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“I love this gory business”: The Art of Female Hedonism in the Poetry of Chelsey Minnis and Sara Peters

Sophia Georghiou

Not often am I pulled from reality by a poem so vividly that I wish to inhabit its space; a space where language transcends its communicative purpose, becoming a personal sanctuary of pleasure. As a female-identifying artist, I have always been interested in the concept of female pleasure: specifically, how embodied language can serve as an expressor of contemporary hedonism. Derived from the ancient Greek, “psychological or motivational hedonism” is the theory “that only pleasure or pain motivates us” (Moore 2019).

In the following essay, I will argue that pleasure and its embodiment in traditional literature is primarily the conceptual product of the male gaze, and that contemporary female poets like Chelsey Minnis and Sara Peters have been reacting against this tradition, creating a new form of female-focused literary hedonism. For these poets, hedonism isn't a masculine-normative reaction against societal restraints (to the further empowerment of men), but an exploration of unbridled feminine embodiment: a deconstruction of patriarchal value- and power-structures, and a reclamation of *lived* female physicality and pleasure. To that end, the somatic language of this female-driven hedonism is that of the female gaze: one of encompassment rather than dissection; a means to reclaim and reconstruct the physicality of female experience as a whole, normatively dismembered and decontextualized by the male-gaze.

In general terms, whilst the male gaze “dissects” (Mulvey 1975) the female gaze is holistic. In traditional hedonistic contexts, the language of pleasure has been markedly masculine: that of violence, of recipients of pleasure, not givers. Contrary to this trend, female poets like Minnis and Peters have explored a different, markedly female language of pleasure: that of giver and receiver, pleasure and pain, strength and vulnerability. To that end, I will examine and compare examples of traditional male-focused literary hedonism to illustrate the aforementioned giver-recipient pleasure gap. As a poet, I don't want to focus solely on my own pleasure: I want to encompass “whole” situations, to slide under their skin and inhabit them as they inhabit me. This is a core quality of Peters and Minnis' work. Their poems aren't sweet, palatable or limited to one point-of-view. They say not only: *Here I am!* but also: *Here is what matters! Here is the reality of it, flaws and all!* Re-reading the poems “Playing Lesbians” and “Sectional” for this essay, I realized I had to abandon, unwillingly, the notion of writing *about* them and instead attempt to write *in* to them, to crawl under their skin and inhabit them, creating my own “gory” poems.

Whilst superficially about two people sinking into a couch, Peters' “Playing Lesbians” is actually about power: the speaker being seemingly intent on abandoning her “moral compass” and hedonistically “sinking” into the pleasure of a memory about their childhood babysitter. “Sectional” also explores power-structure related themes, whilst seemingly being about eating a caramel. In terms of my writing practice, I find

both poems fascinating with respect to the way they *inhabit* the complex physicality and pleasure of “sinking” feelings. My own writing practice certainly feels like “sinking” into a mode of pleasure. Writing in public feels awkward and uncomfortable. As with sex, I need privacy in order to shed my inhibitions, to feel free from judgement, perceived or real. Secondly, when writing, I need music in order to *feel* and construct the rhythm and form of a poem. It is not unusual that the combination of music and relaxants like alcohol make me break into dance: I need to move my body as I write, to inhabit the literal *body*, the *pleasure* of a poem. Both “Playing Lesbians” and “Sectional” encapsulate this process: that of “sinking” into a realm where pleasure and body (viewed holistically) take centre stage.

A poem of mine titled “Pirouette” explores this notion of “sinking” (again, both literally and emotionally). The poem begins with the speaker and a man on a couch. The man talks of how he has used date-rape drugs on women. The speaker, shocked and afraid, performs oral sex on the man, conceptualizing the act as that of performing a pirouette as a child:

*The way to pirouette is to
perfect your spotting technique,
relaxing the neck, focusing
the eyes,
and whipping the head.*
(Georghiou 2021)

The speaker’s sinking to her knees is literally one of sinking into memory, embodying the taut physicality of performance as art, of art as performance, the somatic inhabitability of memory as movement, as ungraspable fluidity. Like Peters and Minnis, my writing practice is one of holistically-orientated female hedonism: whilst exploring topics of grief, pain, alienation, and sexuality, my poems are in fact expressions of *pleasure*, of fully inhabiting myself, my life, both physically and emotionally, my experiences as a woman; of embodying the complex, contradictory “whole” and

thus allowing the beautiful and the dark, the hopeful and the harrowing, to be, as they are—at times impossibly so—equally true and false. Reader responses to my own writing have highlighted the affecting nature of, and potential to use more, vivid sensory imagery.

Recognizing this, I began to reflect on poets I admire (Ariana Reines, Rachel Long, Brenda Shaughnessy and Hala Alyan, to name a few), noticing a common thread: rich descriptions of sensory-focused pleasure. This realization prompted me to explore the place of the “senses” and the “sensual” in my practice, and how these factors can create an immersive experience for the reader. The quotation prefacing the title of this essay is a line in Sara Peters’ “Playing Lesbians”. The extravagance of the phrase “*I love*” (Peters, 2023: 4) felt apt given the central themes of this essay. I will refer to the above-defined concept of “female hedonism” throughout this essay to underpin the distinct methods used in both “Playing Lesbians” and “Sectional” and how both poets indulge in a distinctly embodied form of feminine hedonism, shaping new ways in which to engage the “poetic mind” (Makoha 2021).

In contrast to Minnis and Peters, consider Keats: a poet of the Romantic era known for his sensual language and vivid imagery. Whilst indeed rooted in the language of pleasure, on closer inspection, one soon notices a distinct giver/receiver pleasure gap in Keats’ work. In the poem “Fancy”, Keats uses the feminine third-person pronoun “her” to describe an experience of pleasure. However, in his use of this term, Keats establishes a distance between the speaker and the female-gendered recipient, making it clear that this pleasure is *not* mutual: it belongs to the speaker, not the “her” in question. In fact, in this context, pleasure is mostly readable as a projection of the speaker’s desire, not the addressee’s. For example, consider the passage: “Then let the winged Fancy wander / Through the thought still spread beyond her” (Keats 1820: 122). In this extract, terms like “winged”, “wander” and “spread,” whilst suggesting sexual gratification,

indicate that this gratification is not mutual; Keats’ choice of pronoun (“her,” rather than the more personal, emotionally inclusive “you”) indicates that this pleasure is in fact *his* pleasure, and is thus exclusive.

Similarly, Anthony Hecht’s “The Vow” depicts an experience of pleasure and suffering through a vivid, hedonistic lens. The poem explores a father’s grief-laden reaction to the miscarriage of his unborn child, and the guilt of having originally wanted an abortion: “The frail image of God / Lay spilled and formless. Neither girl nor boy, / But yet blood of my blood, nearly my child” (Hecht 1967: 35). The poem appears in his collection *The Hard Hours*, and focuses exclusively on the speaker’s pain and pleasure while largely neglecting the experience of his wife, the subject of the event. Instead of trying to describe or include his wife’s (the poem’s object-recipient) or even his dead child’s experience, Hecht focuses solely on his own gratification. To that end, in giving the miscarried child its voice, he gives it *his* desired voice, creating a self-gratifying echo chamber of its absence: “Do not recall / Pleasure at my conception” (Hecht 1967: 35). In this sense the poem is limited to one point of view, encapsulating the traditional male-focused hedonistic emphasis on personal gratification or self-centredness. This perspective, which highlights the speaker’s near-solipsistic focus on their own sensual and emotional fulfilment and the priority of their own cogito, though hedonistic in its ideals, is a far cry from the experientially holistic empathy found in the hedonism of contemporary female poetry, such as that of Minnis and Peters.

In the opening line of “Playing Lesbians”, Peters writes “In my dreams I am a moral child” (Peters 2013:4). Interestingly, the poem that follows is a self-aware objection to this statement. Almost practical in their tone, the next two lines “And once I tire of performing / My idiosyncrasies” (Peters 2013:4) preface the rest of the poem: an account of what seems to be a clandestine, psychosexual relationship between the

speaker and their childhood babysitter. While the poem’s opening lines convey a normative self-assuredness, the rest of the poem is littered with decadent, physical language, luring the reader from the overarching theme into the emotionally confused physicality of the speaker’s experience. Peters allows the poem to “sink” into the private language of pleasure, a “vocabulary that is only known” (Adcock 2014) to, and thus interpretable by, the characters in the poem. Upon first reading, the poem’s motive seemed not to be that of an ethical critique on the relationship between a child and their babysitter, but rather to explore the fractured, highly physical nature of memory. There are references to sensory affliction throughout the poem. For example, consider the following passage, in which an highly *affecting* amalgam of the senses is expressed in just four lines:

*As I watched (with one eye that wasn't
Pressed into the couch) the wind shunt one
of her hairs
Over the hardwood floor, and heard
A sudden rain begin, silvery and short*
(Peters 2013:4)

The reader is invited to enter this sensory, all-encompassing space through the alluring use of alliteration (“watched”, “with”, “wasn’t”, “wind”, “wood”) and soft sibilances (“pressed”, “shunt”, “hairs”, “sudden”, “silvery” and “short”), enhancing the poem’s sonic texture and lulling the reader into a linguistic pattern wherein they have no choice but to experience it viscerally and wholly: *seeing* the wind shunt a strand of the babysitter’s hair and *hearing* the silvery, short rain.

I read Minnis’ “Sectional” a few months after Peters’ “Playing Lesbians”. Interestingly, “Sectional” felt not so much like an extension of Peters’ poem, but rather a valorisation of two specific lines: “my babysitter and I / Are somewhere still sinking // Into a dimpled couch” (Peters 2013:4). Coming to “Sectional” after “Playing Lesbians” meant that I read Minnis’ poem in a more *physical* way. Like with Peters’ work, I was struck by her use of visceral

language. Consider, for example, her description of the act of eating a caramel:

..... launching my
molars into the cluster
in order to locate
.....
..... the nucleus
.....
..... of the caramel in my mouth
and maul the unformed mass ...
..... with my tongue
(Minnis 2019:23).

Here, Minnis' highly complex, somatic portrait of the act of consuming a caramel can't but affect the reader, leaving them clamouring for their own hypothetical caramel. The language is careful and exact: the verb "launching" alludes to a forceful and deliberate act, a literal ascent into pleasure; the long-vowel assonance of the term "molars" evokes a heavy, lugubrious biting or grinding motion; and the terms "locate" and "nucleus" introduce a near-scientific sense of precision, of embodied self-awareness, to what is in fact a fairly trivial and mundane act. In general, the language seeks to defamiliarise the action, creating an euphoric sense of near-climactic dissociation, thus immersing the reader in the physicality and emotional pleasure of the speaker's experience. Minnis' use of ellipses is highly distinctive. The ellipsis, indicating a cutting off, or elision, has a breathy physicality to it which well suits Minnis' hedonistic style. The speaker is seemingly breathless and confused, their thoughts jumping around, holistically one but individually non sequiturs, occurring at irregular intervals and with varying intensity in a pattern reminiscent of the literal physical effects of pleasure: the increase of pulse rate, breathing, and sensory over cerebral logic which prelude the achievement of orgasm.

This section of Minnis' poem reminded me of another holistic reading experience. In the opening lines of *Lolita*, Nabokov (1955) describes the journey a tongue takes when saying the name "Lolita": "Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the

palate to tap, at three, on the teeth" (1). "Sectional" similarly engages the reader's literal *body*, drawing attention to the specific teeth used to process the caramel, the intricate journey to its centre. Like Minnis, Nabokov had the condition synaesthesia (Corballis 2010): a neurological blending of the senses, often correlated with visual processing and an enhanced sensorial memory. In an interview with Amy Key for Poetry London, Minnis speaks about her experience of synaesthesia:

I've been learning about ASMR. One theory is that it's a type of auditory synaesthesia. I do have it and I've been wondering how much of my poetry might have been inspired by trying to create a similar type of experience. When you have it, you do this thing in your head to artificially prolong the feeling of it, and some of my poems feel like they have that same almost masturbatory quality. Like trying to keep bouncing a balloon in the air so that it doesn't hit the floor. (Minnis 2019).

The belief that writers, particularly female-identifying writers, obtain an amplified sensitivity to the world rings true, whether the individual has synaesthesia or not. Knowing this, I have endeavoured to bring a wholly hedonistic perspective to my own writing. For example, a poem of mine titled "Pater Noster" explores distinct memories of my Italian-Catholic heritage, including prayers which feel as if they are forever "stuck" in my head. The ending of this poem engages in a poetic pseudo-etymological play on the term "amen": "a man / a men / any man / amen". The creative deconstruction of this key word is an attempt by the speaker to break with tradition by exposing how gendered language is. Switching to the third person (the poem begins in first), the narrative ending attempts to capture a broadly encompassing perspective (specifically that of women) (McLane 2008) and to address female desire in an inclusive, all-encapsulating manner.

In *Madness, Rack and Honey*, Mary Ruefle (2012) writes that "the mistrust of poetry has a long history, for a variety of

reasons, but they all come down to sentiment and invention over fact and truth. Figurative language is suspicious" (42). In Peters' poem "Postfeminism", also in her collection *1996*, she begins with the lines: "From the beginning / you should know I'm embellishing" (Peters 2013:10). These lines cleverly embody the female-hedonistic idea of the 'whole'; Peters reclaims her own "mistrust", her sense that truth and falsity are of equal verity in the domains of memory and feeling, before painting (i.e. re-creating) a picture of a situation in which the true and the false are both expressions of *felt* pleasure. To that end, Peters' use of figurative language in "Playing Lesbians" enhances the poem's exploration of memory and pleasure as something that isn't singular to the speaker, but rather a communal experience. Her use of sensory verbs encourages the reader to experience that memory as a physical experience, a somatic "flashback" formed of textures, colours, and feelings. For example, the use of sensual verbs in the following extract vividly conjures the underlying eroticism in an apparently platonic moment: "in front of my parents she licked // An eyelash off my cheek: for scrapbooking, for luck. / And we all made sounds that groped towards laughter" (Peters 2013:4). Whilst the verb "licked" does not necessarily convey sexual undertones, it does acknowledge the implied *romantic* tension between the speaker and their babysitter, as well as their sense of danger, acting as they do in the presence of the speaker's parents. Whilst the following line has more vulgar connotations, the idea of "sounds that groped" remains ambiguous. Peters is not spoon-feeding us sensorial details; rather, she is inviting us to form our own conclusion, to *inhabit* the moment for ourselves, and experience its pleasure individually, even differently to her.

In describing the babysitter, Peters delights in the image of her "scalloped shoes, / Each heel so high her steps like needlepoint" (4). This simple yet precise simile vividly informs the reader of the chosen style of the babysitter, the speaker's admiration of her appearance,

donning a heel rather than, say, a trainer. The first line of the following couplet, "Bright dust beneath each brow's cathedral arch" (5), presents us with lively personification; the "bright dust" of the babysitter's eyeshadow alludes to how one might see a dust-mote-replete ray of light shine in through a cathedral's stained-glass windows. The following and final lines ("My face swept for a second by one of her thousands // Of polished rococo ringlets, as – for and since it was my birthday – / She fastened gold chains to my ankles and wrists") (5) further enliven the image of the babysitter. Details such as "polished rococo ringlets" and the fastening of "gold chains" to the speaker's "ankles and wrists" evoke a lavish Rococo-maximalist sense of experiential decadence, illustrating that the speaker almost views the babysitter as royalty.

Minnis' "Sectional" also makes use of rich figurative language. In her *Poetry London* interview, Minnis comments on our culture's obsession with materiality and excess: "I might watch a scene in a *"Playing Lesbians"* appears in Sara Peters's "1996"

movie and not be able to appreciate anything except the feathers on a hat" (Minnis 2019). Both poets ruminate on the idea that small details such as the aforementioned feathers are what keeps them coming back to a piece of art. Indeed, this focus on detail is evidenced in Minnis' poem: the "nucleus of the caramel" (23); the "sectional couch with 12 separate sections" (24); "mutable caramels" (24); "modular couch with padded armrests" (25). Minnis adds a fair amount of texture to these images by seemingly fetishising their idiosyncrasies. A leather couch is not simply a leather couch, the same way a caramel is not simply a caramel. They are items to be enjoyed, or rather, *indulged in*. In *Reading Like a Writer*, Francine Prose (2012) states that "details aren't only the building blocks in which a story is put together, they're also clues to something deeper, keys not merely to our subconscious but to our historical moment" (207). This rings true in

Minnis' poem: its fragmentary build-up of images is reminiscent of the way in which our minds process the appearance of objects.

Like many other female poets, I felt drawn to Sylvia Plath growing up, feeling that her poetry conveys a similar desire for pleasure. In the poem "Lady Lazarus," the speaker engages in a performance akin to a strip-tease, but instead of presenting the female body as erotic they present it as a "grave cave" – disembodied and dissociated of subjectivity. The speaker wields her body as a memento of her own self-destructive tendencies. By the poem's conclusion, consistent with much of Plath's work, the speaker is compelled to transcend their physical form, asserting, "I will rise with my red hair" (Plath 1965). Unlike Keats and Hecht, Plath addresses desire and the concept of hedonism from both the giver's and the recipients' point of view. A poem which exemplifies this stance is "Fever 103°" (Plath 1963). In this poem, Plath explores the intensity and complexity of sexual desire and the feverish state it induces, blending both of the poem's individualized perspectives on pleasure and pain. The poem's imagery and language evoke a sense of consuming, *shared* passion, examining the dualities and intersections of erotic experience.

However, similarly to Keats, the female subject ultimately ends "dissolving, old whore petticoats" (Plath, 1963) and thus succumbs to the dissective, disembodiment of the male gaze. This sense of "dissolving" could also be seen to conclude Peters' poem "Playing Lesbians". Pulled into the lyrical with "for and since it was my birthday – / She fastened gold chains to my ankles and wrists" (5), the diction used conveys the abstraction of the speaker's memory, being a digression of voice which is thus intrinsically linked to the overall tone of the poem. The pursuit of pleasure, once thought of as "love" by the speaker, has become protean and ungraspable through the use of lyric abstraction. However, the "gold chains" — a hard, concrete image — are something we as readers can visualize and *grip* onto,

rooting us in our bodies and thus differentiating Peters' resolution from Plath's "old whore petticoats". Furthermore, Peters' is an instinctual, hedonistic landscape over which she holds tonal control. This variation of voice in "Playing Lesbians" can, at first glance, make the poem uncomfortable to read. The strikingly casual way in which the speaker reflects on their own perceived perversion: "*I love this gory business*" (Peters 2013:4), stands in stark contrast with the poem's progressive lyric escalation. Peters uses narrative time to create an *embodied* space for her descriptive language. Trees serve as an outlet for material gain and loss, much like the "gold chains" that are fastened to her "ankles and wrists": "With August over / And linden trees no longer / Buzzing emporiums" (Peters 2013:4). The exteriority of the trees metaphorizes Peters' interiority: the "no longer / Buzzing emporiums" echoing the sensory hedonism once felt by the speaker to be out of reach, high above them. By the end of the poem, we are left feeling both secure and unsettled. Eavan Boland's (2011) work on tone and how it "reveals a poet's choices" (137) implies a deliberate strategy on Peters' part. The voice of these couplets is startlingly serious, an epitome of feminine instinct and sexuality: instinct encompassing pleasure and pain, all without judgement.

The poem "Sectional" exhibits slightly different tonal motivations to "Playing Lesbians". In her interview with Minnis, Key reflects on her own connection between writing poetry and shame:

Even as a 40-year-old I'm still embarrassed about masturbation, and that is entirely shame-driven. When writing a poem, I'm often ranging about for 'that feeling' which isn't a masturbatory pleasure but it's a very specific pleasure that no other activities replicate. Sometimes I can get into that zone, others I'm just not feeling it. (Key 2019)

The "zone" Key is referring to bears resemblance to the female-focused sensory hedonism found in both Minnis and Peters' poems. Feelings of decadence, luxury and self-indulgence

that are often felt whilst writing are framed in "Sectional" as an exclusive relationship between the speaker of the poem and the poem itself. Unlike the varied tonality achieved by Peters in "Playing Lesbians", the consistency of voice in "Sectional" is what drives the poem. As such, the speaker reaches a more concrete conclusion than that of "Playing Lesbians":

..... and hauling
up the delicate past
.....
.....
..... on the
casual
.....
.....
..... modular couch with padded armrests .
.....
..... where I can rest my
arms
.. as I revisit sorrowful .. and frightening
moments .. of happiness that must have
occurred
(Minnis 24-25)

The self-awareness manifest at the end of Minnis' poem serves as an alternative to Peters' tone. The singular voice and lyrical reckoning focus the poem. As Mary Oliver (1994) writes of the lyric poem, "It is not unlike a simple coiled spring, waiting to release its energy in a few clear phrases" (85). The poem gains, rather than cedes, clarity as we reach its end, arguably creating a more hedonistic terrain by virtue of its surety than Peters' poem. The lyric time we are immersed in at the beginning of the poem is eventually 'filled' by the poem's subject matter.

Minnis (2019) defines her writing practice "as a sort of tantrum", a glorious conceit that further relates to the idea of female hedonism. An indulgence in immediate pleasure or avoidance of discomfort, tantrums can be seen as a desire for instant gratification or a release of tension. The alignment of Minnis' writing practice with this hedonistic tendency is

reinforced by her word choice in the aforementioned quotation: terms such as "hauling," "sorrowful" and "frightening" create a simple, almost childlike sense of intimacy. Interestingly, for Minnis (2019) the speaker—whilst familiar—is distinct from herself: "I realized I'd mistaken the speaker for the poet". Due to this poetic anonymizing, Minnis creates an intimate space for the reader to inhabit themselves. However, whilst there is a relatability and familiarity to the speaker of "Sectional", upon closer examination I realized, like in Peters' poem, these qualities are a product of the writer's intent. Recognizing this, I have become more instinctively precise when it comes to the applications of voice and diction in my own writing practice. My approach being a combination of a free-writing "tantrum" and editorial clear-headedness.

What initially drew me to Minnis' poetry, particularly her collections *Zirconia* and *Bad Bad*, was her exciting use of form (or lack thereof) in her "free-verse". Not only does Minnis fill the white space around each line or phrase with ellipses, but each poem also inheres a unique concoction of surprising line breaks, enjambment and repetition. In her foreword to *Zirconia*, Ariana Reins (2019) highlights how the poems in the collection are from the turn of the century, representing the end of the "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement and the beginning of something else: something "erotic, feminine, bored-pissed off, chill evil" (i). Reins' reflection suggests that "free-verse" poems are tonally a product of their time. Mary Oliver (1994) reinforces this sentiment:

With such expectations—of intimacy, of 'common' experience—the old metrical line, formal and composed, must be off-putting for a poet. A new tone, reflecting this growing relationship between the writer and reader, was called for. (69)

The "expectations—of intimacy" are fulfilled by "Sectional". Lines, determined by the individual needs of each moment, are full of the iambs and dactyls of natural speech. Rather than

adhering to a set metre or rhyming pattern, lines seem to be structured by the memories they relate and a nostalgic sense of self-indulgence, of inhabiting one's own life fully and pleasurably. The speaker is enthralled by each moment, each sensation: "I sink into a reverie in leather [...] sectional couches / with caramel in my mouth", and "loosening and loosening / [...] into my dreaminess" (Minnis 2019: 23). Each new line builds upon the last, informing us of the twists and turns of the speaker's psyche. While such enjambment can sometimes be jarring to read, here, it feels appropriate and adds to the overall experience of the poem. We appreciate the unfolding of the poem as we see its language *consume* the page. If this poem contained stanzas or a more traditional form, the notion of the somatic "whole" prevalent in female-driven hedonism would perhaps not be so intoxicatingly manifest. Going forward, I am excited to explore more "free-verse" and experiment with design in my own practice.

Peters' poem has made me aware of the audible qualities of my own poems. Embracing the hedonistic nature of writing—for example, by reading my poems aloud—I have become aware of my spoken rhythms, which help to promote a more expressive and emotionally charged form of communication. Peters cleverly emphasises her pleasure through her use of line, breaking on words like "performing," "sinking," "painting," "becoming," and "thinking". The use of "-ing" present participles at each break literally *embodies* (i.e. in the poem's grammar) an aspectual sense of imperfective continuity, creating a dynamic forward momentum. Indeed, this made my reading of the poem a pleasurable experience. As the poem evolves emotionally, so does the reader's sense of its meaning or conclusion. Suffice to say, I *had* to reach the end of it.

Throughout my research, both Minnis and Peters remained shrouded in mystery, with the latter perhaps being the more private of the two. There are only a handful of reviews of her poetry

online, few interviews, and only a single article written by her in a 2015 issue of *The Poetry Review*. The article is presented as a *Letter from Canada* (Peters' birthplace) and titled "Be Afraid." It explores that state of perpetual fear which led her to live a sheltered lifestyle. She talks about her fear of writing from a place of privilege, making it a necessity to instigate a level of trust between her and the reader. This article came as a surprise to me. The idea of Peters imagining her reader, rather than writing without any fear or mental obtrusions, only increased my appreciation for her poems. "Be Afraid" comforted me: we all have our fears when it comes to writing.

In a podcast with Emily Berry, Minnis is asked to comment on the "outburst of the speaker" (Berry 2018) and the prevalence of grandiosity in her poems. In her answer, Minnis also admits to thinking about her sense of privilege during her writing process and translating that onto the page: "before we can pretend to separate ourselves from it, first we have to acknowledge it and almost follow in it" (Minnis 2018). *Poemland by Chelsey Minnis*

As poets, we may question whether a poem solves certain issues, if the reader will be moved by the end, if the poem will reach its desired audience, but thinking about the future is not necessarily important in art or when having a pleasurable experience. Most poets write for pleasure, a self-indulgence if you will. As Minnis (2018) asks on the podcast, "why can't poetry just have a bunch of satin around?" If it feels true to the piece, why can't we indulge in the repetition of an image, or the authentic cadence of our own voice? Both "Playing Lesbians" and "Sectional" have encouraged me to push the limits of my own writing. Whether that be letting the poem flow freely during a first draft and not trying to control where it goes, choosing line lengths that best represent my subject matter during the editing stage, or not getting bogged down by metrical lines. Whilst honing my senses and following them *into* my

work is something I continue to grapple with, both these poems have shown me how pleasurable the hedonistic approach makes the writing experience. Both Minnis and Peters have created works which push the boundaries of palatable, functional language, all the while maintaining a wry self-awareness. Instead of fearing the "gory business" (Peters 2013:4) of writing, the sensory richness of Peters and Minnis' work has armed me with new techniques, freeing me to indulge in a new female-centred hedonism, to inhabit my own body, my own life, my own words, and to experience a radical, unbridled pleasure in doing so.

BIOGRAPHY

Sophia Georghiou is an Italian-Greek poet. Her poems have featured in Wonder Press, Poets Versus Sexual Harassment: An Anthology x UN Women, the6ress, Spectra Poets and Dream Boy Book Club. She was the winner of James Massiah's Party Poetry Prize in 2020 and was shortlisted for the Bridport Prize in 2021 and in 2022. Sophia is currently undergoing an MA in Creative and Life Writing at Goldsmiths University of London.

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