



sometimes momentarily, sometimes for years

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The poem *sometimes momentarily, sometimes for years*, is part of a group of poems I have been working on, experimenting with a process of erasure and restructuring of my own texts (book chapters, essays and conference talks). In a moment when my creative writing practice was feeling uncomfortably fallow, Emma Filtness' presentation of her erasure work *Bandaged Dreams*,^[i] at the Visceral Bodies symposium, April 2023, seemed to suggest a possible way back in. I began to experiment with erasure - though, somewhat unconventionally for erasure poetry, I am both the author of the 'found' text and the erasure.

In putting my academic texts through this process, my aim was to give back to the themes of my research the fluidity, ambivalence and uncertainty rightfully theirs, before I tamed them into an academic structure. The original text remains valid, in its own form, but I could sense something else beneath the text, something related to why I write at all. I write because language terrifies me, because language is slippery, always too much and too little. And because, as poet Jennifer S. Cheng suggests, 'Sometimes it is a broken narrative, a half-language, that brings us to tears.'^[ii]

I see this poetry project as a chance to lean into the fragmented, searching element of my writing practice, to which I am sometimes nervous to give free rein, for fear of becoming incomprehensible when what I want to talk about is already difficult to articulate. It is also a way to explore my relationship to 'academic' writing, as a first-generation academic. I draw on Jack Halberstam's questioning of the kinds of knowledge and learning produced by 'disciplinary correctness'^[iii] and the potential for 'alternative ways of knowing and being'^[iv] particularly those explored through Halberstam's conceptualisation of failure.

More broadly, my poetic-prose and poetry writing practice aims to perform the often ambivalent and contradictory experience of early motherhood. This practice touches upon the embodied nature of care, the effects of motherhood on language, and writing as an act of survival.

Alongside my creative life writing practice, my ongoing PhD research project looks at how, through theories of the spectral, intersectionality, queerness, feminism, disability, failure and anecdote, we might aspire to transform and re-possess language, in an attempt to express those experiences most difficult to put into words. Both my creative and critical practice specifically explore a recurring connection between my experience of motherhood and ideas of haunting, of presence and absence and repetition (daily and generational).

[i] Filtness, E., 2022, *Bandaged Dreams*, London: Broken Sleep Books.

[ii] Cheng, J.S., 2022, *Dear Blank Space*, <https://lithub.com/dear-blank-space-a-literary-narrative/>.

[iii] Halberstam, J., 2011, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 6.

[iv] Halberstam, J., 2011, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 24.



we were just leaving
when the weather broke
even if we could not always name it

or, languages of haunting
woven into our days
a pattern, there from the very start
turning

I wrote this when he was an infant
at such close quarters

or, all these things at once
the strangeness, the strangeness, the strangeness
the sudden change of light, limp with sleep

the smallness of bones

I returned again and again, from where it lay
an intense system of maintenance
an embodied understanding of our own oppression
forms of containment, mild periodic hallucinations
the language of haunting more and more unruly

I'm not sure
poised calmly with up-turned palms
waiting
outside of the boundaries drawn

he asked what the sky was getting and I replied *dark*
the sound of thunder close in the open
the small look of questioning
the light through rain clouds

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

