymised. i.e. I may be directly quoted.	

Name of participant (print name)

.....

Signature of participant

.....

Date

.....

Name of researcher (print name)

.....

Signature of researcher

.....

Date

.....

Appendix F Interview Questions

Indicative Interview Question List

Study Title: Mentoring in the Contemporary UK Poetry Ecology

Researcher: Joanna Nissel (Supervisor Professor Will May)

ERGO number: 69852

F.1 For Mentees

1. Is your mentorship run independently / informally or via an organisation? Please indicate if you would rather the organisation name be removed from any quotations.
2. Did you have a goal in mind to achieve through your mentorship and did you achieve this / are working towards that goal? This may be publication, a prize, a frequency of writing, or something more personal, like a sense of inner understanding or general satisfaction with your work.
3. Did mentoring guide you towards any goals or come with goals attached?
4. Some mentorships have a focus on developing your career as a writer, on your holistic development as a person and wellbeing, or both. Which do you think your mentorship works towards and why?
5. Were any accessibility measures put in place for your mentorship to take place as far as you are aware? Please expand on this as much as you feel comfortable to do so.
6. What do you think were the strengths of your mentorship?
7. What do you think were the weaknesses of your mentorship?
8. Did your mentorship (or the skills learned during your mentorship) lead to any publications? For these purposes, publication includes pamphlets, collections, literary magazines, anthologies, or via more atypical forms.
9. How did your mentorship impact on your confidence?
10. How did your mentorship impact on your overall wellbeing?
11. Do you think any of your values or beliefs have changed as a result of your mentoring?
For example, you may have new ideas about poetry itself, or opinions on particular

styles or movements of poetry, or it may have helped you re-evaluate a personal or societal situation.

12. In what ways has your poetry changed as a result of mentorship?
13. In what ways has your practice overall changed as a result of mentorship?
14. In what ways has mentorship shaped your identity as a writer?
15. Did your mentorship teach you about or influence what you consider to be markers of a 'real poet'? For instance, characteristics of a poet or milestones that indicate their success?
16. Has poetry mentorship impacted more broadly on your personal development outside of writing? If so, please expand on this.
17. Did your mentorship teach you about the wider poetry industry and how to maintain a career? If so, how?
18. Did you feel prepared to engage and interact with the wider poetry community and industries as a result of your mentorship? If so, why?
19. Do you feel your mentorship has had any therapeutic benefits?
20. How much control did you have in the mentoring relationship? For example, to guide the direction of study, the goals, to reject a teaching, to steer the recommended reading etc.
21. Did you feel empowered to start your own opportunities as a result of the knowledge gained during mentoring?

F.2 For Mentors

1. Do you employ any particular approaches or pedagogies in your mentoring? This may simply be an emphasis on creating a certain kind of environment or may focus on a particular ambition.
2. What are the main benefits of the approaches you use to set up your mentorships and/or mentorship spaces?
3. How much do you charge for your mentoring services?
 - a. Free or on agreement of mutual support (such as exchanging work)
 - b. Free (a funded place or via a competition/prize)
 - c. £0-20 a session
 - d. £21-50 a session

- e. £51-75 a session
 - f. More than £75 a session
4. Why are you a mentor? What are your motivations?
 5. Is being a mentor a key part of your identity as a writing practitioner (as opposed to a side-role that supports your writing practice)?
 6. Is mentoring a key part of your income?
 7. Do you think there is an overlap between the roles of a therapist and a poetry mentor? If so, how do you navigate straddling these two roles?
 8. How do you think the role of the mentor changes with mentees who are focused on literary ambitions compared to mentees focused on writing for wellbeing?
 9. How do you think poetry mentoring has evolved in recent decades? This research spans 1970s to present day so please feel free to include any observations regarding 1970 onwards.

F.3 For Both Mentors and Mentees

1. How would you define a mentor or mentoring relationship?
2. What are the main problems with mentorships / mentoring programmes?
3. What do you think poetry mentorships need to achieve to be considered successful or high quality?
4. Do you feel that poets can openly acknowledge their mentors? Why or why not?
5. Are some mentors more valued than others? If so, why?
6. What kind of figures would you include in the category of poetry mentors?
7. Are mentorships or mentorship programmes accessible?
8. Do mentorships or mentorship programmes exclude any groups? If so, please expand on which groups and how this happens.
9. How easy or difficult is it to find a suitable mentor or mentorship programme? What makes it easy or difficult?
10. How could mentoring be made more accessible?

Appendix F

11. Is higher education positioned as the main route to accessing poetry mentorship, particularly for young people?
12. Do peer networks support your growth as a writer as much as mentorships?
13. Do other forms of poetry event support your growth as a writer as much as mentorships?

Appendix G Mapping Sample

Type of Mentoring Provision:	# of Schemes / Services	Has an Emphasis on Publication	Does Not Have an Emphasis on Publication
Paid Schemes by Writer-Development Organisations	9	6 (66%)	3 (33%)
Formalised Poetry Mentorship Schemes Run by an Organisation and Won via an Application or Prize	28	21 (75%)	7 (25%)
Poets Offering Services Independently	38	28 (74%)	10 (26%)
Overall:	75	55 (73%)	20 (27%)

Table 29: Mapping Statistics

G.1 Mentoring Provision Included in the Sample

G.1.1 Paid Schemes by Writer-Development Organisations

1. Chapter and Verse Mentoring (The Literary Consultancy)
2. The Faber Academy Mentoring Programme
3. GROW Mentoring (Dialect)
4. Made to Measure Mentoring (Moniack Mhor)
5. The National Centre for Writing
6. The Poetry School
7. The University of Bristol
8. The Writing Coach
9. The Writing School

G.1.2 Formalised Poetry Mentorship Schemes Run by an Organisation and Won via an Application or Prize

1. Cinnamon Pencil Mentoring (Cinnamon Press)
2. The Clydebuilt Verse Apprenticeship Scheme (St Mungo's Mirrorball & Edwin Morgan Trust)
3. The Complete Works
4. Creative Future Writers' Award

5. Dialect Mentoring 2021 (Dialect)
6. The Disabled Poets Prize
7. Dynamo (Nine Arches and Writing West Midlands)
8. The Fawn Press Mentorship Scheme
9. The Free Reads Scheme 2023-24 (The Poetry School and The Literary Consultancy)
10. General Mentoring Scheme (Literature Wales)
11. Genesis Jewish Book Week Emerging Writers Programme
12. The James Berry Prize
13. The Jerwood Arvon Mentoring Programme
14. Momentum (Writing East Midlands)
15. The National Mentoring Programme (The Irish Writer's Centre)
16. New North Poets 2017 and 2019 (The Poetry School and New Writing North)
17. The Out-Spoken Press Poets Development Scheme
18. The Peggy Poole Award (The Poetry Society)
19. Poetry Ambassadors (ArtfulScribe and the University of Southampton)
20. The Poetry London Mentoring Scheme
21. Primers (Nine Arches Press)
22. The Representing Wales Programme 2023-24 (Literature Wales)
23. The Rewriting the North Mentorship Programme (The Portico Library and Faber Academy)
24. The Sky Arts & The Royal Society of Literature Writer's Award for Poetry
25. The Streetcake Prize (Streetcake Magazine)
26. The Tempest Prize (New Writing North)
27. The Women Poets Prize (The Rebecca Swift Foundation)
28. Writing East Midlands Mentoring Scheme 2014

G.1.3 Poets Offering Services Independently

1. Aaron Kent
2. Amy Acre
3. Anna Saunders
4. Anthony Anaxagorou
5. Aoife Lyall
6. Caleb Parkin
7. Clare Shaw
8. David Caddy and Louise Buchler (via *Tears in the Fence*)
9. Elspeth Wilson

10. Em Strang
11. Heidi Williamson
12. Helen Mort
13. Jacqueline Saphra
14. Jo Bell
15. Julia Bird
16. Julia Webb
17. Katharine Towers
18. Katrina Naomi
19. Kim Moore
20. Kym Deyn
21. Mark Roper
22. Matthew M C Smith and Briony Collins (via *Black Bough Poetry*)
23. Milena Williamson
24. Natalie Ann Holborow
25. Nikki Dudley
26. Pascale Petit
27. Philip Gross
28. Rachel Bower
29. Ralph Dartford
30. Rebecca Goss
31. Rebecca Tamás
32. Richard Scott
33. Romalyn Ante
34. Rosie Jackson
35. Sallyanne Rock
36. Sarah Westcott
37. Sue Burge
38. Vicky Morris

G.2 Mapping Sample Bibliography

Please note this mapping sample was collected in February 2024, drawing from publicly available information on sources such as websites. Some provision was identified earlier in the research and has an access date of 2022. I reviewed all of these sources during the 2024 mapping period, meaning that all information about the mentoring provision is accurate to February 2024. As many of these schemes are actively ongoing, the details and language

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