THE POETRY OF PRIESTHOOD: A STUDY OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF POETRY TO THE CONTINUING MINISTERIAL EDUCATION OF CLERGY IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis represents a qualitative empirical investigation into "What is the contribution of poetry in clergy continuing ministerial education (CME) in the Church of England?" offering a sustained theological reflection on my professional practice as Bishop's Clergy CME Adviser.

Taking an ethnographic approach within a practical theological framework, I studied four facilitated clergy groups reading pre-selected poems and reflecting on personal experience of ministry in response. Research reflexivity was ensured through multiple methods, including auto-ethnographic poetry.

The research shows that the affective character of poetic form and language stimulates emotional response in the critical appreciation of practice, sustaining diverse interpretations simultaneously, benefiting collegial clergy reflective practice through corporate construction of meaning. The effectiveness of appropriate ground-rules for small groups is recognised. The impact of historical-critical approaches in clergy hermeneutical strategies for reading privileged texts is acknowledged.

I conclude that in facilitated group settings selected poetry offers clergy a generative space for reflection on ministry, suggesting poetry as a trans-disciplinary resource in reflective practice requiring refinement of pedagogy to take account of literary characteristics and participant hermeneutical approaches, developing a more critical approach to the use of poetry in clergy CME and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) more generally.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

BIAPT   British and Irish Association for Practical Theology

CMD   Continuing Ministerial Development

CME   Continuing Ministerial Education

C of E   Church of England

CPD   Continuing Professional Development

CPE   Continuing Professional Education

DProf   Doctor of Professional Studies in Practical Theology (University of Chester; Anglia-Ruskin University)

DPT   Doctor of Practical Theology (University of Birmingham)

HEFCE   Higher Education Funding Council for England

IME   Initial Ministerial Education

IQ   Initial Questionnaire

MDR   Ministerial Development Review

OUP   Oxford University Press (publishers)

RPPG   Reflective Practice Poetry Group

RTP   Regional Training Partnership

SOED   Shorter Oxford English Dictionary

SPCK   The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (publishers)

SSM   Self Supporting Minister

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Locating the origins and context of the research

This thesis is a qualitative empirical investigation pursuing the question: "What is the contribution of poetry in clergy continuing ministerial education (hereafter 'CME') in the Church of England (C of E)?". A key motivating factor in my personal and professional commitment to research in this area has been the desire to generate a more critical and nuanced understanding of the complex and under-researched role of CME Adviser at a time of major organisational transition in relation to formal expectations of clergy and their CME (Pryce 2008). Hence, as a *researching professional* (Fox et al 2008; Scott et al 2009) my aim in this thesis is to develop my own practice and to further knowledge in CME and continuing professional development (CPD) more broadly. The inquiry is restricted to my professional responsibility for the ministerial development of clergy, and does not extend to CME for licensed or commissioned lay ministers. The character and direction of the research is shaped and led by the investigative concerns of a professional doctorate using the interpretative resources of Practical Theology (Graham 2006; Bennett and Graham 2008).

I set out the nature and purpose of the research in this initial chapter, located in Practical Theology, my professional practice as Bishop's Adviser for clergy CME in Birmingham Diocese, and my personal biography as priest and poet. I show how these inter-related dimensions focus my interest around poetry as resource for CME. This is a previously un-researched theme, and in giving an account of my motivations for undertaking the study I trace the field of knowledge to which the thesis contributes new understanding and practice (Taylor and Bogdan 1998, 3-23). I conclude with an introductory summary of the inquiry.

1.2   The theological context

Christians are formed, challenged and sustained by Scripture full of poetry (Jasper 1993; Jasper and Smith 2010). Poetry is the language 'best suited to probing the inexhaustible mystery of the human situation in its *entirety*…poetry looks at phenomena whole' (Davis 2000, 19). Scripture uses poetic metaphor in reference to itself: 'lantern', 'light', 'two-edged sword' (Psalm 119, 05; Hebrews 4, 12). Through metaphor, symbol and rhythm the poetry of psalms and prophets interrogates, convicts, and inflames the human heart (Brueggemann 1978, 1989, 2006). Nourished by Hebrew poetry, the Jesus of the Gospels crafts words like a poet; his metaphors, images and stories ignite imagination and evoke sympathy: 'The Bible's artfulness is our inspiration' (West 1984, in Maitland 1995, 127).

From a doctrinal perspective all poetry is potentially of value to the Christian because poetic creativity arises from the mystery of God uttered uniquely in Christ the Word, present as God's image in each human heart. Poetry articulates this 'word of the heart' – the language of the emotions, intuition, imagination; a 'word which unites', connecting particular concrete occasions and personal insights with universal experience (Rahner 1982). As a religion of this incarnate Word, Christianity can be characterised as *poetical*; its theology has a poetic character (Williams 2000, xii-xvi), and poetry has a particular theological validity. Both articulate truth through imaginative word-forms of story, imagery and a ceaselessly generative plenitude of semantic creativity. When theology is poetical it holds together doctrine and experience in a way which is at once critically reflective and creative: '…an exercise about the marriage of Word and flesh, an endless poem about the mystery of the incarnation' (Alves 1990, 74). Since Patristic times, Christian languages of theology and poetry have overlapped (Young 2013), sharing common traits in the production of meaning through symbols, images and analogies (MacQuarrie 1967; Tracy 1981; Campbell 1985). In both poetry and theology

the metaphorical nature of language is powerful and generative as it deepens understanding and appreciation, simultaneously opening up and extending new meanings and associations, compelling 'new possibilities of vision' (Soskice 1985, 57). Different images and metaphors operate with such deep symbolical or conceptual power that as figures of language they construct formative models; this is the case in science and philosophy (Schön 1963; Midgeley 2004, 2005) as much as theology, ecclesiology and spirituality (Dulles 1976; McFague1982; Soskice 2008); word-forms may imprison or release human action and imagination.

Yet in attempting to speak of God the language of theology and of poetry ultimately falls short. Acknowledging poetry's communicative inadequacy recognises its potential for 'freezing' reflection through the density of its intricate patterns of meaning (Williams 2000, xiv). This is what von Balthasar terms poetry's *lyricism*, a 'too-individualistic idea of contemplation' in which 'an individual's integration of metaphors, images and associations…can have the consequence that the shared public world of experience and action is either assimilated or excluded from consideration' (Quash 2007, 23 with reference to Explorations I, 208). The failure of language itself becomes a poetic theme (Williams 1977). More challenging is the caution that an ecclesial tyranny of propositional logic, functionalism or self-censorship stifles the expansive yet grounded 'artful theology' that authentic poetry articulates (Maitland 1995, 141-4).

Pastoral and Practical Theologians have emphasised this capacity of poetry to foster critical reflection on experience in a manner which grasps the shape and significance of events in ways which are expansive rather than reductionist. A poem can attend to the particular and specific, even to the momentary, distilling meaning in ways which are profoundly faithful to the given-ness of the event but simultaneously opening up new possibilities, different interpretations, attending to and re-framing experience (Capps 1993).

Poetical language seeks to animate the imagination and to stir the heart through use of language as a life-enhancing, transformational resource in new ideas and understandings (Alves 1990; Pattison with Woodward 1994; Pattison 2000a, 2000b). A Practical Theology for ministry which speaks in, and acts out of, evocative, poetical language mediates an 'irascible holiness' as radical alternative to the 'dominant script of therapeutic technological consumer militarism' (Brueggemann 2007, 203). Veling describes Practical Theology as 'poetical' in its hermeneutical, transformational task, telling and re-telling narratives, making and re-making the socially constructed world of our theory and practice (2005). Practical Theology attends to the poetry of ordinary language in every-day pastoral encounter (Whipp 2010, 2013) and finds expression for the integration of the sexual-somatic with the affective and intellectual dimensions in an integrating phronesis (Grosch-Miller 2013). In poetry marginalised groups and issues find a voice because it is an authentic form, speaking out of experience and context in ways which do justice to complex situations through its capacity for nuanced multivalency.

1.3   The professional context

At ordination all deacons, priests and bishops in the C of E are asked to give a solemn undertaking to be '…diligent in prayer, in reading Holy Scripture, and in all studies that will deepen your faith and fit you to bear witness to the truth of the gospel…' (C of E 2007, 143). On-going learning is integral to the character and function of ordained ministry, enforced by Canon C.26.1 (C of E 2014a). These 'studies' are interpreted as a form of professional learning for which the C of E uses the terms continuing ministerial *education* and also continuing ministerial *development* (CMD). The descriptor *continuing* suggests an ecclesial culture of learning which is sustained for the duration of public representative ministry (C of

E 2001, 31; 2003a, 36). My role is to support on-going learning for clergy from first ordination to retirement through educational programmes and a culture of study and research (financial grants, seminars, lectures etc.). Though my official title incorporates the term clergy continuing ministerial *education*, functionally this is regarded as synonymous with clergy CMD.[1] I take a pragmatic approach by understanding each term to incorporate both modes of continuing professional learning as Eraut (1994, 10) outlines them: continuing professional *education* (CPE) as external provision of programmes for 'off-the-job' learning, and continuing professional *development* (CPD) as 'work-based learning and organised events'.

The fundamental purpose of CME is facilitative and missional: '…to equip and develop the Church's ministers in order that they may stimulate and enable the whole Church to participate more fully in the mission of God in the world' (C of E 2001, 75). The scope, content and frequency of these studies is unspecified, left to the ministerial discretion of individual clergy under the unregulated guidance of their Bishop as 'steadfast guardian' and 'wise teacher' of the Christian faith (C of E 2007, 150).

The introduction of Common Tenure as the basis on which clergy hold office in the C of E under *Clergy Terms and Conditions of Service* legislation brings two key changes in clergy CME. First, clergy appointed as office-holders with permanent Common Tenure are required to engage in regular ministerial development review (MDR), to identify training needs and participate in 'appropriate CME' for professional development (C of E 2009a, section 19; Appendix 1:1). For the first time, as a condition of appointment, C of E clergy are required to reflect on their ministry through a formal process, and are accountable for their

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[1] There is no formal distinction between the terms CME and CMD in the C of E. The reference group responsible to the House of Bishops for these matters is the 'Panel for CMD'; its principal officer is 'National Adviser for CMD'; but *Clergy Terms & Conditions of Service* legislation governing this area refers to CME (C of E 2009a, 19).

ministerial development. This suggests a more programmatic and intentional interpretation of clergy 'studies' promised at ordination. Yet the character and content of 'appropriate' CME in which clergy have a legal obligation to participate, and Bishops to provide, remains unspecified.

Secondly, Common Tenure introduces formal training and assessment in ministerial capacity for Assistant Curates (hereafter 'Curates'), measured against a national benchmark of Ministry Learning Outcomes (C of E 2003a, 2006, 2013). Each diocese becomes responsible for the appropriate training and assessment programme to meet these national expectations (C of E 2009b). Whilst Initial Ministerial Education (IME) for Curates continues to hold the energy and anxiety of most CME conversations nationally, I am fascinated to explore how a requirement for 'appropriate CME' might be interpreted. How might this language of appropriateness be creatively and generously construed? In the context of my own practice, how might the contribution of poetry be 'appropriate' in clergy CME?

As CME Adviser I am responsible for designing and delivering a range of learning and development opportunities for all licensed clergy in Birmingham Diocese from first ordination through to retirement, including IME and assessment for Curates. In part, CME responds to the learning needs of individuals identified in annual MDRs, together with programmes for clergy cohorts in a complex variety of ministerial assignments in different social contexts (inner-urban, outer estate, suburban, rural) and at particular transition points in ministerial responsibility (first post of primary responsibility, Training Incumbent for Curates, etc.). CME enables theological reflection and the acquisition of skills for a wide range of pastoral issues whilst seeking to engage the full spectrum of Anglican ecclesial and theological traditions.

This work takes place through a collaborative web of professional relationships within diocese, region and national church. Some clergy CME programmes are designed and delivered in conjunction with neighbouring West Midlands' dioceses and the ecumenical Regional Training Partnership (RTP). In Birmingham Diocese I work in collaboration with a network of officers and specialists in areas such as inter-faith relations, community regeneration, diocesan schools, etc. Clergy CME is resourced by a national officer and panel which organises regular email briefings and annual training events. The development of literature resourcing CME is at an early stage (Evans 2012; Ling and Bentley 2012; Ling 2013), though empirical research into areas such as clergy well-being and practice is a developing priority (C of E 2014b). Recognising these collaborative networks, as the only Birmingham officer with a clergy IME/CME brief, much of my professional work is undertaken in relative isolation. Finding a critical reflective forum for my own professional development is another motivating factor in my participation in the DPT.

The research is situated in my use of poetry in existing and emerging reflective work with clergy, licensed ministers and lay people within the diocese and beyond, which includes Deanery Chapter study days, quiet days and retreats, such as a CME retreat for Birmingham Curates (Appendix 1:2). As participation in the DPT programme enabled me to develop my critical awareness of poetry's capacity to inspire reflectiveness in clergy, I also became aware of its potential to bore, baffle or infuriate in various contexts (Pryce 2010).[2]

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[2] My DPT Part 1 Publishable Article contains a reflection on the power of poetry through an extended case study of a Vicar's proposal to use Duffy's poem 'Last Post' (2009) at a Remembrance Day service, causing a revolt from members of the local branch of The Royal British Legion.

1.4   The personal context

My formation as a Christian, poet, priest and practical theologian informs my professional practice. Poetry has shaped my personal identity, Christian discipleship and my approach to ministry and theology, and this gives rise to my use of poems in Theological Reflection with clergy and other ministers, in a variety of CME settings. Reading, writing and appreciating poetry is a dynamic tradition which continues to sustain me (Pryce 2014a). I am conscious of the creative Anglican heritage on which I draw, with spiritual roots deep in poetry (Allchin 1981, 1995; Countryman 1996; Rowell et al 2001, 8-9). The C of E celebrates poets like Rolle, Herbert, Donne, Keble and Rossetti *as poets* (Tristam 1997; Atwell 1998; C of E 2000). Poetry feeds discipleship and enriches spiritual practice (Morley 2011). Steeped from an early age in the liturgical poetry of the Book of Common Prayer and Authorised Version, I came to associate divinity with powerfully narrated story and the beauty of poetic cadence, rhythm and imagery. This was strengthened by the liberal pedagogy of state schools in the 1960s and 70s which encouraged creative writing. It was the capacity of language as a limitless resource for personal expression that led me to study English Literature as an undergraduate. Poetry has become a form which integrates the personal, spiritual and social dimensions of human experience in generous and adventurous ways, and composing poetry is a constant (though tidal) creative practice in my life.

Poetry has been fundamental in my ministerial formation. I encountered the work of R.S. Thomas as a young man, just as religious questioning began to disturb adolescent faith; his capacity as priest-poet to hold both the light and shade of spiritual experience in a vision of faith as an imaginative project has been profoundly affective. Christian poets nourish my discipleship - both women and men integrating a contemplative, authentic and expansive theological vision through poetry. These include priests writing (in part) from a perspective of

public ministry (Scott 1984, 1989; Williams 2001, 2008; James 2013; Mann 2013; Guite 2012, 2013, 2014), and lay disciples exploring faith from personal experience and the world through a vision of faith (Hill 2001; O'Siadhail 2009; Symmons Roberts 2004, 2013; Oliver 2007, 2008; Slee 2007b, 2013). Whilst I would not necessarily distinguish between lay and ordained poets, distinctive approaches become significant for the purposes of this reflection on clergy development. Indeed, my sense of being fed by poetry is not confined to writers working out of an explicit confession of faith, any more than my own writing is explicitly 'religious'. Intrinsically, poetry from any source is a way of paying attention to the mystery of the world and human persons (McDonagh 1986), enabling me to make connections, find insight, and evoking a sense of the spiritual in the everyday world (Motion 2009). Duffy's poem 'Prayer' (1993), for example, traces the cadences of a post-religious, poetic spirituality as it contemplates the exquisiteness of the ordinary sounds of mundane living (Pryce 2001, 107).

Reading, writing and publishing poetry enables me to reflect on experience and make public theology generated through imaginative engagement with dimensions of my personal life, pastoral encounter and ethical commitments. Practical Theology is the field in which my own poetry first 'found a voice' as one mode of theological reflection on experience in which the imagination combines intellect, senses, affections and spirit in ways which test out implications for human relationships and identity (Pryce 2014a). In a critical examination of Men's Studies and the performance of masculinity in the light of feminism and gay liberation I attempt to integrate theology, gender studies and personal experience through poems – or at least, to hold these dimensions together in dialogue without forcing a conclusion, allowing me to play with non-patriarchal models of masculinity as I reflect critically on Scripture and Christian tradition (Pryce 1993, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2014b). In a different dimension, I

offer poetry as a resource for spirituality and worshipping life in Christian communities through compiling Literary Companions for liturgical celebrations (Pryce 2001, 2003), and reimagine Scripture as poetry (Woodward, Gooder and Pryce 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014). In this work, poetry, biblical scholarship and pastoral theology combine with spirituality in a generative mode of refreshing interpretation of the gospels, re-encountering biblical text as artistic imaginative creation (Watson 1997; Brown 1999, 2000). My aim is to deepen appreciation of theological themes in Scripture and challenge Christian discipleship in the ordinary settings of relationships, work and domestic life. When these poems are set to music they take on a further artistic and liturgical affectivity (Pryce with O'Regan 2004).

1.5   The nature and purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is to explore the role of poetry in CME as a means of developing professional knowledge through constructive, creative and authentic dialogue with ministerial practice (Pryce 2009, 2010, 2011b). This exploration of poetry in CME arises from the profound role it plays in my own formation as person, priest and practical theologian. This stimulated me to investigate more about how other clergy experience poetry as a means of reflection on ministry. The research is innovative and original, and offers a distinctive contribution to CME and CPD theory. The inquiry is reflexive and critical, taking into consideration the subjective nature of interpretation and potential bias arising from my practice as a poet.

I am drawn to undertake research within a practical theological framework rather than, for example, the discourse of CPD as a branch of adult education or personnel development practice, because Practical Theology provides theological resources which integrate empirical research approaches within an hermeneutical enterprise concerned with Christian ministry,

church community, and the significance of language. Practical Theology offers me the methodological scope to explore clergy *experience* of poetry in CME, including my own reflections as a practitioner, whilst also allowing me to develop a critical and appreciative investigation into my own distinctive contribution to CME practice.

The study has the following aims:

i. To generate a critical and nuanced understanding of the nature and potential of poetry as a resource for clergy to reflect on their experience of ministry.

ii. To develop an associated methodology for the effective use of poetry in CME settings.

iii. To construct a reflexive theological reflection on my professional practice, generating new perspectives within the field of CME in ways which inform, refine and transform practice.

iv. To relate these reflections to formal requirements for appropriate CME in the C of E.

v. To bring these insights into conversation with theory and practice in the broader domain of CPD.

1.6   An introductory summary of research practice

The research was undertaken on a part-time basis during the period 2011-2014. An estimated 18-month period was planned for fieldwork and the subsequent 18-months for data analysis, participant feedback and drafting the research report. Located in my experience as a theological educator using poetry in ministerial development with clergy, I make a critical inquiry into my own professional practice, generating a sustained theological reflection through an ethnographic approach within a practical theological framework, using qualitative social research methods to gain insights into the experience of clergy using poetry to reflect on their experience of ministry. As a study in Reflective Practice, the character of the research is phenomenological and interpretive, rooted in and attentive to the experience of both researcher and research participants (Stanley 2004; Lee 2009). The reflexive character of the study enables me to gain insight into my own practice in facilitating professional learning, and this dual approach as a researching professional enables new pedagogical understanding in the practice of CME to develop, with trans-disciplinary implications for the theory and practice of CPD and research practice in the domain of professional knowledge.

Empirical investigation involved four groups of clergy - three from Birmingham and one from a neighbouring diocese – each meeting five or six times. In these *Reflective Practice Poetry Groups* (RPPGs) poetry was introduced as a resource for participants to reflect on their experience of the practice of ordained ministry and to share these reflections with ordained colleagues in conversation which I facilitated. Opportunity for participants to review their experience of the groups was integrated into the reflection process, and further reflexivity was ensured through selective one-to-one participant interviews, review questionnaires and group review sessions. These conversations and review processes were recorded through audio-digital technology and by hand-written field notes; transcribed data was analysed by thematic

categorisation, and refined through a participant feedback process, including comparison with the insights of a Neutral Observer for triangulation purposes. My own reflexivity as researching professional was ensured through my keeping of a reflective research journal and writing auto-ethnographic poetry, together with regular academic supervision and peer review within the DPT community at Birmingham and in the Professional Doctorate (DProf) consortium comprising the Universities of Anglia Ruskin, Chester, Glasgow and Manchester. Being a co-organiser and participant in the BIAPT-sponsored 24-hour residential *Poesis in Practical Theology* at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in May 2011 also helped me refine ideas in the company of others.

1.7 Conclusion

In this opening chapter I have recognised the situated character of the research (Haraway 1988, 1991), enabling me to identify the prior commitments and motivations which inform my epistemological frame of reference and interpretive choices as researcher (Pels 2000), including my formation in Anglicanism as the confessional stance shaping the research (Cartledge 2003). Having shown how poetry informs my particular contribution to CME, linking with practical theological themes of poesis and the transformational power of words, in Chapter Two I go on to make a critical survey of literature relating to CME, poetics and Reflective Practice theory which gives a rationale for qualitative research into the contribution of poetry to clergy development. In Chapter Three I set out the methodology for the inquiry. Chapter Four describes the research practice. Chapter Five gives my analysis of the data. In Chapter Six I reflect on the findings, drawing out the implications of poetry in CME for reflective pedagogical practice. The appendices relating to these chapters include supporting documentation to provide the reader with background material relevant to the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

Having situated this inquiry into the contribution of poetry to CME within a practical

theological framework which incorporates my professional practice as priest, poet and clergy

CME Adviser, this chapter develops the conventions of a Literature Review (Hart 1998;

Graham 2008) to ground the research endeavour as an exercise in Reflective Practice (Schön

1983, 295; Chapman and Anderson 2005), identifying areas for further research. I begin with

a brief reflection on a case study (Asquith 1990) of using poetry in a CME group setting

which indicates the gap in my professional knowledge and understanding, giving rise to the

research question "How does poetry contribute to clergy CME?" I go on to identify poetry

written by clergy as a form of reflexive and critical reflection on ministerial identity and

practice. This poetry resonates with the distinctive language of the Ordinal which seeds a

metaphorical dynamic in shaping the formative ministerial theology in the C of E. I note how,

despite this connection, poetry by ordained ministers receives little serious attention as a form

of Reflective Practice.

I then consider the priorities established for CME in C of E policy documents,

particularly in relation to Reflective Practice and Theological Reflection (Graham, Walton

and Ward 2005b, 1-13). I argue that official policy uncritically adopts the technical language

of professionalism, and contrast this with the metaphorical emphasis of much contemporary

ministerial theology. Turning to the theory of Reflective Practice and Theological Reflection

for an indication of the power of art forms and imagination in reflection and reflection on

practice, I note the value placed on attentiveness to experience, the power of metaphor and of

creative writing as reflexive tools, but the absence of any theory which can inform my own practice with clergy of reflecting on the experience of ministry with poems.

In the absence of serious attention to the reflexive potential of poetry in Reflective Practice literature, I trace some of the claims poetry makes for itself as a reflective and reflexive cultural form which attends to lived experience, going on to consider some of the claims which theology makes for poetry as a way of apprehending theological truth. Surveying the uses of poetry in Practical Theology as a further indication of its generative power, particularly Practical Theology's characterization of its reflective, critical hermeneutical task as poetical (Veling 2005), I describe the prospects for a practical theological inquiry into the use of poetry in CME as a reflection on my own professional practice, exploring what poetry contributes to clergy Reflective Practice, and how this may constitute 'appropriate' CME.

This gives the literature review the character of an extended case-study into the potential of poetry for CME which the empirical research investigates further.

2.2   Poetry in CME: reflection on practice

A critical incident in shaping this inquiry was reading Herbert's poem 'Aaron' (Appendix 2:1) as part of an induction session for Training Incumbents of Curates. In this practice setting, heavily inscribed with official expectations of professional standards for ministerial capability, the poem seems a kind of antidote to the technical language of ministerial learning outcomes generated by the advent of Common Tenure (C of E 2006, 68-72). It offers a different approach to ensuring excellence in ministry as an inhabited vocation located in spirituality as well as performance, knowledge and skill. The poem speaks in an alternative register, through image, metaphor, scriptural reference and allusion to the realms of emotion

and prayer (Leech 2006, 108-117; Williams 2000, 13). It does so in a non-coercive and polysemic way. It is a form of beauty as well as truth. The poem has purchase on emotions, thoughts and memories through linguistic technique. In this way it has capacity to gain access beyond performative and propositional dimensions, yet in doing so the poem offers *complexity* rather than simple insight.

In the previous chapter I gave other examples of CME settings in which I use poetry as a way of fostering reflection on practice. Some of this poetry is, like 'Aaron', a spiritual exercise in reflexivity as the priest-poet reflects on the experience of ministry through the poem. Yet my use of poetry in these practice settings is largely intuitive. I am drawing on resources that speak personally to me as a priest rather than working out of a clearly articulated pedagogical approach. Whilst Anglicanism celebrates poets as sources of holiness and insight, as resources for practical wisdom in ministry, there is no explicit guidance or theological critique to inform practice. There is, I go on to argue, an unacknowledged recourse to poetry as a source of practical wisdom in reflecting on the theology and practice of ministry, which resonates with the ministerial values of the Ordinal and connects with the pattern of metaphorical language which flows from it in shaping clergy identity and practice in the C of E.

2.3   The Ordinal's metaphorical power shapes ministerial identity and practice

As a public text the Ordinal bears both continuity and change in shaping the generic identity, tasks and functions of an ordained minister (MacCulloch 1996, 460). Though twentieth century revisions of the 1662 form (C of E 1980a, 2007) bring a shift in emphasis towards mission and collaborative ministry, the pastoral and liturgical functions of clergy remain

largely unchanged, as do the vocational requirements of call, obedience to authority, appropriateness of lifestyle, and on-going commitment to study and prayer. The same metaphors have been used through generations to evoke and steer the identity and function of ordained ministers: they are to be Servant, Teacher, Watchman, Steward, Shepherd, and Guardian. The language and symbolic action of ordination liturgies, rooted in pre-modern rites, suggest that public and representative ministry is *profession* in the dual sense of a sociological group operating within technical conventions for functional purposes, yet simultaneously professing values and principles derived from a theology of vocation (Bridger 2003, 15-16). Any emphasis on proficiency in demonstrable skills is to be integrated in a pattern of regular prayer and public worship, study and reflection on Scripture, which equips public ministry whilst also nourishing personal spirituality and vocation in the continual formation of ministerial character (C of E 2006, 68). Ministry is 'both being and doing…both the formation of character and the acquisition of learning and skills' (Croft 1999, 107).

Greenwood's assertion of 'the urgent need for revising the Ordination Service' to express the re-evaluation of Anglican theology of ministry in the light of social trinitarianism and the ordination of women exemplifies the Ordinal's enduring influence as the authoritative public articulation of models of ministry which numerous secondary texts interpret, amplify and critique (1994, 184-186). Russell notes that any comparison of contemporary clergy handbooks with those of the mid-nineteenth century will find '…the similarities rather than the changes…are the most striking' (1980, 274). A modest survey of contemporary ministerial theology indicates how the language of the Ordinal sets a *metaphorical dynamic* for critical reflection on ministry.

Aiming to reinvigorate conventional categories of the priestly task, Pritchard (2007) introduces a range of novel images which complement and extend the Ordinal's metaphors:

the priest as 'presiding genius', 'spiritual explorer', 'artful story-teller' and 'multilingual interpreter'. He recognises that the language describing the tasks of priesthood has a role in constituting its identity and self-understanding. In similar mode, Williams (2004) introduces the metaphors of 'witness', 'weaver' and 'interpreter' in his reflection on priesthood. Clark-King, reflecting on ministry from a feminist perspective, offers the metaphor of Choral Conductor bringing harmony among a range of voices through fostering mutual listening (2004, 212-216). Cocksworth and Brown (2002) use a range of performative metaphors: clergy sweep and prepare the stage, restore broken instruments, direct the performance; and an organic analogy for the pattern and purpose of ordained ministry describes it as rooted in prayer and worship, shaped by vocation, and bearing fruit in others. Percy (2014) reflects on motherhood as a metaphor for priesthood, based on the generative power of metaphor to renew identity and practice through its shaping influence socially and personally; similarly White's (2012) reflection on the implications of 'midwife' as a metaphor for priesthood. Richardson (2005) writes of pastor as 'coach', and the activity of ministry as 'coaching'. R. S. Thomas's expansive language for the spiritual experience of priest as 'fugitive', 'astronaut' and 'pilgrim' offers an opportunity to re-envisage reflective ministry less as a means for 'getting sorted' and more as a pilgrimage of discovery that can be unsettling and inconclusive (Pryce 2013).

Having established the particular power of metaphor in shaping clergy identity I now turn to explore further the methodology of working with poetry as a resource for critical theological reflection on ministry.

2.4 Poetry shapes reflection on ministerial identity and practice

Presenting a 'Christological, Charismatic and Catholic methodology' for shaping contemporary Evangelical ministry and mission, Cocksworth draws on Herbert's poem 'The Windows' for a vision of discipleship and ministry in which the gospel message is effective not only through homiletics, but also in the way that it is enacted in ministerial conduct and attitude. The poem is a meditation on public ministry through the metaphor of stained-glass:

> Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one
> When they combine and mingle, bring
> A strong regard and awe, but speech alone
> Doth vanish like a flaring thing,
> And in the ear, not conscience ring.
>
> (Cocksworth 2003, 13)

Cocksworth takes Herbert's dual approach as an analogy for the contemporary formational agenda in ministerial training, focused on both task and identity. This is developed further as an on-going dedication to prayer, the regular reading of Scripture and study, ministerial identity aligned with particular discipline and practice (Cocksworth and Brown 2002, 83; Chapman 2004). This synergy of preaching with personal lifestyle expressed in the poem – that is, *profession* as both situated proclamation through a way of life as well as through the specialist occupation of preaching sermons – has its origins in the Ordinal.

Whilst an extended treatment of the value of Herbert's poetry for informing clergy identity is beyond the scope of this project, the diverse use of Herbert's writing in ministerial theology is worth further enquiry, and particularly the use of his poetry in reflection on ministry and Christian discipleship across a range of theological approaches (Russell 1993;

Pryce 1999; Scott 2000; Drury 2006; Watson 2007; Threlfall-Holmes 2014). Lewis-Antony's

call for a 'death to Herbertism' argues that inappropriate idealised patterns of ministry have

developed around misconceived notions of Herbert's life and work, doing much harm in

contemporary Anglican ministry (2009, 1-22), but this critique is aimed at a general

perception of what Herbert represents as an ideal model of ministry, not on close study of the

use of his poems. A survey with regard to the poetry of R.S. Thomas indicates a similar role

as resource in reflection on ministry (Moody 1992, 3; Greenwood 1994; Cocksworth and

Brown 2002, 111, 191; Percy 2006, 151-152; Coakley 2008, 9; Newey 2008, 105; Pryce

2013).

The reflexivity of these poems by clergy suggests priesthood as craft, as work which

involves awareness of itself and its consequences as integral, an art of 'making human

relationships' (Sennett 2008, 288-289). However, they may be read strategically in terms of

how they portray ordained ministry, an assertion of the pastoral and liturgical role of priest as

pastor in the face of structural changes in the organisation of the Church which bring a

different emphasis to the role of ordained ministry (Francis and Francis 1998 on Non-

Stipendiary Ministry; Grundy 2007 on leadership issues; Hampson 2006 on disaffected

clergy; Hennessey 2003a, 2003b, and Herrick 2005 on personal issues; Jordan 2008 on Local

Ordained Ministry). Contemporary handbooks on ministry focus on themes of identity in

relation to role rather than on specific details relating to task. Where task is referred to, it is in

connection with the broader picture of ordained ministry and the pattern of life and spirituality

which is to undergird it. The contemporary Church does not seem to require the kind of

detailed handbook for parsons produced by Dearmer (1907). Croft's focus on the threefold

order of diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal ministry is to offer them as 'three dimensions' of

the character and function of the whole Church. The particular role of the ordained, sharing in

aspects of the three dimensions, is to offer leadership which enables others and gives direction to the whole. This role requires both character and expertise.

Poetry is able to bring this duality into focus, going beyond technique to explore ministerial role and identity. For example, Scott's poem 'Parish Visit' (1984, 77; Wells and Coakley 2008, 184) reflects on a visiting parish priest and bereaved parishioner attempting to "make little runs at understanding" in their conversation. The poem offers a profound reflection on priesthood practiced relationally in and through pastoral care. Using minimal words and a simple narrative the poem attends to complex issues which are developed concerns in Practical Theology, such as professionalism in pastoral care (Campbell 1981, 1985; Lambourne 1983 [1971]; Wilson 1988; Graham and Halsey 1993; Pattison 1994). Within Anglicanism from Herbert onwards there is a body of poetry in which priests reflect on their work – for example Donne (1979 [1929]), Traherne (1966), Keble (1827), Studdert Kennedy (1927), Bowen (1993), R.S. Thomas (1993), Williams (2001, 2008, 2014), Guite (2012, 2013, 2014), James (2013), and Mann (2013). These poems suggest particular views of what it is to be and to function as a priest, generally concentrating on the liturgical and pastoral functions as the core ministerial tasks outlined in the Ordinal (C of E 2007). Poems by Vanstone and Scott offer reflections on priestly ministry alongside prose theology (James 1979, 71; Wells and Coakley 2008, 183-186).

Without laying exclusive claim to the role of word-smith as clergy expertise, priest-poet Scott emphasises the centrality of the literary tradition within Christianity, and the essential power of words and word-forms for the life-giving expression of meaning in the Church: 'Our theologians need to draw from the world of the poets…they should attend to the *logos* and the *logoi*, the Word and the words' (2000, 50). The Church should be a place in which poetry thrives as the language of faith, not characterised by technical or managerial

discourse, but the language of the imagination: 'God's revelation of himself is too expansive

and penetrating to be propositional' (Oakley 2001, 38). Immersion in poetry is crucial for the

practice of theology, fostering an appreciation of symbol, image and word which express the

mystery at the heart of both humanity and divinity, an antidote to the banality of

contemporary talk and a gateway to prayer as the basis of critical and creative intellectual

reflection (McDonagh 1987, 242). It is the 'one who stands apart'– the analyst, social

scientist, or artist – whose critical distance gives a capacity to make illuminating observation

of their subject. Yet the most truthful telling will be oblique and enigmatic; poetry (and all

literature) offers a deeper understanding about our experiences through the 'indirect

communication' of story, parable, anecdote, analogy and metaphor (Cameron 1987, 224-225).

In this assertion of the fundamental role of poetry (and all literature and art) as the grounding

and dynamism of creativity and imagination in theology of a critical and humane sort, the

difficulty that poetry may pose to the reader through its obscurity of meaning, density of

language or complexity of structure is rarely acknowledged, and a method for reading it

appreciatively is never proposed.

Having noted the insights poetry offers for its reflective capacity for ministry,

personally and in a group setting, I now go on to consider how C of E official policy

documents establish theory and normative practice as a dominant discourse for CME, tracing

some of the ideological and social forces understood to be impacting on ordained ministry,

and the shaping influence of these perceptions for Reflective Practice. I then contrast the

metaphorical, poetical language with the official discourse of guidelines and procedural codes

generated by the administrative and managerial processes of the C of E as it attends to

professional standards and Human Relations legislation. The code-language speaks of clergy

as office holders, shaped by the culture of professionalism and its associated accredited

learning programmes. It is not a language which fosters expansive reflection, even though code stipulates reflection to be a core element in ministerial practice.

2.5   The development of CME as professional learning

The initial case study identifies a dimension of anxiety among clergy participants as they encounter institutional expectations for ministerial practice. Acknowledged issues facing ordained ministers in the C of E are multiple and complex (Lewis-Anthony 2009; Kuhrt 2001). International research into clergy as an occupational group suggests a spectrum of intrinsic and extrinsic difficulties which affect mental health and resilience, such as social marginalisation, personal identity, and inter-personal dynamics arising from contemporary patterns of ministry (Sanford 1982; Rutledge and Francis 2004; Lehr 2006; Rutledge 2006; Francis et al 2009; Francis et al 2013). Perceptions among parish clergy of rising external expectations in response to professionalisation can be a source of anxiety or resistance to change (Rooms and Steen 2008), and tension between conflicting models of ministry causes stress (Irvine 1997; Warren 2002). These pressures are sufficient to drive some clergy from parish ministry to alternatives like Health-Care Chaplaincy (Hancocks, Sherbourne and Swift 2008). Whilst clergy have grown accustomed to centralised, publicly accountable provisions in remuneration, housing and pension (Chandler 2006), legislation around standards of ministerial performance has been rare. Clergy office holders have been obliged only to assent to the Ordinal, Ecclesiastical Canons and Scripture as normative for their work and conduct. As additional clergy responsibility for compliance with Child Protection, Adult Safeguarding, Employment Legislation, and Health and Safety standards brings to CME expressed needs for technical training in skills to meet legal obligations and standards, reflective exercises may appear an unnecessary luxury. An increasingly evangelistic emphasis to mission and a focus

on clergy leadership technique in church growth can be a further factor in marginalising more reflective forms of CME: 'academic, dilettante and fringe subjects will have to take a back seat' (Jackson 2005, 135).

Reflection on ministry practice is a consistent core strand in the C of E's formal policy documents on CME (e.g. 1980b; 1986; 1994; 2001; 2003a; 2006; 2008a; 2013). CME is summarised as continuing learning which enables practitioners to 'Reflect on the actual experience of ministry' whilst maintaining their role as public representatives of the Church in a changing social environment, developing as professional theologians, with the capacity to exercise leadership, teaching and care for the people of God (C of E 1980, cited in C of E 2001, 29). A participative theology of mission (Bosch 1991) gives CME further intentionality:

> '…to equip and develop the Church's ministers in order that they may stimulate and develop the whole Church to participate more fully in the mission of God in the world (C of E 2001, 30).

Whilst acknowledging a possible pedagogical tension between 'open-ended personal exploration' and 'professional development and the acquisition of skills for ministry (2001, 6) ministerial training before and after ordination is located within an educational ecclesiology, envisaging Church as a 'school of theology' in which learning is life-long and for all (C of E 2003a, Chapters 3 and 4; 2006). Ramsey's sense of clergy partnership with laity in discerning 'the meaning of divine truth in its human context' (1991, 7-8) is made more explicit. Clergy are envisaged as theological educators facilitating others in leadership, mission and ministry; capacity to enable Theological Reflection on experience of life, context and ministry is fundamental alongside practical ministerial skills and the capacity for leadership in mission (C of E 2003a, 39-42). Building this reflective expertise becomes a greater priority for CME in response to anxiety about the social role of clergy (Paul 1964; Russell 1980) and a sense of

'rising expectation of ministerial and professional competence' (C of E 2003b, 41). The reflective character of churches growing spiritually and numerically is cited as a key indicator of missional leadership (C of E 2014).The principle that Training Incumbents and Curates should regularly engage in reflective supervision illustrates this trend (Burgess 1998; Ward 2005; C of E 2006, 114-119; Lamdin and Tilley 2007); likewise the *Learning Outcomes for Ordained Ministry* as a national benchmark for professional learning against which ministerial capacity is assessed (2006, 64-72; revised 2013).

In tracing the development of CME it is important to note the Anglican middle-way negotiated in the 'Berlin-Athens' debate between contrasting approaches of *Wissenschaft* and *paidea*: objective scholarship combined with professional education for purposive action in the service of the Church, contrasted with formation into inhabited wisdom (Farley 1983, 1988; Hough and Cobb 1985; Wood 1985; Herzog 1994; Kelsey 1992, 1993). Crass instrumentalism is avoided; CME is to foster 'inhabited godly wisdom' (Hardy in C of E 2003a, 42, 57; 2006, 64) through cultivating 'dispositions' in the clergyperson which integrate character, knowledge, understanding and skills (C of E 2013) within the liturgical and ethical life of the Church (MacIntyre 1984; Hauerwas 1981; Hauerwas and Williamson 1989a, 1989b; Graham, Walton and Ward 2005b, 100-102). The purpose of structured and intentional CME is to shape ministers capable of animating mission and ministry in the people of God and to lead the church in an age of complexity and change (C of E 1998a, 2001; Ison 2005, 9-18). Curacy is to shape ministers into persons who serve with 'developed skills as reflective practitioners…exercising wise and discerning judgment'; and those taking up positions of Primary Responsibility must show additional 'sophisticated skills as an effective reflective practitioner and the capacity to develop these further to energise and enable creative theologically informed practice' (C of E 2013, 10, 14).

Thus we see a strong emphasis on Reflective Practice developed in theological training and the early years of ordained ministry, and sustained by clergy throughout ministry, supported by CME provision. Yet although Reflective Practice figures as a key strand in CME the term remains undefined in the context of ordained ministry.

Whilst professions and professionalism have received intense and prolonged study, they remain slippery concepts (Freidson 1986, 1994) influenced by sociological theory (e.g. Illich 1977; Brint 1994) or the philosophical approach forged by MacIntyre (1984). With some exceptions (Towler and Coxon 1979; Louden and Francis 2003) major sociological studies have discounted ordained ministry as incompatible with theories of professionalism developed in industrial and technological Western economies. Yet clergy can be understood to have been intentionally engaged in a process of professionalisation (Russell 1980; Percy 2006) and may still be regarded as an 'eccentric' professional group (Ballard 2004, 47) or an occupational group espousing professional values (Woodward 1998, 40-83; Pattison and Pill 2004, 18). Official guidance influencing CME conceives of it broadly within this trajectory of professionalisation, seemingly ignorant of studies which interrogate notions of virtuous professionalism in terms of the nature of power relations between professionals and their clients pursuing a 'collective project' within society which combines ethics of service and expertise as a means of securing monopoly (Larson 1977; Foucault 1979; MacDonald 1995).

If Clergy CME is understood as a form of CPD within the broader professionalisation trajectory, what shape and content is *appropriate*? In MacIntyre's philosophical perspective CPD generates virtuous practitioners who build on the generic virtues of honesty, courage and justice, ensuring the moral probity of the institutions in which they practise (Pattison and Pill 2004, 23-24). Virtuous professionals have corporate as well as personal moral responsibility, shaped by moral values as well as technical expertise. This formation requires models of CPD

that enable professionals to ask ethical questions of themselves, and to adjust working practices for social good rather than narrow self-interest. CPD as technical training may be sustaining a professional technocracy, but it can also foster 'best practice' which benefits clients and society in general (Freidson 1986).

This brings into consideration the pluriform nature of professional knowledge. It may be 'propositional', the knowledge of academia; it may also be 'occupational' knowledge which is procedural and tacit (Eraut 1998; 2000). A technocratic model of CPD (Lester 1995) facilitates the acquisition or updating of fundamental knowledge relating to well-defined problems. This is 'maintenance learning' in an input-based model; it does not address generative or innovative learning that will reshape organisational practice (Botkin et al 1979). If to possess occupational knowledge is 'to be capable of participating with the requisite competence in the complex web of relationships among people and activities' (Gherardi et al 1998, 274), then CPD requires models of learning which are practice-based and use reflective techniques to facilitate understanding (Boud and Solomon 2001, 114). This kind of learning will bring about change rather than defend a professional status quo. For example, in Social Work the epistemological work of Habermas (1972) has inspired models of critical reflection on practice which enable different kinds of learning: knowledge concerning procedures and methods (technical knowledge) through attention to practice-based experience (practical/communicative knowledge) leading to an understanding of how power operates within structures and situations. This process enables a critique of existing practice, and informed action for change (emancipatory knowledge) (Thomas 2004). A Reflective Practice approach to learning will open up dimensions that may be marginalised in propositional learning, such as the role emotions play in Social Work – a crucial consideration in a 'messy'

profession where interventions involve feelings and impressions as well as material facts on the part of both practitioners and clients (Butler 2007).

2.6 Poetry and metaphor in Reflective Practice and Theological Reflection

This awareness of the power-relations in professional knowledge and interaction puts an emphasis on educational methodology in CPD. In practice-based reflection the role of the practice teacher is fundamental: she facilitates reflection through appropriate methods, approaches and techniques to facilitate 'deep learning' (Moon 2004). In this view CPD is characterised by fostering professional practice which exercises freedom from rigid observation of rules and guidelines, has an intuitive grasp of situations, a deep understanding of situations and of possibilities within them, and a capacity to use analytical approaches when new problems occur (Knott and Scragg 2007). This 'Practice Wisdom' facilitates the well-being of practitioner, client and community and requires CPD methods which foster rich understandings of complex situations (Gould and Taylor 1996, 2). In developing appropriate methods for CPD, Bolton offers detailed work on the role of creative writing in reflective practice, emphasising the story-based nature of our knowing and meaning-making. Participant exercises composing stories and poetry, or journaling, are all methods for creating narrative from experience of professional practice enabling deep reflection and reflexivity. Drawing on Hughes' reflections on poetry, Bolton (2010, 119) identifies poetry as a way in which the undisclosed and unacknowledged may be revealed; poetry helps to articulate in a reflective mode the metaphors by which we understand our lives, enabling critique; poetry may allow different and unexpected metaphors to surface, enabling transformative insight into practice. Writing a poem is an exercise in contemplation - 'a gift to be wondered at, not least by the creator' who discovers it and gives it form, a search for connections with self and others, an

expression of incarnation through which readers may connect with fresh insight (Jamieson 1997, 188-9). There is no explicit theoretical focus on reflection with the entire text of a poem, however. Nor is there any exploration of what a group setting might contribute to Reflective Practice through a poem.

Alongside poetry other 'aesthetic' representations of meaning such as dance, drawing or sculpting, may enable practitioners to tap into emotional aspects of their work (Moon 1999, 206). These techniques of 'holistic reflection' may 'make possible unique forms of understanding that are not possible through rational means of knowing' (Moon 1999, 61). Intuition may be accumulated in 'non-rational' reflection which builds up into a learned wisdom that is tacit and seemingly automatic (Polyani 1967, 1969), circumventing logical thinking processes (Dewey 1933; Schön 1983, 1987; Korthagan 1993). Problematic situations in practice may manifest this taken-for-granted knowledge (Eraut 1994, 2000). It may be accessed, articulated, examined and reinforced in CPD through appropriate techniques such as writing poetry.

2.6i   Poetry and Theological Reflection

When Practical Theology is construed as Theological Reflection it draws on a range of disciplines including social sciences, psychotherapeutic and medical disciplines and the arts to undertake 'critical, interrogative enquiry into the processes of relating the resources of faith to the issues of life' (Graham, Walton and Ward 2005b, 6). Whilst Theological Reflection overlooks the aesthetic in comparison with standard empirical methods of social research (Couture 1999; Bennett-Moore 2001), reflection through imaginative literary word-forms such as metaphor and story has been encouraged as a form of critical practice (Graham, Walton and Ward 2005b, 89-222; Thompson, Pattison and Thompson 2008, 65-70; Nash and Nash 2009, 57-69). Bennett-Moore (2001) and Slee (2007a) commend poetry as a means of

deep and emotionally connected Theological Reflection, seen broadly as 'the discipline of exploring individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage' (Killen and de Beer 1994, viii). From this perspective Theological Reflection is an art as much as a science, a creative activity of meaning-making and spiritual discernment which is always a movement towards insight and which balances critical, interrogative and analytic skills with more creative, synthesising and integrative impulses. For Anglican clergy Theological Reflection will often take the form of conversation on events, feelings and principles concerned in their ministry practice, such as occasional offices, as they connect their work with the more tacit dimension of Church as '…incarnate in particular times and places…how it is being Christ for others, and bread for the world' (Percy 2013, 15). In the context of clergy reflection on ministry practice, Pattison's (2000d, 135-145) characterisation of Theological Reflection as 'critical conversation' between (a) personal ideas, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and assumptions, (b) the Christian tradition and (c) the contemporary situation under examination, overlaps with Reflective Practice.

Poetry resists instrumentality (Slee 2007a, 2) yet serves as an excellent teacher of skills and abilities that comprise the artistry of Theological Reflection, such as careful reading of texts and listening to narratives; the discipline of paying attention; the freeing up of the creative imagination, accessing of the affective and symbolic; the search for images and metaphors that might lead to insight; the work to find appropriate and authentic form; the development of a distinctive 'voice'; the consolidation and integration of other forms of learning. The activities of creative writing – poems, prayers, litanies, other creative methods - can function in a wide range of ways, but may be particularly good for getting under the surface of things to explore underlying emotions, feelings and intuitions, and for detecting subtleties of meaning, pattern and significance in situations.

Slee is exceptional in commending poetry as literary form as a means of fostering deep reflection. This insight has yet to be developed through empirically-based reflection on the experience of poetry in Theological Reflection among clergy or of its contribution to ministerial development. The shift towards the hermeneutical focus of Practical Theology (Graham 1996; Pattison and Lynch 2005) draws on and also generates a wealth of theological resources for reflection (e.g. Maitland 1995; Kinast 2000; Thompson, Pattison and Thompson 2008). Graham, Walton and Ward's survey of methods and sources (2005, 2007) features reflection working through the power of words (Alves 1990) and of literary forms, figures and practices such as narrative, parable and metaphor (McFague 1982). The theme of poetical language is frequently touched-on, but nowhere in this scheme is a poem attended to as a form of Theological Reflection. Walton's (2014) development of *poesis* in Theological Reflection methodology works with prose creative-writing rather than poems. Furthermore, texts exploring Theological Reflection in the practice of ministry, both in offering practical exercises or commending it as integral to ministry, make regular reference to image, metaphor and imagination - 'a rich source of metaphor' (Nash and Nash 2009, 62-69) - but there is no attention to the reflective potential of entire poems. As a way of fostering reflexivity among practitioners both Reflective Practice and Theological Reflection overlook poetic literary form and the ways in which metaphor operates within the economy of an entire poem. It is as if metaphor resembles a prize truffle to be hunted in the poem as ancient woodland, dug up and lifted out for enjoyment elsewhere. As a mode of theological imagination, poetry has its own integrity:

> …poetry is surely not 'second order' reflection on discrete primary experience. Rather, in the gift of images symbols and other figures of speech, along with the constraints of form, a kind of creative spirit enables the generation of elusive yet direct insight (or *theōria*) into truths that transcend logocentric rationality (Young 2013, 3-4).

2.6ii Phronesis without poetry

The practice of Theological Reflection and Reflective Practice is commended as a core discipline in faithful, flourishing ministry, vital as prayer and sacraments (Litchfield 2006, 4). Reflective method should be portable, performative and communal in order to discern the presence and activity of God in a complex and changing world (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995, 3) – there is less emphasis on the strictures of method and more on the distillation of truth discerned through practice – *phronesis*, practical wisdom distilled in the discipline of reflection as *habitus* (Farley 1983; Graham 2000; Gadamer 2004; Graham, Walton and Ward 2007, 46). Sadgrove (2008, 9) commends learning the *habitus* of wisdom found in the poetic tradition of Scripture. This vocational resource for the demanding tasks and challenged identity of public ministry is exercised through an 'ordered life' continually seeking insight – 'alive to its meaning and purpose in God's scheme of things' (84-93). The wise priest will interpret in a way which brings reality into 'God's focus' (44). Yet Sadgrove makes no connection with the value of poetry as a resource in the reflective enterprise of CME. Poetry is overlooked in other reflective practices such as pastoral supervision, summarised as *attentiveness* to practice in its various dimensions (Leach and Patterson 2010). A characteristic of this attentiveness is *playfulness* – the capacity to listen actively and skillfully to experience and to reimagine reality by leaping over preconceptions, risking failure in order to act faithfully (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995, 70, 142). For Whorton, reflectiveness *connects* meaningfully with others and the self at depth (2011). Yet poetry remains unconsidered as a resource. Whilst Whipp quotes Galloway's poem 'Over Coffee' (1993) in which the poet reflects on her sense of inarticulacy as a minister receiving the 'immensity' of confidences told in ordinary conversation, she offers no reflection on it (2013, 136-7); her reference to Bowen's 'Litter stick' (1993) pays no attention to the text of the poem, which is

unquoted (2013, 136). Though poetry features in a range of ways within Practical Theology (Capps 1993; Pryce 2010), and Theological Reflection is generated in and through poems (Lewin 1993; Adu 2001; Williams 2008; Tillier 2013), this is under-theorized.

While Graham, Walton and Ward recognize narrative and poetic power in reflection, taking up the revelatory value that Ricoeur sees in parables, stories and fiction (2005b, 66), there is no focus on working with the particularity of a poem. This is in contrast with the perceived value of poetry in CPD in business (e.g. Whyte 1997, 2002; Windle 2006), medicine and nursing (e.g. Wagner 2000; Hunter 2002; Macduff and West 2002; Foureur et al 2007; Curtis 2013), counselling and psychotherapy (e.g. Leedy 1969; Canham and Satyamurti 2003; Hedges 2005), and education research (e.g. Saunders 2003). The inter-disciplinary, conversational approach of Practical Theology proposed for the framework of this inquiry enables cross-fertilization from other professional domains to enhance the theory and practice of CME, particularly as it relates to the potential of poetry as a tool for Reflective Practice. Whilst research into professional development and Reflective Practice in other professions addresses the contribution of poetry, I have found no indication of research linking poetry and CME. Attention to creative writing and literary material as reflective method in Theological Reflection (Killen and de Beer 1995; Ward 2005; Veling 2005; Walton 2014) focuses predominantly on a prose-narrative approach. The potential for theorizing poetry as a tool for Theological Reflection and Reflective Practice remains under-developed. This lacuna in researching the possibilities of poetry in CME is particularly striking when considered alongside poetry's reflexive value within the broader CPD domain, and in relation to poetic self-understanding as creative practice and literary art-form.

2.7   What poetry claims for itself

Poets' reflexivity across centuries and cultures, both as creative writers and literary critics, has generated a substantial literature on the significance of poetry (Schmidt 2001). As a poet using poetry in CME, I will now attend to a number of English-language poets who are influential in my own creative formation to identify what capacity for reflection they discern in poetry: 'evidence from practice has its own contribution' (Jones 1973, 12).

2.7i   Poetry as voice of the excluded

In a long poem celebrating his native Birmingham, Fisher says: 'Most of it has never been seen' (1961). Poetry gives voice to particular localities, persons and social groups, including those marginalised by dominant cultural convention, testing 'the truth of images of reality', which stifle difference (Hooker 1982, 11). It also gives voice to unheard communities. This is powerfully the case for feminist poets like Slee (2009), and a compelling priority for dialect poets such as Walcott writing both in mother-tongue and 'mother's tongue', and for ethical poets like Murray eradicating 'relegation of any sort' through vibrant expression of cultural specificity (Schmidt 1998, 2). Poetry speaks from the place of struggle and marginality: 'The inmost spirit of poetry…is at bottom, in every recorded case, the voice of pain…poetry, is the treatment by which the poet tries to reconcile that pain with the world' (Hughes 2007, 459).

2.7ii   Poetry integrates past and present

Poetry is a resource rooted in cultural tradition through literary form and content. A Shakespeare sonnet, for example, gives access to the accumulated wealth of culture through the contemporary purchase of its language and sentiments: 'poems swim free of their age and live in ours' (Schmidt 1998, 9). Poets consciously subsist in an ecology enriched by the work of predecessors, for 'things truly made preserve themselves through time in the first freshness

of their nature' (Muir 1954a, 280-1). Eulogizing Eliot, Spender writes of how in poetry 'the living shall read/The more living - the dead!' (1994, 46). The creative power of the poet is not domination but 'access to sources', connecting readers to the history of words and to the variety of human experience accumulated in literature (Rich in Parini 2008, 22). Alert to the past, poetry continually remakes language and expands its vision in relation to the present; so where women are excluded from the tradition – 'a book of myths/in which/our names do not appear' - the poet dives down to confront the wreck of patriarchal culture and see what can be salvaged (Rich 1973).

2.7iii   Poetry as reflective space

Artistic culture is 'the main instrument of society's self-knowledge' (Havel in Constantine 2013, 134). As part of the literary dimension of this reflexivity, the 'office of poetry' is to 'say the human in all its variety' (Constantine 95, 129). Paying close attention to the texture and tone of human experience, poetry is good for the 'quickening of sympathy'; its cultural reach derives from 'exact and loving knowledge of particular human beings in their dealings with the world in particular time and place' (Constantine 106). Religious poets no less than others are *diesseitig*, 'on this side', rather than dealing exclusively in abstraction or metaphysics (Constantine 16). A poem's rootedness is in place and language as well as personality and circumstance; yet its *poetic* value lies in the imaginative power of its imagery, not in its recording of detail (Constantine 109). Whilst a poem makes the individual figurative by fully acknowledging his or her individuality - 'the "absolute quality"' (MacNeice in Constantine, 31) – poetry celebrates this particularity in 'The drunkenness of things being various', for 'World is crazier and more of it than we think/Incorrigibly plural' ('Snow' 2007, 24). Thus poems are a 'holding-ground' for examining the particularities of lived lives, resonant spaces for contemplation. In their capacity to evoke experience poems 'bring ideas back to life' by

locating the reader into the places from which they arise 'so as to be thought and felt again as if for the first time'(Davis 2013, 4). 'To restore a common-place truth to its first *uncommon* lustre' says Coleridge, 'you must first have *reflected* on its truth' (1913, 1).

2.7iv   Poetry is unbiddable

Poetry's capacity to evoke experience and to speak from the margins is guarded by a radical resistance to exploitation by authority extrinsic to its creative origin and purpose: 'poetry resists capture' and this is most transparent in the art of translation to another language (Clancy 1999, 62). Whilst poetry may seem to be integrated into the cultural mainstream, the life of the imagination is such that poems are unpredictable, untamed, likely to come at things from an unforeseen perspective: the poet is 'an ambassador of Otherwhere' (Graves in Constantine 2013, 3). Poets differ on how particular poems arise and take their form: some crafted through careful revision (Amis in Gibson 1973, 24), others written 'straight, with scarcely any alteration at all' (Jennings, 90), arising as sheer gift: 'something that wrote itself instantly, as though dictated from some unknown source…haunting and never fully understood' (Lee, 105). Heaney reflects on how occasionally a poem comes 'like a ball kicked in from nowhere'; the poet's task is simply to go after it (2008, 366). All creativity entails the disciplined work of nurturing language and form which produces the 'surge of utterance' and 'forcibleness', as if 'the lines had been decreed' (355-6).

A poem is polysemic, generative of multiple interpretations, its rich possibilities of meaning defy simple utility: 'poetry just being useful is a bigger sin than poetry just being pleasurable' (Heaney 2008, 176). Poetic independence is inalienable, fundamental to safeguarding its source and spring: '…the chief characteristic of poetry (is) that the spirit of it refuses to be directed' (Hughes 2007, 459).

2.7v   Poetry revives language

Poetry is ascetic: the vocation of the poet is 'day-by-day, word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence, struggle' restoring language 'to the state of plain speech, a revealer of truth, a preserver of freedom' (Williams 2011, 12). The authentic poet anchors his work in immediate and unpredictable reality, resisting the lure to produce 'magic words' of advertising culture in order to pursue the prophetic 'diagnosis of dead words and false acts' (Williams 50). So Merton's poetry contradicts the propaganda of American imperialism and nuclear weaponry; Heaney challenges a world diminished by the reduced speech of George W. Bush (2008, 196). For Parini, contemporary poetry's task is to counterbalance the rhetoric of 'War on Terror' in the tradition of Blake 'building Jerusalem', Dickinson 'lighting lamps', Auden's '…voice/To undo the folded lie', and Stevens providing 'the bread of faithful speech' (116-132). A task of poetry is to 'brood over' language (Hill 2003, 20 - resonating with pneumatological themes of Genesis 1), to purify and trace its connections with the deep roots of religious culture, keeping alive an authentic discourse capable of learning, lament, and revelation amidst the cacophony of popularist mass-media: 'Erudition. Pain. Light. Imagine it great/unavoidable work; although: heroic/verse a non-starter, says PEOPLE' (Hill 2001, 1). Poetry's capacity to offer this re-visioning comes through its relentless attention to words in the construction of meaning, reflecting on life as it is imagined, described, talked-up, talked-down, or stifled. For many poets achieving simplicity and immediacy of language is an artistic aspiration (Thomas 1964, in Anstey 1986, 83), what Wordsworth calls 'the real language of men (sic)' (Davis 2013, 4). From this perspective 'poems are not written to conceal meanings, but to express them exactly'; their artfulness is in exploiting, to its fullest potential, language shared with prose, in communicating the felt emotion or experience of the author (Beaty and Matchett 1965, 9). Whilst much literary critical poetics and creative-writing theory demonstrates the art

of formal technique in expressing emotion, experience and perceived truth through metre, rhyme and vocabulary (Sansom 1997; Wolosky 2001; Lennard 2006) poetry is also interpreted as a linguistic exercise, a symbolic game or code in which the "I" or "Truth" of a poem is constructed to produce in the reader experiences of pleasure or pain (Blasing 2007, 1-9). From this perspective the poem is "human" in that it is a construction; its authenticity is its artifice. Poetry is not intended to be uncomplicated, says Williams: 'It sets you puzzles. It requires work' (Moreton 2014, 31).

2.7vi Poetry is both personal and public

In a poem originating in the poet's historical life and imagination, 'private truth is made a public good' (Constantine 2013, 27). The reader gains access to intimate life-experience imaginatively re-presented: 'Poetry is the profession of private truth, supported by craftsmanship in the use of words' (Graves 1967, 26). Thus poetry 'allows us to see ourselves freshly and keenly. It makes the invisible world visible' (Parini 2008, 181). The word-craft of a poem presents experience to the reader with vivid persuasiveness, perhaps because the poet is absorbed in that which he describes, the 'negative capability' of the 'camelion poet' (Keats in Constantine 2013, 29-30). The reader is moved, participates imaginatively in the world of the poem, 'extends the biographical self' as he recalls his own past or conceives new ways of being beyond his experience; the imaginative power of the poem is immense, yet the potential for fresh meanings is never exhausted: 'the poem exceeds the poet, exceeds the present reader too, goes its own way, also and always for somebody else, some further human being, elsewhere' (Constantine 2013, 28-30). The interpretative afterlife of a poem is outside the poet's control: 'once a poem gets written, it is, in a manner of speaking, none of your business' (Heaney 2008, 197).

2.7vii Poetry re-shapes the world it describes

This poetic 'saying' is not merely descriptive or narrative, writing *about* something; it is creative, *making* something new out of that to which it attends: the act of *poiesis* (Constantine 2013, 104-105; Nesbitt 2013). Poetry is re-creation, transformation through interpretation in language: 'writing is re-naming' (Rich 1979, 43), for in its creative endeavour 'all art re-presents' (Jones 1973, 173). This artful finding of words makes the processes of thought and speech, knowing and not knowing, apparent, allowing 'consciousness itself to emerge within the grid of the poem' (Parini 2008, xi-xii). Metaphor being 'the kernel of poetry' (Thomas 1964, in Anstey 1986, 79), reading poems becomes a study of the dynamics of metaphor operating in language and the construction of meaning (Taverniers 2002; Lakoff and Johnson 2003; Davis 2013, 7).

Poets are candid about the artifice that poiesis employs, the play of words to construct particular perspectives and lure the reader into emotional and intellectual response, what Larkin calls 'disguise' (Gibson 1973, 102). Patten's 'Prose Poem towards a Definition of Itself' celebrates the artful guile of poetry, which 'should pay no attention to its name', employing any literary technique (even prose!) to conjure the unpredictable, alternative, compelling artistry which is its character: 'the unicorn dying on the edge of the new industrial estates…the scar on a beautiful person's face' (Gibson 1973, 124-5).

2.7viii Poetry is the primary language of imagination

For Christian poets artistic production is vocational, epitomizing the *imago Dei* in created humanity, expressing a theological anthropology shaped by creative practice (Jones 1973, 13). Coleridge's theology of imagination is profoundly influential here:

> …the nearest we get to God… is as created beings. The poet by echoing the primary imagination recreates. Through his work he forces those who read him to do the same,

thus bringing them nearer the primary imagination themselves, and so, in a way, nearer to the actual being of God displayed in action (Coleridge: Chapter 13 *Biographia Literaria*, cited in Thomas 1963, in Anstey 1986, 64).

These artistic ways of knowing are threatened by scientific, rational and instrumental epistemologies of the 'megalopolitan technocracy and the kind of men it requires us to be' (Jones 1973, 16) in which the 'particular' ceases to hold deeper significance, dislocated from historical roots in European culture and dissociated from the presence of the divine in the created world:

> Today we live in a world where the symbolic life (the life of the true cultures, of 'institutional' religion, and of *all artists…*) is progressively eliminated – the technician is master. In a sense the priest and artist are already in the catacombs, but *separate* catacombs – for the technician divides to rule (Jones 1973, 103).

Yet Thomas is candid about the historic suspicion Christianity harbours towards the aesthetic (1963 in Anstey 1986, 64), acknowledging 'a kind of moralistic or propagandist intention' in his own poetry (1964 in Anstey 1986, 83). Whilst the imaginative is not universally welcome in the Church, this will not stifle religious poetry: '…it is not necessarily the poems couched in conventionally religious language that convey the truest religious experience' (Thomas quoted in Anstey 1986, 65). The task for the poet, religious or otherwise, is to 'take the words as one finds them, and make them sing' (1964 in Anstey 1986, 81). So, as a priest-poet, Thomas makes Nature and Wales his artistic priorities. As Heaney (2008, 451) says of Lowell: 'There was no more literary poet around but at the same time he was like a great cement-mixer: he just shovelled the world in and it delivered'. What emerges is 'a ratification of the impulse towards transcendence' (Heaney 470); poetry need not be explicitly religious to have a graced quality – 'the cure/By poetry that cannot be coerced' (Heaney 2001,7) – a tentative, revelatory impact on the reader which is profound yet oblique: '…the feeling of

being on the edge of something not quite revealed. Like watching the horizon just before sun-up. A true thing felt out by free association' (Heaney 2008, 388).

Yet poetry expresses in a more intense and memorable way than any other art-form the vision and revelation which comprise religious truth; poetry schools its readers in the language of revelation: 'Jesus was a poet…he is God's metaphor, and speaks to us so…How can anyone who is not a poet ever fully understand the gospels with their accumulation of metaphor?' (Thomas quoted in Anstey 1986, 90). The imaginative language of poetry is Christianity's *lingua franca*, to a degree that it becomes indispensable for discipleship (Oakley 2001, 43). For Murray poetry becomes an analogy for the divine in its irreducible creativity, '…God is the poetry caught in any religion…being in the world as poetry is in the poem, a law against closure' ('Poetry and Religion' 1991, 272-3).

2.7ix   Poetry teaches the art of reading

A poem invites careful reading to appreciate the possibilities of meaning that are generated through the nuanced and complex verbal structures of its form. Poems are 'democratic spaces' in which each reader is at liberty to find the responses appropriate for them; poetry 'elicits answering energies from our imaginations – if we listen closely' (Schmidt 1998, 7). This attentiveness involves giving weight to the ways in which a poem uses language, and gaining a perspective through an awareness of the literary traditions and cultural inspirations that inform the poem: 'The task is less to explain, than to illuminate; to set a poem free …the reader must *hear* it fully' (Schmidt 8, 11). This will involve cultivating 'techniques of ignorance' (Sisson in Schmidt 2001, 16) as a way of eluding habitual response and being open to new sounds in language and different ways of seeing familiar things. The opportunity to hear a poem read aloud helps it to become a poem rather than simply another text for critical scrutiny. The poem has to be read on its own terms:

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means (Collins 1988).

2.7x Poetry benefits from shared reading

Rich (1993) describes her labour of writing a poem as 'words…set down in a force field'
fraught with magnetic charges. In neuroscience, sonic-imaging of reader/listener brains
demonstrates the somatic impact of poetic word-forms as the compressed metaphorical
language of Shakespeare, for example, stimulates fresh activity in the brain, in contrast to
clichéd formulations which reinforce established mental pathways (Davis et al 2006; Davis et
al 2012; Oatley 2011, 206-7; Davis 2013, 5-13). Psychiatric medicine recognises the benefits
of *bibliotherapy* for patients suffering with a range of anxiety disorders (Davis 2009;
Billington et al 2011; NICE 2011). The Reader Organisation finds both linguistic and social
dimensions of shared reading and responding to literature in groups increases participant well-
being for socially marginalised people (Billington 2012; Billington et al 2013; Whelan 2013).

From a counselling perspective, Lynch and Neale draw favourable comparisons
between their *Make Friends with a Book* project and the benefits of psychotherapy (2014).
Five 'mechanisms of action' comprising a framework for the shared reading group contribute
to personal development and social and emotional growth for participants: regular group
meetings; reading literature aloud; sharing responses to what is read; the guidance of a trained
facilitator; and the importance of a safe and supportive environment. Within this framework
'the power of words, language, metaphor and stories to stimulate emotional and imaginative

responses' is striking, fostering 'moments of meaning' and instilling calm in participants. Endorsing van Gogh (2012), the healing value of poetry is its capacity simultaneously to stimulate both the cognitive and the emotional, restoring a sense of wholeness in participants which bridges thinking and feeling. The use of a literary text creates 'a degree of distance' which enables participants to regulate their own level of involvement in the group. The diversity of participant perspectives engenders a 'creative alchemy', though facilitators' skill is crucial in sustaining the group as a safe space, a role which in itself can be draining and distressing (Lynch and Neale 2014, 22-23).

2.8   Conclusion

This chapter has brought together a number of insights which suggest the value of researching the contribution poetry makes to CME as a dimension of my own practice. The critical incident analysis with which I began suggests that my use of poetry in CME is intuitive and deserves further examination so that critical analysis may surface tacit knowledge and transform practice. I have located poetry's CME role within the context of formal expectations for CME which now incorporates Reflective Practice within its paradigm of professional learning. Reflective Practice theory and Theological Reflection theory has looked towards metaphor and creative-writing methods as valuable agents in fostering Reflective Practice, though there has been scant focus on the value of the whole poem as literary form rather than as a resource from which metaphor can be harvested. Poets' reflections on form and language suggest poetry as an artistic practice which fosters profound insight into the world it describes. It has capacity to construct unforeseen imaginative realities which disturb conventions. This forms the theoretical framework on which the thesis is woven. I go on to

give my analysis of the data yielded from my inquiry into the possibilities of poetry in a CME

setting.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

Having located myself within the research enterprise and my prior commitments, motivations and conceptual frameworks as practitioner-researcher, I continue to render visible my interpretive agency in the research process by offering a critical evaluation of the individual components and overall intention of the inquiry. In this chapter I set out the initial design; in the following chapter I describe the research practice and process of data interpretation. I show how the design relates to the motivations and assumptions identified in previous chapters, shaped to research the role of poetry in my CME practice, and how the research-tools evolved in the course of the inquiry. In this way I aim to make my research decisions explicit (Flick 1998, 55) so that my authorship is 'audible' (Charmaz and Mitchell 1997, 194) and knowledge is 'accountable' through data which is 'retrievable' (Stanley 2004, 10).

3.2   The research design

My methodology was designed to undertake research in the domain of my own professional practice, particularly my use of poetry in CME, to generate a critical and nuanced understanding of the nature and potential of poetry as a resource for clergy to reflect on their experience of ministry, and develop an associated methodology for the effective use of poetry in CME settings. My aim was not to prove or validate poetry as a reflective tool but to pursue an heuristic study of the contribution which poetry makes within the context of my own work with clergy through developing '…a discovery procedure, a systematic way of exploring a topic to see what is particularly interesting or problematic or puzzling about it' (Johnstone 2012, 262). The inquiry is not without constraints however, pursued within a framework

constructed to be appropriate for researching professional practice, taking a qualitative rather than quantitative approach because the nature of professional development is experiential and transitory, a subjective phenomenon personal to both educational practitioner and participants, unique to particular practice situations which are never exactly replicable (Jarvis 1999, 30-31; Lee 2009; Taylor and Hicks 2009). The character of the research process was envisaged as iterative, provisional, and multivalent (Geertz 1973, 1983) using flexible, participative and imaginative investigative methods to be effective in the particularly sensitive context of researching professional colleagues (Blaikie 2000, 243; Liamputtong 2007; Grbich 2013).

My approach to researching poetry in the practice of CME was shaped by a range of principles which gave rise to a variety of methods and techniques in order to generate a rich picture of poetry in CME. Hence my research practice embraces hybrid methodology (Flick 1998, 226-7) and the principle of triangulation as 'crystallization' (sic) comprising multiple perspectives and interpretive practices (Richardson 2005, 963).

3.3   Aspirations and approaches

I now describe guiding principles for my research and associated research tools, before going on to reflect on my research practice in the field.

3.3i   Research grounded in experience

I needed a methodological approach which would attend to the lived encounter of clergy reading poetry, located in a CME setting in a way which would enable me to gain critical insight into my own professional practice. This suggests an ethnographic, inductive approach in order to apprehend participant perceptions, meanings and experiences and to reflect on them critically (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 10-11).

3.3ii   Attentive to the collegial character of CME

Given that most of my CME work involving poetry is with clergy groups of various sizes and constituencies, I required research methods allowing me to research clergy in a group setting rather than as individuals, whilst also attending to difference within groups and between persons and contexts. A research project wholly focussed around interviewing individual ministers about their favourite poet or poems would have yielded fascinating material, and may have been more manageable, but it would not have included the capacity to attend to the group dynamics which characterise most formal CME sessions in the C of E context. The research design enabled me to attend to the reflective potential of poetry within the context of professional ministerial relationships and the theological and social difference inherent in those settings.

3.3iii   Theologically engaged

I embraced Practical Theology as a suitable framework for reflection on professional practice, especially as this relates to using poetry as a means for reflection on ministry, because Practical Theology is explicitly interpretive and theological (Graham, Walton and Ward 2005a, 2005b, 2007). In attending to social processes and practices, Practical Theology brings critical theological analysis to the substance, shape and meaning given to lived experience and to the frameworks which govern these hermeneutics, promoting human flourishing and transformed practice, individually and corporately (Graham 1996). Practical Theology is inter-disciplinary, intentionally hosting a dynamic interaction between approaches, and locates the process of doing theology within these inter-connections of discourses and critical practices (Woodward and Pattison 2000). As a dimension of this enterprise, Practical Theology attends to the nature of language and its power, appreciating the potential of words in pastoral care (see Chapter 1.2). Practical Theology interrogates organisational discourse to

uncover the implications of its ideology for individuals and communities (Pattison 1997, 2000b).

3.3iv   Appreciative of poetry and attentive to language

Within this practical theological framework I use the *critical correlative method* as an approach which offers a theological rationale for bringing together of a number of hermeneutical approaches, fostering a generous, appreciative, critical and transformative approach to the study of subjective experience and professional practice (Pattison 1989; Ballard 2000; Swinton and Mowat 2006, 77). This method is particularly advantageous for an interpretive study of clergy experience integrating qualitative social research with theological interpretations in an ecclesial context. It also allows attentiveness to language and literary form to be integrated with other approaches to analysis. As recent methodological developments in the contribution of poetry and poetic inquiry in qualitative social research bring the poetic and the empirical into the same interpretive enterprise (Fontana and Frey 2005; Prendergast, Leggo and Sameshima et al 2009), Tracy's call to enrich the theological vision of Practical Theology by including the aesthetical and spiritual-mystical dimensions of art-forms and spiritual practices within the correlative enterprise is an invitation to draw on poetry as a methodological resource. Tracy commends poetry as a way of paying attention to the spiritual and theological experience of individuals and communities in particular settings (2011, 50-54). As a mode of critical enquiry Practical Theology is becoming poetical, and thus hospitable to a sustained reflection on the contribution of poetry in CME.

3.3v   Practicable and transformative for professional practice

Working as a part-time researcher with clergy colleagues who are volunteers, giving valuable time to participate in the research project, I needed an approach which embraced practicability

and flexibility, valuing an evolving research method able to respond to particular circumstances and be attentive to difference. This resembles the character of much CME work, which has to adapt to available time, resources and patterns of ministry among clergy. I required an approach which would enable transformed practice (Graham 1996, 2000), helping me to appreciate the learning in an evolving method rather than one which resists change. Thus the research strategy is influenced by the insights of Action Research (Cameron et al 2005, 26) in which knowledge-creation is seen as a collaborative enterprise between researcher and participants, developed through a cycle of reflection on action/experience with participants, resulting in shared knowledge (phronesis), transformed practice and changed attitudes, facilitated and directed by myself as research-practitioner (Todd 2009, 44-52; Cameron et al 2010, 58).

3.4   Research ethics

My intention was that the research should benefit participants, contributing to their ministerial development as well as my own. The practice-based nature of the research implied a number of serious ethical considerations which would require appropriate protocols, safeguards, and self-awareness personally and professionally on my part as researcher and by participants. Participation in the University research ethics procedure was useful in providing an opportunity to think through systematically ethical dimensions of the research process in compliance with the University code for research (Appendix 3.1). The inherent power difference in research relationships was potentially further complicated by the pastoral, hierarchical nature of ecclesial working relationships (Fox, Martin and Green 2008, 76-111). Given that as a researching professional I was straddling 'dual roles' (Jarvis 1999, 8-9) my approach to practice-research ethics sought to integrate with my pastoral and educational

responsibilities supporting the ministry of others, an integrated ethical approach for practitioner-research which Moschella describes as 'caring for relationships' (2008, 86-114). Ethical confidence in my conduct was essential not only for the integrity of the research but also for the on-going viability of my professional educational ministry. In the unusual circumstances of a research setting (audio-recording, note taking, the presence of a 'neutral observer') I was conscious that clergy participants would require re-assurance that their contributions were confidential to the research process and not material for sharing within the diocesan structures of which we were members, so that they felt free to contribute reflections without judgement, and also that they may withdraw from the research process without penalty. These ethical dimensions were crucial to my professional standing as a diocesan officer as well as a researcher.

These ethical principles shaped a number of complementary safeguards to ensure informed choice for participants, summarised in the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 3.2). Given that research participants were encouraged to share freely and to listen with mutual respect in the group process, I anticipated a degree of risk that some clergy might feel exposed. I prepared simple ground-rules for confidentiality and appreciative listening in the RPPGs to which participants were asked to agree at the outset, confirmed by a Participant Consent Form. Given the reflective nature of the process in which emotional issues or personal difficulties might arise for individuals, and to enable pastoral boundaries so that the research purposes of the RPPGs were not diverted, I gained the agreement of the relevant diocesan Advisers for Clergy Pastoral Care and Counselling to be available to participants, and this resource was made known at the outset of each RPPG series. Ethical accountability was built-in to the research through guidance and supervision by Research Supervisors. Participant information material included these contact details. I received the support and

goodwill of Birmingham Diocese as my employing organisation to undertake this research as a dimension of and development in my professional practice, but it had no control over the research or its findings, and at no point were any enquiries made by diocesan officials about any aspect of the research, the participants, or the findings.

I decided to exclude Curates from the research on ethical grounds as my CME role includes oversight for assessment in years 1-3 of ordained ministry. This was a difficult decision: Curates comprise some 20% of the clergy work-force in Birmingham, so the potential research group was significantly reduced. Furthermore, given that my association with Curates at formational stage is close and intensive, their exclusion felt like a departure from my ministerial role. This ethical decision was part of a transition towards an enhanced role as a researching professional, and foregrounded issues of power dynamics within my working relationships with clergy that I had not considered in a critical way before.

3.5   Poetry in reflective practice groups

The research involved a longitudinal study of clergy reflection on ministry using poetry in a series of four *Reflective Practice Poetry Groups* (RPPG A, B, C, and D). I facilitated each RPPG, comprising between four and six participants, meeting for five or six sessions of one hour. After an introduction explaining the research process and ground rules in Session 1, each subsequent session followed a similar pattern designed to enable participant clergy to focus on a poem or poems (hereafter, the *research poems*) which I pre-selected as an heuristic device to foster shared reflection on ministerial practice. The research poems were selected from a collection I had accumulated through Reflective Practice work with licensed ministers and lay people. My choice of poems for the RPPGs exemplifies a reflexive approach to ministry practice (see section 2.6), intending to focus critical conversation on pastoral care

('Sick Visits'; 'Visitor'), occasional offices ('A Priest at a Funeral'), the cure of souls in particular communities ('Soho Road'; 'A Prayer to Live with Real People'), and leading and preaching in public worship ('In Church'). Each poem was presented at the outset of the session to evoke an issue or family of concerns relating to ministry experience. The full texts of the research poems and a schedule of their use in RPPGs are appended (Appendices 3.3) with my RPPG process protocol (Appendix 3.4).

The method I used to structure the RPPG process was as follows:

a. I introduced a pre-selected poem, relating it to a theme in ministry which I invited the group to address. I distributed a text of the poem to each participant, read the poem twice, and invited participants to reflect on their own experience in conversation with one another in response to the poem.

b. During the sessions, data was collected by digital audio-recording the conversation and by the researcher hand-writing notes.

c. As facilitator, to foster reflection, I briefly introduced a theme for consideration, along with some initial thoughts and questions about the poem in relation to a dimension of ministry, with the aim of fostering a free-flowing conversation to develop between participants.

d. At the conclusion of every session, each participant was invited to give a brief summary of any particularly significant insight, learning or issue which may have occurred during the conversation, in terms of a phrase, metaphor or word-image for the experience of ministry. These responses were recorded.

e.   Immediately after each session I wrote up Research Notes. The audio-recording was transcribed as soon as possible.

f.   In the sixth and final meeting participants had the opportunity to reflect on their experience of the entire process. Participants were reminded that they would be invited to comment on research findings, and to offer further reflections.

To some degree this pattern resembled my use of poetry in previous CME, with some important differences. Previously my use of poetry had been more of a presentation followed by participant response, rather than a free-flowing reflective conversation. The former is largely a product of working with large groups, whereas the smaller research group gave an opportunity to experiment with a different style. The intentional research character of RPPGs enabled me to take a step back from my familiar CME role and bring a dimension of critical analysis to my facilitation. Giving a distinctive name to the refection group was a first step in a reflexive process of researching professional practice, as was constructing a formal group protocol. For this I drew on techniques shaped by Focus Group theory (Kreuger 1988, 18) to foster in-depth discussions in a permissive and non-threatening environment in order to obtain participant perceptions. Working with groups rather than individual clergy enabled me to collect a rich and comprehensive wealth of data in ways which were economical in terms of research time (Bloor et al 2001).

In terms of research sampling strategy, the *a priori* practice-research focus of the study determined that the research group should be clergy of Birmingham Diocese engaged in CME. Recruitment was *gradual* (evolving over the course of the project), *purposive* (broadly representative), and embracing *convenience* (shaped by conditions of limited resources and timescale) (Patton 1990). All participants were volunteers, including Stipendiary and Self-

Supporting Clergy; 'active retired' clergy were also potential participants. Given that my

research aim was a study of poetry in CME, I did not seek to collect a scientific sample of

Birmingham clergy. In recruiting I bore in mind representative pastoral values regarding sex,

ethnic origin, ministerial experience, social setting and Church tradition that would inform,

for example, the recruitment for a clergy CME planning committee.[3] I planned to minimise

the risk of failure to recruit sufficient participants and to sustain long-term commitment to

RPPGs by taking ministerial work patterns into account. This required careful diary

management and awareness of pressure-points in professional rhythms of work, such as

avoiding festival seasons or 'school run' periods, factors in shaping the research design for

which the insider knowledge of a researching professional is advantageous.

Participants were recruited by open invitation within Birmingham, by personal

invitation and via the diocesan e-Bulletin. In two cases participants recruited another

colleague. This replicates participant patterns for CME events which are advertised generally

and by word-of-mouth inter-personal contact. An Initial Questionnaire allowed participants to

self-identify in terms of sex, ethnic origin, formal theological education, prior professional

formation, ministerial experience, current context of ministry, habits of participation in CME,

and attitudes to poetry. The questions were designed to stimulate reflection on poetry prior to

participation in the group sessions. A summary of RPPG participants and process is presented

for detailed reference (Appendix 3.5).

To ensure participation from clergy who were disinterested in terms of our immediate

working relationship (Flick 1998, 62), I formed RPPG C from clergy of a neighbouring

diocese through collaboration with CME colleagues. For practicalities of time and

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[3] C of E dioceses do not hold official statistics for licensed clergy on criteria of sex, sexual orientation, ethnic origin or Church tradition. Regarding ministerial deployment, there is no formal categorisation of parishes in terms of social demography.

organisation this RPPG took the form of an overnight residential consultation which comprised six hour-long reflection sessions interspersed with meals and worship (Appendix 3.5iii).

Locations for RPPGs A, B and D, and participant refreshments, were provided by clergy hosts, situated in the sitting-room or dining room of a vicarage. Seating was arranged to allow ease of participation for all members and optimal audibility for data recording. In compliance with the University ethics review stipulation I ensured there were no risks to health and safety for participants in these venues. Each vicarage had the advantage of relative comfort and privacy compared to a public space such as a church hall, but in sessions I was conscious that those hosting groups should not dominate conversations, nor indeed become anxious about practical arrangements. Neither of these appeared to be the case in any RPPG session. Reimbursement of expenses was offered to participants but none was requested. Small gifts of appreciation were given to the hosts of RPPGs A, B and D. The venue, hospitality and other costs associated with the RPPG C residential in a comfortable retreat centre were provided from the clergy CME budget of that diocese.

3.6   Research reflexivity

From the outset I adopted an epistemological stance in which knowledge is regarded as situated, subjective, socially constructed and gendered (Slee 2004), what Pels describes as 'the constitutive inseparability of knower and known' (2000, 2). My affinity with poetry required an approach which would enable me to attend to the reality of my own interpretive agency, and also to participant allegiances and predispositions, not pretending to remove influence on others, '…but to know it' (Gouldner 1973, 77). I envisaged that the reflective process would be a collegial enterprise in which my participant observer role was

characterised as *reflective partner* participating in the research dynamic (Habermas 1970, 1972; Blaikie 1993), a *dialogic facilitator* who encourages a 'polyphony of voices… in order to reduce bias and distortion' (Fontana 1994, 214; Blaikie 2000, 52-57). To ensure a rich description of practice, the research incorporated further means of data-gathering and reflexivity. This was not undertaken for purposes of positivist verification of data but to deepen insight into participant experience.

3.6i   Neutral Observer

I invited a Neutral Observer to be present in RPPG sessions, to enhance triangulation by providing a different perspective on proceedings from my own. His observations were a sounding board on which to test my insights as researcher. The Neutral Observer's contribution, set out in a role description given to all participants (Appendix 3.6a), was intended as an informal conversation partner and critical friend to deepen my reflexivity about the RPPG process, not as a research assistant. The Neutral Observer completed a fresh Consent Form for each RPPG in order to guarantee confidentiality to participants. On five occasions the Neutral Observer exceeded his observational role by making a contribution to the RPPG dialogue in the form of a spoken interjection. None of these comments were taken up by participants into the conversation. Reflecting on this afterwards with the Neutral Observer he felt that these interjections arose because he became so absorbed in the descriptions of ministry that were being shared in response to the poems – an appreciative perspective that comes through in his summary reflection (Appendix 3.6b). This indicates that although the NO was a useful sounding board for what I was observing in the groups, there is no absolute neutrality in empirical research, and particularly in the affective domain of poetry and ministry.

3.6ii   Participant interviews

Selected participant interviews were conducted following completion of RPPG A, B and C, after an initial analysis of data, using a semi-structured one-to-one protocol (Appendix 3.7). My overall selection rationale was to generate further data enriching the description of clergy experience from particular insights. From RPPG A I selected Shirley for interview because I was interested in her perceptions of the experience of conflict within the group, and also because of her professional adult educational expertise. Michaela was particularly interesting to me because of her powerful reactions to Zephaniah's 'Soho Road' which challenged my own preconceptions about the poem. From RPPG B I chose Janet because I was keen to pursue her insights into the value of poetry as a form of reflection, and Peter because he had expressed personal hesitations around poetry. I selected Nancy from RPPG C to gain further reflections on poetry as a reflective tool from the perspective of a CME colleague.

I was conscious that selection was not an objective process and that the interview is not a neutral tool (Scheurich 1995). Whilst I was careful not to influence the responses, much of the interviewing developed an empathetic character, and some insight was co-constructed through creative conversation (Kong et al 2002). This partnership ethic of empathetic interviewing to research my professional practice relates well to my CME ministry fostering participative learning, and from this perspective I undertook all the interviews myself rather than engaging a separate researcher. It was agreed in advance with each interviewee that the ground-rules for confidentiality and withdrawal established for RPPGs applied also to the interview material.

3.6iii Auto-ethnographic journaling

Inquiry into others is also a process of discovery of self (Fontana and Frey 2005, 97). I sought to generate 'active reflexivity': a critical self-scrutiny as researching-professional (Mason 1996) through keeping a research journal (Moon 2010). I made regular written records of my impressions, hunches, intuitions, observations of the research process and its effect on me and my professional practice, and my perceptions of its impact on others. My journaling also reflects on the poems as they are used in the groups, and gathers poems and other material relating to the research process.

One reflexive method of journaling was to dialogue with a personification of the DPT programme as a way of testing out my feelings and ideas about participation in the research process and its impact on my identity and professional practice (Pryce 2011a). My conversations with the shifting and elusive DPT character (reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's Orlando) helped me to fathom my way through the uncertainties of a brand-new programme (Appendix 3.8).

3.6iv Auto-ethnographic poetry

My aim in writing auto-ethnographic poetry (Ellis and Bochner 1996; Holman Jones 2005) in response to the research process and data analysis was to emphasise that the enterprise is 'artful' on my part as researcher – the product of my own interpretative choices – but also high-lighting the skill and bias that the researcher as reader brings to interpreting the recorded text of research transcripts and journals (Stanley 1990). The poems are a reflection on my practice as researcher as well as CME officer (Bolton 2005), expressing something of how the research process affects me as person, priest and poet, as well as participants and readers (Letherby 2003), indicating how the self is central to research (Stanley and Wise 1993). This

reflexive aspect of 'Poetic Inquiry' (Darmer 2006; Lahman et al 2010; Sullivan 2009) is integral to the research process and selected poems are included in the thesis as a component part of the research report.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has set out my aspirations, approaches and intentions in the research design. The next chapter will describe the research practice as it unfolded in the fieldwork and analysis stages. The following poem is a reflection on the artistic work of Matisse as a research paradigm[4] which expresses the challenges of capturing and representing the energy, vibrancy and contingency of an organic creative enterprise in a way which makes it available to the critical appreciation of others. Matisse and his team strove to maintain a sense of the multi-dimensional nature of his *cut-outs* when laid flat, such as revealing the rough edges which are torn or showing different layers of cut pieces laid on a flat base. In reproducing the cut-outs as prints their three-dimensional vibrancy risks being flattened-away, colour dulled without the play of light. This is analogous for the challenge of describing the research enterprise in a written report which does justice to the vibrancy of the dialogue and engagement of the RPPGs and reflective process with poetry.

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[4] In his sickness and old age Matisse no longer painted canvasses. Instead he cut out figures and shapes from sheets of painted paper which, at his careful direction, artistic assistants positioned and pinned to the walls of his studio at the Hotel Regina in Nice and rooms in the Villa le Rêve in Vence. The images were of human forms, birds, fish, flowers and fruit of different kinds. In due course these colourful and dynamic cut-out shapes were pinned and pasted to boards and framed as independent art-works. Later, the same cut-outs were reproduced as printed works in books and portfolios. These processes risked the loss of vibrancy from the original cut-outs Matisse created with scissors as he sat in bed or wheelchair. His friend Rouveyre said: "These paper cut outs have a very pure existence when they spring from your hands, your scissors. Their papery material, with subtle plays of light on their flexibility, the very physicality of this flexibility, all of this contributes to making something miraculous that loses its essence when laid out flat. But it retains its essence when stuck up on the wall with pins by Lydia. For doing that preserves the vitality of the paper I mentioned, by subjecting it to constant changes" (Hauptmann 2014, 22).

Poem: Matisse cut-outs

Your sea deep eye

scissors colour

light

from hands

fall

leaves

fly birds

swim fish across the ocean walls of sky

Pacific, coral, magic island studio

acanthus shade

in this world you have made

a place for Prospero's convalescence

gather the fruit of your yearning

dream

listen how the garden of your sickness

sings

in pinned and pasted shapes

that dance

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH PRACTICE

4.1   Introduction

Having set out the principal research design I continue to recount the story of the research as it unfolded through the fieldwork, describing the adjustments and research decisions that were taken at significant 'forks in the road'(Ganzevoort 2009). Whilst RPPG A was envisaged as a pilot for the group method, research practice continued to evolve through the entire fieldwork stage in the light of experience and changing circumstances. I focus on key transition points which are fundamental to the practice of the research and to my self-understanding as a researcher. To retain an alertness and flexibility in the research process I regularly audited my fieldwork practice through critical analysis of RPPG sessions through journaling, regular supervision, and in conversation with the Neutral Observer, asking myself what the various methods were yielding in response to the research question and what additional tools might further the inquiry. Emerging insights and questions were noted in order to explore, test and develop them further in following sessions, and the design was adapted to progress the research.

4.2   Straddling dual roles as researching professional

Initially I found a tension between my established role as educational facilitator and the new identity and practice as researcher. It took time to inhabit and combine both into the dual role of researching professional (Jarvis 1999, 8-9). The character of research within the RPPGs also took time to emerge, negotiating between facilitating a genuinely permissive culture in the group in which clergy responses to the poem unfolded at their own pace, fostering group interaction and pursuing directions of conversation that were participant-led, and a more

investigative role. My early tendencies were slightly towards a Group Interview approach –

seeking answers to questions about the impact of the poem and controlling the dynamics of

conversation (Bloor et al 2001, 42-43). Early sessions gave me confidence that the researcher

can also be facilitator, and alerted me to the reflective significance of the 'synergy' generated

between participants which allows opinions, meanings, and feelings in response to poetry to

emerge alongside individual experiences (Kitzinger 1994), and thus how my perceptions of

the dynamics of interaction between participants contributes data (Johnson 1996; Parker and

Tritter 2006, 34). Taking manuscript notes in addition to audio-recording captured these

dimensions of the group process, given that I felt video-recording would create an excessively

artificial and clinical environment unconducive to a reflective ethos.

4.3   Empirical social research as *bricolage*

My response to the early frustrations in recruiting participants to the research enterprise was

to find some encouragement in the notion of qualitative research as *bricolage* (Denzin and

Lincoln 2005, 2-4): '…piecing together fragments, eschewing elevated theoretical schemes,

aware of the provisionality and fragility of knowledge' (Graham 2000, 106) – a theme to

which I return in Chapter 5. This implies methodological entrepreneurialism rather than

passivity or haphazardness in the research enterprise. For example, I rejected the viability of

working with pre-existing, discrete clergy groups as an alternative to recruiting individual

participants, resisting the temptation to exploit for research purposes frequent invitations to

facilitate Reflective Practice with poetry in Deanery Chapters and other official clergy

meetings. Two issues dissuaded me: the likelihood that such groups would include Curates

whom I had excluded from the research, and also the question as to what extent participants

could give informed consent if involved as corporate members of a group rather than by individual choice.

4.4   Varying the pattern of sessions for RPPGs

Initially I envisaged RPPG sessions held at regular monthly intervals. In the event the practical difficulties of co-ordinating clergy diaries and limits on participant availability meant that intervals between sessions varied, and some (at the suggestion of RPPG A participants) were held back-to-back in a single afternoon or evening. For RPPG B I took the decision to opt for a more spacious programme of single sessions, with greater intervening periods to reduce pressure of double back-to-back sessions on myself as practitioner-researcher as I adjusted to the demands of *dual reflexivity*, simultaneously facilitating groups and making an ethnographic study of them. My interest was to enable a more spacious programme which might give a different ethos in the group, and therefore a different experience for participants. It also gave participants more scope to reflect on the poems and the sessions in the intervening periods between meetings, offering the possibility of greater reflexivity regarding the process in which they were engaging and the impact on themselves and their identity and practice in ministry. For RPPG C involving clergy from a neighbouring diocese, the sessions were held over a 36-hour residential. For RPPG D the intervals between sessions were a combination of the patterns for RPPGs A and B. In all four RPPG series the basic format of hour-long sessions remained standard.

4.5   Trusting a poem's generative capacity

In the early sessions of RPPG A I brought a stock of poems as potential material for reflection within the group. I quickly recognised that a single poem was sufficient to stimulate reflective

conversation in available time and that I could crowd-out reflection by introducing too many poems in a session. I took a decision to stay with a single poem in each session. Participants in all the RPPGs commented on their surprise and pleasure that a single poem could sustain corporate reflection and engagement for an entire hour. Two further points of learning are connected with this.

4.6   The value of multiple methods for research reflexivity

I was also straddling a dual role as researcher-poet. Having anticipated that a key part of my reflexivity would be in the form of auto-ethnographic poems, a mode of reflexivity which I imagined would flow naturally, I found that poems did not arise in accordance with a structured research programme! This initial personal poetic silence may have been an indication of the analytical demands that engagement in research can make at a deeper level for the practitioner. The vulnerability, autonomy and potential resistance inherent in the creative process is a dimension of poetical inquiry in qualitative research which deserves further methodological exploration, especially in the light of unfailing creativity assumed by much of the burgeoning literature (e.g. Prendergast, Leggo and Sameshima 2009).

I maintained other forms of reflection by continuing to use a research journal, supervisions, and peer review sessions with DPT colleagues as part of a research community to maintain a critical approach to the conduct of the research.

4.7   Letting-go of interpretive control

It became clear in the early RPPG A sessions that participant reflections on the poems I presented introduced insights and interpretations that I had not previously considered. In this sense participant response began to indicate the effectiveness of poetry as a stimulant for

clergy reflection, but my field-notes also record a personal negotiation in my own mind as facilitator about consciously relinquishing control of the interpretation of poems so that they could do independent work of fostering response in participant imaginations. An early innovation in method therefore was to note responses to individual research poems which accrued in the RPPGs, including particular words or phrases from a poem which participants offered at the end of session review. This allowed me to gauge expansion and transformation in my own understandings of the poems that flowed from the groups, as well as gathering data on the aspects of poems that participants felt had impacted powerfully on them. I offer examples of how the process transformed my insights into the research poems (Appendix 4.1).

4.8   Enabling participant reflective agency

I developed multiple methods to enable participants to reflect more intentionally on their experience of the group and its dynamics, and on the significance of the poems for their reflection on practice. In early RPPG A sessions, I forwarded a group e-mail containing metaphors which participants had focussed on at the conclusion of the session, inviting them to comment further on their own and/or on one another's metaphors. The intention was to maintain and deepen reflection between group sessions. I found that response to this email was minimal, and discontinued the practice in favour of other forms of reflection. A more fruitful mode was to allow a short time at the beginning of each session in which participants were invited to share reflections on the previous session and its poem. The invitation was made in the form of a question which I put to participants informally at the beginning of our time together: "I'd like to ask, looking back at our previous session and the poem we shared, if you have any reflections on the session or the poem, or if anything has popped up in your

minds since then?" This revealed some valuable reflections on the impact of poetry, e.g. that the significance of a poem could echo across days and weeks after a session, and new insights dawn in response to it. The reflectiveness stimulated by a poem was not confined to RPPG sessions.

4.9   Including participant choice of poems for reflection

A second development introduced participant involvement in the selection of poems in RPPGs B, C and D. Acknowledging the crucial role that the facilitator-researcher seemed to play in the reflection process, particularly in the choice and presentation of poems for the group, this offered a more robust method for identifying the nature of this influence in the reflection process. Participants were invited to bring a poem of their own choice to share in a session of the group dedicated for this, giving participants the opportunity to identify a poem that in some way addressed their personal concerns and commitments in ministry, and to reflect on the significance of the poem with the group. This also enabled a broader resource of poetry for participants to consider in relation to the research question, so that the study includes some material not selected by the researcher. I should make clear that within a single session of one hour the available time for each participant to introduce, read and receive the responses to their poem was very limited – about ten minutes per poem. Whilst this time-frame meant that introduction and responses to the poems were necessarily brief, the data shows a sufficiency to yield some helpful insights into the role of poetry in clergy CME for participants in this exercise. Reflection on the rationale participants gave for their choice of poem, and reflections on it in terms of ministry experience, yielded further data. A sample participant reflection is provided (Appendix 4.2).

Participants expressed appreciation of the invitation to choose a poem, and the response to and reflection on participants' poems suggests that the value of poetry for reflection was not confined to the poems I had chosen as facilitator-researcher. I decided to continue with this session in future groups, and to keep the form of words for the invitation to participants as the initial response indicated that it was clear and practicable.

4.10   Maintaining participant motivation and ethical integrity

At the outset of each session during RPPG A I had reminded participants verbally of the ethical basis on which the research was operating. Though informed participation is fundamentally important, reminding participants each time of the purpose of the research, the need for confidentiality, the nature of publication of material, their rights to withdraw etc., the participants came to find somewhat comical. For RPPG B, with sessions separated by greater intervals of time, I developed the practice of sending participants a reminder email which had Participant Information material as an attachment. I drew their attention to this each time in the email, thus freeing-up the first few minutes of the session. I decided that I would continue with this technique for reflection at suitable opportunities in future groups. The reminder email may also have been helpful for the research in keeping clergy committed to attending the sessions as there were no absences during RPPG B.

4.11   Developing methodology for participant interviews

Reflection on my experience of conducting semi-structured interviews with participants of RPPG A led to the distilling of a series of questions for one-to-one in depth interviews. This arose from a methodology evolved to resolve early tensions I experienced between the developmental role of adult theological educator in a CME capacity and data-gatherer as a

researching professional, and between a focus on group process and the role of poetry in reflection. In addressing the first tension, I found a feminist methodology of research interviewing as a mode for giving participants a voice, interpreting their experience in their own words, and thus enabling a degree of self-realisation, gives the interview an educational dimension in so far as this is conceptualised as self-realisation (Slee 2004). Hence I developed a more focussed, confident approach to interviewing individuals (and subsequently groups), and the empowering creative potential of the reflective process through interrogative dialogue. The series of questions developed in September 2012 after transcribing interview transcripts A1 and A2 embodies this confidence in the developmental dimension of interviewing whilst simultaneously ensuring that poetry's contribution to clergy reflective practice retained its proper place within the inquiry.

The residential nature of RPPG C, comprising clergy participants from disparate locations in another diocese at some distance from Birmingham, suggested that follow-up interviews would not be practicable in terms of time, travelling and financial costs involved. I therefore devised a two-part format for participant reflection which took place at the conclusion of the residential. First, I invited all participants to complete an individual review questionnaire completed privately (Appendix 4.3). After this, I facilitated a conversational group reflection to which all participants could contribute (Appendix 4.4).

I used this same method for session D6, given that participant reflections about the research experience generated in the group review conversation were no less insightful or acute than the perceptions expressed in one-to-one semi-structured interviews. It seemed valuable to have insights from two sets of one-to-one reflections from RPPGs A and B to compare with two group review sessions from RPPGs C and D, and to see what similarities and differences these generated in their reflections on poetry in CME. I retained the option of

asking individuals from RPPG D for one-to-one interviews if there was a need – for example, if significant conflict developed in the group that participants may be reluctant to talk about in a group situation, as in RPPG A, but the data generated by the group review was sufficient and indicated that my data gathering had reached saturation point.

4.12   Methods for attending to particular dynamics in RPPGs

As fieldwork progressed it became clearer that particular group dynamics within RPPGs could help or hinder reflection in a corporate setting, e.g. if there is hostility or some other threat experienced by participants. My ability to analyse this dimension of the reflective process was aided by undertaking a Critical Incident analysis (Bolton 2010, 8) allowing me to distil a cohesive picture about what relevance these might have for reflection through poetry (rather than the functioning of group dynamics as such). I focussed not only on vividly remembered events (Brookfield 1990, 4), but also tried to be vigilant about attending to the overlooked and untold (Sharkey 2004). This was useful for exploring the significance of conflict between Shirley and Matthew in RPPG A and between Nancy and Cora in RPPG C.

A second method was writing research poetry to reflect on the phenomenological 'fullness and complexity' of the research experience (Galvin and Todres 2009, 308). An example of this approach is the poem 'Research Chocolates' through which I analysed my own reactions as facilitator-researcher to the gender dynamics of being the only man in RPPG C and the awareness on my part of how the poem and the inquiry has always to be interpreted within a particular context (Appendix 4.5).

4.13　Interpretation

My aim was to gather a rich description of participant perceptions of the role of poetry in group reflection settings, together with my own perspectives on the process, which can inform reflection on practice. To make meaning from this wealth of material I required a process of data analysis which enabled me to access participants' meanings and interpretations, and to hear their individual perceptions of the experience in which they have been involved, as well as attending to my own experience.

4.14　Transcription

I undertook all transcription of group procedures and participant interviews into text in order to become immersed in the data material (Swinton & Mowat 2006, 177ff). I observed practical principles in the transcription of spoken discourse: manageability for the transcriber; readability, learnability, and interpretability for the analysis (Bruce 1992 in Flick 1998, 175). Observing transcription conventions developed for Discourse Analysis, I noted interactive patterns and character of speech which seemed indicative, e.g. laughter, silence, tone of voice, hesitation, repetition, turn-taking, etc. My field-notes also recorded aspects of speech-as-action, incorporating seating position within the room, gesture, eye-contact, and physical posture (Drew 1995, 64-79; Paltridge 2012, 106-126).

I experimented with different forms of representation for raw data. Where participants' expression struck me in their use of imagery and metaphor I considered transliterating this data into poetic form rather than prose to emphasise the character of the material (Prendergast, Leggo and Sameshima 2009, xix-xlii). I decided against this method to ensure a more direct engagement with the raw data; poetic form smoothed-out the hesitant character of some participant contributions, e.g. Shirley's halting reflections on the power of

poetry in IA1.3. Also representing dialogue becomes more complicated in poetic form, e.g. C3:11-12.

All electronic data is stored securely on my personal computer backed up on memory sticks kept in a secure location in my home, and fully backed-up on the Birmingham Diocesan Server, to which no other person has access (except IT Officer for technical maintenance). Manuscript data is also kept securely at home. These arrangements were approved by the University ethical review process.

Participant identity is protected in the transcripts by allocating fictional names rather than numbers to retain a sense of personality behind participant contributions. These names are congruent with the sex of the participant but give no other indication of personal features such as ethnic origin, church tradition or social class. Whilst the practice-based nature of the research makes its general setting identifiable, precise locations of the RPPGs are concealed. Groups and sessions are identified by a system of alphabetical and numerical coding – RPPG A, B, C and D; session A1, A2, A3 etc., with reference to page numbers in the transcript thus: A2.4, A5.22, etc.

Given the sheer volume of data gathered through the fieldwork I developed a schedule to track the transcription, analysis and secure storage of the material as it accrued, and an overview survey of data (Appendix 4.6).

4.15 Data analysis

Taking a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2005), themes in the data were identified through a sifting procedure of theoretical coding and categorisation. In order to create the closest possible familiarity with the data, I elected not to use specialist data analysis

software packages in this research. I used a constant comparative method, simultaneously coding and analysing data to identify emergent themes, developing concepts which were gradually refined and distilled over several months of paying attention to the data (Taylor and Bogdan 1998, 136-161). My coding system was graphic, using coloured pens to distinguish recurring or significant parts in the transcription texts, and extracting themes by writing them on coloured sticky notes, grouping and re-grouping them in a large A3 notebook (Appendix 4.7). My approach was influenced by Discourse Analysis (Johnstone 2012, 262), paying close attention to the language participants were using in conversations about poetry in both RPPGs and Interviews. I concentrated on participant metaphors and descriptive phrases, a poetic approach of attending carefully to images in the language rather than making a technical analysis of speech exchange (e.g. Todd 2013), seeking to identify the character of reflection on ministerial experience that was being articulated and to trace connections between this and the poems. I aimed to honour the data whilst retaining transparency about my own role in selecting and shaping it (Slee 2004, 57-59), finding a way that allowed the data to speak – to be generative and not reductively analytical.

In my analysis I am more interested in articulating my impressions and participant impressions of the effect of poetry on them as ministers – how it felt to them, what it evoked for them, what connections arose, what confusions descended. An eclectic and pragmatic attention to metaphor and description of the RPPG experience seemed appropriate for this – a process of carding and disentangling which draws into focus the relative weight of significance we accord to the intellectual and to the affective, both in methodology and in professional learning. The danger in metaphor is that it can polarize thinking and shade out other dimensions, magnetising the field of meaning and so can mislead. My analysis identifies themes and patterns in the data rather than landing on attractive metaphorical islands which

are treacherous and disconnected. The findings are suggestive – the sample is too small for water-tight consistency; the thesis is intended as an heuristic, qualitative piece of work.

Whilst the data generated in RPPGs could be analysed for group comparison purposes (e.g. comparing sessions over a sequence of weeks with those in a 24-hour residential, or between mixed-sex and single sex groups) I did not pursue this route of analysis because the inquiry concerns the contribution of poetry in CME rather than the significance of group dynamics as such (Flick 1998, 178-220).

The following research poems are a reflection on my approach to data analysis - the idea of sifting, disentangling and un-loosening that which is given.[5] In the process of research this sifting/carding idea has become fused with the craft of my (country-woman, house-maid) grandmother – her cooking, knitting and gardening skills – in which she employed a variety of methods to bring out the best in what she had and make it more distinctively itself. There is a parallel for me with qualitative research: 'The researcher is a craftsperson' (Taylor and Bogdan 1998, 10).

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[5] Poems first conceived March 2013 following a conversation with Professor Eleanor Nesbitt about the etymology of the term 'data analysis' in Nottingham, 2012; subsequent versions and transcribed 1st June 2013.

Poems: On data analysis[6]

On data analysis I: My Grandmother's cooking

"The secret to good pastry

Is cold hands",

Said deftly sifting flour,

Rubbing in the fat,

Then rhythmic fingers lifting out

A steady snow of crumbs to

Drift down in a measured fall

For water sprinkling, scooping up,

Kneading, rolling, shaping skill.

Tongues will marvel, savour at

This art of ordinary method:

Her way of working staple things

Stage by stage through cool-handed magic –

The taking-up of what is given,

Making it more apparent.

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[6]*data* – Latin, plural of *datum*: a thing given or granted; something known or assumed as fact, made the basis of reasoning or calculation (SOED 1973, 491); *analysis* – Greek, αναλυσις: unloose (SOED 1973, 66).

On data analysis II: The Craftswoman's assistant

In the knitting bag,

Beneath a fence of random needles,

Papered layers of crumpled patterns,

Is the tangle of wool.

Made viceroy of this jungle

You commission me for untying knots,

To unravel threads

Into rivers of colour, pooled at your feet.

You need to see what is there, flowing:

What is distinct, which yarns might match.

Discarding none of it, all vital, freed,

My sorting becomes the stuff of your making.

On data analysis III: Clearing the herbaceous border

It could be mistaken for destruction,

This loosening of roots before Winter,

Unearthing plants, pulling them apart,

An atrocious separating of intestines.

In Spring we will see:

You were clearing space between growing things,

So that each may flourish with adequate ground

For graceful Summer bowing, one flower to the other.

4.16   Participant feedback on research findings

In order for the analysis to be accountable to participants, and to generate further insight into the role of poetry in CME, a feedback session to which all participants were invited took place in January 2014. As well as giving verbal and written summaries of my draft research findings, I included an opportunity to reconnect with some of the research poems so that participants were re-located in the RPPG experience. I also shared with them some fresh poems brought by participants in RPPG C so that the event had a nourishing CME quality to it. Participants were asked to critique the draft research findings in terms of their experience of the groups, and to feed back their criticisms and reflections after discussion in RPPGs. Unfortunately no RPPG C participants were able to attend; three absent participants emailed comments.

The findings were generally affirmed as resonating with participant experience. Some insightful nuances emerged which I have taken into consideration in my analysis. For example, there were one or two significant questions about the nature of power in the dynamics of the RPPGs, in terms of responding to the interpretive authority of the facilitator and in responding to other participants. Do ground-rules suppress conflict in ways which stifle authentic engagement? Ought they to state explicitly that participants are free to 'dislike' poems presented by others? Does the success of the RPPG method depend on the reflective capacity of participants, and the fact that Birmingham clergy may have been formed in reflective practice through a particular approach to CME?

There were suggestions for a different kind of inquiry involving poetry, such as a comparative study using different media such as art or music, or an analysis as to whether particular personality-types or theological traditions are 'poetry sympathisers'. There were

indications of a positivist approach to research and the expectation that the value of poetry can be objectively proven rather than described in a specific case. Participants gave some reflection on their sense of how participation has benefitted them personally and professionally.

4.17 Conclusion

Having given a reflexive methodological account of my epistemological stance, research strategy and multiple qualitative methods I used in making this study of my professional practice in relation to the contribution of poetry to CME, I now go on to set out my interpretation of the data generated.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS

5.1   Introduction

This chapter describes insights into the contribution poetry offers to CME, analysing data gathered in the RPPGs. These indicate perspectives on poetry presented as a stimulant for clergy Reflective Practice, experienced as a shared activity operating within agreed parameters and facilitated by myself as researcher-practitioner. My analysis presents themes and sub-themes distilled from sifting data generated in each RPPG session, together with participant interviews, questionnaires, group reflection exercises and my field-notes. The data is highly reflexive in character. The analysis generates insight from the research process involving specific participants rather than making universal claims. This organising and categorising process is interpretive and selective: 'an intuitive and inductive process' (Taylor and Bogdan 1998, 141).

A distinctive feature of the data is participant use of metaphor to describe their experience of reflecting with poetry on ministry practice. This indicates how working with poetry may foster a poetic way of reflecting on experience. Whereas subsequent feedback indicates that a minority of participants wrote poems stimulated by their RPPG experience, and my own reflection on the research includes auto-ethnographic poetry, metaphorical language is a consistent element of the discourse in all the RPPGs. I give participant metaphor a particular prominence in leading the analysis to communicate the character and tone of the material, as well as reporting the content of group reflections with poetry.

The contribution of poetry to clergy reflection in the RPPGs is described through four inter-connected themes: poetry as location, language, learning, and limitation. First, I describe

the power of poems to locate clergy in the reflective process and to connect them with their experience of ministry practice in particular contexts. Then I make a study of the language that poetry provides for clergy to articulate experience. Thirdly, I undertake to listen for the generative processes of reflecting with poetry through which clergy participants interpret poems and reimagine ministry practice. Finally I address some of the limitations apparent in poetry as a stimulant for clergy Reflective Practice.

I now give an account of how reflection with poetry in RPPGs enabled clergy to attend to their experience of ministry practice.

5.2   Poetry locates reflection: describing encounter with ministerial experience

> …we have been able to share who we are, and poetry acts as a springboard that releases that sharing. An image I keep thinking about is scuba-diving…deep beneath the sea: there is the coral, and rocks, and reef and fish in the water. The sea is the group, the coral reef is the structure of the poem that keeps growing and changing, and the fishes are our experiences of all kinds which keep swimming in and out of the reef… it's been an opportunity to be bathed in poetry which has released possibilities in me (D6.6 Faith).

Faith's ecological simile offers a dynamic, reflexive description of reflecting with poetry in the RPPGs: swimming deep within an ocean created from fellow participants and poems. This reflective, poetic sea sustains a wonderful variety of experiences shared in response to the poems' words. Poems launched Faith onto an ocean of discovery as she leaps from words into the deep waters of herself and others, diving down to see the hidden life of experience in a total reflective environment which is alluring, exotic, exciting, and strange; a demanding, enchanting encounter requiring whole-hearted participation, energy, equipment and skill. The

adventure involves risk. Faith's metaphor suggests that poetry has the capacity to foster among clergy an ecology for connection with and reflection upon ministry experience.

Nancy also evokes a beautiful metaphor describing her experience of poems both launching and locating clergy in a reflective participative dynamic where experience can be touched, articulated and reflected upon:

> …given a group of clergy who do want to reflect, the poem gives a place to begin and go deeper. Manon's phrase "sculpt space" [Appendix 3.3ii] – it wasn't that she had hit on something that we had never thought about before, but her phrase gave us an anchor which helped us to go deeper. The poem was a framework which was economical and profound. How we interpreted the poem may not have been what she meant as the poet writing it, but it was so exciting that as poet she gave us a language to talk about ministry that was a kicking-off point (Nancy IC1.5).

The poem anchors participants, becoming a starting-place for reflection, a *framework* shaping the character of that reflection through its sparse character as a form of words. The rootedness of poems in the actualities of lived experience, not necessarily unconsidered but possibly unarticulated, and their attentiveness to particular places and situations, the richness of meaning concentrated into intense, nuanced language, allows participants to access memories and feelings, enabling them to 'go deeper' into their experience. Yet the intensity of this reflective encounter is accompanied by the sense that poems provide a neutral space where differing perceptions and insights can arise and be held in creative tension. There is the sense of submersion and rich discovery in participant reflections on the experience of working together with the poems, and also an acknowledgement of the latitude and open-endedness of the process.

I now consider aspects of poetic form and language which foster capacity to connect with ministerial experience in a reflective way.

5.2i   Poetic attentiveness

Poetry models attentiveness to the lived life by capturing detail of ordinary events and situations, inviting participants to engage with a close study of the poem's world. Becoming associated with it, participants gain a deeper understanding of related aspects in their own lives, including their pastoral role and context, discovering previously hidden or unacknowledged experience:

> Janet: It's helped give a new angle on some things…Like taking soil samples, going deep into one area; the poem goes into one area and that has prompted us and me to go deeper into one area and to reflect, so that's been valuable.… there is the keen observation – it wouldn't come naturally to me, but it's wonderful that someone else has done it and helps you make connections with another situation and your own situation (IB2. 8-9).

A poem pays profound attention to experience as the 'keen observation' of the poet 'goes deep' beneath surface impressions. Faith talks about the poem *grounding* her, "being kept in touch with reality", and Beatrix of the poet's experiences *earthing* participants in their own lived realities (D1.4). Poetry helps clergy to notice more of what they experience, describing and analysing it, making the fabric of ministry more apparent. The Neutral Observer (Appendix 3.6b) describes this as opening up a sacramental approach to reality, as poems reveal more of the diversity and detail of experience. For Janet, poems give a particular tone and ethos to RPPGs which is helpful in addressing bewildering or desperate situations in ministry in contrast with experience of clergy groups which tend towards generalisation or abstraction: "All of the poems are about particular people and particular situations, so that encourages conversations about particular things rather than general things" (IB2.7). Poems have the quality of Case Studies as they locate the ordinary practices of ministry, such a pastoral visiting, in a specific time frame, geographical area, and historical context.

The form and language of a poem holds stores of experience and insight which readers unfold at length; it acts as a focus and stimulant for their own reflections. The poem is a form of stillness in its concentrated focus, enabling participants to gaze with the poet on particularities, and also dynamic in the insights it stimulates. Nancy's metaphor for the dynamic stability of the poem as an anchor for reflection has a beautiful nuance: the poem tethers participants in and also over experience, enabling insight and overview:

> Nancy: …rather than an anchor which holds us still, the poem is more like the tendrils of an ivy creeping up a wall – it holds us, and it enables us to climb, to get up higher. The reflections were not Manon's – they were ours - but she enabled us to go somewhere else. It almost felt like discovering new Scripture which is about priesthood – we don't have enough material to help us reflect on some aspects of ministry – like Scripture doesn't have material on what it is to be an Incumbent. That's how profound it felt (IC1. 5-6).

Other participant metaphors keep as distinctive these two features of poetry in the reflective process, some emphasising the holding dimension of poetry, others emphasising its dynamic explorative character.

5.2ii Poetic perceptiveness

Participant responses to the poems frequently suggest that the power of a poem to foster reflection rests in its perceptiveness, its descriptive accuracy of situations, contexts and roles in ministry and the feelings associated with them. Given a situation which they recognise, the poem resonates with participants' practice experience. For example, Beatrix describes the "astonishing, startling accuracy" of the descriptions in 'Sick Visits' (Appendix 3.3i) (D1.1). For Paula the poem recreates a recent pastoral visit: "I can see that person – that was last week – as you read it, 'wintering me'" (D1.1). The evocative power of a poem lies in its description of recognisable feelings and a sense of solidarity in ministry:

Peter: …that line "winter me" – that was very powerful; it is very helpful to see that it has happened in the past, that it's not just an isolated thing that happens to me, but that it is part of ministry and happens to other ministers (IB1.5).

Where the poem enables participants to visualize experience through its linguistic power to embody situations and feelings, impact is immediate. In session D1, my impression was of Thomas's language exploding like fireworks in participants' minds as they began associating their own experiences with the poetic images: Beatrix picks up on "stiff in their beds" and "shouting their faint names"; Paula focusses on "pale eyes wintering me" and "joints twisted"; James reflects on "without the subdued light their eyes kindle"; Paul picks up "life in its play was a bit rough"; he goes on to associate with a recent tragic funeral he conducted. The metaphorical language evokes the raw stuff of practice in its vibrancy and colourfulness. Responding to Stephenson's description of 'real people' in the pub (Appendix 3.3iv), John is immediately taken to his own working-class parish: "I did a baptism this lunchtime – all these people were in church – two hundred of them!" (A3.1). Stephenson's 'incredibly graphic' ethnographic accuracy becomes a starting point for reflection on context:

Gary: It's a splendid description of women of a certain…morphology; these are women that we know and love because they are around us and they live for ever, don't they?

Rick: They do – just go to the supermarket and you'll see them (B3.4).

Peter's association with the poetic narrative of Frost's forest scene in Janet's chosen poem 'A Road Less Travelled' leads him on to reflect on ways in which he interrogates his own life journey:

…I identified so much with the situation, going for a walk and having thoughts and seeing the two roads and wondering how they relate to each other… wondering if it makes a difference or not … (IB1.8).

The powers of description with which a poem depicts a particular place with its political, economic, demographic, cultural issues, evokes participants' experiences of places in their own lives, whether similar to or different from the poem's world. This draws out participants' ethical stance on situations they engaged with as resident parsons. The invitational nature of Zephaniah's language in 'Soho Road' (Appendix 3.3iii), urging readers to come and visit Handsworth in their imaginations – to "open up the eye and see", describing the bustling, multi-ethnic inner-city neighbourhood as "heaven" (lines 24-25) – draws his audience beyond the judgmental assumptions and surface impressions of conventional culture to a new vision where local people are celebrated. Paula embraces Zephaniah's appreciative tone as revealing the true identity of a place which so many outsiders fear (D4.2); she voices her frustration and hope as a pastor who longs for Birmingham's citizens joyfully to embrace the diversity of their city:

> I'd like to give a copy to everyone who when they drive me down this road in their car just makes an excuse and locks the doors! This is about a vibrant place of belonging, a springboard, a diving board into it (D4.3).

For other participants, the poem's imagery and rap rhythm evoke similar neighbourhoods elsewhere, stirring appreciation of the assets of these places – their energy, vibrancy, diversity, cohesiveness – and also compassion for the tough lives which they imagine residents lead there (B2.6-7).

5.2iii Poetic aptness

The power of poems to locate participants into their own experience of people and places rests in the apposite words poets choose to communicate effectively and affectively. Particular phrases and images in 'A Priest at a Funeral'– rage, midwifery, sculpting space – strike

participants in their accuracy and resonance with their sense of the liturgical and pastoral

anatomy of funeral ministry, and also how it feels for them as practitioners:

> Cora: There's a beautiful symmetry to it…Interesting the word "rage" – I know, I know I think what the poet means – that moment when we stand there and everybody is there and you have to be *it* then, and you have sort of fill yourself with this stuff and then – I suppose rage is a quite a good word – it's not anger – it's sort of filling, where… "rage" is a really good word…

> Christine: I feel I look out over the church or the Crem. and think "This is mine to control" and need to be aware of every person who is there – who is weeping, who is distracted, who is with me, is the technology ok, is there an organist ? There's so many things that you are holding together – and that's not the ones in which you are emotionally invested. And then sometimes it's someone with whom you are involved pastorally or personally: all that stuff on top (C2. 2-4).

5.2iv Poetic density and brevity

Integral to a poem's gift in helping participants attend to the fabric of ministry practice is its

compressed language. There is a repeated focus on a poem's intense distillation of feelings –

its concentration of images and emotions and the affects these achieve in the reader/listener

through relatively few, carefully constructed word-forms and rhythms. In 'Sick Visits' single

phrases such as "Life in its brief play/Was a bit rough" (lines 8/9) and "the echoes return

slow" (line 16) evoke powerful memories of individuals. In RPPG C for example, participants

(all women priests) share nuanced stories about resilient older women encountered in the

course of their ministries. Reflecting on this Christine uses the metaphor of the poem's words

holding meaning:

> I think "life in its brief play was a bit rough"- just one brief line - manages to hold on to the fact that they have had a whole life and history and experience, and that it's *that* which brings them there, not just being old (C1.9).

Speaking from the perspective of a clergy CME Officer responsible for facilitating

clergy reflection, Nancy identifies that compared to a novel or feature film, poems concentrate

experience and emotion in a relatively brief form. With sufficient time for reflection built in to the group process, the poems yield insight in an immediate, intense way:

> Poetry is unique in that it is so economical – it gives depth with economy…what is beautiful is that in a poem you have got blood, sweat and tears of ministry expressed beautifully and simply in a few words, so our reflection is ten miles on already (IC1.5).

The brevity of R.S. Thomas's 'Gift' makes it significant for Suzy: "Because it was small it said something to me" (C4.2). The form of the poem together with its words assists its evocative power. This brevity and density enables participants to access experience more quickly and immediately than through other forms: "The fact that it is distilled suggests that the reflection has happened; the extraneous matter is driven off somehow so that the heart of it remains" (IB1.11P).

5.2v   Poetic expansiveness

The sense of freedom and rich potential which participants describe flows from their engagement with the Tardis-like quality of poetry: "the poems open a door" (D6.6 Paula). Conversation around the poems has a distinctive expansiveness. The poems offer an encounter which feels liminal, exploratory, with potential for unforeseen possibilities. Paula talks of "the luxury of reflection". This is partly a release from mundane work patterns and a change from the usual format of CME events; as Chad says, "It's been lightening and refreshing to come out of what we normally do" (D6). It refers also to the style of the reflective process: the poems have demanded time to unpack their meanings, and the process of careful reading and attentive listening has been expensive and feels full of quality. Furthermore, the poems lead to a new place: into the unarticulated self and into the inner

thoughts and feelings of others; mutual encounter leads to new insight into ministry and practice.

The language of poetry is intrinsically permissive, playful and expansive, setting a generous tone for reflection through its subtlety and nuance:

> …for me good poetry…doesn't…doesn't go at things like a sledge hammer...or, or, it's not about stating things in black and white...it's about…um, the depths, you know, um,…there's a, um...there are different possibilities I think…um…that's the kind of poetry that I respond to...that it's not closing things down, it's opening things up and you can play with it yourself, in different ways, so… (Shirley IA1.3).

5.2vi   Poetic clarity

A poem's capacity to expose and bring to recognition unaddressed aspects of self in role has disturbing and consoling effects, confronting participants and also offering a form of solidarity that they may not have experienced in other forms of shared reflection, particularly where this might leave them exposed to peer scrutiny. The poem draws out the uncomfortable or shameful experiences of participants in ways which contrast to the rivalry sometimes characteristic of clergy groups reflecting on raw experience. Faith points to this in her reflections on reflecting with poetry as scuba-diving. The capacity of poetical language to describe feelings and situations in ways which render experiences tangible to a reader means that the poem does not collude with inclinations to dissemble or evade difficult questions about ministers' attitudes and motivations. A poem can challenge participants, but also form a nexus for connection with others having similar experiences or anxieties, previously hidden or unaddressed publicly:

> Beatrix: One or two poems have been quite exposing – when you recognise yourself! This morning's poem ['In Church'; Appendix 3.3v] was uncomfortable – it was challenging.

Paula: It *was* challenging, but also affirming as a counterbalance. What's been helpful is the way some of the poems have described experiences that I recognise and I thought "It's only me" – the shared experience was phenomenal – in the poems and around the table.

Paul: I think it's like holding up a mirror – it enables us to touch on emotion (D6.8).

The imagined world of the poem enables reflexivity; this *emotional seeing* is rare, it would appear, following on from Paula's comments, given how isolated clergy participants can feel themselves to be.

5.2vii Poetic obscurity

Sometimes this seeing is opaque; mists have to clear. Whilst some words and phrases of poems have immediate impact, the language does not always yield meanings immediately, insisting that participants work at interpretation. Obscure language can be a barrier to reflection as participants struggle to make connections between the poem and their experience. Whilst a few participants expressed degrees of personal unease or unfamiliarity with poetry (notably Peter in RPPG B and Suzy in RPPG C), most indicated in the initial questionnaires and in the group settings that they have an affinity with poetry, reading it personally or drawing on it for liturgical and pastoral purposes. This broad affinity, however, does not translate into participants finding every poem accessible or salient.

Sometimes the most evocative language is also language over which participants most struggle. Here the group dynamic in interpreting the difficult language of a poem becomes productive and inclusive, facilitating a dialogical form of reflection. Participant conversation centres on words and phrases almost as if they are doing a puzzle together, paying close attention to the language of a poem and lingering over its meaning before articulating a response: "I want to mull over the words" says Cath (B1.3).

Most RPPG sessions, after I had first read the poem, begin with a silence which seems to be characterised by a reflective atmosphere as participants read the text of the poem just heard. Subsequent conversation between participants focusses on words, phrases and structure of the poems to establish the significance they hold within the poem's whole meaning. Having heard and read 'Sick Visits' participants wonder about certain phrases: "pale eyes/Wintering me" (lines 4/5), "Shouting their faint names/I listen" (lines 13/14), "I would have gone wild" (line 20).

> Michaela: I am interested in 'shouting faint names'. Who is shouting? Is this the old ladies who have faint-sounding voices? Or that their names are faint – being rubbed out by age and infirmity which leaves them marginalised? (A1.9)
>
> Rick: This phrase "wintering me" – what did that mean to him? How would he have gone wild?
>
> Peter: I was wondering that too… (B1.2).

5.2viii Poetic slantedness[7]

Coming to a poem with an appreciative disposition and engaging with it in a spirit of interpretive co-operation does not dissolve participants' critical capacity as discerning readers. The poet's particular perspective or bias may be apparent to participants – its perception of truth may seem *slanted*. Reflection on practice arises as participants question poems which seem eccentric, inaccurate or ideological.

The slant of Zephaniah's 'Soho Road' is challenged in several RPPGs. In session A2, two participants who feel they have first-hand knowledge of the area comment that the poem presents a distorted, ethnocentric picture of Handsworth. B2 participants wonder if the poem's depiction of cultural harmony is idealised. In RPPG D there are challenges to the "big claims"

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[7] Emily Dickinson: "Tell all the truth but tell it slant/Success in Circuit lies/Too bright for our infirm Delight/ The Truth's superb surprise…" (Franklin 1998, 1263).

the poet seems to be making for community cohesion through his un-moderated celebratory tone. These challenges are rooted in participants' own experience of community and local ministry which differs in various ways from the poem's perspective. Their critique of the poem is evidenced through an articulation of that experience, often in vivid detail – a kind of oppositional reflectiveness inspired by their sense of the poem's distortion.

This emphasis on the partial perspective of the poet as observer drew parallels with the ministerial approach to some degree. Zephaniah's poem becomes for Beatrix a gauge to survey limited clerical horizons, a "reminder that community is much more dynamic than organic and much bigger than we are" (D4.10); its perceived ethnocentricity invites comparisons with clergy bias:

> Michaela: You get this in some clergy – valorising the experience of a place and the specialness of an area – ignoring what is going on elsewhere… (A2.3).

> Mark: I wondered if the poet here is somewhat like a priest, like George Herbert knowing his or her parish?
>
> Michaela: …Benjamin Zephaniah walking his patch!
>
> Shirley: It could be similar in that he sees the place from his own perspective, not seeing the whole picture, through rose-tinted spectacles (A2.9).

Paying critical attention to the priest in 'Sick Visits', read as hieratic and patriarchal in his solitariness and absence of touch, participants' critique is articulated in terms of how their own pastoral practice differs from the scene in the poem. Thus reflection on practice and transformation in the mode of pastoral care evolves. So James talks of how he now rarely visits the sick, but supports lay people in this ministry, and shares his regret provoked by the poem: "I have got two parishes. Now I visit the visitors and the supervisors" (D1.4).

Similarly, Thomas's approach to pastoral visiting fails to engage Janet's imagination: the poem stereotypes vulnerable individuals, limiting its reflective value: "In terms of pastoral care, I find this quite a difficult poem because it's about grouping people and making them into categories and de-personalising them" (B3.6). Whilst the material accuracy of Stevenson's portrayal of the pub scene is unchallenged, her role as poet in making these observations comes under scrutiny. Some find the authorial distance artificial, comparing it with the voyeuristic character of pastoral placements in theological training, like the remote lives of some priests observing "the zoo" of their parishes (A3.6). The ethnographic skill of the pub-going poet leads to reflection on the identity of the parson who lives with "real people", has a share in their lives and some understanding about their motivations:

> Gary: (the poem) is observing quite a lot of human nature…I think she (Stevenson) is stepping back – it's quite a perspective she has got…
>
> Peter: But is she a participant or is she an observer?
>
> Gary: Or a voyeur? (B3.6).

This exchange about the poet gives rise to conversation about what characterises authentic involvement in a local community for 'an outsider', and whether the priest is on the inside or the outside.

A more intractable problem arises when questions about the integrity of a poet's vision or the veracity of their perceptions weaken a poem's purchase in participant imaginations. So Rick asks: "Do you think he [Zephaniah] would write this poem now, if it is thirty or so years old…? Is it still accurate? Is it idealised?" (B2.9). Can a poem based in authorial experience only become meaningful in the reflection process if it resonates with participants' experience? A poem can falter as a starting point for reflection if the author's cultural presuppositions, however deeply rooted in their own experience, conflict with those

of participant-readers. This is the case in RPPG C3 with Stevenson's celebration of "real" working-class people. Cora finds the poem deeply engaging, but for Christine (a pastor of suburban churches) the poem fails to evoke her sympathy – "It doesn't do anything for me". Yet this dissonance draws from her an assertion of the humanity and authenticity she glimpses among her own middle-class parishioners, so different from Stevenson's celebrated pub people: "I guess they are not the real people I engage with; they are defining who real people are, but Habitat people are different real people; that snobbery of saying that some people are real and others aren't" (C3.5). Similarly, in Michaela's challenge to the distortion she perceives in Zephaniah's depiction of Handsworth, her critique of the poem's limitations becomes material for exploring an issue which confronts her in ministry: whether and how to challenge the limited perspective of groups within the church or local community:

> …being critical of a poem like this and saying "Maybe this is a construct?" or "Maybe this is not real?" is a bit of a taboo and it is very difficult as a White person to say "This is not the real Handsworth" or "It's not my Handsworth" or "The community that's presented here is very much a West Indian community and that's only one of the communities that exists"…without coming across as being racist against people who are themselves West Indian…and I find that a difficult sensitivity and I would only want to talk about in areas where I felt comfortable or where I felt secure because I think it is a really tricky one …and when as a priest you challenge that victim culture…In some ways the most controversial poem of them all, for me it is the most difficult to discuss openly (IA2.12 Michaela).

The RPPG feels like a safe place to express the tensions in ministry evoked by a poem. This pastoral background to Michaela's dissatisfaction with 'Soho Road' shows how sensitively poems may need handling lest they pose difficulties to participants, touching on challenges in ministry or personal identity.

5.2ix   Interim summary

Poetry was effective in connecting participants with their experience of ministry through its capacity to attend to concrete situations. Poems evoked reflection on practice even when language seemed obscure or the authorial perspective antithetical. I now present a study of the language which poems provided for reflection on ministerial experience and identity in RPPGs.

5.3   Poetry speaks: articulating language for reflection on ministerial experience

> …the focus has been on pastoral ministry, but goes everywhere out of that –
> it's like the computer: there is a programme running but there are multiple
> things going on connected with it, all completely woven in, which poems have
> brought to life, and so has the conversation (Paul D6.8).

Paul's computing metaphor evokes the complex and far-reaching nature of poetry in Reflective Practice. Poems, vividly immediate and rooted in specifics, have been for him agents of a reflectiveness which connects at deeper levels of the self and with a wider range of ministerial practice and issues beyond individual pastoral encounters. Poems evoke a comprehensive, multi-dimensional reflectiveness. This flows from the impact of the poem on him personally, and from conversations in the groups as theatre of expression for the variety of impact which poems have on others. The poems have foregrounded aspects of clergy identity and practice often hidden or undisclosed. A number of these are common threads relating to clergy experience. Others are distinctive issues and concerns pertinent to particular groups, settings and individuals. These reflections are fascinating in what they offer for an analysis of clergy identity and practice. However, my emphasis continues to be *the role of poetry in the reflective process* as an exercise in clergy CME, rather than addressing ministry

issues in themselves. Pursuing the inquiry into the reflective role of poetry I use aspects of the poetic language and form to identify how poetry functions in the groups' reflective dynamic, looking at how words connect with ministerial experience to provide a language for reflection.

Particular words and phrases in the poems registered powerfully with participants and connected with dimensions of their experience. Articulating an interpretation of these words participants express an affinity with the situation they perceive to be described in the poem, or they express the words' impact for them in relation to their ministerial practice. This symbiosis of poem with participant experiences releases ideas and emotions which relate both to the nature of practice and their sense of its impact on their lives, and also in response to the poem itself. The data reveals a *flow* of words – words flowing from individual participants and moving between them – responding to the poem with language that also relates to ministerial experience. Engaging with aspects of the poems permits or provides a language for a shared engagement with dimensions of ministerial practice, and particularly how that practice is experienced on an emotional and personal level by the minister.

5.3i   Words for venting

The poems provide words through which participants vent frustration and irritation about dimensions of ministry. Cora's selection of phrases from 'Sick Visits' enables her to articulate concerns about the expectations of others – both ministry colleagues and parishioners – who seem to have a model of priesthood with which she cannot associate.

> Cora: …those "pale eyes wintering me" - I know exactly how that feels, and I am obsessed at the moment at expectations of me. That "wintering me", for me it is all "Right, now do the priest stuff" - and I don't know what the priest bit is! …The word that comes to me is "straight jacket". I think it's all to do with this expectation thing from a generation that was… (C1.5).

These reflections give rise to a long conversation between participants (C1.14-17) about their perceptions of expectations and the persistent influence of outmoded models of ministry. The few words from the poem Cora selects and interprets unlock participants' enormous frustration addressing inherited ministry patterns perceived to hamper their work. In RPPG B similar reflections on the expectations of self and of others arise from the last lines of 'Sick Visits'. Participants ponder what the language of "going wild" means for parochial ministry. Can this be interpreted as recklessness in over-spending the self? Can it be a clergy obsession about being available to others? Is it the curse of a target culture set by diocesan mission initiatives?

> Janet: It's interesting to think how one would go wild (in ministry). Is it to think "What good am I doing?", or is it "How much is this costing me?"
>
> Gary: It is very costly…
>
> Janet: Yes, the role is a constraint – a duty – that has a pressure on me… (B1.10).

In session B2, Zephaniah's celebratory language for inner-city community provides material for a lament among participants about the real challenges of ministering in small congregations in places of socio-economic deprivation (like Handsworth) and the strain for clergy living with a sense of parishioners' relentless needs. Participants show mutual trust in sharing their experiences and survival strategies because their sense of vulnerability is often apparent:

> Janet: I am very much aware of the tensions…there is a way in which you could feel pulled apart by all these calls on your time – the expectation, the unwritten, unspoken expectation of the leech-like quality of the need, which can be difficult if you can't get off the patch. So in this poem I would not want to be there all the time, I would want to be somewhere else some of the time, and then come back to it – but if you've got no way of getting away from it, it would suck you dry (B2.22).

95

Janet enters into the poem, imagining herself living in the kind of community Zephaniah describes. She brings to the imagining her experience of outer-estate ministry and the demands of being resident pastor with vulnerable people. Through this imaginative work of associating with the world of the poem, and associating the poem with her own sense of lived reality, Janet articulates how challenging her ministry is, and what makes this sustainable for her (the ability to escape from the demands of the parish). The poem becomes an opportunity to speak difficult truths.

In RPPG A, Hardy's scene of the preacher performing to an adulatory congregation allows clergy participants to talk openly about the strain of living under public scrutiny. The narrative of the poem and its language enables them to articulate perceptions of congregational expectations of a good show from the Vicar in the pulpit or liturgically, and of a persistent sense of pressure experienced from ministry colleagues and within themselves. Hardy's scenario of expectant congregations feels true to their own experience: "It's not just the preacher whipping them up, it's also the crowd coming along wanting a show, and that's what I felt on Sunday" (A4.7 John).

5.3ii   Words for differing

If certain words, phrases and imagined settings in the poems are powerfully evocative of shared frustrations, the *multivalency of words* in poetry gives the capacity to articulate differing, even contrasting or contradictory experiences of ministry. The poem is interpreted differently, holding several viable meanings. There is also a range of reflections stimulated by a poem and held together simultaneously in the group without being mutually exclusive. Potentially this makes for a rich conversation sustaining a range of perspectives. The character of poetic language sets the tone for the nature of the reflective discussion.

Whereas Cora interprets "wintering me" as a metaphor for disapproval she feels from dissatisfied parishioners, for Nancy the same language suggests a positive dimension. The old ladies sick in their beds ground and validate the ministry of the parish priest through connection with sickness, suffering, ageing and mortality integral to human existence. Speaking from her perspective of ministry in a diocesan role, Nancy translates this sense of being "wintered" to the ways in which one-to-one pastoral work in a parish roots her clergy development work. The poem sets up a dynamic of reflection containing more than a single interpretation.

> Nancy: I had not read the "wintering me" as negative…I think I was thinking of snow and frost as stillness and um, calmness in the sense that at winter everything goes to sleep. For me it's a poem about being tethered in reality...It's actually the doing nice things for an old lady, and that tethers you in the reality of ministry – doing small kindnesses taking the love of God to somebody when they need it…Does that make sense?...You know how you said you read it and saw 'straight jacket' [to Cora] …I thought 'anchor' – like a boat… if it wasn't tethered it would drift out to sea little by little and get completely lost.
>
> Cora: I see what you mean.
>
> Nancy: I don't think it's either/or… (C1.6-7).

This interchange reveals the possibility of different interpretations of the same words emerging, with participants suggesting different perspectives on what the poem is describing, and in some cases holding different interpretations simultaneously. So Paul finds a constructive theme in Hardy's performing parson – that striving for excellence in preaching and leading services is a valid, godly activity, whereas others interpret this scene as the exposure of clerical vanity and manipulation:

> Paul: I also see a different side. I remember reading the theology of the Eucharist and the drama and the theatre of it. It is a drama, it is a production. We are not acting and yet there are elements of drama in there and actually when we do it well and we draw attention to the sacrament, then actually that is very legitimate, so I am not quite so antagonistic to this – it depends really…

> Beatrix: Who is glorified? That's the key thing.
>
> Paul: Yeah, but I didn't read it like that (D5.5M).

The nature of poetic language requires sophistication on the part of participants to sustain a range of views handled with maturity. Beatrix takes on the different point of view expressed by Paul, returning to it constructively as an opportunity for learning:

> Beatrix: I am grateful to Paul for drawing attention to the other dimension of the first part of this poem because it could seem that he (the preacher) is completely bogus and just an actor, but he isn't…he is actually talking about something important (D5.12).

Participants referred to the open-endedness of poetry, and interpreting its particular gift – the reader has freedom to decide on interpretation.

> Paul: I like the openness at the end actually, and for me it totally reflects the gift of poetry. Poetry for me is never closed, that's what I like about it so much because the images and metaphors take me off on tangential journey. There isn't a right or wrong answer and perhaps the deepest insights are what the poet never intended. I like the openness because it invites me to respond to issues that are just waiting in me itching to be scratched because there's something in my life or ministry and that will trigger it off and there's an inner working in me. It's frustrating sometimes…Poetry is just an invitation…
>
> Faith: It is an invitation to write the story ourselves… (D5.19).

5.3iii Words for appreciating

The poems also provide words for appreciating various roles, aspects and functions of ministry. The graphic, material language of James's 'A Priest at a Funeral' allows participants to develop their sense of pastoral ministry as a privilege. The poem's play with images of careful nurturing in child-birth, such as the caress of the midwife, releases participants into an appreciation of familiar funeral ministry, giving a new awareness of its weighty responsibilities and emotional charge:

Christine: The line "I am the last to stroke the wood that bears this ending…" What's extraordinary about it is that the priest who never met this person, who you don't even know, you have never even seen the person – and there are all around these people who did know them intimately – and yet you are the one with this privilege – that is one of the moments when you really grasp what priesthood is about (C2.12).

The poem's language enables Christine to imagine the role she is in so often at a funeral and to undertake this "grasping" of the value of the ministry. For Nancy, the metaphorical language of "sculpting space" and "holding fragile colours" resonates with her work in facilitating learning communities as well as leading liturgical events. The evocative way that the poem describes the art of ministry helps her to see her own work in a new, appreciative light:

But "sculpt space to hold shifting fragile colours" – I know that either when I am taking a service or leading a teaching group I know when I have got them, I know how to measure where we are going. The last paragraph "to let it fall through my fingers", you know when you are letting something go and letting it take its own form and direction, and you know when you are pulling it back, so I really identify with that (C2.6).

5.3iv   Words for disclosing

Some of the poems draw out participant reflection around a lack of ministerial gifts and abilities, expressing a sense of vulnerability or even inadequacy in the role, especially when confronted by contemporary challenges they feel ill-equipped to meet. There was much reflection in the groups on the tension between the public and private dimension in ministerial practice. This was apparent in the conversations around the challenges of being alongside sick and vulnerable people arising from 'Sick Visits': "When you are faced with what he describes – twisted joints and a rough life and thick tongues…there's no pretence any more. I'm not very good at visiting" (B.1Peter).

For one participant the scene evokes pastoral "terror" at the prospect of caring for this sort of vulnerable, house-bound person rather than engaging in outreach and evangelism with which she feels far more comfortable (C1.6S). Reflecting on public representative ministry in response to Murray's 'Visitor' (Appendix 3.3vi), and the experience of 'being visited' by callers of all kinds at the Vicarage day and night, participants share their sense of vulnerability to disturbance, abuse and even attack. The memories of aggressive callers linger, and the intimidation experienced by resident clergy when someone 'in need' is knocking persistently at the vicarage door is evident as participants recall fraught situations and share feelings about them (A5.7-8). A superficially simple poem like 'Visitor' evoked a depth of emotional experience about what it is like to be 'visited' in the vicarage.

The pastoral role of visiting people in their own homes or in hospital can be exposing:

Michaela: I suppose there is power in making a pastoral visit, but the visit I dread is when some kind of conflict has occurred: in that pastoral visit you actually make someone quite vulnerable by going to visit them (A5.8).

Matthew: Actually going away is often very difficult in a hospital visit… (A5.13-14).

The poetry evokes candid reflections on professional façade in ministry – for example the contrast between the external appearance of the minister at funerals and her internal emotional world. The language of James's poem exemplifies how the poem models an emotional self-awareness and reflexivity which inspires a similar responsive reflexivity. Hardy's poem, written in a different tone, stimulates conversation about the sense of acting-in-role, shutting down to personal emotions when performing in a public representative way. This stimulated participant candour about how things sometimes feel to them on Sunday mornings as partners and parents, emotional people in relationships with others. Men as well

as women contributed to these conversations. The poems draw out the human dimension to inhabiting the ministerial role:

> James: And there are times when you are presiding or preaching… and, um, either there is something horrible pastoral going on which you can't share, or something has gone wrong at home which is your fault and you have upset everyone else, and you have to lead the congregation at that point...Sometimes you have to step outside yourself and your feelings, and reach out (D5.5).

Sometimes participants share details of their personal lives and feelings which are intensely private and domestic, yet have a direct bearing on their ministry. 'Sick Visits' draws one participant to talk about her elderly, increasingly dependent mother living with her in the vicarage (D1). For others it evokes powerful memories of leading services with enormous emotional potency, such as preaching at the time of the Beslan massacre, or conducting the funeral of a friend, and the pastoral strategies of why and how the officiating minister's private emotion is with-held, and the personal cost of that with-holding.

> Paul: I am not uninvolved, I am so emotionally involved I have to detach…I projected the image they wanted and then afterwards I cried. If I didn't protect myself, or allowed God to construct something, I couldn't do it. That military funeral taught me a lot, use the liturgy, play a straight bat, do what you need to do and then walk away, you know (D5.11-12).

As well as identifying with the descriptive world of the poem, participants also attend to perceptions of what seems to be unsaid, and what these apparent absences and silences might disclose about ministry. The absence of ecclesiastical language or technical ministerial references in 'Sick Visits' led participants to ask what dimensions of pastoral care constitute a specifically priestly role, and how the visit of a priest is distinctive vis-à-vis lay ministry, or the work of other caring professions:

John: It makes me think about our role – what is distinctive about ordained ministry when compared to other professionals or to other carers such as relatives? (A1.6).

Michaela: How is the priest different from the Health Visitor, from the nurse? The poem does not make Christianity explicit (A1.9).

Peter: I'm interested: does it make any difference that he is the Vicar?

Rick: There are no Vicar-ish things in the poem. What are we getting from this poem? There is no mention of communion or prayer. Could this be anybody visiting? (B1.5).

Later in this group, these reflections develop into an appreciative discussion of the fundamental role of lay people as long-term members of a congregation who are the bearers of the history of community Christian witness and service (B3.10).

5.3v   Words about words

Attending to the language of a poem leads to reflection on the role and nature of poems in public preaching, liturgy and teaching, as well as in personal reading and devotion. Poetry also features as a touchstone for cultural difference between clergy and their congregations or parishes, and the role of priest as cultural arbiter in the religious setting. Michaela reflects on experiences of family members wanting to read a poem at funerals which, for the priest "is not really a poem, but it is to them". The question "when is a poem not a poem?" arises (A2.2): awareness that in settings such as working-class parishes, poetry can be alien. The cultural difference in language highlighted by Zephaniah's poem leads John to consider clergy discourse which may be perceived very differently by parishioners. The poem foregrounds how different the parson may be, alien from the contextual culture in which s/he operates:

> …the way that Benjamin Zephaniah had written that poem… led me to think about language and how we use language and how we explain things perhaps, and how some people may interpret what we say or write in very different ways – that led to an on-going reflection on how we use language as priests (B3.2).

Poetry also stimulates reflection on liturgy as beautiful, poetical language which does not always receive the respect it deserves from clergy (C2.6). Conversation about Zephaniah's language for Handsworth, such as his choice of the word "heaven", leads to reflection on language's power to construct identity of persons and places. This suggests the nature of poetry, and reflection on the poetics of representation, helps clergy focus on how description constitutes self-identity and shapes public attitudes, positively and negatively. Participants reflect on the words they use as pastors and community leaders – how ministry subsists not only in actions but also in the power of words to build-up or denigrate: "as clergy you are a curator, you are not the owner of the identity of where you are" (C3.13 Suzy). The restorative power of language is a strong theme as participants consider poets describing their settings: "You have to sell your church and make it sparkle a bit" says John, "and it works!" (A4.16). James identifies the same strategy for language of corporate identity in outer estate contexts: "If your community is one where people don't feel good about it, trying to present positive narratives like he is doing here is so important: Talk it up!". Paula echoes from the inner city: "Yes, don't talk about riots, talk about good things. Talk it up!" (D6.8).

5.3vi   Words honouring silence

Evoking reflection on language, poems offer an opportunity to be appreciative of the constructive role of silence in ministry, and to talk about the absence or failure of language in pastoral encounter. Cath refers to Thomas's "…thick tongues, fumbling for words" as a helpful description for the difficulty of communication in some pastoral settings, encouraging her to feel more comfortable with silence when visiting the sick (B1.3). Helen's focus on

another phrase suggesting faltering speech in 'Sick Visits' illustrates how the poem evokes

reflection on the nature of communication in pastoral work – how visiting feels to the

minister, and a recognition of the reciprocity involved:

> I was struck by "the echoes return slow"…There is a lady in our church who is now
> housebound – her responses are becoming delayed – it's about patience of sitting with
> her and being silent and taking what she says and it's about taking time to respond
> back. And she has taught me lots about being patient and not filling silences which is
> easy to do and try to make it all nice but just giving that space for her to respond (C1.7
> Helen).

The poem stimulates reflection on the clergy role as one which holds silence in times

when words are insufficient. Shirley wondered whether ordained ministry might be "giving

the space for this thick tongue, fumbling for words" – to provide for the unsayable to be held

in silence when relatives or lay ministers are also lost for words in the face of long-term

illness (A1.6). For Cora the poem gives clergy permission to find space for themselves in

pastoral silences, and to see them as gift (C1). The words of the poem give an opportunity for

participants to consider difficult aspects of pastoral ministry in detail, and to articulate their

own anxieties and struggles with "not knowing what to say". Their combined reflections help

participants to find a constructive, informed perspective on uneasy aspects of pastoral care.

5.3vii Words for vocation

Participants imagine themselves 'into' situations described in poems and the poet's

motivations and sensibilities 'out of' the poem in ways which prompt talk about the well-

springs of their own ministry. Poems provide a language to reflect on vocation. Asking

questions about Stevenson's motivation, and speculating on how her poem narrates her

personal search for community, Suzy draws a parallel with the priestly search for fulfilling

ministry: "That's ultimately what's at the root of all our calling isn't it: where do we find authenticity for our ministry to work out?" (C3.17).

The form of a poem, as well as its language, enables participants to talk about pastoral vocation. The slender beauty of Thomas's brief lyric 'Gift' becomes an expression of Suzy's call to pastor a small, vulnerable congregation: "…there is a sense that as a priest you are given a group of people…you don't have to have a massive trendy HTB[8] or whatever…and the more you learn about that group of people, the more you learn about yourself" (C4.2). Suzy contrasts her vocation with fashionable trends for leading numerically "successful" churches. The poems permit an alternative theology of vocation and mission to be articulated which might be less easy to express in Deanery Chapter or Diocesan Synod. The poems invite participants to share their personal vision of ministry which may differ from diocesan mission priorities. Zephaniah's rhythmic recreation of Handsworth's vibrant community stimulates Paula's sense of call to inner-city ministry, challenging predominant models of Church which marginalise poor, Black communities: "I love the music of the place, the atmosphere, the 'beat that makes it complete'. I am called to be there, but also to myth-busting – so engagement and also disengagement" (D6.10).

5.3viii Words releasing pastoral imagination

Poems enable participants to reconfigure understandings of pastoral situations, models of ministry and mission. Reflecting on the bed-bound women of 'Sick Visits' leads participants to wonder about the whole-life identity of those whom they visit, opening up the potential for seeing 'old ladies' differently. Rick says: "as clergy we have never known these people in their prime, only in their decline. That's not all they have been, or are" (B1.2). Taken as a

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[8] Holy Trinity Brompton: the large, enterprising, predominantly middle-class Charismatic church in central London.

whole the poem suggests a vast personal history behind 'the old lady', which pastors can easily overlook. The poem opens-up to the reader a spectrum of perspectives – such as experiences of war or recession, and differences between women's life experience and those of men: the constraint of marriage and family, and the possibility of widowhood as liberation (B1.9-12). The poem depicts an ageing society in which the pastoral demands are difficult to contemplate: "What he describes is challenging for us" says Gary (B1.8). The poem alerts Peter to how caring for older people confronts the pastor with stark mortality:

> That (phrase) "They winter me"… I don't know…I somehow I know what it means without being able to say what it means (*laughs*), but it says quite a lot somehow doesn't it?...um…a sort of, um, growing old, getting towards the end, getting towards winter, and that there's a sharing in that, that it's not something done in isolation, it has an impact on us as well… (B2.3).

The evocative language of the poem brings out different responses in RPPG C as they reflect on demographic change. This group welcomes new missionary opportunities when care of individuals no longer dominates clergy ministry patterns (C1.17).

5.3ix Words for integrity

Poems stimulate reflexive conversations on aspects of authenticity, identity and performance in ministry. Hardy's poem 'In Church', with its vignette of the persuasive preacher practising speech and gestures in the vestry mirror, led participants to discuss the place of rhetoric and rehearsal for public performance in preaching and liturgical ministry: how does technique sit with values of integrity, sincerity and transparency in the person of the minister? In what sense can learnt behaviours belong to a priest's tool-kit? When are they manipulative and deceptive? What constitutes authentic ministry? John talks about teaching his Curate to celebrate Mass and the importance of practising technique: "I suppose I ought to have added – 'But don't get caught doing it! All clergy know how to work an audience'" (A4.3). In

preaching "there has to be some device" says Michaela (A4.4). This sense of legitimate

performance leads into reflection on technique in pastoral care:

> I think there are times when we have to learn behaviours which are outside our personality…It does not come to me naturally to be tactile with people but I know that sometimes that's appropriate…There is something in pastoral and liturgical situations that requires behaviour which is not normal – but it is expected (A4.9-10 Michaela).

Beatrix focusses on gender dynamics in Hardy's poem, touching on power in pastoral

relationships:

> It's actually very important that the female – for it is a 'she' – has the inappropriate sense that he is without gloss or guile corrected. But one has the sense that the impact on her will be devastating – not merely corrective, but devastating… (D5.7).

5.3x   Words for practical wisdom

Poems provide language to talk about inhabiting the role of priest. Occasionally there is a

tendency towards technical talk in sessions – 'hints and tips' of how best to do the work of

ministry, or sharing amusing anecdotes from clerical life. Predominantly however, the poems

foster serious engagement with the psychological, spiritual and emotional dimensions of the

ministerial task. Profound reflection on clergy experience in different contexts yields insight

into the critical hermeneutical task of hearing a community's stories of itself and discerning

appropriate prophetic challenge: "We come in from the outside" says James, "and a key part

of any prophetic ministry is to discern and name the truth – to test whether their narrative is

still true" (D6.6).

Participants share their stories, some of which express the art of parochial ministry in

tackling the vested interests of particularly difficult churches, narrating the un-wisdom of

inward-looking congregations. In RPPG D Faith talks about ministry in a housing-estate

parish where the congregation of formerly resident parishioners returns each Sunday for worship, but is uninterested in serving the local area. Chad talked about the difficulty of effecting change in a church resisting new worship songs as 'foreign'. Paula shared the story of her struggle to remove a dominant memorial clock from church where it was set above the cross (D5.18). These narratives describe the costly role of priest in challenging the strangle-hold of myths, cultures and powerful individuals on corporate ethos. These reflexive, critical perspectives arising from reflection on the poems generate empathy for Hardy's performing parson. He needs the affirmation which is rare in parochial ministry:

> Paul: Going into the vestry afterwards and feeling that the job has been well done is an OK kind of experience, when it's gone well. If we can't give ourselves a pat on the back, who is going to give us one? There is an interesting tension between being transparent – I don't want to detract from what I am celebrating, yet I am an actor and actress on the stage communicating a message, not detracting from the drama. I have never thought of that before, but the theatre and drama of the Eucharist is so important and interesting for me. That's partly what we are, not to glorify ourselves yet part of what we do... (D5.5-6).

5.3xi   Words for laughter

Finally, the poems provide opportunities for humour in reflecting on various ministry experiences or in response to the human predicament which a poem exposes. Most participants found Stephenson's picture of pub people amusing, though not all. In every RPPG session focussing on 'In Church', Hardy's performing parson provoked laughter: a sympathy vote from clergy colleagues, perhaps?

Perceived bias of poets is comical, for example when female participants ask of 'Sick Visits': "Why is it just old ladies?" (C1.4 Christine; D1.11 Beatrix). The gendered slant of the poem is preposterous, yet its scene-painting is so recognisable and so well-observed that it persistently engaged participants. It evokes from Suzy a poignant tragi-comedy:

Suzy: I used to visit an old lady on a Sunday evening – she was ninety-six – we would sit and have a cup of tea and watch Family Fortunes together. She taught me how to knit, and I would ask her questions like "Do you remember when the washing machine was invented?" – I was going through every household appliance!

Laughter

Suzy: There was something sobering about it. There was nothing wrong with it, she was just old, and she would say "Suzy, I have had enough, I've had a good life". It was that companionship we had for each other (C1.8).

Whilst laughter in sessions seems mostly natural and appropriate, for some participants it feels troubling. Looking back on a previous session, Cath realises that her laughter was in response to the sheer power of the poem to depict a reality she recognises with startling clarity (B4.2). Hilarity was not about the kind of people that Stevenson was celebrating, but sheer delight in the art of poetry to describe, and its disruptive power to reveal reality or expose what most appeals.

Some individual laughter seemed significant to me as group facilitator. Janet's contributions were punctuated with frequent laughter (e.g. B2.11, 14, 17, 20). In my notes I ask what this indicates: is Janet nervous about the process, or uncertain of her contributions?

5.3xii Interim summary

Having traced the language poems offer participants to reflection on ministry experience, in the next section I present what the data reveals about the enabling role of the RPPG structure as a reflective method using poems in CME.

5.4   Poetry re-imagines: listening for generative process in Reflective Practice

> James: How does poetry relate to the reality of ministry nowadays – Health & Safety, Child Protection, etc.? The choice of poems has reflected an older pattern of ministry… (but) the poem about the pastoral can be the shard of something which gives rise to more.

> Paul: For me it's been cathartic…there has been a real quality of centring, almost a sort of therapy thing, as if there were aspects of me that needed to be spoken, and that just saying gives release – responding to others and sharing insights is health-giving – like when I spoke about conducting my friend's funeral – I have not confessed how disturbed or shaken I felt before – there was a voice lost within me that needed to be spoken.

> Paula: The release and therapy thing – there has been a lot about pastoral ministry which we don't often get to share. The sessions have been about allowing the luxury of reflection – the poems open a door (D6.8).

> Faith: Having something to respond to that is neutral, or neutral-ish, helps.

> Beatrix: …a poem is nobody's territory (D6.6).

> Paula: Poetry gives fresh insight and conversation.

> Beatrix: And you don't know where it's going to take you (D6.9).

These quotations from participants reviewing their experience of reflecting with poetry in RPPGs are representative of participants in other groups. Of particular note is the sense that poems are powerful in opening-up new insight, and how this has been enabled by working in the context of a group setting, and within the framework of agreed parameters for process and conduct.

Paul's reflection on the healing quality of the process as "cathartic" alludes to different aspects of sessions, attending to emotional dimensions of ministry experience with which he has not consciously connected before. Articulating these emotions for the first time is

liberating, as is the power of exchanging insights with others. The RPPG as well as the poems has been fundamental in generating insight, freeing him to speak and find understanding. For Faith and Beatrix this generative quality flows from the character of poetry as material with which to foster reflection: the poem is "neutral", it is "nobody's territory". The poems sustain a number of meanings from the different perspectives of participants, and this provides a generous space in which to test ideas and share insights: the sense that there is no right or wrong response to a poem frees participants to reflect without anxiety.

James's reflection on poems as "the shard of something which gives rise to more" suggests that the encounter with experience facilitated by a poem is not always straight-forward. The poem may be a broken thing, without a fluency in stimulating participant reflection, sometimes only touching on dimensions of ministry in an oblique way. For James, overseeing a multi-parish benefice, the intimate pastoral relationships of minister and parishioner in a poem like 'Sick Visits' does not connect directly with his own (no less pastoral) oversight ministry. Yet the poems have stimulated fresh vision in him beyond the world of the poem itself.

These participant reflections suggest awareness that the composition, structure and process of the group sessions had an important role to play in aiding reflection with poetry. The distinctive value of poetry in Reflective Practice lies not only in the gift of words to enable a language for clergy reflection, but also in the dynamics of interpretive and dialogical processes operating in the group setting shaped by a pre-determined and facilitated structure. Beatrix commented: "there is a chemical reaction between the reader, poem and also in a group, between the members" (D6.4).

I go on to identify the meaning-making processes which are elements in this chemistry, attending to participant references to their experience of reflection through poems in the context of the RPPGs. I group these participant reflections around a series of key inter-connecting themes relating to the construction of meaning in the reflection process.

5.4i   The facilitative role of structure and process

Participants recognise that the group structure and process was an aid to reflecting with poems. The protocol for sessions creates a space for the poem to be considered with care, in which participant reflections can be articulated and responded-to respectfully. The RPPG format establishes a sustained interpretive dynamic in the group sessions which enabled reading and reflecting on poetry to become a shared enterprise.

Whilst establishing mutual confidentiality in clergy groups is conventional, there is rarely a written understanding for this way of proceeding. The research process makes the ethical framework explicit through the considered process of the research design and accountability of University research procedures, communicated in the Participant Information pack, giving confidence to participants to share vulnerable dimensions of their practice. For example, an extremely able and eloquent participant reflecting on 'Sick Visits' talked about the occasional failure of language in ministry: "…sometimes I feel the same myself…I just don't know what to say…I have a thick tongue for words" (A1.4). Michaela feels that explicit ethics are important in creating a sense of safety for clergy to speak freely: '…you have set ground-rules… this is a truly free space' (IA2.6).

As well as the framework of the group, the mode in which the poem is presented and interpreted is also significant. The poem is heard as well as read, with sufficient time and quiet for the words to be absorbed aurally as well as textually. The opportunity to hear the

poem was important in enabling feelings to engage with the words, allowing the poem to

move at its own pace – though of course the reading is in itself an interpretation.

> …I like to hear it, I feel it's an event, a poem being read aloud, I feel that's what it's been written for…like Scripture being read in church, I prefer not to read it, I want to hear it: it's a proclamation somehow…so that I think that there's a fuller impact in terms of the feelings that are evoked, or the point that the poem…because you can't anticipate the punch line or whatever it is, you get the full force of it…that's how I want to experience it, so I am receiving it afresh…(IA1.15).

5.4ii   The choice of poems enables reflective capacity

Participants noted how choice of research poems aided reflection. I selected poems intended

to connect with the ministerial experience, either directly with ministerial work (Thomas,

James, Hardy, Murray), or with social contexts of ministry (Zephaniah, Stevenson). Beatrix

comments that "the poems took us straight to the heart of lived existence" (D6.3). This

capacity is seen to be in the nature of poetry itself:

> Michaela: The poems that you used were extremely well chosen to elicit good discussions and be good spring-boards for them (IA2.4).
>
> I think the poems that you have chosen…enabled us as clergy to say "Yes we relate to that". I think the nature of the poems enabled us to do that (IA2.11).

Michaela's suggestion is not that *any* poem fosters reflection, but those carefully

selected for the purpose. She supposes a level of expertise on the facilitator's part. Other

participants suggest that focussing participant reflection on a poem avoids the competitive

individualism which can characterise clergy exchanges, and that the concentratedness of lyric

poetry is particularly suitable for a time-limited clergy group. Some poems model

reflectiveness, such as Thomas's reflection on his vulnerability and interdependence as a

pastoral priest. Though others were less immediately appealing, they still generated reflection

on ministry (e.g. Michaela's response to Zephaniah).

5.4iii The poem as structured free space

Whilst a poem is 'open' to multiple interpretations, a permissive form in terms of what it

evokes in the readers/listeners, this permissiveness operates partly because of its careful

structure of ideas and techniques: "The poems gave us a structure for reflection that was so

subtle that it felt like a free-flowing discussion" says Nancy, "except that it wasn't, it was

both free and structured" (IC1.3). Similarly, the RPPG seems a permissive place in which to

think aloud – there are no right or wrong interpretations of a poem. This interpretative

generosity is dependent on relationships within the group working cohesively and

respectfully. Beatrix comments that "nobody rubbished what was said, and the sense that

there is not a right or wrong answer was important. People were able to come in with different

points of view – we were part of Chemistry" (D6.6).

But in the participant feedback session Beatrix expresses the sense that she took time

to feel confident in expressing her dislike of 'Soho Road' because she was unclear how I

might feel if one of 'my' poems was criticised. This comment makes apparent that

participants may not feel entirely free to speak candidly about a poem even if, as Beatrix says

elsewhere, they are assured that the RPPG space is neutral. My facilitative role of choosing

poems implies that I admire them, and this has interpretive weight for some participants.

5.4iv Reflective luxury: time and space for meaning and insight to evolve

Confidence in poetry as a starting-point for reflection took time to establish. Nancy talks

about this as a matter of establishing trust in the text – in contrast to a personal story:

> I found it a real challenge to trust the poem, but now I ask if we have anything else
> that has enough subtlety to give us complexity and depth. I do think the poetry
> stimulated reflection. It somehow allowed us to tap into deeper places of reflection on
> ministry which all those people have done …so much reflection (in clergy CME
> events) is surface stuff on one's own and then a floundering plenary (IC1.4).

For Peter, the evocative power of poetry was not always immediate; the meaning and significance of a poem dawned on him gradually. The RPPG method through which the poem was read, reflected-on and re-read aloud gave sufficient time and interpretative space: "I was surprised how long we focussed on each poem, but I did find on the whole that more stuff came out and for me personally in that extended period of reflection and talking around it, what other people say, it did draw more out of it – over quite a long time in some cases" (IB1.12).

As research-facilitator I made particular note of processes of reflection that appear to be operating within the group. This method of reading, reflection time on the text, then reading again, was followed in each group session, including those where participants presented poems of their own choice. The poem's meaning is distilled as sound and text combine into a word-form with which participants engage, and through which they begin to attend to their own experiences. Reflection deepens through engagement with the experiences and insights of others in the group.

The process emphasises the importance of each participant having a printed text of the poem. This allows the poem some autonomy as text. It ceases to be the sole possession of the presenter as it is read by individual participants, and so is more accessible to individual interpretation. When I read the poem aloud to the members of the group, the reading aloud is interpretive; the tone of voice and particular emphasis to some degree creates the meaning of the words. Yet hearing the poem read aloud allows each participant to make their own interpretation as it is read, which may or may not coincide with the way in which the presenter interprets the poem. There is no evidence in any of the groups of participants challenging my interpretation of a poem in terms of how I read it aloud, but subsequent

conversation in the sessions shows that during this initial period in which the poem is presented, participants make personal interpretations through reading the poem as text and listening to it as aural event.

The place of silence is significant in this interpretive process. Though silence is an absence of speech, this does not appear to be an absence of cognitive activity. Often during silences individuals are looking at the text of the poem. In my notes interpreting the transcript of session A4, for example, I recognise the frequency of silence in the session, occurring on pages A4.2, 4, 5, 6, 13, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21 (twice), 22 (thrice). I interpret the silence as the space in which individual participants 'absorb the poem' or 'process' what other participants have said. Silence is a creative moment, particularly during the intentional silence which I maintain as facilitator after the poem has been first read (A4.2).

The fruit of silence is often a spoken expression by an individual which indicates that s/he has been undertaking a careful interpretation of the language of the poem through a 'silent' process of listening to the poem read by the presenter and reading the poem as text simultaneously with the interpretive reading of the presenter. During this active, interpretive 'silence' the participant may also be making an alternative, personal reading of the poem: what Shirley calls "listening to the poem in the head": paying attention to particular words and phrases, and to structure, rhythm and form.

In the dialogic speaking and listening which follows initial silence, as group conversation develops, reflection is generated as individuals attend to other perceptions of the poem in respectful openness to personal insights, endorsing or sometimes questioning and challenging their interpretations of words, phrases or forms of the poem. Reflection deepens

further as participants respond with insights from their own experience, developing the point

another participant has made.

5.4v   The power of reading in the company of others

For a number of participants the facilitative nature of the group was crucial in fostering

reflection. Reading poetry alone and in silence on the page is not an easy experience for them:

> Shirley: I think I need the person saying the poem and the others listening…to be able to stay there long enough to hear it properly or to really take it in...I find it difficult sitting at home by myself to stay with a poem; I find it harder reading a poem for it to grab me somehow, whereas having you reading it and having the group be there helps me to attend to it (IA1.17).

> Peter: I have to admit I haven't had a huge amount of exposure to poetry what I find I can't do it by myself I have to have other people so that's why I joined the group…I find reading it myself very dry…It is a very rich world that I have rejoiced to walk around in, but I need a guide! (IB1.9,12).

These observations suggest that individual participant reflection is generated through

solitary 'interior' interpretation of the text, but also through a group dynamic of interpretive

dialogue. For Shirley the RPPG setting and process is integral to her interpretation of the

poem and the distillation of its meaning in relation to personal life and practice. The group has

been part of the poetical encounter. Being part of a hermeneutical community helps with the

reading and appreciation of poetry.

Participants will bring distinctive reflections on ministry context and experience which

the poem is able to evoke and hold. No poem commands a universal vision, and some

significant areas of ministerial experience, such as the perspective of self-supporting ministers

(who now comprise a substantial proportion of the ordained work-force in the C of E), only

feature in reflective conversation when the group includes a member from that constituency.

In session B3, where Stevenson's poem prompts discussion of the challenges and

opportunities of clergy being resident in parishes, Cath's perspective as an SSM priest engaging with the 'real people' of a parish, yet residing in her family home elsewhere, among different 'real people', makes a stark contrast for resident clergy to consider (B3.18). Cath's retail chaplaincy experience also introduces a perspective distinctive from the more territorial cure of souls theology of resident parish priests in the group (B2.22-23). Rick's perspective on ministry priorities is distinctive: "I am about to retire, so I am tearing up the rule-book!" (B1.1). As participants listen to a variety of experience articulated around the poems, they begin to reflect on and to appreciate contexts and approaches different from their own, building collegiality within clergy groups of disparate experience and tradition:

> …the busy Soho Road…I've actually had to drive down it a few times since we last met, and it struck me how easy it is to encounter people in the city – and I found myself at the village not far from you Peter, and it struck me how it must be much more of a discipline for you to encounter people in the rural areas rather than the city and how different the contexts are. I personally would find it very, very different in a rural context and don't actually appreciate what you have to overcome – but you may not think of it like that – just some thoughts that the poem gives me (B3.3 Cath).

5.4vi Developing appreciation of the poem

In some cases a single word becomes an obstacle to the appreciation of an entire poem. In C3 Stevenson's poem feels inauthentic for some participants. Christine locates her dissatisfaction in the poem's language of "Real People":

> I think my problem with it is the title – if we didn't have the title, or it was 'A Prayer to Live with the People I *Love*' or The People I like to be around'. It's the word 'real' that really narks me as if other people aren't real (C3.8).

This careful attention to language establishes a currency of significance for a poem in which a variety of different interpretations of particular words and phrases allows multiplicity of meanings. Descriptive phrases evocative for one participant could be puzzling for another.

In an exchange over 'Sick Visits', Rick responds imaginatively to Thomas's metaphor of "pale eyes/Wintering me", expressing his sense of scrutiny and confrontation with bleak reality for the visiting priest in the pastoral encounter: "…it's the idea of the foliage being stripped away by another person, the camouflage removed" (B1.11). Contrastingly, Peter feels he cannot resonate with Thomas's description because the poem's metaphorical language is obscure to him, whereas Cath and Janet find the poem evokes for them particular memories of visiting vulnerable, elderly people, stimulating reflection on the formative influence these experiences have for on-going ministry.

5.4vii Meaning accumulates

Making sense of the poem in RPPGs is iterative; meaning accumulated as sessions progressed. Participants sometimes referred back to words or phrases that have already been attended-to in previous conversations, expressing a new or more developed sense of understanding.

> Nancy: So from – as Helen was just talking about – that kind of visit that is so joyful, it occurred to me that you could read the last three lines differently from the first time I had. So the first time I read them that you could go mad…whereas in fact you could read it I would have gone wild when drinking earth's huge draughts of joy and woe.
>
> Christine: So we *do* drink, and sobering stops us going wild with it… (C1.7-8).

Sometimes participants interpret a poem in reference to prior conversations. For example, RPPG D participants interpret Hardy's 'In Church' in powerful terms borrowed from 'A Priest at a Funeral' explored in the previous session. The phrases "summoning rage" (line 1) and "sculpt space" (line 2), which participants found descriptive for the demanding, artful task of liturgical ministry, subsequently illuminate the scene of Hardy's poem:

Cora: There's a lot in it though, in the sense that I am thinking of that *holding* – what was it – "sculpting space" thing – and how do you *sculpt space*?…the sculpting space is akin in many ways to acting, but he can't re-enact, because that's what happens: you get found out. There is a tension in that for me because there is that moment of filling when you stand…

Nancy: "summoning all your rage"…

Cora: Yes…It has to be genuine. It can't be anything but authentic (C5.5).

Similarly, Chad uses a phrase from Faith's chosen poem 'How to stuff a pepper' (RPPG D4) to interpret Hardy's poem in the subsequent session: 'It's that "coming from behind" – like with the pepper in the poem shared by Faith in the previous session' (D5.4).

5.4viii Attending to the text

Sessions were often exercises in careful reading. Participants return to the text of the poem to establish meaning, nuance understanding, and critique what the poet seems to be saying. In A3 Stevenson's exuberant celebration of working-class pub life stimulates Matthew to see a theological tension played out in the poet's admiring depiction of ugly people. He compares his experience of judgemental Calvinist theology denigrating others, and his appreciative Catholic eucharistic theology, which is forgiving: '"Here we are, fat and ugly" – that's what the poem depicts – "yet God loves us"' (A3.2). In response Shirley returns to the words of the poem, correcting Matthew's reading with her own interpretation:

Shirley: "Fat and *beautiful*".
Matthew: I don't think so…We are this unprepossessing mess which God loves.
Shirley: The picture in the poem is not a mess to me. "O Russian dolls" is not a mess.

A poem's language evokes participant feelings and personal resonances, but in the RPPG context other readings of the poem are presented, rendering different interpretations as they carefully attend to the words of the text rather than the impressions they evoke.

In session C.2 Nancy critiques the (perceived) child-birth focus of James's poem as an example of a pervasive theological trend towards the maternal in contemporary women's writing. Cora checks these objections against the language of the poem: "Actually I think it's drawing a parallel between midwife and priest, not mother and priest" (Cora 2.7). Again in session C.5, referring to the motivations of Hardy's minister re-enacting his preaching performance in the vestry mirror, participants pay attention to the specifics of language:

> Nancy: It's not something I would ever have thought that I do. There's nothing inauthentic, apart from that feeling of vulnerability – almost like it is checking yourself…Not, as in this case, "self-satisfied smile"…
>
> Christine: It doesn't say "self-satisfied", only "satisfied".
>
> Nancy: That's a good point! (C5.5).

There was a careful focus on particular words and the meaning they conveyed in the context of the poem, for example Hardy's use of the word 'idol' (C5.20).

5.4ix Shared language develops between participants

In some groups this inter-textuality develops between sessions to a degree that a shared language begins to evolve out of the poems. In RPPG C in particular, phrases like James's "sculpt space" and Heaney's "sky-light" (C4.11-14) take on a patina of significance as a culture develops around them through accumulated reference and interpretation. Heaney's admiring reflection on his wife's boldness in fitting a sky-light becomes a simile for an innovative approach in ministry to the extent that it almost develops into the language of person-specification in collaborative ministry:

Cora: I think I can do skylight but I can't dig-in and do the day-to-day…I can do the radical change…

Christine: I think that I have always thought of myself as an ideas-person, and I am to an extent, but not the really radical idea, and it's good to know it because then you know you need to look round for those who are the sky light people.

Suzy: Not all ministry is putting in the sky light (C4.11).

5.4x Poetry connects with resources beyond itself

There is intertextuality of a different kind as participants refer to a broad repertoire of poets and poems, writing and other cultural and theological resources not introduced by me within the research process. Poetry connects with other art-forms and shapes of meaning which participants share to support or develop responses to the poem. The diversity of these references is striking, including films, radio and television programmes, novels and plays, biography, website material and recollections from theological college. They offer an illuminating insight into the character and range of resources on which clergy participants draw within the process and, it may be assumed, in their reflection more broadly. There is minimal explicit reference to classical theology and Scripture.

5.4xi Poetry makes apparent the character of language

The metaphorical nature of poems makes the activity of interpretation explicit and intentional, inviting reflection on the character of poetic language itself. Janet gives a clear expression of this in her reflections on participating in the groups:

> I am using words – clergy use words with preaching and listening to Scripture – so words are part of the tools we use, and with poetry you only include the words that are important. I am not a poet, but I am assuming that each word holds a lot of meaning and I think then, of course, it's all guess-work and gesturing, it works like a trigger… much more condensed, so if you can work with it, it can get to the depths of things in a different way (IB2.5).

For some participants the puzzling and demanding character of poetry becomes an analogy for the complex nature of corporate identity. Nancy wonders if the Anglican Church feels like she feels about this poem: "…you have to do some working out for yourself in order to interpret what it means for you; it's about personal interpretation, and it's not easy (C2.18).

5.4xii Working with difference: openness, conflict and intervention

> It's been non-competitive – sometimes a group of clergy can be rivals, saying "I have the toughest time" or whatever. Here we have been sharing stories that in other contexts could have become competitive. It has not felt like that. It has been quite affirming; we have been able to share who we are, and poetry acts as a springboard that releases that sharing (D6.6 Faith).

The appreciative tone of the conversations is significant for participants and makes RPPGs distinctive as clergy gatherings. Even when clergy attend to the everyday in ministry, Janet finds, we begin a verbal competition about "the biggest and the best", but this has not been her experience of RPGGs (IB2.4). These comments suggest that in the RPPGs poetry makes for reflective hospitality among participants. Sharing stories in response to the story of the poem, rather than directly to one another's experience shaped by ecclesial context and theological tradition, may have a moderating and sensitizing effect on the quality of reflection. The moderating influence operating in some RPPG sessions becomes apparent in in the Participant Feedback Session when James comments that some participants restrained criticism of the poem written by a Black poet (Zephaniah) because they were conscious of not trampling on racial sensitivities of ethnic minority clergy in the group.

5.4xiii A case study in conflict within the groups *tgf cevgf 'hqt 'eqphkf gpvkcrkv{+

5.4xiv Poetry making hermeneutics apparent

Reflecting with poetry foregrounds the significance of participant hermeneutical strategies for interpreting poems.

> Faith: I was just reflecting on my experience of how we look at Bible passages as clergy; often we read wearing our intellect, sharing our learning…
>
> Beatrix: Nor is there a single truth that has to be communicated.
>
> Faith: With poetry, whichever tradition you come from, you can find different truths. Poetry is more of a gift.
>
> James: Poetry takes the human story – the framework for the group works well, the boundaries and process – it is rare to have a quality of experience like this. I

think I might be able to minister more effectively because of it – in some sense I am healed through it – so it has a number of potential spin-offs (D6.7).

The work of interpretation became apparent in a number of ways, often emerging through a comparison with reading Scripture in Bible study or other clergy groups. As a privileged text, Scripture is felt to be a site of vested interests and conflict when interpreted in clergy groups. These are "nothing like as fluid or deep" as the experience of reflecting with poetry, which is less inscribed with prior ecclesial commitments and prejudices, and therefore enables a more open discussion enabling a range of perspectives to emerge.

Yet the conventional hermeneutical strategies for reading Scripture are apparent in RPPGs as clergy-participants bring their default historical-critical method to bear upon the poem as text, with questions about its historical context and the sex, biography, personality and presuppositions of the author – as Michaela says, "critiquing the author rather than reflecting on our own practice" (IA2.11). As facilitator I am assumed by some participants to be the expert on the literary form and social context of the poems and poets. Over time the possibilities of a reader-response approach in fostering reflection becomes more apparent to participants, recognising the reflective potential arising from a non-didactic stance towards the poem. Within the interpretative economy of the group the poem becomes "a blank canvas enabling us to put our interpretation on it" (IA2.11). Shirley recognises that her academic training in theology makes her "fixated on the background" of texts, wanting to create a critical distance from the poems, yet recognising in retrospect that "the most helpful bit was engaging with feelings and with the poem as a poem". She has found it easier to touch on feelings relating to ministry with a poem than with a biblical text, where academic training "gets in the way" (IA1:19-20). My field-notes record, however, that in some cases where I do not take up the opportunity to respond at length to detailed questions about the context of the

poem and author, another participant may well step in to fill a perceived absence (B5.2)!

These hermeneutical perspectives on reflecting with poetry suggest that the RPPG process

benefits from a considered pedagogical strategy in which the facilitator is aware of these

dynamics.

5.4xv Poetry nurturing a creative culture

Working with poetry gives rise to the composition of poetry in some participants. Reflecting

on her scuba-diving metaphor, Faith says "There's a poem waiting to be written …I do write

sometimes…it's an opportunity to be bathed in poetry which has released opportunities in

me" (D6.6). In the Feedback Session participants suggest that a clergy workshop to develop

creative writing skills in sermons, parish magazine articles and poems would be a welcome

CME development (Appendix 4.9a). Reflecting with poems encourages participants to write

their own poetry. Reflecting with astonishment and pleasure on crafting her "first ever adult

poem", Nancy recognises the artistry of choosing words and shaping structure in a poem:

> What I loved about doing it, and the reason I kept coming back to it, was the economy
> of words. It took all the flamboyance out of communication and gave me the chance to
> choose words really carefully. The fact my wittering about it is substantially longer
> than the poem proves the point (Participant Feedback material).

5.4xvi Interim summary

The data shows the importance of RPPG structure and process in enabling reflection on

ministry with poetry, which are both an individual endeavour and a collaborative enterprise.

Participant reflexivity shows that the RPPG process was fulfilling and enlightening, but also

contains potential for constraint. I go on to draw attention to aspects of RPPGs which inhibit

the effectiveness of poetry in Reflective Practice, also addressing the limitations of poetry as a

reflective resource in the CME setting.

5.5 Poetry falters: tracing the limitations of poetry in Reflective Practice

> Cora: I really, really wanted to bring my slippers.
>
> *Laughter*
>
> Cora: I looked at them lovingly as I left the house.
>
> Christine: O Cora, you should have brought your slippers; it would have been alright.
>
> Cora: It's this business of cultural norms.
>
> Helen: Expectations… (C3.11-12).

This short conversation during the RPPG residential suggests that Cora came with expectations of a CME event involving poetry as a serious business for which casual wear would not be appropriate. This leads into consideration of participant inhibitions and potential limitations which may hamper the contribution of poetry to clergy Reflective Practice.

5.5i Affinity with poetry as a pre-requisite for personal reflection

Poetry is reflection on experience and encourages reflection in the reader/audience. Where a participant is unable or unwilling to associate with the experience which the poem reflects, its affective purchase will be limited. Peter, for example, makes clear that the reflective capacity of a poem depends on his affinity with it:

> Peter: I have my own experience of sick visits and the road less travelled and to some extent the Soho Road – so it does invite you if you have a comparable experience yourself…there are some poems about things I have no personal experience of at all and that's different…but if you have something about a matter of which you have some personal experience – then someone else's experience is going to kick off your own reflections (IB1.10).

From her CME Officer perspective, Nancy reflects that the choice of poems for reflective purposes is important. The research poems worked well in RPPG C (though she

senses they struggled with Stevenson's poem), but this success implies risk. If there is no affinity with an inaccessible poem it will not yield reflective responses: "An oblique Haiku or a poem that is all metaphor would be difficult to use – the poetry that you gave us is a way in" (IC1.4). This issue of accessibility and affinity connects with James's sense that there is a need for poems to relate immediately and transparently to contemporary ministerial experience (D6.8).

Paula wonders if the reflective process requires a shared appreciation of poetry among participants. "I am not sure how it would be if someone was negative". Faith suggests "Where people have no sense of poetry it would not be any use" (D6). Beatrix comments that given the special character of poetry, a CME poetry reflection group would need to be voluntary. Whilst Paula is emphatic that her own participant experience has been one of whole-hearted engagement with the poems, also shared by other members of RPPG D, she is aware that it could have been different. Beatrix's comment hints that not all clergy would be so positive about working with poems.

There is some expression of a sense of obligation in the process to 'find the positive' in a poem. This is expressed in RPPG D in relation to 'Soho Road', perhaps the most contentious for Birmingham clergy (groups A, B and D). Paula is enthusiastic about the poem when first presented with it, but in the group review of the whole process, and hearing hesitations about the poem from James and Beatrix, shares a degree of uncertainty about some of it:

> Paula: In terms of my contribution there was something in me which was defensive, because it was about parish and place and contextual theology, but I had questions too about what was said and not said (D6. 5).

Does this sense of obligation towards the poem originate in wanting to co-operate with me as researcher, clergy colleague and diocesan officer? Perhaps the cultural status of a poem is such that participants feel they must 'find something meaningful' in it? The weight of my choice of poem is significant in shaping participant response: Beatrix mentions that she would like to know what I think of the poems (D6.5).

Peter associates poetry with specialist knowledge he lacks in comparison with fellow participants: "They seemed to know more about poetry than me… several of them could talk quite intelligently about R.S. Thomas". When selecting a poem he perceives "a poverty of knowledge of what's out there in terms of poetry" in comparison with other participants (IB1 Peter). Whilst participation in the RPPG has been beneficial for reflection, Peter's views may be indicative of a broader culture which views poetry as elitist. From this perspective RPPGs can be viewed as intimidating, potentially exposing or exclusive.

5.5ii   Styles of presentation, personal expectations, and patterns of participation

Though participants did not explicitly raise any inhibitions about the process in RPPGs, as facilitator I noted some conduct which concerned me in relation to group ethos. Very occasionally there were private conversations between members (e.g. D5.5), and also times when I felt a participant was over-contributing in relation to others (e.g. D5.20), or pursuing a line of thought which was highly obscure in relation to fellow participants. All these behaviours could potentially inhibit the reflective process in response to poems. Though participation was dynamic, there were a few group sessions in which participants spoke only rarely (e.g. D5), despite my encouragement. In the Review Questionnaire RPPG C participants affirm the enabling quality of the group, but also recognise limitations that participant dynamics brought to the reflective process. One comments that it was sometimes difficult for her to make a contribution in a group where participants were so willing to speak

(C.4A), and another that there had been a tendency to fill all the gaps with chatter (C.4E). These aspects suggest that confident and sensitive group facilitation skills are vital to the reflective process and that in group settings poems cannot intrinsically guarantee fruitful engagement independently of dynamics.

There were no significant participant absences,[9] but as the value of group dynamics for reflection became more apparent so did my recognition of the degree to which the process depends on maintaining levels of participant attendance. This suggests a degree of vulnerability in a process which relies on group trust established over time through regular participation. However, this is a familiar risk common to all small-group CME programmes. Regular commitment to five or six sessions over a period of time is not easy for busy clergy. The research event felt like an additional pressure on time and commitments for at least one participant (IA2.3), and the expectation of committing to serial sessions may have deterred some clergy from participating.

5.5iii The emotional cost of the reflective process

The participant comments about the intense emotional character of the reflection process involving poetry suggest that it is a demanding and potentially challenging experience. Participants become vulnerable through the trust they place in others to receive personal insights and respond appropriately. Conflict in RPPGs A and C indicate situations in which participants might have been emotionally hurt. Participants did not express any adverse impact at the time or subsequently, though Michaela acknowledged conflict in sessions as an issue when I raised it in the interview, and John raised it in the Participant Feedback Session.

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[9] The only absences were one RPPG A participant missing a single session due to traffic delay, and in RPPG D a single participant gave me prior notice that work-commitments obliged him to miss one session.

In session D2, after almost an hour reflecting on the personal cost of funeral ministry, Faith talked about the emotional effect of a family funeral on her, and wept openly (D2.15). Participants comforted her appropriately, and here I saw the value of including reference to the diocesan Pastoral Care Adviser in the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 3.2). Poetry can lead to participants feeling vulnerable as stories and memories emerge. Whilst this is an indication of the power of poetry to evoke feelings which may be buried under layers of professional competence, it also suggests that for some clergy the process might be over-exposing.

5.5iv   Limitations of hermeneutical conventions and personal learning styles

Issues relating to the interpretation of texts, the significance of authorial intention, and the default mode of the historical-critical method in contemporary clergy may also inhibit reflection through poetry. Reluctance to accept that poetical language fosters a range of meanings for participants would limit its scope for reflection if a participant insists on his or her own predetermined perspective in response to a poem, disregarding those of others. Careful listening, and an appreciative hospitality towards the insights of others, is crucial. Shirley raises some of the hermeneutical questions that challenge the effectiveness of a poem as ground for reflection: "Can you make any poem anything you like?"; "Are there legitimate interpretations and illegitimate interpretations?"; "Once it's left the author, is it open for you to make of it what you will?"; "Is it possible for…you come with what's going on in your head, so do you automatically make it into what you want to hear?". For Shirley, these issues of interpretation indicate that there are all kinds of possible 'pitfalls' in the use of poetry for reflection in clergy groups (IA1.20).

5.5v   Poetry as a prelude to technical talk about ministry practice

On occasion, though not as a regular feature of the groups, I observed a tendency for the poem to be exploited as an opportunity for discussion about church business or clergy technique. For a period of session A5, in response to Murray's 'Visitor', John talks about how pastoral visiting by clergy needs an agenda, a purpose – possibly even a challenge for the parishioner. The risk here in relation to the purpose of the CME exercise is that the poem ceases to be a stimulant for reflection, and becomes a route to another kind of discourse – in this case a kind of 'hints and tips' form of CME. This suggests the importance of the facilitator's critical awareness in safeguarding the interpretation of poetry for reflection, steering the group back towards experience, perceptions and feelings around practice, away from predetermined agendas if these threaten to dominate a conversation.

5.6   Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown what the data indicates concerning the contribution of poetry to CME through clergy reflection in the context of RPPGs. Poetry helps clergy to connect with their experience, including the personal interior dynamics associated with the ministerial role and practice. Poems enable this connectivity through the integral dimensions of the style of poetic forms and the language of poetic content. The poems appear to capture human experience and emotion in a multivalent reflective mode which evokes reflectiveness in participants. Poems provide practitioners with a language through which to describe and reflect upon their own ministerial experience. This is supported by the framework of the group as an interpretive community, including the ethical basis upon which relationships of trust and openness can develop around the powerful reflective disclosure stimulated by poems. Poetry generates reflectiveness on ministerial practice through its characteristics as

word form, and as a lens through which to make a study of experience and practice within an intentional reflective community. I have drawn attention to how meaning is constructed around poems within the group, and to some of the limitations of poetry in Reflective Practice apparent in the RPPGs.

I now proceed to consider the theoretical implications arising from this picture of reflective poetics, and the implications of transformed self-understanding and changed practice for my own work as CME Adviser and for the use of poetry in Reflective Practice and Continuing Professional Development more broadly.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1   Introduction

This practical theological inquiry has made a study of poetry's contribution to clergy CME in the C of E. Rooted in my professional practice as CME Adviser, the research shows that specifically chosen poems, in a simple but intentional, carefully managed process, enables reflection on the work of ministry experienced by clergy participants. The data reveals how poetry, in the context of facilitated reflective practice groups, contributes to CME as a tool for reflection on ministerial practice in ways which enable clergy participants to reimagine their work and identity.

This chapter sets out the research contribution to knowledge in the field of CME, summarising the findings in terms of poetry's reflective agency in clergy Reflective Practice and indicating the significance of poetry in relation to formal C of E requirements for CME (6.2). It traces the implications of an associated methodology for CME practice (6.3) and for Reflective Practice theory in the broader field of CPD (6.4). In the light of the research findings I go on to offer further reflections on the nature and potential of poetry for Reflective Practice in the context of CME (6.5), implications for Practical Theology (6.6) and for my practice as researching poet and priest (6.7). Finally I offer a critique of the thesis (6.8), discuss dissemination of the findings (6.9) and possibilities for further research (6.10).

6.2   Poetry in relation to Continuing Ministerial Education

Common Tenure legislation (C of E 2009a) gives Bishops responsibility to provide appropriate CME, and clergy obligation to participate in it, making explicit the vocational

commitment to study articulated in the Ordinal (C of E 2007). Whilst the shape and content of CME is a matter for episcopal judgement and discernment of individual ministers, official guidance commends critical reflectiveness as core to professional standards in ministry (Chapter 2, section 5). The thesis argues that poetry contributes to CME through its capacity to foster critical and imaginative reflection on practice.

6.2i   Poetry's contribution

The empirical study shows how reading poetry together in the context of RPPGs offers clergy an effective way of reflecting on ministry with peers. The poems evoked reflective conversations about ministerial identity as well as practice, relating to person, role and the organisation of the Church. The graphic, affective character of poetic form and language stimulates reflection by giving participants a framework in which to connect with the responsibilities, relationships and contexts of their work, including narratives about the functional and inter-relational dimensions of ministry, allowing a grounded reflexivity to develop.

As a language of feeling poetry evokes an emotional response in participants, giving clergy means to connect with and express the emotional dimension of their ministry experience, in relation both to the emotional and spiritual lives of individuals, Church communities and neighbourhoods among which they minister, and in terms of their own subjectivity in relation to the joys and sorrows of pastoral care and Church leadership. The multivalent character of poetry permits diverse interpretations of a poem to be sustained simultaneously within a group setting, allowing different perspectives and traditions to be voiced and heard without reaching for a mono-vocal or unanimous conclusion. The unresolved, irreducible character of poems offers participants opportunity to articulate interpretations and share reflections which are fragmentary, contradictory or ambiguous.

The shared and constructive method of interpretation and meaning-making in the groups is affirmed. The data shows that the RPPG structure and process provide a method for selected poetry to be a reflective resource for clergy groups in the context of CME. Reading and responding to poetry in this way offers participants a quality of reflection on ministerial experience which is subjective at a deep emotional level yet simultaneously collegial in which the sharing of insight represents a culture of mutual learning. This includes the corporate character of poetry as a performative aural-oral art-form which operates beyond words on the page as it is read and corporately appreciated in the groups, evoking silence or laughter as well as words in response. Participants acknowledge the mutually enriching and appreciative character of reflecting with poetry. The benefit of collegiality in the RPPGs as a collaborative, constructive setting for clergy Reflective Practice is affirmed. In connection with this, the importance of appropriate ground-rules for the conduct of small groups is recognised, both in relation to confidentiality but also to safeguard mutual respect between professionals in a situation of some personal vulnerability and risk.

The research shows that the process for RPPGs which has evolved through the inquiry presents a practicable method for fostering Reflective Practice among clergy, representing a mode of CME which is reflective, collegial, critical, and shows potential for impact on self-understanding and ministerial identity.

6.2ii Poetry's limitations

Poetry as a reflective tool is not, of course, the entire CME tool kit. Nor is every poem suitable for reflection on ministry experience. The study recognises the communicative and interpretative limitations of poetry (Quash 2007; Motion 2009; Williams 2000) and the potential for a poem's obscurity to inhibit reflection. Whilst the majority of participating clergy had a positive attitude towards poetry, not all felt comfortable with poems, and this

indicates that although all clergy work with the medium of words, formal literary constructions are not necessarily their preferred medium. Cultural forms like music, painting or film, or activities such as dance or craftwork, may be more effective in connecting with personal clergy experience and fostering reflection. Poetry may be socially exposing for some clergy, like a cultural test of superior learning or good taste (Bourdieu 1997). Bearing this in mind makes the voluntary nature of reflection with poetry crucial.

6.2iii   Poetry nourishes clergy for ministry

Arguing for the contribution of poetry to CME's reflective task does not imply that poetry equips clergy in a technical sense. However, the data shows that reflecting with poems fosters attentiveness to language, text, and to the context of ministry. This resonates with the importance of words in various dimensions of pastoral and liturgical ministry. Practical Theology emphasises taking care with words as a route to the renewal of pastoral care (Capps 1993), becoming more reflective pastors through listening to the everyday poetics of the particular contexts (Whipp 2010, 2013), enabling the internal discourse of Church to become increasingly polyphonic, her theology more 'choral' (Clark-King 2004) and less dominated by a single (oppressive) language. This fostering of critical attention to words has profound implications in relation to the liberative power of language for human flourishing (Pattison 2000a). Replenishing the stock of poetic images and stories renews the social imaginary of the church (Taylor 2007, 23), transforming identity and mission. In giving clergy the opportunity to wrestle with the language of symbol and myth, the experience of RPPGs offers potential to develop the capacity for a critique of ideological language, and to interrogate the functionalist managerial rhetoric of organisation and profession (Pattison 1997, 2000b). Whilst symbolic language is a positive tool for illuminating the mysteries of the Christian faith (Dulles 1976), images used unreflectively become deceptive or evasive theological models. Theology

requires a critical capacity with regard to its symbolical language (20-21); reading poems develops this critical discernment.

Attending to ministerial experience through the lens of poetry requires the same expansive appreciativeness demanded by 'biblical imagination' (Brown 1999, 36; 2000) expressed in scriptural poetry which addresses human situations holistically rather than in abstract, intellectual terms (Davis 2000). This enlivens preaching with the 'language of the heart' (Denison 2006, 53), voicing the prophetic conscience (Brueggemann 1978, 1989). Rahner urges priests studying the word of God also to attend to the power and depth of their imaginations, to 'nourish' them with poetry, novels, theatre and film (1967, 303; Cozzens 2000, 94). Poetry animates the imagination for Christian apologetics in a post-secular age where the creative arts can witness attractively to the gospel in the public square (Davidson et al 2011; Graham 2013). Poetry creates beautiful language by regarding ordinary things; its attentiveness restores to clergy the contemplative dimension of ministry and discipleship. In this sense poetry is close to prayer and to the prayerful appreciation of persons, places, practices, which is part of the minister's calling – and indeed, at the heart of discipleship (de Certeau 1984). It brings readers into a contemplative space in which the 'flowering of ordinary possibilities' (Merton 1966, 299) becomes possible, making apparent the hidden agony and divinity of the everyday (Vanstone 1977, 119-120).

6.3   Implications for CME practice

Reflection on the contribution of poetry illustrates the critical awareness required by the CME practitioner in finding methods to access the hidden territory in which clergy are called to operate: the non-rational domains of story, identity and imagination. In developing good practice among ministers, CME must be rigorous and have the tools for the task. Yet it must

not be imprisoned into a professional paradigm which is alien to the actual nature of the practice of ministry as it is performed and inhabited by clergy themselves. If CME, rooted in practice, is not to lapse into a self-perpetuating professional stasis the CME Officer will need to foster a broad and dynamic approach to the reflective task to offer a creative and useful process for participants and for the Church they seek to lead and serve. This requires a theologically informed pedagogy to facilitate method and content which connects with the particular character of the professional nature of ordained ministry, whilst retaining a critical capacity. This will be an educational approach drawing out the interrelated potential of the different aspects of self, theological tradition and context which contribute to the practice of ministry, in ways which foster the personal, vocational and spiritual in the formation of clergy character, individually and collegially. The CME Officer will consider not only discrete ministerial tasks and the acquisition of skills to fulfil them adequately. S/he will also find methods which facilitate reflection on practice, and particularly the elements lying at the heart of ordained ministry: dealing with words, stories, intuitions and emotions, in pastoral care and spiritual counsel, as well as preaching, liturgy, education and social action. This suggests that poetry is an appropriate reflective tool because it offers space for imaginative theological conversation.

The inquiry reveals a number of issues for my practice as facilitator in RPPGs. First my own appreciation of the poetry selected as reflective material has been expanded and deepened through the reflexive process of the RPPGs, and my capacity to foster a more generous economy of interpretation has been enhanced. Furthermore I have recognised the potential for my selective role in choosing poems to inhibit participants' freedom to respond as they might wish, and the innovation of encouraging participant selection of poems enhanced the capacity for RPPGs to be a generous place of shared reflection. My analysis of

participant responses to poems suggests some tendency towards historical-critical approaches in clergy hermeneutical strategies of reading privileged texts. This has implications for the development of pedagogical strategies for fostering reflection. Furthermore it requires the development of Reflective Practice theory within the broader field of CPD. In the context of using poetry as a reflective stimulus when working with clergy, a simple focus on metaphor as a reflective tool will be inadequate where participants want to give the full text of the poem the critical attention and reflective value it requires, including how its historical and social context may contribute to meaning-making in the reflective process.

6.3i   Hermeneutical insights into clergy reading poems

In terms of the contribution of poetry to clergy Reflective Practice, the research indicates that participants import hermeneutical conventions developed in the interpretation of Holy Scripture. Whilst a perceived advantage among participants is that poetry is less contested than Scripture in its potential for reflection because it does not carry the same hermeneutical baggage as biblical text, to some degree the poem is likely to be subject to historical-critical analysis. Historical context and autobiography are valid concerns in interpreting poems; the 'circumstances of a poet's life and times are the soil in which the work is rooted … Understanding these enriches and clarifies the reading of the poems' (Drury 2013, xvi-xvii). Similarly, a literary-critical approach will analyse the poem as a literary construction; this too may be valuable in understanding the poem. Whilst this is skilful, and may even draw considerable knowledge out of participants about the poet (e.g. notions about R.S. Thomas's misanthropic personality), or technical study of form (e.g. sonnets), or about the literary tradition which the poem represents (e.g. Metaphysical or feminist poetry), the reflective purpose for which the poem is introduced in CME moves beyond questions of the poem's form and authorial origins into connection with the subjective experience of the reader(s). An

entire poem, hallmarked with its author's identity, may need some shepherding out of the valley of historical facts, biographical detail, literary form and speculation on authorial intention, into the sunny (or shady) pastures of imaginative response. Sometimes clergy are resistant to the poem as a form of play.

This insight from the research suggests the value of a more intentional pedagogy on my part as facilitator which anticipates hermeneutical strategies in ways that can welcome appropriate historical-critical concerns whilst opening up potential for personal participant responses to the poems. Both are routes to reflection, but the risk is that participants (e.g. Rick in RPPG B) detain a group of clergy with literary-critical details of a poet's oeuvre or style rather than move into the zone of personal ministry experience. Hence the need for awareness and vigilance on the part of the facilitator to open up the poem as a gate to participant experience – the poem as lever or net to give participants access to reflection on practice – with some generative questions – as in Godly Play (2014) or Appreciative Inquiry (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003,12). A *Lectio divina* approach may allow a poem to work in the reader's imagination (Leclercq 1988) more than rational analysis driving a technical form of interpretation which may stifle imaginative meaning-making. In this context poetry is akin to

painting rather than the study of artistic technique or the history of art;

cooking and eating rather than lists of ingredients, utensils or recipes;

dancing, not the technical choreography of steps.

Poetry may be analysed in its various forms and components, but this anatomy is not the living organism nor is analysis the performed practice of reflection.

6.3ii Choosing poems for CME

As a result of the intentionality which research has brought to my practice, I have developed greater reflexivity in selecting poems for reflection with clergy and lay ministers. Where a poem addresses ministry experience or articulates an explicit theological theme, its relevance for CME is apparent. In cases where a poem is tangential to the practice of ministry I have developed some *considerations* to make my selection more explicit, adapting Lynch's criteria (2005, 190-1) for forming aesthetic judgements on popular culture so that I am clearer in my own mind about the reflective potential of the poem for CME. Does the poem…

- demonstrate an impressive level of technical skill?
- exemplify originality, imagination or creativity?
- offer a powerful reflection on human experience?
- enable the reader to empathise with experience?
- deepen awareness of experience?
- evoke mood, surprise or provoke?
- offer a vision of value/meaning for our lives?
- provide stimulation – emotional, sensual or intellectual?
- make constructive relationships/interaction possible?
- convey a sense of encounter with God, fostering a sense of the transcendent or spiritual?
- faithfully serve that for which it was intended?
- does it have a discernible moral or ethical perspective?
- does it challenge and have potential to change/transform?
- Is it a convincing poem?
- Is it authentic?

6.3iii Extending my interpretation of poems

My understanding of the research poems has been extended, deepened and enriched through reflecting on them at depth in RPPGs (see Appendix 4.1 for an indicative summary of this learning). By listening to participant reflections on poems I developed a more critical sense of my own interpretations. For example, I had not seriously considered the gendered nature of male priest/sick old ladies in 'Sick Visits' articulated in RPPGs A, C and D, nor the cultural specificity of its approach to sickness and old age challenged by participant

experience of vibrant older Caribbean parishioners in RPPG B. The session could be reconfigured to include a poem from the perspective of being visited (e.g. Wilson's 'The Handbag' (1988, 35-6), or Causley's 'Six Types of Hospital Visitor' (2000, 231-237)), but the purpose of the research was to gain insight into the reflective potential of poetry, not to teach pastoral practice. One respondent in the Participant Feedback Session felt I could have been more explicit in RPPGs about my reasons for selecting the poems. I think this may have inhibited participant reflection rather than fostered it. I have shown that taking issue with poems was the stimulus for reflection on ministerial experience and context.

I had imagined Zephaniah's 'Soho Road' to be a celebration of local neighbourhood modelling the parson's cure of souls; participant perceptions of its particular male Caribbean ethnocentrism challenged this interpretive naivety (RPPGs A, D), even as others confirmed its inspirational ethnographic value (RPPG B). Hardy's performing preacher 'In Church' attracted far more empathy from participants about the appropriate place of learned gestures, rehearsed liturgical style and homiletic rhetoric than I had anticipated. Hence a form of *midrash* or interpretive tradition developed around the poems, funding capacity on my part to support a more nuanced reflection with other clergy. Poems chosen by participants contribute to a richer repertoire of poetry for reflection, enhancing practice (e.g. Heaney's 'The Skylight', Appendix 6.2c).

6.4   Implications for Continuing Professional Development

The research suggests a number of implications for CPD arising from insights into the contribution of poetry to professional development in a CME context. The role of poetry in fostering reflection on ministry experience in the groups suggests that poems may strengthen the capacity for 'reflection-in-action' which Schön (1983) describes as a kind of 'artistry' or

'intuitive knowing' on the part of a practitioner responding creatively and, as it were, spontaneously to problematic practice situations characterised by 'uncertainty, complexity, instability, uniqueness and value conflict' (17). The deep reflection that poetry evokes through its power to connect participants with their accumulated wisdom of professional experience and to find a language in which to describe it critically, connects with Dunne's use of Newman's *illative sense* (2009, 34-5), generating insight through the surprising power of words and the attentive power of narratives to foster *phronesis*, and so develop a capacity to connect with professional tacit knowledge (Polyani 1967, 1969). The research reveals this process in the stories of making a sick visit, putting in a skylight, and conducting a funeral as sculpting space.

The contribution poetry makes to CME resonates with existing Reflective Practice theory, dwelling as it does on creative-writing and metaphor as powerful agents both to help professionals access 'hidden' knowledge and experience, including emotions, and to refine their existing professional knowledge into new and more effective practice for the generation of reflection on practice. However, the findings indicate five interrelated areas in which CPD can be enhanced through conversation with this research.

First, there is value in reflection on the entire text of a poem as a literary form which contains metaphors, but also a narrative and a structure, even a degree of poetic puzzle, which is also stimulating. The difficulty of a poem, and its capacity for multiple interpretations, generates insight.

Secondly, the research shows the value of poetry as a resource for Reflective Practice in a group setting. The thesis makes an original contribution to Reflective Practice theory by showing the potential for *collective poesis* as participants construct meaning collaboratively from the variety of participant interpretations of a poem. A reservoir of reflective wisdom

accumulates within the security of the RPPG process. Adding to research into the Continuing Professional Development benefits from shared participation in career cohort groups (Tams and Arthur 2011) and Balint groups (Travis 2008), the research shows the particular contribution of poetry in enabling clergy groups to generate reflective insight through conversation and shared experience.

Thirdly, the poem is not a neutral tool, a blank sheet or inert construction, but has the potential to stimulate various interpretive responses in the readers. The poem creates an affective chemistry interacting with persons and group dynamics which the facilitator orchestrates, opening it up and sustaining it to a satisfactory conclusion without stifling the power of the poem to continue working in participant imaginations. Whilst Reflective Practice theory attends to the power of poetry in connecting with experience (Bolton 2010), its focus tends towards creative writing by participants, or towards extracted metaphor (Nash and Nash 2009). The research shows how respect for poems as sophisticated word-forms rather than malleable tools obviates naïve approaches to poetry in Reflective Practice, particularly as poems operate in a text-oriented professional culture such as ordained ministry. This study of poetry in CME suggests that Reflective Practice theory needs to develop more complex understandings of textual interpretation.

Fourthly, more complex Reflective Practice theory also generates the need for more sophisticated pedagogical strategy to negotiate the different hermeneutical strategies which participants may bring to reading a poem in Reflective Practice. The research identifies the importance of process and facilitation in fostering the ethos of constructive group reflection around a poem in CME. This includes awareness of how to negotiate between an historical-critical interpretation of the poem and a more naïve reader-response interpretation. Whether

particular hermeneutical strategies are more prevalent in distinct professional groups would be a matter for further research.

Fifthly, in relation to participant emotion as a key trigger for or inhibitor of learning in a CPD context (Cross 2009), reflection with poetry in the facilitated context of RPPGs allows emotional factors to be integrated into the educational exercise in an intentional way, rather than treating affective dynamics as additional factors of which the facilitator must be aware, and with which s/he must cope. As authentic response to the stimulus of the poems within a reflective framework, participant feelings become part of the process of reflective learning. This research indicates that attending to the value of poetry in reflective learning among clergy makes a contribution to integrating emotional dynamics and self-understanding for educational methods in CPD more generally.

6.5   Implications for poetry

Reflection arising from the empirical research leads me to return in an iterative way (Lee 2009, 30) to the nature and character of poetry revealed in the process of Reflective Practice within the CME setting. I dwell on five metaphorical descriptions for dimensions of poetry apparent in the RPPGs, drawing on a range of theories to help draw out the reflective potential of poetry and so illuminate further the capacity of poems to contribute towards clergy reflection in CME. These reflections begin with a focus on spatial metaphor for the experience of encounter through poetry, turning to an epistemological reflection on poetry as a way of knowing, and then to consider poetry as the practice of hermeneutics, a way of seeing. Finally I consider the generativity of poetry, and its capacity to be a source of wisdom.

6.5i   Poetry as a place of encounter

In the data, language about the experience of reflecting with poetry in a CME setting is frequently *spatial language*, describing how poetry offers participants an environment or ecology for deep reflection. Faith gives her enthralling analogy with scuba-diving; Beatrix talks about the poem as territory which nobody possesses. The experience of poetry has been one of *reflective space* shaped by a dynamic of encounter with other clergy. These insights resonate with Baker's (Baker 2009, 26) adaption of Bhaba's (1994) third space theory of language and culture in a post-colonial context, which originates in literary cultural theory. Poetry allows a 'third space' to be created in which encounter is not a field of combat between binary opposites to establish an interpretive norm, but a space in which multiple perceptions can be sustained. Participants encounter one another in a place of translation and hybridity where their own identity is plastic: they construct the meaning of a poem together, and collect multiple meanings. Perceptions of self, the other, the work of ministry, the nature of place, church, God…these shift and integrate, or are disturbed, through the conversations around the poems. The poems in RPPGs become 'in-between' spaces where binaries may unravel, or at least, become subject to challenge (Bhaba 2000, 139; Sugirtharajah 2006, 15). They unleash the possibility for multiple interpretations which are rooted in context and personal circumstances rather than abstract ideals (Betcher 2007, 50). This liberating poetic agency offers generative pedagogical potential for holistic spiritual formation in ministry (Whitehead 2012, 38-39).

The ambiguous, multi-interpretable character of poetry makes it a fruitful format in which to explore the 'blurred boundaries' clergy now encounter in terms of pastoral relationships, demographics and ministerial role – the paradoxes of professional/voluntary, technical/relational, public-representational/intimate, parochial/congregational,

pastoral/evangelistic perceived as inherent in the ordained role (Reader 2004; 2008, 10-12). This series of paradoxes can breed a sense of tension and stress among clergy negotiating the inter-relationship of person, role, status and sociological position, not least the tension between interiority and exteriority in the formation of identity and purpose (Irvine 1997, 146).

Poetry resists the tendency of organised religion to tidy things up. Following Wittgenstein it asserts that 'what is ragged must be left ragged' (Morgan on Thomas 2006, 52-53). This is also a resistance to the ideological ratio-technical certainties of the modern organisation with its mission statements, aims and objectives and associated targets (Pattison 1997, 2000b). The practice of ministry may be more complex and less systematic than diocesan mission strategies allow. Poetry in its attention to the 'litter' of parochial ministry, pastoral care and the leadership of volunteers in a local association dependent on the arbitrary goodwill of its membership, 'picks up' this messiness in the way that, for example, the slick corporate language of an Annual Report cannot do.

The research has foregrounded the appreciation of poetry as a corporate activity in which meaning is accumulated co-operatively: the puzzle of poetry becomes a constructive game to play with others. The RPPGs are an exercise in collegial CME, and show the place of learning in presbyteral ministry which is collegial (C of E 1986, 2007). One of the modes to address pressures experienced by clergy is to engage in group encounter with colleagues. This is shown to be beneficial for Balint reflection groups with clergy (Travis 2008) and for Career Communities in other professions (Tams and Arthur 2011) and for shared reading groups (Billington et al 2012, 2013; Van Gogh 2012; Whelan 2013). Participants' comments about the refreshing character of the group experience suggest that encountering colleagues through an opportunity to share ministry experience is potentially supportive or even therapeutic,

particularly shaped around a well-structured and spacious process providing 'vital safe territory' (Evans 2012, 115).

The research also indicates some of the obstacles to shared space: the operation of power around class/educational differences and gender, and the importance for participants of voluntary participation and for ground-rules and confidentiality is significant for CME, not least in the way that they suggest some clergy meetings can feel like unsafe places. My own perception of the constructive power of the group dynamic has been enhanced. Through the fieldwork I have come to recognise with greater clarity and appreciation the way in which meaning accumulates between participants, and the significance of stewarding the reflective inter-relationship to enable learning and meaning-making. These are crucial insights into using poetry in CME as the character of a programme is an important factor in commending it to clergy participants (Evans 2012, 10-17).

6.5ii   Poetic knowing

The research recognises poetry operates as an art-form in the context of Reflective Practice, with its particular characteristics as such, and suggests the need for a richer hermeneutical repertoire in reflecting on experience through a poem. This implies that poetry has its own epistemology which is accompanied by an aesthetical, art-shaped mode of appreciating self and world that resonates with participant reflection on their experience of poetry in the groups – poetry's capacity to locate participants in, and connect them with, experience through poetic forms, words, rhythms and images which are particularly apt and affective. Poems are doorways into a way of viewing the self in the world (and the world in and through the self).

Here Maritain's aesthetical epistemology of *poetic knowledge*, a sense of intuitive cognition, offers a fuller appreciation of what poetry offers to clergy reflection: '…that

intercommunication between the inner being of things and the inner being of the human Self which is a kind of divination' (1953, 3ff). Poetic knowing is a mutually illuminating process of creative intuition in which the individual grasps a deeper sense of subjective identity, simultaneously and in conjunction with a profound sense of objects and things. It is this deep, comprehensive knowing which gives rise to the creative production of poetry. Finding meanings in a poem, through hearing, reading and conversation with other clergy, opens up to participants the particular poet's appreciation of a situation, person or object, and in an intentionally reflective context such as the RPPGs, invites participants to enter into the poet's way of knowing, and also to construct their own perspective. The poems are inviting a form of discernment and attentiveness which is interior as well as outward, so that grasped through poetic intuition a subject becomes '…diaphanous and alive…populated with infinite horizons…things abound with significance, and swarm with meanings' (127). This poetic sensibility revitalises the critical, constructive capacity of Practical Theology, '…for seeing and naming the world which can be too often smothered in lazy familiarity or buried in unquestioned assumptions', fostering an 'alert receptivity' to concrete existence (Veling 2005, 212-13). This is the animating power of the poet, who '…brings the whole soul of man into activity' (Coleridge *Biographia Literaria* 151, in Constantine 2013, 93).

6.5iii Poetic seeing

Maritain's notion of creative poetic epistemology leads to a related theme connected with aesthetical appreciation: the *possibilities of seeing* that poetry opens up for the participants. Nancy talks of the poems *anchoring* participants in the lived-experience of ministry, allowing them to drill down and go deeper into the specifics of a ministerial task or a specific context (Janet's 'taking a soil sample', Paula's 'diving board'), but also giving participants something secure on which to gain purchase as they climb higher to enjoy a clearer, uninterrupted view

over the territory of their experience. Nancy interprets Larkin's poem 'Here', describing a train journey to the open sea, as of ministry and a metaphor for personal history. Participants resonate with these two models of how Reflective Practice and Theological Reflection can be undertaken – travelling on a train, looking out to sea. Participants find a model for Reflective Practice in the poem, a reflexive appreciation of reading the poem itself as a process of reflective ministry, and one which narrates the practice of reflectiveness through travelling and contemplation in 'unfenced' nature. Reflectiveness through poetry is a journey away from work, but into a deeper level of recognition, a different light, opening-up perspective.

Larkin's own retrospective comments sum up his poetry as extended vision: 'I want readers to feel "yes, I've never thought of it that way, but that's how it is"' (Booth 2014, 428 speech-marks mine). Williams' vision for poetry is similar: 'It's saying "These are some of the extra dimensions I see in the environment we inhabit; come and have a look with me"' (Moreton 2014, 31 speech-marks mine). Poems help participants to see further and more extensively from a different perspective. Bennett's reflections on Ruskin's aesthetical theory, with its combined hermeneutic of immediacy and analogy, argues for aesthetical values in public Practical Theology to foster 'prophetic seeing' which is connective, imaginative, compassionate and critical (2013, 102-103). Theology which 'sees' in this way will find its way into words which engage, challenge and change society and religion, not least through transformed professional practice (127-129). This requires the capacity to see reflexively and courageously, to look inward and see the contradictions within ourselves as persons and professionals (129). Reflecting with poems in the company of others fosters this kind of seeing into the self, and outwards into communities and churches, in a way which allows understanding to collect and perspectives to form, if not necessarily providing solutions.

6.5iv   Poetic gravity

Through the poems participants are *drawn into* situations, narratives and worlds which they create, to be held in them and inhabit them imaginatively. Faith's description of tropical scuba-diving gives a powerful image of how a poem interpreted in the group creates a reflective experience which feels like immersion, adventure and discovery. This sense of absorption and insight resonates with Coleridge's poetic notion that all modes of human knowledge and feeling involve *abduction* – a process in which the whole person is drawn away from 'self' and 'closer to the divine light and thus closer to all things', following divine light into the depths, and experiencing personal and social transformation (Hardy et al 2010, 46, 50ff). Thus abductive reasoning enables us to 'see' more than perception allows, generating probabilistic claims about the world through attraction to others which engenders a divinely inspired 'socio-poiesis' (49) that transforms human relationships and understanding. In this scheme the imagination is central in the movement of human knowing towards God, and the transformative process which this intuitive sense-making entails. It is a theological epistemology which is capable of interpreting the promise art-forms hold out for human reflexivity and flourishing as truth is apprehended intuitively in response to beauty (Quash 2013). This is what can flow from our encounters with poetic 'Otherwhere'.

Hardy's final theological reflections entitled 'Wording a Radiance', a phrase distilled from his chosen O'Siadhail poem 'In Crosslight Now' (1998), speak eloquently of the poetic desire to capture in language the vision of memory, love, peace, 'the fractured voices of humanity' – to render in words all the seeing of an interior landscape (Hardy et al 2010, 149-150). This is something a poem can do, and yet can't, since human telling is 'fractured'. A poem holds this fragmentary nature of deep insight without moving to resolution, and so sustains the multiple perspectives of readers. For Empson, poetry's capacity to sustain

ambiguity is its core characteristic (1930, 295), and poetic capacity 'to hold contradictory thoughts and feelings together simultaneously, not one after the other' is the key to human maturity (Drury 2013, 69). The value in this for reflection is the offering of an *imaginary* for readers/listeners – the gift of words, images and symbols through which to attend to the particular – but in a form which will resist the capture of total and final interpretation, holding multiple meanings and sustaining several arguments. This is what Beatrix glimpses when she says 'a poem is nobody's territory' (RPPG D6). A striking dimension of poetry's contribution to CME is its generosity in evoking reflection for participants in the groups. This richness resides in a poem's capacity to hold within itself different perspectives, and so to sustain multiple readings.

Steiner draws on spatial imagery and the symbol of the burning bush to describe the inexhaustible capacity of a literary classic to evoke meaning in a way which defies final interpretation, for 'no hermeneutic is equivalent to its object' (1997, 21). His defence of the inviolate capacity of the poem to yield meaning describes its gravity and richness for reflection. The potential of poetry to generate meaning is found not only in similarities of interpretation within and between groups, but also in the differences which poems evoke.

> All understanding falls short. It is as if the poem …drew around itself a last circle, a space for inviolate autonomy. I define the classic as that around which this space is perennially fruitful. It questions us. It demands we try again. It makes of our misprisions, of our partialities and disagreements not relativistic chaos, an 'anything goes', but a deepening. Worthwhile interpretations are those which make their limitations, their defeats visible. In turn, this visibility helps make manifest the inexhaustibility of the object. The Bush burned brighter because its interpreter was not allowed too near' (22).

For theology this is salutary: poems such as Herbert's 'Aaron' resist 'completeness in divinity', for in contemplating God and the creation they yield 'only wonder, which is broken

knowledge' (Francis Bacon in Drury, 134). Poetry provides a place for the fragmented nature of human knowing and human experience to be expressed, and it is this fractured vision which 'offers life wholly' (Constantine 2013, 93).

6.5v   Poetic challenge: self and other

Williams takes up Steiner's concept of a presence within art (1989) which generates difference and self-questioning within the perceiving subject in a dynamic which also affects the audience and 'engages us in dialogue with ourselves, the artefact, the artist, and what the artist is responding to' (2005, 150). This is nothing less than 'the production of a self' (163) through artistic creation and artistic appreciation in a dynamic process of 'making other' which reflects divine, Trinitarian creativity (Bentley Hart 2003, 155-178). Poetry can be the invitation into something new which the poem makes through its apposite words and accuracy of observation, opening up dimensions of experience which is both astonishingly recognisable and yet previously unspoken or unacknowledged. As poet Saunders Lewis says: 'How do I know what I think until I see what I say?'(Lewis 1973, in Williams 2005, 163). Hence, perhaps, the excitement of participants at the 'astonishing accuracy' of Thomas's 'Sick Visits', or the 'diving board' of Zephaniah's capacity to render urban vibrancy in words (RPPG D), the revelatory terminology of Manon's 'sculpting space' or Heaney's 'skylight' (RPPG C) for familiar but never before so aptly articulated aspects of ministerial practice and identity. Thus poems 'open a door', they are a 'starting point' for reflection on experience which is made real and known through the words of the poem which describes them – an evocation of some dimension not before seen or appreciated – 'It's been an opportunity to be bathed in poetry which has released possibilities in me' (D6.6 Faith).

Whilst Miller-McLemore discerns 'Problems and Possibilities' in Practical Theology's evolving self-definition, poised between different disciplines, publics and contributors (Tracy

1995, 5; 1998, 196), reflection on practice through the transparently particular voice and perspective of a poem offer grounds for conversation between practitioners in which difference is made apparent and welcomed. Such 'connectivity in difference' requires 'hard dialogue' and the acknowledgment of personal and cultural bias (Miller-McLemore 1998, 189-90). Using poetry in this way is a model of embodying various contexts and perspectives and engaging in a collaborative praxis of teaching and learning which feminist Practical Theology has pioneered (Graham 1998, 151-2). Through attentive listening a poetic approach to Practical Theology as Reflective Practice offers the possibility of movement towards an understanding of what particular differences can mean for us all in multi-cultural settings, finding 'similarity-in-difference' (Tracy 1987, 20-21).

Walton has suggested that Practical Theology's enthrallment with the empirical and applicable has undervalued poetics and the concerns of artistic creativity through writing (2012, 175). As an imaginative construction made out of human language, the poem will be a 'something else' for the writer-reader to encounter (2012, 173), or in the words of Cixous, a 'Somewhere Else' in which to explore the dreams and depths of artistic self and culture (1993, 26). A flourishing relationship between literature and theology will be more than Practical Theology plundering literary texts to revive a spent discourse (Walton 2011, 40). Ricoeur's (1997) theory of metaphor as the imaginative capacity to create something new from the meeting of different terms, offers a theoretical basis for creative writing to be interpreted as the way in which meaning and identity are reconstructed (2012, 179). A practical theological poetics offers the 'meaningful action' of writing creative pastoral responses to people in pain, and most fundamentally to 'construct theological wisdom in the midst of everyday life' (2014, 136). Literature does this by confronting the reader with 'the complexity of the world in a manner that forbids the reduction of particularity to abstract

generalisations' (144); it 'imagines otherness in order to further imagine self and other ever more radically in common' (Wall 2005, 60 in Walton 2014, 145). For Chopp, poetical writing is witnesses to the radical Gospel through speaking in a language which is different from the dominant discourse, disturbs the conventional social imaginaries with new myths and symbols, and which speaks for the silenced and oppressed (145-147).

The data suggests that in encountering 'the other' in the poems, participants have the opportunity to reimagine themselves and to develop narrative agency in response to the worlds which the poems create for them and with them as readers/listeners/interpreters. Extending the notion of 'imaginative labor' (181) beyond the process of creative writing to include the work of interpreting a poem allows us to appreciate reflection on ministry through reading poetry as, in Walton's terms, a *wisdom-generating practice* in which new understandings dawn and meanings impact, generating fresh connections in relation to self, practice and others. Participants bringing their own poems and interpreting them in the group added another dimension to this process, and comments by some participants about how valuable they would find a further opportunity to work with others on creative writing, suggests that there is further to go in strengthening the production of imaginative *otherness* as a dimension of clergy CME.

6.6   Implications for Practical Theology

6.6i   Poetry in critical correlation

The methodology of this thesis is rooted in the 'critical conversation' model of Practical Theology outlined by Pattison with Woodward (1994; 2000, 1-19; 2000, 217-252). In summarising this conversational model, Pattison and Woodward offer a spatial metaphor –

the idea of Practical Theology as 'a place' where 'religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experiences, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical, and practically transforming' (Pattison and Woodward 2000, 7). Pattison suggests that the dialogue of partners in the space for inter-disciplinary conversation which Practical Theology opens up offers the potential for transformation (disruption!) in the personal domain, as well as in professional practice across disciplines, and in Practical Theology itself (2000, 12-15). These 'dialogue partners' are: '…(a) one's own ideas, beliefs, experiences, feelings, perceptions and assumptions; (b) the beliefs, perceptions and assumptions arising from the Christian community and tradition; (c) the contemporary situation, practice or event which is under consideration; and (d) relevant insights, methods and findings that emerge from non-theological disciplines' (2000, 9-10). This model has been useful in pursuing an enquiry which, in considering my professional practice as clergy CME Adviser, also impacts on my self-understanding as a priest who works with fellow clergy.

Reflection on and with poetry can overlap with the liberative concerns of Practical Theology where 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1991) arise from praxis in diverse contexts to inform transformative pastoral care and public engagement (Selby 1983; Pattison 1994; Graham 1996, 1998), inspiring a 'poetics of resistance' (DeShazer 1994). In refusing to pretend objectivity, creative writing invites confrontation through the violation of convention, and evokes participation in a re-visionary project, be it ethical, political or literary. This sets a pattern for Practical Theology to be engaged in, and articulated out of, places of struggle (Miller-McLemore 1998, 186-198). This dimension of poetry connects with Browning's reorientation of Practical Theology towards critical hermeneutics (1991), evoking a return from exile in systematic constructions to the messy, complicated and ambiguous homeland of human suffering, pastoral practice and lived faith. The selected poems were chosen to be

insightful rather than to incite. My choices were tamer than I might use in some CME

contexts. Poems written from the particular perspective of the oppressed or marginalised

could generate a more socially-engaged, praxis-transforming and potentially liberative

discourse than the RPPGs exemplify. Poems about the marginalisation of older people (e.g.

'Handbag' Wilson 1988) or a critical feminist perspective on Christian tradition (e.g. Duffy

1993; Slee 2007) could be more challenging of theological convention and more generative of

radically new perspectives on ministry, as Walton observes in the radical poetics of

Nussbaum, Wall and Chopp (2014).[10]

6.6ii   Towards the construction of poetic Practical Theological inquiry

Having drawn on a poetic inquiry approach (Prendergast 2009; Butler-Kisber 2010) which gives

poetry a more distinctive place as a reflexive research tool within a hybrid range of

methodological approaches in qualitative inquiry, the study has contributed towards a greater

understanding of how arts-informed qualitative research methods may inform and enhance the

methodological range of practical theological critical inquiry, particularly as it relates to CPD

and on-going formational work with ordained ministers. In particular poetry is an appropriate

practice for connecting with and articulating the areas of research which connect with

personal identity and character, and where the boundaries between personal and professional

are blurred or interwoven. This has been the case in the research of one priest researching his

CME work with other priests, and where the technical skill and (to a degree) scientific

methodology of social research method must operate within a domain which is bound up in

my own identity and public role. Auto-ethnographic poetry has enabled me to trace some of

the terrain in this foggy landscape.

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[10] This has been something of my own experience of using poetry and other art forms in a critical revisioning of
gender theology when co-teaching *Gendered Perspectives on Faith* with Dr Nicola Slee with ordinands in The
Queen's Foundation.

The research has given me insights which help in reappraising previous work in Practical Theology, undertaking some methodological reflection on my earlier auto-ethnographic poetry and poiesis in critical masculinity studies (Pryce 1996). I used poetry and creative writing to explore in a critical and intentional way the complex nature of masculinity as a lived and imagined experience. This method has a number of advantages for critical reflection, allowing for:

- the possibility of complexity, ambiguity and unresolvedness in expressing dimensions of lived existence – such as gender identity and sexuality – which are necessarily untidy, inter-connected and emergent;

- exploration of areas of self-in-relationship which are exposing, vulnerable, marginal, and to a degree heterodox/ideologically deviant in the sense that critical men's studies challenge and subvert conventional ideologies and theologies of masculinity;

- dangerous things to be said in a language that is at one remove from the codes and conventions of established theological and social norms. It resists categorisation in these terms through insisting on its own discourse;

- pluriform interpretations, so that readers can find a range of meanings in poetical language which allows a generous hermeneutical economy;

- forms and language which is stimulating, evocative, generative – releasing imaginative possibilities for others to create their own critical, reflexive responses to gender identity and sexuality.

The draw-backs of this kind of reflexive material are that the imaginative character of the material means that for some readers it is hard to interpret and hermeneutically frustrating.

6.6iii Methodological coalescences: researching professional poetics

The research has been an exercise in researching professional poetics as meaning and insight is constructed through reflection on ministry experience in response to the poems. Poetry itself provides an improvisation on this theme in Bowen's 'Litter Stick' (Appendix 6.1) as the priest-poet watches a figure in the park collecting waste and storing it for transformation. In describing this scrap of observation the poet unfolds an analogy for the creative enterprise of poetry – gathering eclectic impressions from ordinary life into the memory for re-cycling as a new creation. This is a sense of the creative, contemplative, constructive art of poetry as *bricolage*, and the poet as *bricoleur* (Pryce 2014): 'poetic ways of making do' (de Certeau 1984, xv). Coleridge identified this poetic gathering of experience to create a language of symbols and metaphors as the generative power of imagination (Guite 2010, 153). It is the poetics of creatively interpreting random experience.

Reflecting on the creativity inherent in this inquiry, the litter-picker-poet could be qualitative researcher, a methodological *bricoleur* constructing multi-faceted and reflexive interpretations of practice, piecing together data generated through multiple ethnographic methods (Richardson 2000, 934; Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 641; Flick 2002, 226). Qualitative research is poetic in its attentive, participative, intentionally constructive approach to the interpretation of everyday life and practices (Brady 2000, 2009).

My experience of qualitative research as bricolage extends to a sense of research as poesis: a creative and constructive enterprise like poetry, with artistry in shaping and pursuing the research through design and implementation in fieldwork, analysis and interpretation of data into a coherent and compelling story, like using raw material in cooking or gardening, creatively constructing identity and transforming practice. It also relates to the entrepreneurial skill of the educator, who must improvise in responding to his students' learning needs and abilities, resources available, and educational intentions and frameworks. This is also the integrating process of Reflective Practice itself, which poetry has generated as ministry experience is evoked, considered, refined and accumulates over time as the 'pastoral imagination' (Dykstra 2008) of the practised minister, surfacing the skilled professional's 'tacit knowledge' (Polyani 1967), shaping it through reflection on practice (Schön 1983), so that ministry derives from the 'rough ground' of distilled *phronesis* rather than smooth surface of programmatic technique (Dunne 2009).

Coakley (2013, 26-27) suggests that all representation of theology in a postmodern world, even Systematics, will necessarily be a gathering together of fragments. She proposes *théologie totale* as an appropriate method holding together empirical research, doctrinal systematics and reflection on art-forms with elements of autobiography and spirituality. Bennett (2013) uses a multiple methodology, and Young (2013) includes poetry in her theological repertoire as well as sermons, for poetry is itself generative of multiple theological insights (3-4). Pattison has warned against Practical Theology losing its identity as a humanistic discipline under the 'paradigm imperialism' of empirical science (Pattison 2007a, 287). Practical Theology's commitment to correlational theological method suggests that it is the discourse in which further exploration of the distinctive contribution of poetry in theology can be pursued.

6.6iv Participation in the DPT programme

Empirical research with a particular group of clergy participants has given me more understanding of the potential contribution poetry can make to ministerial development, increasing my confidence and ambition regarding the potential benefits for clergy gain from reflecting with poems in CME. Recognising the limitations and difficulties of poetry for CME is integral to this critical perspective. The research has brought an integrating energy to my practice, enabling me to connect a range of disparate virtues and values relating to poetry, language and the task of ministry. In this sense reflexive research has brought order and direction to my professional practice, strengthening intuition and style, and contributing to a development of practice in various ways.

This enquiry shows the value that Practical Theology, and the use of the critical correlative method in Practical Theology's hermeneutical task, contributes in developing a critical awareness of practice, and particularly in the domain of CME, with its practical theological concerns. The framework of the DPT, with its focus on Reflective Practice and peer-group study, has been invaluable for researching my professional practice. The culture of mutual support, robust critique and inductive inquiry allows research purposes to evolve in response to professional priorities (Graham 2006, 306). The Birmingham Practical Theology seminar enriched the research through exposing me to a variety of research methodologies, and academic peer support, constructive research critique and training through the Consortium has also been beneficial, offering access to a range of expertise nationally and internationally. If CME is considered as professional development within a learning organisation, which official C of E policy documents suggest, this approach to critical reflexivity offers rich possibilities for developing the *theological* character of CME, which gives formal clergy learning its appropriateness.

The support of my employing diocese has been crucial. Even so, as sole CME officer, research has been done 'in the cracks' of a demanding professional and personal life (Bennett 2013, 128). Organisational reorganisations, shifts in policy and ethos, family illness, and potential upheavals in ministerial appointment were not suspended for research purposes. The rhythms of University terms and demands of a reflexive part-time programme have regularly felt in conflict with professional and personal obligations. Sometimes I have longed for research to be an evasion of professional life rather than a deeper engagement with it!

These researcher struggles and tensions have increased my respect for the generosity of clergy research participants and form the context for a sense of awe at the deep levels of personal commitment in ministry which emerge in response to the poems. The places of reflection that have formed around the poems feel like holy ground. They also embody the conflict and enrichment that participating in part-time learning can foster within an already overloaded professional and personal schedule. As an educator this gives me insight into how CME programmes can be experienced by busy clergy. This emphasises the importance of well-structured, clearly defined, spacious and purposeful learning events to make CME experience both attractive and beneficial (Evans 2012). Perhaps the major CME project during the period of this research has been the introduction of assessment of Assistant Curates in the C of E and the attendant IME programmes and procedures for that process, including the training and on-going supervision of Training Incumbents to which I briefly refer in Chapter 2. Whilst the research has been focussed elsewhere in the CME domain, the overflow of learning about professional wisdom, Reflective Practice and adult education in a CPD setting, together with the intellectual discipline, analytical skill and organisational capacity which research practice develops, has benefitted this and other dimensions of my work beyond the immediate research topic.

A further example of this impact is the CME research culture which I have encouraged and sustained among Birmingham clergy and lay ministers, and the Round Table Theology research group meeting with the Bishop twice-yearly at which members present post-graduate level research and publications.

6.7   Personal implications

The research has had enormous impact on my sense of identity as researching practical theologian, priest and poet. I have developed as a qualitative researcher committed to the value of a critical hermeneutical perspective rooted in empirical research for the transformation of practice. As a full-time diocesan officer with responsibility for extensive residential CME programmes, I found that Sundays were often the only available day for my academic work. Research demands across the six-year programme led me to reassess priorities in my priestly vocation, giving study priority over liturgical and pastoral ministry. This adjustment was sometimes painful and disturbing.

The research has given me a greater confidence in my vocation as poet, facilitating my return to a deep calling and practice which public representative ministry had overlaid with ecclesiastical functions. In this sense the DPT has been a vocational renewal characterised by searing repentance and simultaneous delight, to which this auto-ethnographic poem gives voice.

Poem: Locating myself

Did the bishop know

he was ordaining

a poet?

Did the poet feel

he was becoming

a priest?

Did the priest wonder

what might become

of the poet?

Did the poet ask

where to do

his writing?

Did the priest wait

too many silent years

for the bishop's answer?

6.8   Critique of the thesis

My critique of the thesis focusses on my management of the research process and methodological choices.

The voluntary character of participation had a number of implications. Slow initial recruitment prolonged the duration of fieldwork. Participation of more ethnic-minority clergy in RPPGs would have been interesting in terms of the response to some poems, particularly 'Soho Road'.

The research poems were carefully chosen to foster clergy reflection in a CME context, rather than to prove the reflective potential of poetry in general. Testing the use of a less accessible poem, or one less oriented towards Reflective Practice, would yield different insights. The data contains little explicit talk about God among participants. This begs further reflection on my part, e.g. whether more explicitly sacred poems would yield more explicit theological discourse.

Regarding my handling of the RPPGs I could have been more directive or encouraging at times when individuals over/under contributed relative to other participants. I have identified that a more intentional pedagogical strategy regarding interpretation of poems would move on discussions at key times where they seem to stick on historical detail or authorial intention. This is clearer to me as an educator when not observing group process in an ethnographic researching mode. I am also conscious that the contribution of two ethnic-minority RPPG D participants concerning the Zephaniah poem was relatively muted, and I wonder if a follow-up one-to-one interview would have yielded greater insight into the value of work by a Black poet than the group review session.

I found the triangulation provided by conversation with the Neutral Observer useful in articulating my insights as researcher. In any future project further consideration of how this role might be more effectively deployed could yield greater research contribution from their participation.

Had participants been invited to keep a personal journal as part of their involvement this would yield valuable insights into their experience and the development of views on poetry in CME.

Regarding interpretation of data, given the mass of material generated from RPPGs, interviews and reflexive material, the work of data analysis was almost overwhelming alongside professional and personal responsibilities. However, I decided not to opt for selective transcription as this risked losing the opportunity to ponder at length transcripts of entire events and interviews.

University regulations permit doctoral thesis submissions to take a creative format on special request. I could have been more creative in the format I used to report on this research into my professional practice: e.g. writing a collection of poems and reflecting on them.

6.9   Dissemination of research findings

The research has equipped me to develop resources for dissemination within the academy and for wider use in CME and CPD more broadly, such as:

6.9i   Academy

I have presented aspects of this research in a variety of Practical Theology forums, including the Oxford Centre for Practical Theology graduate research seminar, the ProfDoc Consortium Summer Schools, and the Birmingham Practical Theology Seminar. I was a co-organiser for

the BIAPT Poesis in Practical Theology colloquium in 2012, and keynote respondent at

BIAPT annual conference 2013 (Pryce 2014). I have reviewed submissions relating to poetry

for *Practical Theology* in 2013 and have been invited to submit poems for publication in

Theology Journal in 2014. I am in conversation about contributing to the 2015 Theology and

Arts programme at St Andrews University.

I hope that conclusions and findings from the study will contribute to research

communities in Practical Theology, CME, Theological Reflection, Adult Learning Theory &

Practice, and Adult Theological Education, through submission for publication in academic

journals such as *Practical Theology*, *JATE*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Reflective Practice*, and *The

Way*. The method evolved for using poetry in Theological Reflection and Reflective Practice

would be one aspect of the research to publicise further. I intend to submit the thesis for

consideration by the editorial board of the Ashgate Empirical Theology series.

6.9ii   Church
The research contributes to a range of resources and presentations linking poetry, theology

and ministry, such as Birmingham diocese Churchwardens' Quiet Day 'Poetry and God'

(2013); lectures on poetry and ministry at Vaughan Park Retreat Centre, Auckland NZ

(November 2013), and the International Clergy Consultation, St George's House Windsor

(July 2014)[11]; ministry reflection days for Worcester diocese (2013); the place of poetry in a

reflection on Pope Francis I's *Lumen Fidei* (2013) with Shirley Deanery Greater Chapter

(2014); a poem used in the liturgy of dedication at a Charismatic Evangelical church.[12] I have

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[11] One of the participant clergy wrote this response to my session on 'God in the arts: poetry':
'There once was a poet from Wales/Who brought us some poems and tales/To speak of divine/Our words to refine/And let fly, with wind in our sails'.

[12] I worked with the Incumbent of St Mary Wythall, Birmingham, to find an appropriate poem for the dedication of a stained-glass window depicting the Tree of Life in a newly-built worship space attached to a local community school. Being Eastertide, Rowan Williams' translation of Ann Griffith's ecstatic poem 'I saw him standing' meditating on Mary in the garden with the risen Christ was suggested, discussed and used, to great acclaim!

also found that the research has given me greater insight and skill in using poetry in Bible Study, diocesan meetings, and preaching in a variety of contexts ranging from majority Black congregations in Handsworth to choral evensong at Westminster Abbey. Forthcoming clergy study days are planned for the dioceses of Bath and Wells (April 2015) and St Asaph (June 2015).

6.9iii   Professional development

This thesis pioneers interaction between research into CME and CPD theory in other professions. Sharing research findings in CPD forums will progress this theoretical dialogue, exploring how insights into Reflective Practice through poetry arising from a clergy context may inform a critical conversation which applies across professions, fostering greater reciprocity of knowledge. Potential for further collaboration is indicated by some early examples of trans-disciplinary interchange (Lee 2009, 140-141). The first is work with counsellors and therapists using poetry and metaphor in professional development at University of Warwick led by CPD trainer Alison Paris (Appendix 6.2a). The second is a brief correspondence with Michaela (RPPG A participant) about her use of poetry in theological education (Appendix 6.2b). The third is using the method for Reflective Practice with Spiritual Directors in the West Midlands Forum (Appendix 6.2c). [13] Initial conversations are underway about the value of poetry and RPPG method for Reflective Practice with trainee GPs at University College London and with the Jubilee Centre in the School of Education at Birmingham University about how Reflective Practice with poetry contributes to the formation of professional character.

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[13] The West Midlands Spiritual Directors' Forum is ecumenical. A large majority of members are lay people and lay Religious, with a few ordained ministers representing a range of different denominations.

6.10   Further research

The thesis opens up a number of further research avenues:

Making a study of poetry written by clergy as a form of Reflective Practice; making an analysis of 'operative theology' in clergy poems (Cameron et al 2010; Cameron and Duce 2013, xxx); a comparative study of poems by clergy and those in other professions.

It would be interesting to see what insights might arise from a similar study involving Chaplains, and also Readers. In terms of broader CPD, a study involving multi-disciplinary RPPGs would be valuable for fostering inter-professional reflection in e.g. a health-care or hospice setting. To develop RPPGs as a tool for fostering reflection on lay discipleship and faith-in-work or public theology settings would be valuable. Further reflection on the place of poetry in theological method in research and in theological discourse is required. There is scope for dialogue with current research into clergy well-being, job satisfaction and stress, e.g. some RPPG participants declare a preference for dialogical discursive forms of CME, with which Reflective Practice through poetry would resonate. This also begs a study of the contribution of poetry to CME in relation to personality-type analysis as it impacts on learning preferences, Reflective Practice and professional well-being.

6.11   Conclusion

The thesis generates a critical and nuanced understanding of the nature and potential of poetry as a resource for clergy in CME settings to reflect on their ministry experience in ways which inform, refine and transform practice.The knowledge generated in the context of this small-scale inductive study is not intended to prove or disprove extant theory, nor to articulate generalisable theory. In making an analysis of how poetry has been experienced by clergy

participants the research develops methodology for the effective use of poetry in CME. Undertaking a critical analysis of my professional practice in this context, and bringing the findings into dialogue with resources from the Christian tradition and from other sources of reflection on poetry and professional learning, the thesis offers a reflexive, heuristic theological reflection on professional practice, with implications for CPD more broadly. In doing so, I develop some critical reflection on methodological approaches to researching professional practice in Practical Theology, particularly as this relates to poetry in empirical research. I have also reported on how this research is already impacting in Church, academy and trans-disciplinary CPD settings, and given an indication of how the learning may contribute further to clergy CME and CPD networks.

Writing this research report has been a journey of discovery. As researcher at the outset I was *explorer* finding out about the world I had created through a Practical Theology inquiry using a particular method with a definite group of participants. As an analyst I became *cartographer* mapping the terrain both in its entirety and in detail. Map in hand I became a *tourist* who roams around appreciating a variety of interesting and perplexing dimensions of a country which is both strange and familiar, gaining a sense of it in one place, then becoming confused again in another. Having done my mapping, learned languages and tramped the highlands and the lowlands, learned the wildlife and the fauna, finally I become *tour guide* communicating to newcomers a sense of the territory by finding a route through which will give good views and a real sense of what is to be found. I do not pretend to have covered the whole ground but to have given as fair a representation of the country as I can render. I hope you have enjoyed your visit.

END

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