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# HOW DIARY/MEMOIR/ARTIST/POET JANE COMPARES WITH SOCIAL MEDIA JANE: AN EXPERIMENT IN PERSON/PERSONA VIA LYRIC ESSAY FRAGMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*In this creative submission, presented via lyric essay, I examine/identify many aspects of persona, including ones developed through social media use, while writing poetry, in diary/memoir writing, in visual art, and in academic writing. This essay considers how my social media persona differs from the reality, as an autistic person, as expressed through memoir writing. The essay is divided into chapters, touching upon the persona as an asset, my dependence on social media, trivial online quizzes, and speaking truth through #hashtags.*

*I wondered how much I might be trying to 'sell' myself to the world. I looked for differences in self as I shifted between personal memoir, Facebook and Twitter. Between those lines, I wonder if I have written the 'real' me. The notion of "researching your own life" (Forché & Gerard 2001, p. 45) is of interest to me and this essay concerns itself with who I might be on social media. If "a social media profile is meant to be a representation of an individual" (Humphrey 2017), am I speaking on behalf of myself? I would hope this essay reveals how important it is for an individual to 'story' themselves.*

*In choosing excerpts from these versions of self, then placing them together, I discover where the truth of 'me' exists and reveal how I have found the courage / desire to understand life through the written word.*

## KEY WORDS

Lyric Essay; Persona; Memoir; Autism; Poetry; Academia; Neurodiversity



Figure 1. *Self-Portrait As Things I Might Be Or Might Not*, by Jane Burn

## INTRODUCTION

This creative piece explores persona curation through written word, and the **differences** I discover between **self** as autistic person on social media / as memoir writer / as artist / as poet. I aim to discover where / if true representation of **myself** exists.

The ‘chapters’ touch upon persona as an “asset” (Barnhart 2018), my **dependence** on Social media, my “...crav[ing] the catharsis in getting things off [my] chest...” (Sevilla 2019), online quizzes, and the **truth** told through Twitter hashtags. As someone who masks throughout ‘real life’, is online persona just another way to ‘cover up’?

The use of hybrid form accessibly interprets my hybrid **self** expression. I find it easier to speak through a keyboard and **thrive when putting myself upon a page**. Choosing excerpts from these versions of **myself**—**life-writer / poet / social media** (over?) **sharer / artist**— then placing them together demonstrates the offering of **self** through words; an inhabitation of **public / private / creative selves**. Hybridity allows my neurodivergence to enter into conversations around persona / life writing. Energised and inspired, I learn much about **myself** (**self** through research).

I learn I am happiest when writing and, although I can speak only of my own experience, “autistic adults report that they **communicate** particularly effectively through writing” (Gillespie-Lynch et al. 2020, p.1899). Hybridity offers the **permission** I need to establish my **voice**. Traditional ways of working fail to nourish **the writing of my own uniqueness**.

Indeed, in the delivery of this essay, I sensed another persona—that of ‘**Academic Jane**’—a version of **self** I doubted would ever exist, a **self** I am ecstatic to discover.

I provide no definitive closure.

This piece is as raw, imperfect and motley as myself.  
Everything I do, somewhere / somehow, is flawed.

**I am a work in progress—the idea of bequeathing a finished article  
seems the antithesis of self. Final conclusions become the antithesis  
of learning's future (especially in my case).**

I guess the only answer I can give is that the spaces between my myriad selves  
is where I have learned to live. I am fragments.

I reserve the right to be eternally unfinished.



Figure 2. *Self-Portrait As Bard*, by Jane Burn.

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Do I worry people don't think that **I am real**? Yes, I do.

*Am I real?* **A person is a bag of flesh, bones, bits.**

**A persona is built using interpretations of self,**

**the parts you let people see.** If I post a photograph of myself, you'll have some measure of my physical **self**. If you have seen someone else's photograph of me, then you have seen the rest—

the double chin, the unflattering views. I self-censor, **worry that I am painted on the outside with weird.** I am so uncomfortable with who I see (or imagine others see) that I try

to avoid direct evidence. “[It] might be that there is no objective way to **view yourself**. When you look at **your image**, you're seeing it superimposed over years of changing appearances and through layer upon layer

of **self-perception filters**” (emphasis added, Cueto 2015). I try to **understand what persona is—what persona means** to me, as an autistic person. A person **masking** through what might be considered ‘real life’, who **tries** (and sometimes **fails**)

to monitor their face-to-face (FTF) behaviours. Who **uses mirroring** in order to fit in, who **worries constantly** how she is being perceived, who finds social situations “over-stimulating and anxiety-provoking” (Mazurek 2013, p. 1709).

Masking makes me feel safer, less likely to **feel embarrassment / shame / fear** . When I began using social media platforms (SMPs), I was unsure how to present myself, how to connect with people. At first, I just wanted friends

that didn't come with the usual FTF complexities. **Loneliness** is a huge part of my life. Every **friend** request that led to a **connection** felt like a victory, a **comfort**, a **validation**. I found “alternative avenues for socialisation”

(Mazurek 2013, p. 1709). After years of practice, I have become more confident in these places. Much of the credit for this belongs to poetry. Writing it has given voice to my life. Fluency through **poetry has developed my**

**fluency** when using SMPs. Poetry **has made me more sure of myself** FTF. Bonuses are the **delete / edit buttons**—valuable keyboard tools, necessary in **shaping your online self**. It's been a bumpy journey so far—

it's far from complete, but I'm learning, everyday about my own capabilities. **Forgive me** if I'm giving the impression it's been a series of **gorgeous epiphanies**. It hasn't. I press buttons and **I have friends**. Like magic. Or rather, it felt like magic,

at first. I have learned the hard way that there are still difficulties—what is said by **myself** / others can still be misconstrued. Can feel **awkward, clumsy, distressing** or **wrong**. Online, I have learned, it is still possible to give / take

offence, to be hurt / to hurt, to make mistakes. “To be chronically **misunderstood** and **misjudged** is traumatic” (emphasis added Oswald 2020). It's just as easy to feel as if you don't fit in, still possible to struggle with interactions, to suffer from **loneliness**

and “...loneliness [can be] associated with...compulsive Internet use behaviours”  
(emphasis added Hu, Huang & Zheng 2020, p. 1).



Figure 3. *Self-Portrait As Blue Woman With Birds*, by Jane Burn

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Here is where persona comes in. If I want to protect myself from negative experiences, I must develop a degree of control over my interactions on SMPs. Learn to monitor what I say. I have friends who are kind, have taken time to talk to me, discuss the content of posts I have made, ask me if I am **OK**, ask me about the personal thoughts, feelings or opinions I have shared. Ask me if I am **OK** with having them 'out there'. I wonder this **myself**. Turns out, communication and interpretation on SMP's is as fraught with difficulty as it is in FTF life.



Figure 4. *Self-Portrait As 18<sup>th</sup> Century Folk Art Hare*, by Jane Burn

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We can grow ourselves a persona in order to find our “perfect customer[s]” (Barnhart 2018) / fit what we are selling into their lives / know your audience / pitch your best angle / be what they want you to be / within your persona / you can be the “fictional representations of your ideal” (Barnhart 2018).

There’s a saying where I come from: *he / she / they’ve got more faces than t’ Town Hall clock*. Apparently, this is the way to reach everyone, hook everyone in, make them need whichever product (**Self as Product**) you want to shift. Many of us, at some point, have felt a desire to fit in. Are we selling parts / the whole of ourselves? Is this what SMPs are ultimately for?

**Are any of us as real as we think we are?**



Figure 5. *Self-Portrait As Bad Housewife*, by Jane Burn

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Your online persona is an “asset” (Barnhart 2018). Through Lockdown, we realised the importance of being online. We ordered food, gifts, clothes, necessities. We spoke through screens, searched for information / help / comfort / hope.

It became a lifeline and it seemed that almost the whole of Me had shifted from real to virtual. If I can’t go online, I feel lost, alone. Any outage, like the “great social media blackout of 2021” (Wade 2021) showed that I, for one,

am dependent on it. I read about “digital nutrition” (Moskowitz & Ringertz 2018). The thought of it made me uncomfortable. Is social media my most necessary food? Am I capable of “healthful consumption” (Moskowitz & Ringertz 2018)? I need SMPs,

otherwise I am overwhelmed by disconnection / solitude, start to disperse, like mist. I must not disappear. Everyday on SMPs, I find something difficult / distressing. The middle ground is the safest place to be. This middle ground is persona.

The Jane that I show you is doing her best to be **O K**.



Figure 6. *Self-Portrait As One Of The Hare Witches*, (middle, seated behind the other person), by Jane Burn



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When a stranger pops up and likes one of my photographs, I feel **discomfited, vulnerable, worried**. Why would this person want to know anything about me? What do they want? **Am I in danger?** Perhaps they are curious about you professionally (it scares me to discover that organisations use

online tools to report on / find out about employees / potential employees), or they have heard of you as a writer / artist or you are a friend of a mutual friend and it's curiosity. Perhaps they just want, like you do, to reach out. If someone sends me a follow or a friend request,

I hop over to their profile to see if our ethics are going to align. Politics, beliefs, meme choices, words. Are we labouring under the illusion that privacy still exists? Perhaps (and I see this increasingly with my own profiles) their intentions are predatory. What do they see, when they click

on your profile? How much have you rearranged the life you want people to see? What is your profile secretly saying about you behind your back?



Figure 7. *Hares And Healing Hands*, by Jane Burn

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I look at a quiz that offers to reveal what “social media personality” I have (Ayres). I can’t see **myself** in any of them—“Social Athlete”? “Social Do-er”? “Social Visionary”? I am way more complex than a mildly diverting game. According to a *BuzzFeed* quiz, my personality is more suited to Twitter. All of which I disagree with but it’s possible these quizzes

were not designed with a **50 year old, neurodivergent, LGBTQ+, working class polymath** in mind. Are any of us truly who we say we are? The best thing about SMPs is the delete button. Every day, I’m thankful for it. If only it was so easy FTF, where you cannot unsay the said. I’m unfiltered, in the main. I think of [#nofilter](#), popular on Twitter. This is a Good Thing—you haven’t

tweaked / edited a picture you have taken. That **selfie**, landscape or sunset sky is already everything we want it to be. It’s different when you are flesh, not photograph. Navigating between filter / unfiltered is not so simple. I am “caught between disclosing that [I am] autistic and concealing it, but feel [I am] treated negatively either way” (Botha, Dibb & Frost 2020).

I must speak. I must unroll my tongue. I must do it with **self-care**.

Take my time, keep learning everything I can  
about **myself**. If this means

I must break **myself** between the many outlets

I have found for self-expression— between

SMPs, FTF, essays, poems, notebooks or word documents,  
then so be it.

You will find fractions of **self**.

Fragments, portions, confessions.

Perhaps these are the aetiology of persona.

Add them together and you end up with me.

I have no-one at home who wants to witness my distress / confusion / flailing against the challenges of life. I often wonder if, online, I get to be *more myself*. I don’t want to have FTF people (especially my child) feeling wary around me. You can’t see me through a screen. I’m invisible: a myth, a unicorn and when I am done with everyone for the night, all I have to do is switch them off.

**I can be naked with my need—love me, love me, *please!***

**I want to tell someone / anyone what I have achieved.**

The amount of friends / followers I have is important to me in ways many fail to understand. In a life that is filled with fear,  
uncertainty

and confusion, they make me

not alone.



Figure 8. *Inside The Fairy Tale*, by Jane Burn

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I am always **struggling** but sometimes, something comes as a shock, hurts more than I thought it would and there I am, flickering my soul all over the keyboard, for 6000 other people to see. I try to be **prosocial**. Over the years, online friends have (mostly) grown used to me—sometimes they have even appreciated such **honesty**. I think ? Social media often seems built from someone else's

**“picture perfect moments”** (emphasis added, Sevilla 2019).

Sometimes, it cheers me up

to know that **I am not alone** in my imperfect world.

Someone else is out there, being honest about the way

they **look-think-sound-feel**, about their life-job-family, relationship status-disability-mental health, fear-worries-finances-home.

**I am not alone.**



Figure 9. *Self-Portrait As Gerda, Searching*, by Jane Burn

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I think (?) that I'm washing about 70% of my dirty laundry in public.

I am saying most of the thing but not all of the thing  
 all of the thing then delete all of the thing  
 all of the thing and a friend sends me a kind message  
 saying *you really ought to take that thing down*  
 I write the thing out first and read it back  
 can spellcheck (although the thing still has a typo or two)  
 I have time to decide how I want the thing to appear  
 can "...revise and calculate..." (Millian 2010)  
 I try to make sure the thing is legible  
 'dial down' the extremities of **self**  
 is there any "...correlation between how people act  
 on the Internet and how they are in person" (Millian 2010)?

Are we as confident / kind / powerful / shy / modest / genuine  
 as we appear to be? Are our lives as wonderful as we  
 would wish them to be? Are we all now "stars  
 of [our] own reality shows" (Millian 2010)?  
 My mouth is unguarded, unfiltered. I am not great  
 at impulse control—its painful mix of "...tantrum  
 behaviors, aggression and extreme reactions...  
 (Carmen B. Pingree Autism Center of Learning, n.d.)  
 require much "...effortful control..."  
 (Bryce, Jahromi & Swanson 2013, p. 235) When I come  
 down from the heights of petrifying emotion,  
 at least I can wipe the page clean.

What of the **selfie**, another component of the public persona we have  
 learned to control? We can alter the colour of our eyes,  
 thin our waists, whiten our teeth, be blemish-free.  
 I have a real problem liking the way I look.  
 If I can help it, I won't show a picture of **myself**  
 that I'm unhappy with. When I'm tagged  
 in someone else's photograph, I struggle to recognise  
 who I am and become distressed. Seeing this stranger  
 upsets the sanitised view I need to continue living  
 with **myself**. My online persona's photographs appear  
 to be someone I can bear to look at.  
 I like her more than I like **myself**.



Figure 10. *Owl, Moon, Tree, Flight*, by Jane Burn

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It's never been so easy to assume that you are getting to know someone—  
to think you know who they are. Almost anyone

can be discovered, almost anywhere in the world, only a few keyboard clicks away.  
Distance, it seems, is no object, for those that want to search.

Right there—pictures, relationships, a lifetime in each status. What we see  
is what we get, right? All those close-ups of avocado

on toast, are they the modern measure of happiness? How many of us  
have spent time on social media and come away, thinking

is everybody perfect / beautiful / successful / fulfilled / happy except me?  
**What is persona / what is truth?**

As someone who relies on social media for connectivity, friendship and accessibility,  
**what is my persona / my truth?**



Figure 11. *Self-Portrait As Be Feared*, by Jane Burn

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In the spirit of a quick-fire internet pop quiz, I invented a series of questions and posted them on my Facebook page, leaving them for one hour. I wanted to discover what percentage of ‘themselves’ friends believed they revealed online.

Sixty - four friends answered. **Here are the questions and the results:**

0 - 10% I say almost nothing about myself.	1
10 - 20% I give away a little bit about myself.	7
20 - 30% I am a slightly open book.	9
30 - 40% I am giving out just enough information.	5
40 - 50% You have half the necessary info. That’s all I’m comfortable sharing.	14
50 - 60% Others know a fair bit about me but no-one could accuse me of over-sharing.	2
60 - 70% I’ve let a few secrets out here and there.	12
70 - 80% You almost have the jist of me. But not quite.	5
80 - 90% I have given you the book minus the final chapter.	3
90 - 100% I’m like a burst water main. It’s pretty much everywhere.	6



Figure 12. *Loneliness, Assuaged By Books & Cat*, by Jane Burn



## xi

I never came out as bisexual. I just added [#LGBTQIA](#) to my Twitter profile and it has done this task for me. The same with [#ActuallyAutistic](#) / [#Neurodiversity](#) Twitter is where you can reveal what you might find difficult to say in a selection of convenient [#hashtags](#). Perhaps because you can say so little there, you hide less.

I have vague memories of Myspace. Facebook is where I have over-shared for many years. Instagram I seldom use. It just seems (in the main) to try too hard to be perfect—that amazing meal, blissful beach, smug view, fashion icon, gorgeous pooch—almost every photograph filtered to the max, as if the world is muted, heightened, or vintage-faded out. Can we no longer trust what is there? I got bored of just pictures. I love words. Snapchat and Twitch I don't understand. TikTok I haven't tried. LinkedIn? I felt obliged but never completed my profile. How many hours of the day are we meant to spend on SMPs after all? Too many, is my guess, as we become more addicted to this almost unreal world.



Figure 13. *Magpie In A Coat Of Feathers Like Leaves*, by Jane Burn

**xii**

I want people to like me / want to mean something / want to have friends.  
I wondered how much (if at all) I might be trying to 'sell' **myself**.  
I wondered how different I really was, as I shifted between

personal memoir / poetry / Facebook / Twitter / art / academia.

Somewhere, between all those lines, I must have written the 'real'

**me.**

I decided to experiment, by choosing excerpts from these versions of

**myself,**

then placing them side by side. Would I discover where my truth fell?



Figure 14. *The Bees Made Her A Crown And Gave Her Honey For Hair*, by Jane Burn

### xiii Excerpts

Ideas of morning filter through my head. Dawn has made its usual conquest of the dark. I don't want to move. I never want to shift from beneath this beautiful weight of blankets, the composition of pillows that has been the trial and error work of a lifetime. I am impossible to sleep with but that's okay. I don't like sleeping with people anyway.

I am in some kind of ecstasy of creation at the moment. That sounds rude / weird / biblical but I know what I mean. Dull sessions of prepping these reclaimed boards over the last few days has led to the pleasure of painting skies

I have done a picture on [#recycled](#) plywood. It is one of my mind's happy places. When I started painting it, I had a feeling it was going to snow - kept sniffing the air like a weathersage, thinking, *snow is coming*. After I finished it, snow did come. [#ArtistOnTwitter](#) [#nature](#)



Figure 15. *Mountain, Snow And Hare*, by Jane Burn

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**a voice / is small until / it is amplified / by the page**

Am doing much studying. How hard is it not to keep going off on tangents? Had an hours meeting with lovely woman re necessary support I need. Was incredibly tired after meeting and my speech was a bit slurry / stilted and I ended up with swollen eyes. It's been a stressful week. There's no point getting upset about the help I should have had. I didn't know. Nobody knew. I feel as if it might be better for me now.

I keep asking myself this same question. In the hinterland between fuzzy 5 a.m. and get-yourself-up, I ask myself, *am I an awful wife?* I know the answer is there somewhere. **My husband must be sad** to be turned away like this but every time I go to bed I listen, prey-keen for the danger of his approaching footsteps and eye the door handle for **signs** of a testing hand. I want a pure, unstained dusk.

I have written a few poems over the years in various voices I have imagined trees using. Imagine if your voice actually became a tree's? It would be quite brilliant



Figure 16. *Self-Portrait With A Mouth Full Of Birds*, by Jane Burn

Winter sun, falling snow and quietly waiting birch trees. Location from inside my head. Acrylics on reclaimed plywood [#nature](#) [#environment](#) [#recycling](#) [#recycle](#) [#ArtistOnTwitter](#) [#art](#) [#Neurodivergent](#)

**the invasion / of myself / into / beautiful space**

Skies, skies are keeping me going.

I am trying to put **distance** between me and the hammering of my heart. I picture the bedroom door full of rivets the size of orange halves, the sliding shaft of a bolt, a satisfying, irreversible *click*. On a **perfect** night I hear him pass by, switch the television on. I un-stiffen. Settle into the **purity of my nest**. This love and doesn't love / yes / no love. I wonder why I have to feel like this.

In other news, quite a bit tired after suffering from some major headspace troubles and overwhelming fatigue. Am trying to emerge, like a feeble moth from a cocoon of spam.

My drawing [#penandink](#) [#ink](#) [#ArtistOnTwitter](#) [#lovebooks](#) [#Cat](#) How lovely to be this snuggled up with a pet you love and books.

**fill / the awkward silences / with my own noise**



Figure 17. She Spoke To The Dawn In A Cracked Voice, by Jane Burn

For a few weeks now, during the daytime, whenever I am cooking, I have been having this recurring feeling that my dad is there and he has come to live with us and I am making him nice things to eat. It's very vivid when I wake up before anyone else I have the strong feeling that he is with me. What does this mean?

I wake exactly where I set myself to sleep. **Unruffled. Free** from scents of breath and sweat, accidental brushes of hand or hair, **ugly** sounds of swallowing. I **worry** so much. My husband—did I **waste** his life? Did I waste mine?

I can't help it. It doesn't mean that I am a berk— I am neurodivergent and this is the way I interpret one of the parts of my life, this is how tough I am on myself, how hard I drive myself in the inferno of hyperfocus. Academia is this place which I will describe as follows: dangerous and wonderful, a gorgeous ether of pain and bliss.

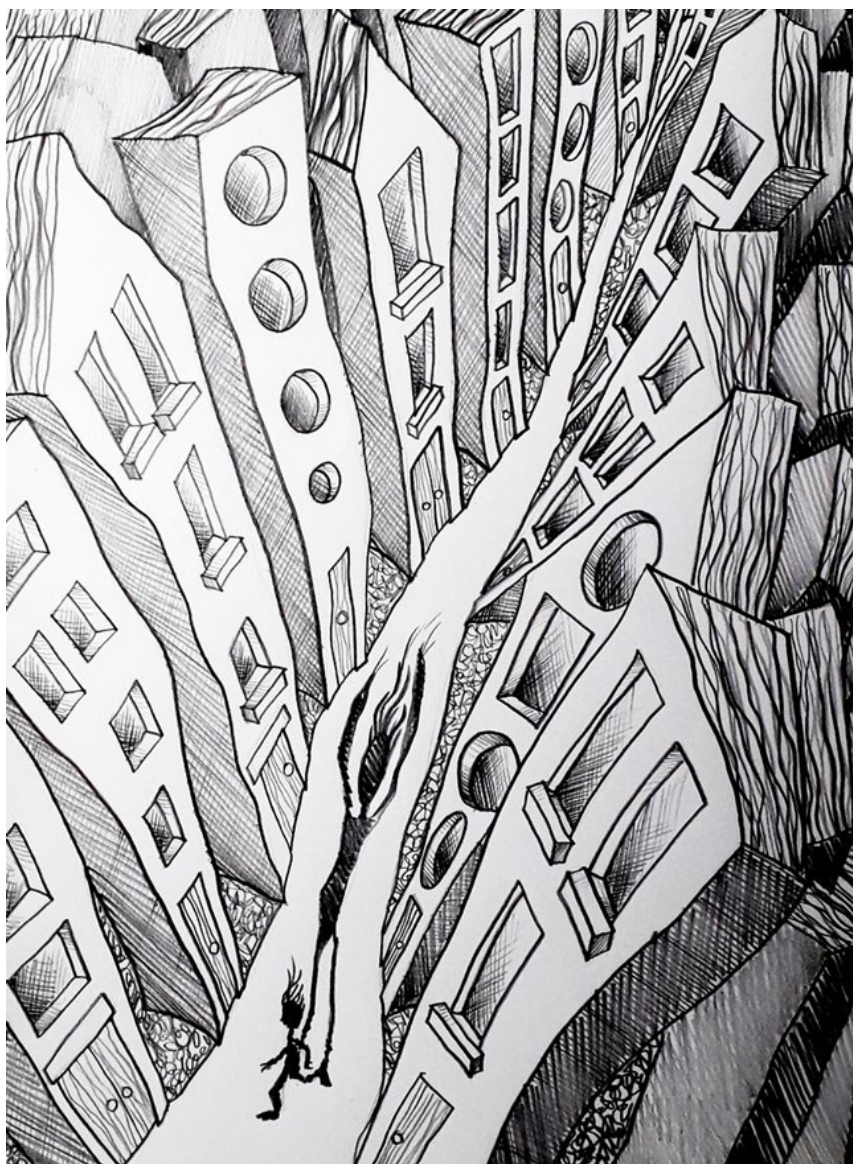


Figure 18. *Self-Portrait As Academia! Scream!*, by Jane Burn

Went to supermarket, was fumbly with trolley, bags, sanitising. Person near said GOD, SHE'S DOING MY HEAD IN. Wanted explain why I find stuff hard sometimes. I wanted to shout at them. Instead, I choose to see kindness / wonder everywhere.

**like a horse / who grew up / suspicious / of everything**



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Just got back from walking a lot of miles. It's so amazing just to lose yourself in the wild, remote world of beautifulness. Even saw a rainbow that appeared to be made of white light.

We have had **sex** but there is no rhyme or reason why, how, or when. Just sometimes I get this ripe sensation between my legs and I ask him *now?* He will slip in next to me—I know I am a sentence of **loneliness**. Worst days, rigid as a plank, I hold my **breath**, think *how long until he goes?* I do not want to be ruled by that wet bulb between my legs, the juice, **disgust** and unsaid **prayer**. I am not a good person. I press my hands to the side of my head and hope that it does not **crack** apart in my hands.

I feel like I have climbed this immense wall and am spinning down this daisy-strewn other side.

Yes I did! Handed in my 2nd MA @StudentsNCL assignment. ME! I thought I'd never get there. I LOVE LEARNING, ME! Poems, theory, yumyum. This #workingclass #LGBTQIA bi/wonderbian #neurodivergent #autistic is proud of herself & tired happy #poetry #iamwriting

**my / head / is / a / mountain**

I am feeling a bit collapsible today—if I shared what is going round in my head right now, you might think I was completely cracked. I wish I could! I wrote it and deleted it. Clinic phoned two days ago and I thought *well at last, appointments are happening again* but it was just to tell me there is a new system where things are red, amber, and green and I was meant to answer questions with these colours to update. It didn't go well. It felt a bit random, confusing. This day has a lot of wobble in it.



Figure 19. *Self-Portrait As Deer Embryo* (linocut), by Jane Burn

How can the apparently simple act of waking up end up with me in these distressing spirals of memory, of thought? I think because it never leaves you. It's there, like breath, like time, like my own skin. It's written right down to my bones. From being so young, from the age of around nine, I was made into something that could be touched. **I didn't know. I didn't no. I didn't know.**

How would it be to live in a world where we didn't have to second guess all the time what danger we are in? That all the time, there is the knowledge out there—that there are men waiting for the opportunity to do us harm. That we have had this for centuries. That we have to bend our lives around knowing this and, that it is with us always.



Figure 20. *It's Okay Hare, To Feel*, by Jane Burn

We also discuss growing confidence in academia, [#Neurodiversity](#) [#Neurodivergent](#) [#Autism](#) family breakdown, nature, being [#workingclass](#) and the utter joy / importance of [#poetry](#) [#art](#)

In my late teens and twenties, I would feel this **urge** and simply go out, wait for some man to attach himself to my side, take me by the arm and steer me to his flat, **wasteland**, somewhere. I'd get up after and focus only on getting myself **home**, picture bus or tube routes, walk for miles, welts and scratches on my **skin**, soreness, a sick feeling of **filth**. Why were none of them ever kind? I never really understood the **danger** I was often in. Have never been able to properly process **consent** / no consent / sex / reality. Not fully. I cannot even tell you how many times I have been [REDACTED]. I just know a lot of things have been very, very **wrong**. A terrible thing, this wanting to be loved.

I know I seem to suffer from immensely massive  
highs and lows—I swing from them almost moment  
to moment, it seems. I can't help it - it's who I am.

Last night I read my poem at @ [REDACTED] @ [REDACTED] Competition event. I explore how ideas of transformation filter through my #Neurodivergent mind like sealife filtering nourishment in & out. Yet not concluding as I can't change who I am #poetry #poetrycommunity

**my eyes / are fascinated / by the tree**

This morning's big news is that I have very dry bogeys  
in my nose, like I have been breathing in too much hot air.



Figure 21. *Four Dancing Hares*, by Jane Burn

I wish I could scrape it all off, grow a new, unblemished skin. I never called for help. I could / couldn't feel anything, all at the same time. I had a HIV test when I was twenty - two. Maybe I shouldn't be telling you this. This is one of the problems with having no filter. If you asked me to **fuck** you now, I would **offer** myself and I don't know why. They told me what to do and I did it. I never learned how to say **no**. I felt as if I would do anything, just to be liked. Even a tiny bit.

I am working class—I grew up in the Dearne Valley, South Yorkshire, where almost everything there was to do with the pits. I was at secondary school when the Miner's Strike came and I witnessed a lot of Frightening / upsetting things. I played in the school brass band. We played at the funeral of two young brothers who died when a coal tip collapsed on them as they were searching for pieces of coal.



Figure 22. *Horse Skull and Roses*, by Jane Burn

Just completed tough work putting together two academic proposals. Will they get anywhere? I can say I tried, which is how I have comforted myself in the darker places

I've been to, writing them. Speed, my odd little birds. Please don't let them be a waste of time! [#iamwriting](#)

**I know / that I / am not / beautiful**

Who knew? Broad beans grow upwards, like I'm in  
some kind of alternate universe.

I wake before the alarm chimes, have second-guessed its job, as I always do.  
Habit, habit. There is no disruption of slippers. Smartly paired,  
they are waiting for my feet. One pyjama leg rolled to the knee, always.  
I do not know what happens in my sleep, what journeys I make. Do I dream?  
I remember snatches of this and that, suffer all day from thinking I must have been  
afraid, angry, mad. Or I dream something stupid like glasses falling off,  
wake, gasp, look for them. Doze and repeat.

I have studied all the poems and made copious notes  
in case I make a fool of myself trying to speak.  
I'm nervous and excited in equal measure.

One of a series of pictures I made which is me trying to understand love as a  
[#Neurodivergent](#) [#art](#) [#artwork](#) [#illustration](#) [#watercolour](#) [#love](#) [#autism](#) Sometimes  
my love is too big, sometimes I don't know where it went.

**never / rarely see / the horror / of myself**



Figure 23. *Witch Not Drowning*, by Jane Burn

I survived it—I talked a lot! I heard and read many amazing poems. It was the most electrifying poetry thing I have been to! My mind was on overdrive - it was going like the clappers! I was so bloody nervous! I wish I had a picture of us all on the screen with that absolute icon poet [REDACTED]!!!! To think that she might have liked my poem one tiny bit!!! The hardest bit was hitting the

time limits and having to stop talking. I have celebrated  
with cup of tea, salad & chips (where one eternally negates  
the other in a complicated culinary loop) and ice cream.  
I will never forget this.

I prefer to suffer alone. I love my husband and son but often, I feel as if  
I'm drowning and dragging them down with me. Every day, I'm bothered  
by almost everything they do. I can't seem to help it. Like how easily they crack  
a perfect plate or print the floor with dirty soles. I pray for them to go out,  
yet if they do, I panic, count the clock around till they are home again.  
Conjure tragedies and grieve in a way that eats away at my health.

I am shocked with happiness and emotion and have been  
crying quite a lot. I just want to lie down and sleep,  
like something in my body / soul / mind uncreased  
and the effect feels like massive relief.

I can't tell you how much I have cried (joyfully) at reading this book description by  
@ [REDACTED] for my soon to be @NineArchesPress book. For my writing to be  
understood like this is like stars shining inside. #poetrycommunity #poetry  
#amwriting

**words / have a sense / of quivering**





Figure 24. *Swan, Flying Over Swallowwell Roundabout*, by Jane Burn

Oh dear, Missus—you are meant to be writing  
a 2000 word poetic commentary for your Summer School  
assignment and you appear to be 514 words into a  
personal essay on the idea of authentic voice.

The mind wants what it wants I guess.

I make myself good at running a home. Laundry is flawless, although they  
do not know my utter repulsion at its stagnant pile. The home is spick and span.  
They never lose their stuff. I work on knowing where everything is—sketch maps  
of their crap in my head. I hate the washing up—could vomit in its unearthly soup.  
I match each unpaired sock, line up all the shoes. I get completely overwhelmed,  
can't cope. Turn on a sixpence. Yell at them that I want to run away forever.  
Grapple strange love into my son. Tell them I am sorry, that I just can't help it.  
Tell them that I will change, when we all know that I won't.

Once, I lived on my own in [REDACTED] and often,  
I was very frightened.

Crikey, I am so touched and emotional from all the responses and messages I have had from lovely people about my @NewDefencesNCLA essay. I keep crying for such lovely support #amwriting #WritingCommunity #poetry #poetrycommunity #autistic #Neurodivergent

**talk / in shades / of waltzing breath**

Here are two oak trees I have been growing this year  
from acorns. I'm going to pot them on till they're stronger.  
then plant them somewhere. How much of my personal  
carbon footprint will they help with? I don't know  
but it's got to be some of it. Especially if I keep doing it.  
Feels like something I can do, more than I'm already doing.



Figure 25. *All Of Nature, Earth*, by Jane Burn

From my foetal curl in the mattress dent, I roll on my right - hand side,  
lower my legs to the floor, brace my arm to sit myself up—I have learned  
to do this slowly, keep my head from spinning, treat myself like a fragile load.  
One foot into the right slipper first, then the left. I make a beeline for the bathroom,  
squat out a knife of urine, un-glug my throat with a half-cup of water.  
*Today is a day. Today is a day. Repeat until you make it real.*

On my trip today I got a flower headband from a charity shop, saw a grotto (I must have a grotto, why don't I have a grotto?), saw many gorgeous views from the coach. Of course there wasn't enough time to do much but it was still wonderful.

Here is a painting of mine—*Self Portrait as a 19th Century Folk Art Hare*. I like to see myself in different ways [#art](#) [#Illustrator](#) [#illustrationart](#) [#illustrationartists](#) [#illustration](#) [#ActuallyAutistic](#) [#Neurodivergent](#)

**this is nothing / hardly / plainly / always**

I just wrote and deleted a post about various stresses that have almost had me at the very end of myself, to do with having to fiddle through really hard techy stuff. Total stress for both sides in really glitchy goblin phone call with nice tech person. Many tears. Many stresses. I am worried about some things which I won't say here. My ears are agony. In the last three weeks I have been ill for many days on and off. That unsolvable loneliness that keeps coming for me is coming for me once more.



Figure 26. *Self-Portrait As Child Being Carefully Led*, by Jane Burn

What if one day, I woke to mountains, to forests, tulip fields? You get ingrained into your own life. You seize, you root, moss right in. So many incredible places that I will most likely never see. Then I worry that there is nothing left of the world's wonders anyway and I begin each day as I end it—unsolved, sick to my heart, anxious as blades, nervous as a bird, loud as a crime scene, ugly as a pit.

One half of my mind is going *wheeeeeeeeeeeeeee!*  
*Giddy-kipper-boing-boing* full tilt into joyous obsession  
with latest idea and I am literally pressing my hands  
on my head to stop it bursting with all the exciting paths  
it is trying to take at once, and it is euphoric, yelling,  
Clicking on 200 tabs at once and absolutely, indescribably  
hyper. The other half is trying to reason with it, saying  
*cool your jets, dear*, while it tries to put foundation  
and structure underneath. Guess which side keeps winning?  
Send bricks and cement please.

So happy, after having profile stolen last year, that I've almost 2000 followers which makes me feel there is a lot of love in the world—LOVE YOU x To celebrate, here is an [#illustration](#) Blue Woman who loves birds [#Illustrator](#) [#ActuallyAutistic](#) [#Neurodivergent](#) [#illustrationart](#)

### **a dry cloud / closed caves**

I went to the hospital today for my ears looked at.  
I had a hearing test and my hearing is OK (which I knew anyway) as, like I kept trying to explain, I hear sounds TOO much. Had a pressure test on right ear which they had to stop through pain. I couldn't get it through to them that sound, when it is loud, really hurts.  
Maybe it's a manifestation of my noise intolerance from me being *me*. After this poking about I had to explain I felt really dizzy again and we had a long talk about the attacks of vertigo that keep really affecting me as they have done over the years. My ears are so itchy inside, I could writhe them off—I couldn't really make them understand that either.

Look what an early bird I am, organising mushrooms into my favourite pan. There's an hour before I have to wake my school-bound son, a while before propriety demands I split the curtains apart—before I have to meet the window's dull gaze. I hate that I am afraid of it. My reflection cowers in its taunting glass. It always says the same thing to me—*somebody will SEE*. Eye on the time, I go to wake my boy, flat out asleep in a way that I never manage to be. I sit at the edge of the bed and run my palm along the duvet, blank myself out in the wonderful feel of soft cloth against my hand. He wakes and puts his hand upon my arm. My skin burns. He rubs and the touch is electric pain. I concentrate upon my smile.

I am very emotional at the moment. This is the stuff of dreams and the culmination of many years of incredibly hard work and deep study as I have learned more how to say what I want to say. Here is the cover reveal for my Nine Arches book *Be Feared* which has just been revealed today. I am coming into my 50th year and many of those years have been tough, uncertain, painful, desperate, difficult (especially childhood and the years 18 - 40) have made me feel ashamed and afraid. Throughout my life (though sometimes it has seemed too tough to do), I have held on to glimpses of light.

Happy [#Bivisibilityday2021](#) and loads and loads of love to everyone and peace and kindness xx

**take / your hand / from / my sleeve**

Thank you everyone for being so kind after  
the fat-shaming incident. I took the post down  
as I am feeling very exposed and a bit vulnerable  
and twitchy but you are so lovely xxxx

When my son is gone, a brick of loss lodges in my chest. Routine makes its drab claim and I knuckle through the folding, the minding, spills, stacks, and crumbs. I've got the dogs and I'm glad. If I didn't, I doubt some days I'd go outside and then I'd forget the things that I love, like the whiny, creaky singing of the too-tall pines that wilt at the side of the farm track, the loopy tyre swing, or the flooded drainage ditch that swims a spangle of leaves across its muddy ghost. When I return, hot with brisk sweat and pink round the gills I feel virtuous, sip the cup of tea that I have earned.

I've took my post down. Yes, I'm sad / angry /  
despondent. I've put in glorious, inappropriate earrings  
and I'm doing my best to deal with the bruises.

This is a poem I wrote a few years ago and it is still the same for me and so many  
[#poetry](#) [#poetrylovers](#) [#poetrytwitter](#) [#ActuallyAutistic](#) [#Neurodiversity](#)  
[#mentalhealth](#) [#MentalHealthMatters](#)

**a world / of slow gold / a molten world**

I am feeling very proud of something I have just done—  
I have taken my courage and added it to something  
I have been working on privately—a workshop proposal  
built around a sort of new theory and way of writing  
that I invented for myself. I have kept on swallowing  
down Impostor Syndrome. I have kept on fighting the  
Idea that I am not good enough to do this and no-one  
will be interested in what I have to say.



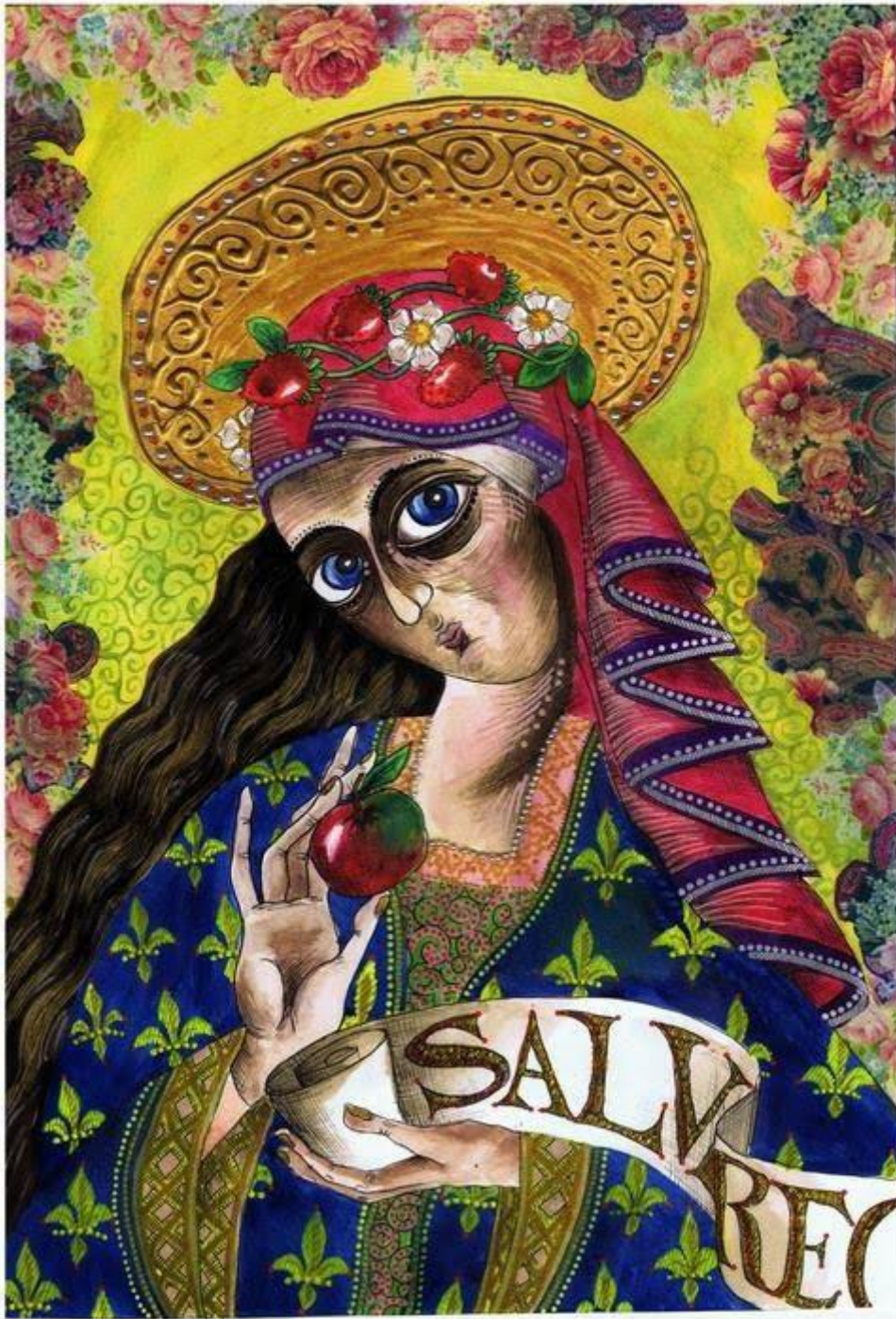


Figure 27. *Salve Regina* (Hail, Queen) by Jane Burn

I open my laptop. The keyboard holds a universe of words—I put my fingertips upon them and I can taste the twists of phrase, hear the clamour of stories asking to be out. They make a waterfall from my brain and the keys click and clatter, sing to the speed of a poem's birth. Here it doesn't matter that I can't control what I eat, that my belly is gross type 2, that if I could, I would kill myself with potatoes, that I am a charmless whale. I type myself fantastic. Sonnets are the body I wish I had—my legs are a couplet, kicking a hymn of rhyming out. I pick up a pen and become flight. The page wears murmurings of everything I ever wanted said.



Figure 28. *On A Calm Sea*, by Jane Burn

I must just say that after attending the first seminar for my 2nd year MA semester 1 module, [REDACTED] is a BRILLIANT teacher. She gave us the most exciting, unusual, informative and different lecture and we had great discussions. I left the lesson on a total high— I felt highly excited, full of new and unexpected ideas, buzzy and a bit nervous and afraid, as if I am on a new and strangely rocking boat that I must work out how to balance upon, and then sail in. This is not a bad Feeling to have—it means I am going to learn lots of new and incredible things and that can only be a good thing. I travelled home in a very thoughtful fashion, as if I am beginning yet another journey. Times like this you feel as if you can do anything.

Thank you so much @ [REDACTED] & @ [REDACTED] for including my poem in this incredible anthology - I bought a copy and it arrived today! Thank you @ [REDACTED] for first publishing it x I can't believe I am with such amazing poets  
[#poetry](#) [#ActuallyAutistic](#) [#NeuroDivergent](#)

**faces turned / to a ceiling of promises**



Figure 29. *Moon Hare* (linocut), by Jane Burn

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When I read these excerpts back, it is clear how glad I am of the **salvation / truth** I find in nature, art, and poetry. They allow the exposure of raw reality in, give me courage to **fathom / translate life / self** through the written word.

I guess I was lulled into thinking everybody had got to know me well. On reading a recent review of my latest poetry collection, I was left with much to dwell upon, with regard to persona—over the years, **have I said too little / too much?**

Suddenly, I had to consider **second-hand persona**—one built by people upon what they believe they know about me—and there is no way (I don't think) of controlling this. Perhaps **persona has a life of its own**. It is something you start but other people finish? An extension of who you are? A separate being? The real **self** after all?

Living in such a digital age, it is increasingly rare to not at least know something about a writer even before we read their work. I wanted to try to approach this collection by Jane Burn as if I was in a vacuum, unaware of **what I know of her from social media and the like**. I didn't want to be influenced in any way and to read the poems and appreciate them as linguistic entities free from preconception and bias (Edwards 2022).

The truth is scattered between the many written parts of **myself**. I am threaded between every letter, every atom of punctuation, am broken upon every line. The truth is fragments. Nobody else will tell me who I am. I will not be "excluded and dehumanised" (Botha, Dibb & Frost 2020).

"My very being [my very **self**] became a story..." (Yergeau 2018, p. 1)

**I will author myself.**

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