

CLOSER TO HOME:
A CREATIVE AND CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHICAL
ANALYSIS OF THE MOTIVATIONS AND CREATIVE PROCESS
BEHIND WRITING VIOLENCE

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Abstract

The novel presents itself as a creative critical artefact, simultaneously fictitious and autoethnographic, borrowing from the disciplines of Fine Art and Film Studies to convey its troubling narrative. England has been torn apart in a civil war over immigration and ethnic minorities, the fighting long over but terrorists persisting in the knowledge that *they are right*. The Dogs, led by a disillusioned soldier from the traumatising conflict, recruit aimless adolescent boys wanting to be “men”, desensitising them to violence through film and ritualistic savagery. Lee struggles with the ease with which he excels in this world, far removed from his mother and young sister, Cissy, and it is only when he discovers that Muma is regularly prostituting the nine-year-old that his new aptitudes spill into his home. Lee and Cissy escape to the Dog’s base - a House that writes on its own walls, sitting close to the Wall bisecting the country, and it is here that Lee discovers the immolating roots of the faction, and the destructive impetus behind their acts.

The artifact is sentient. It obfuscates its own text to protect Cissy, steals the words of other texts amidst scenes of torture to explain itself as it squirms and morphs within the reader’s hands, wrestles with its own abject content and sends endless warnings for the reader to stop and look away. This continues a theme of magical realism that sees animal totems as guardians and a landscape as emotionally scarred as any person by conflict and suffering. Reality is unstable, as are facile presumptions about justice and truth. *Closer to Home* is an example of practice-led research, wherein the text illuminates and examines the creative process behind writing physical violence, child sexual violence and simulacra violence, finding the domestic and familial roots of abject fiction writing.

Author Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University. All reproduced images are used lawfully, either because copyright does not apply, because copyright has expired, or because the copyright holder has permitted reproduction under a Creative Commons License.

Original artwork by Kayleigh J Moore.

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Date:.....

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K J Moore

We know how much of an affront the
Spanish civil war was to THE human
spirit WHEN we stare at Guernica than
when WE read a FACT-based account

ART IS THE ONE THAT allows us To see the truth

PICASSO (1923)

Central nursery was the only free childcare centre left in the city, overpopulated and understaffed though its design portrayed a different façade. It housed the majority of working-class children during business hours, six days a week. It held nothing else of value. Entry was digitally controlled by DNA scanners and eight-code keypads. Children, parents and staff were logged. There were barcodes on everything. There were no panic buttons. It was safe; one of the handful of the central Liverpool buildings that did not have, or require, razor-wire and automated towers.

Inside the SUV made hot and dark by its armour, Adam rested his weight through his elbows and down his legs as he addressed his unit. The closed posture was not one that they had seen on him before, and it sharpened them and the little ticks and fidgets they presented before a difficult first-response. He had volunteered them for this.

“The footage that was sent out was all from internal security cameras,” he began evenly, running the side of his thumb back and forth over the tip of his right index finger. It made an O shape through which the folds of his black khakis appeared sharper. “It was sent from an outside, mobile source that’s already been contained. Time stamps are an hour and a half ago.”

The black and white images had been broadcast as an advertisement for what was waiting to be found, bearing down uncut and unforgiving on the public for a full six minutes before the feed was blocked. They had looked like clips from a bad film, with unrealistic levels of gore and long, unchanging shots from high angles of bodies being dragged along corridors by figures in black. On his radio show, after the feed had been taken down, Steve Glough tried to describe the footage. Soon he was only murmuring ‘horrible, horrible’, over and over.

Adam’s thumbnail pressed into the trench of hard skin alongside his fingernail. He waited for the vehicle to stabilise before he went on. “There was no alarm from the nursery and no warning or threat from any group before the attack.”

Sat opposite, Ellis snorted. “The IRA used to at least give us a ‘heads up’. Not like these kids, today.” No stuttered laughter, nothing to dispel the tension. He went on without missing a beat. “We know it’s the Southies, though, right? I mean, it’s got to be.”

“Glough was saying as much.”

“Oh - fuck Glough. I don’t know why you listen to his shit.”

“It’s not their MO.”

“Been a while since they last did something big.”

“This big, yeah.”

“The biggest that we know about. Only reason this is in the press at all is because they streamed it out.”

“Don’t be stupid – no one could cover something like this up. Why would they, even?”

“Not to cause a panic? Play it all down quiet.”

“When did Glough say it was Southies?”

Adam listened to the quiet ripple of conversation like radio chatter but made no remark. Speculation was above his pay grade. His nail moved into his palm and quickly made a dent. He spoke again a fraction louder than he had before. “The footage was a pretty comprehensive covering of the site, except for the central room. First objective is to recover survivors, but in all likelihood there aren’t any. They were pretty thorough about that.”

“And they were putting out the fires, did you see?” Clive, whose stature could only be that of a scout or a jockey, threw out. “Glough said about some of the strip lights catching when they came down getting put out with blankets or coats or something.”

“Wasn’t enough to just shoot the place up.” Rich, their field medic. The words were underscored with a hollow whistle from being spoken across the lip of the gun barrel. “Had to make sure there was something for everyone to see.”

Adam flicked a hand up to cut off the chatter without looking, his eyes tracking motes of dust made visible in flashes of sunlight. He hadn’t told them that he and Jen had transferred Evelyn to Central a month ago.

A whirl of blue light, obscured by the glass, drew Adam’s gaze out to another cordoned off street being blocked and searched. Traffic was a mess – any cars that had been abandoned were now being checked and towed. They were alternating between the path and the road to get through the swelling hysteria, people battering in thicker and louder waves the closer they came. Barriers were doing little to impede the flow of parents and journalists. Shots were being fired into the air just as ineffectually. The instinctive sense of self-preservation had been superseded.

Adam led them out of the cab and down the steel steps with a firm grasp on learned stoicism. He faintly needed to urinate – a first on an operation, for him. Ellis came to stand a little closer than normal at his shoulder, as if knowing. The commander nodded towards the building. “We sweep through to the central chamber and recon there, then clear outwards to the perimeter. Keep your eyes up for explosives and lives.”

There was hesitation at the entrance, too long to be called mere caution, before they found resolve from one another’s nearness. With a ripple of signals, they moved as one black body into the maw.

In the reception area Adam gestured for Clive to go on ahead, watching as the smaller man ghosted against the wall until he came to the doorframe. The door had been disintegrated in its frame, leaving a black line that had bubbled like scorched varnish on wood. The main corridor beyond was expansive and still, the walls marred with colours made unfamiliar through sheer quantity. Strip lights angled down from the ceiling, smoky and grey, whilst others lay shattered and half covered with burnt fabric.

His stance low and tight, Adam moved to a point on the wall where something red appeared to have shattered, scrutinising the smears. He looked up to confirm that the camera was in front of them, and that the body had been taken deeper into the complex, not out of it. There was a sense of direction to the scorch marks and smears, like paint feathering out to nothing at the end of a brush stroke. Everyone had been herded – children and carers. Without looking back, Adam motioned them to keep moving.

As they neared the doorway at the end of corridor, wet debris began to litter their path. Ahead of them, Clive picked finer and finer paths through the material one step at a time, sweeping for mines beneath the flesh. The soldiers stepped where the scout had stepped, following the red-hashed prints like wet depressions into drying sand. Shoulders low and weapons high, they were alert without seeing.

Clive stopped alongside the cracked hand-scanner by the door, waiting for the unit to gather in a scattered convergence. There was no furniture in the corridor – no cover other than the body scraps. A wave of creamy yellow swept across the door’s windows, pushing out lazy grey shadows that shrank as quickly as they’d formed. The Light Room was the nursery’s jewel, where sunlight-calibrated displays were

projected to soothe and amuse. Adam opened the door with his foot and the muzzle of his gun.

The smell hit them before they could see, thick and visceral and vividly portending of what was inside. In the high-domed space, the central mound of bodies and parts was still shifting and slumping from the wet weights that comprised it. Adam led the group in ahead of Clive to see. The bodies were stacked as if kindling, twigs amidst logs. Evisceration. Disarticulation. Hemipelvectomy. Hemicorporectomy. Massive haemorrhages turned tacky as they ran down and mixed and coagulated on the floor. Periodically, extremities twitched as tendons were pressed, or something descending in the core levered the other end of a limb to jerk and wave. Colours traced its rough gradient, pinks making the blood vivid before greens and blues turned it black. White stars and hearts shivered over the surfaces, down the pile, across the floor and up the soldiers before terminating on the wall behind them.

Adam watched Clive begin a slow orbit of the room; saw the impossibility of walking without stepping in at least fluid. Black flecks converged at the edges of his vision, swarming tighter and tighter as his body numbed and his stomach crawled up to knot around his tongue. He was aware of Rich taking a cautious step towards the pile, stiff and bright eyed, lost as to how to even begin. They had so vastly underestimated the South's capacity.

The remainder of the team watching him, waiting for him, sent a cold lance through his chest, and he rubbed a hand across his eyes. It was a short respite from the scene. The dark was no comfort, bringing Evelyn's gangly body and freckled face to juxtapose with the bent angles and sharply wet osseous tips. Some of the cleaved ends were clean and abrupt. Others looked like split wood.

A display so that they might make a critical mistake; an emotional retaliation that left them intelligently exposed. They could not have prepared for this, he privately iterated. Its gore was inconceivable even as they stood in it. Most troubling, however, was the futility: neither an attack on a resource nor a test of strength, but a corrosive wound that would never heal. Something intended to poison them into recklessness.

Long minutes of heavy quiet were wasted in staring until Adam brought them back. "Focus on the job," he intoned, the instruction as much for himself as the team. The soldiers forced composure before looking to him, broken from their reveries into clear, ready water. "Confirm the area as clear, then we can start getting people in and laying them properly."

Clive returned from skirting about the edge of the chamber, showing no sign of wanting to look again at the drying spectacle. Scouts had it ingrained not to look at one single thing. He held out the scanner confirming the mound as dead, though it bore an unaccounted light on its screen when he showed it to Adam. "There's someone here. In the kitchens, probably wounded."

Adam held up a hand to him, ignoring the glower the gesture earned to check the medic when he saw the smaller man move. Rich's head was bowed as he approached the bodies, gore peeling away from his boots in thick ropes. He knelt, picked up an arm. Smaller though, Adam realised, and with narrowed eyes he confirmed it to be an elbow in the man's hands. Not hers, though. She couldn't come apart like that. She'd have died whole, immaculate and quick.

"Everyone wait here." He nodded for Clive to lead.

They both made a conscientious bid to only tread the floor, but they still heard small things crush beneath their boots, felt them crumple and mash together into

something they couldn't identify afterwards. Out on the other side of the Light Room the corridors were clear of parts, though they showed the same signs of the dismembered and dragged.

A rattling clatter further down the corridor froze them both, Adam taking point whilst Clive referenced the scanner. The light didn't move and there were no others to explain the approaching sound. After an immeasurable time, the sight of Adam's rifle traced a small animal picking its way beneath and through the shattered furniture. When it felt itself being watched, the white rabbit sat up to check the air with its blunt nose, forelegs hanging down as if bound. The fur on its underside and legs was slick and wetted, giving it the appearance of being partially skinned. When they did not move, it dropped down again and continued past them in bobbing two-step, tail high and black pupils tiny in its red eyes. Neither of them commented on the escaped pet. They moved on.

The kitchen was dark and overturned, with a soft *clink-clink* of fluid on metal coming from the far corner inside a nest of toppled storage units. A glance to the scanner confirmed the presence of life, though weak. Adam raised his rifle to the sound. His chest tightened with something between excitement and fear, a feeling that never went away but had long come to be ignored. Evelyn would have known to hide, even when it was all over. Smart girl. A good girl. Still said her prayers even after he'd told her that God wouldn't make things come true just because she asked. That she had to make good for herself. Came to fetch him when she found bullets in the road without touching them first. Was scared of dogs and wanted a cat called Mouser, who was all black except for three paws that were white like he'd stepped in paint and didn't realise until he was three out of four paws the way in.

Clive moved to uncover her. Standing at the edge, he watched Adam for the nod before his hands came to rest on the top unit. His body tensed, adjusted to tear it back and then get out of the way himself, when the dripping stopped. Hollow, dreadful silence, and then the sound of retching as Clive finally suddenly, reached his capacity for horror.

Adam crossed the room without realising he was moving, kicking utensils and dented panels out of the way to see. The girl was perhaps four years old, barely differentiated from a boy child if not for her nakedness and the wide spread of her bent legs. Something like a knife had been forced into her in long, twisting jabs. He hadn't realised that such a small body could hold so much blood. It wasn't Evelyn, yet it took almost a minute of staring to convince himself of that. The flashing light on Clive's scanner went out with a dull chirp, and they were desolately relieved.

He cradled her as best he could, retreating back to the Light room with Clive following, but she came apart in his hands. When he got back, Ellis was shouting into his radio and the people outside had surged in.

Cissy walked around the shadows – all of them, including the buildings, which turned the twenty minute walk from school into a forty minute trek. She could only do this in the weeks between Easter and summer, and then only this route. Today was the last time for this year, and her small strides were eager.

The high wire fences fringed with barbed curls were still intact around the school, but they disintegrated into split nets and finally to solitary posts around the buildings the further out she walked. Here in the town centre, the bricks were scarred and etched with paint whilst the windows shone black through the gaps of matte-metal shutters that were always down. She liked how the wind played through all of the defensive measures of the town, raising soft notes like a fluttered breath through taut grass reeds. Overturned concrete bollards lining the road made nests in the diamond lattice and bleached litter, their steel roots from the kerb crusted orange. The thick tangles were more menacing, catching skirts and scratching shallow cuts that burned for hours. Beneath her dress, her blue leggings were already scuffed with rust.

Cissy moved into the road when she reached the sweet and tobacco shop that went around a corner, tracing the outlines of chimney stacks and a skeletal aerial. Scatterings of people passed her, but they were in the shadows so the streets were, according to her rules, empty. She tripped aside when a slow car appeared in the light, continuing diagonally across the street and cutting the corner off her route.

The church and its dry grass were completely in the sun on clear days, and Cissy ducked through the entrance that had been cut in the fence. There was a wide chestnut tree in the southern corner that wouldn't die no matter how many copper nails were driven in a belt around its trunk. Cissy took up a handful of chestnuts that had fallen outside the shadow. The tree dropped them all year round, even when it was bare of leaves to cover them. She arranged the mahogany orbs in a lopsided pyramid by the split fence on the other side of the graveyard, ready for the squirrels she knew lived in the house across the road. Her bag caught as she went through, and she stopped to check it and Moth on her shoulder before moving on.

The construction site stood next to the church, and nothing inside of it had moved since before she could remember. There was no longer a barrier cordoning it off, so she could walk the steel pipes that carried her alongside a grey barricade that spanned the street. The heat from the metal built in her shoes, warming her small feet. She turned her chin to her companion.

“You should fly more. Your wings'll fall off if you don't use them.”

Moth flicked its antenna back to rest against its thorax, taking the feathered protrusions out of the breeze of her walk. It perched in its customary place against Cissy's collar with hooked legs splayed, its multifaceted eyes fixed ahead, unblinking.

Sliding her hand up to grasp the strap of her bag, Cissy spoke whilst watching a scattered flock of seagulls pass overhead. They were slick and thin against the sky, calling in lilting shrieks. At night they frightened her, incongruous in the dark. She palmed a mass of her light brown fringe away from her eyes.

“Muma says if you don't use it, you'll lose it. Your arms and legs will fall off, your holes all close up and your brain comes out and has to go in a bucket.”

She punctuated the fact with a serious, no-nonsense nod, coming to stop at the end of the pipe. Usually she would climb down the stack, but now she considered the short drop with a sly smile. The ground below was in the sun.

Moth pitched forward into the open air when she jumped, her arms splayed and legs bent ready. She landed laughing and sat sideways in the gravel, her skirt tight around her lank thighs. Her teeth showed as she watched Moth circle with

obvious agitation before fluttering to land on her shoulder. It flicked its wings in what Cissy saw was a proxy huff, and then clambered across her chest to crawl into the shallow tube of her collar.

Cissy brought both hands up to where its wings crossed at the edge of the fabric tunnel. “No, don’t do that. It was really good, and you didn’t go anywhere.”

She felt the body bump over her fingers in a light touch, waiting until Moth had backed gingerly onto her hand before holding it out. Her brow creased, pink mouth pursing. “Is it maybe me going somewhere that you don’t like? Like I might run away?”

Brown dusted wings flexed out slowly, fidgeting back down into place.

Cissy cocked her head and gave a pantomime sigh that bounced her shoulders. “Silly. You’re the one who can go away. You can fly. I can’t go anywhere.”

Moth shuffled at that, body dipping and proboscis tapping at her skin. She looked up and saw the position of the sun. Something heavy and beyond articulation held in the air, like a cloud passing over.

“Come on, or Muma’ll have me,” Cissy finally murmured, pushing up to her feet and brushing off her skirt with flat hands. Moth hovered, waiting, before returning to her shoulder.

“Cissy?”

She looked up to see a young man crossing the road in a clumsy trot, concern dragging his features down. “Hi, John.”

John stopped several paces away, hands twitching with an anxious resistance to touch. “Are you okay? Did you fall?”

Scratching the pit of her skull, making a loud noise that sounded like dry sand, Cissy shook her head. “No, just going home. I jumped.”

“Ah, I see,” came the grave remark after a pause. John took a long look up both ends of the street, as if he were going to cross back over the road, then fixed his wet eyes back on to her. “Shall I walk you home? Make sure you get back alright.”

Cissy made a noncommittal sound and shrugged, falling into pace beside the man but outside his shadow. He didn’t try to take her hand and she didn’t offer it.

He cleared his throat, which seemed to take unnatural effort. “What did you learn in school today?”

They didn’t look at one another, passing into uncharted territory.

Moth tucked into Cissy’s hair and made her scalp itch. She touched the area with care. “Nothing.”

“Oh.” John crossed the paving slabs whole, Cissy in halves. She minded every crack whilst his feet moved on dumbly. He knew the way. “That doesn’t sound very good.”

She took hold of the bag strap again, running her thumb along the smooth bumps of chewing gum she’d collected. They were pressed into the seam where Muma wouldn’t find them and scrape them away. They were all from the mouths of girls. “No, it’s ‘cause it was about the slag pits, and Lee works at the slag pits and he tells me about it sometimes, so I already know.”

John allowed a beat of silence to pass. “And Lee is your..?”

A cocked lamppost put a grey line across the footpath, snapped over the kerb. Cissy meandered around it without comment. “My big brother. He works in the slag pits and he goes up the hill and he’s going to be a Dog someday.”

A four slab pause. “You have a brother?” Though it lifted at the end, it sounded more a cautious statement than a question. When Cissy didn’t respond, he added in the same soft tone, “Where does he live?”

“Down the hall next to my room,” she replied, oblivious to the way the soft flesh of his face moved. “But, well, not all the time. That’s just where his clothes are and where he sleeps. He doesn’t live there anymore.”

Cissy stopped abruptly an inch from the next paving slab, inspecting the width and breadth of the shadow closing the street before them with the utmost seriousness. There should have been a yellow path left against the laundrette, where the windows were dark and her hair look like it was glowing white in the reflection. The days were getting shorter, the sun faster.

“What?” John asked with the same gentle, puzzled irritation of men who spend limited time with children.

“Can’t go into the dark,” she replied, a clear and quiet truth.

John’s expression changed again, as if remembering something dreadful and bitter. He acquiesced with a breath, allowing the child to lead him down a bright alley that faced the sun.

STORIES. like poems,
ARE CODED autobiographies.
Brophy, (2003)

The trees were dry, hunched and splintered over the boys and the fire. They sat in a ragged circle, faces turned towards the bowed head that watched the creature labouring its escape from the heat. Behind thick strands of light brown hair, Lee's features were impassive - as if he was still labouring at the slag pit, vacant from muscular pain but enduring little thought. His nails were tipped with crescents of black, the dirt and grime packed so hard as to be a part of his hands. The long sleeves of his too-big grey top were darkened to the same shade.

With painful slowness, the orange-bellied slug slouched away from the fire, curling when it was intermittently flicked and prodded. The escaping gastropod was one of the spoils of their impromptu hunting expedition, concluded only minutes ago.

For their first initiation night, insects had been a popular though predictable choice. Killing and consuming something disgusting was a small oblation, something they'd all done before, but it still mattered. By the end of the week they would all be Dogs, the stained marks around their necks washed off and black ink put under their skins. They had to earn the collar with their attitude.

Sitting beside the fair-haired teen, Dan impaled the slug with a peeled-sharp stick. It curled foetal around mucus and crumbs of earth, secreting yellow. "Yeah, man, that's the stuff right there. Fuckin' sick it is. Get it down ya, Lee."

Lee had come up the hill with Dan, walking astride and making their own path through the dark. The older boy had met him on his first day at the factory gate a year ago, preening his dark hair into a short halo of frizz that would never be thick enough to hold the comb no matter how hard he tried. Though he was as white as the rest of the country, Dan claimed his spiritual heritage was with the absent people of colour, and coveted his interpretation from the rumours of black culture. He'd seemed more decent and friendly than strange to Lee. After they'd finished slugging they would roam the decaying town together, unconsciously searching for something indistinct. Eventually they'd found this gang of teens doing the same thing. Then they'd found Adam.

Like Dan, Lee hadn't taken the dirt collar seriously at first, but the excitement of getting the permanent mark was contagious. Now he smirked and motioned to the fire. "You gonna be a good cunt and cook it for me?"

There was a chorus of jeers as Dan picked up the slug and corkscrewed it onto the stick, forcing the tip through its turgid body in sharp little turns. He held it out over the flames, watching it begin to bubble. It arched back and rippled the edges of its thick underbelly, snapping back and forth before finally, slowly, turning crisp and still.

Lee took the proffered stick and blew the trembling ribbon of white smoke sideways. He felt more than saw the others watching. Jerking the slug off, he considered it in his palm and forced the grin that had slipped back into place. The animal looked old and creased, nothing like those that ascended the low walls around Muma's garden.

Dan thumped his back, voice thick with the weight of his aped accent. "Do it, man - get it down ya."

Lee slapped the roasted curl to his open mouth as he threw his head back. Launched into his throat like a big black pill, the slug left only a glancing taste against his palate. He'd been eating like this since running with his first gang, a requisite of wild nights with wild people where anything was possible. Anything was edible if you burnt it first.

Shouts, cheers, sham animal howls, and Lee glanced to Adam as he finished his animated swallow. The older man sat stoic and watchful above them, posed on an outcropping of rock that seemed designed for the purpose.

The youngest boy scuffed up on his knees. “Look – caught these at the ‘shop.” Cal held out a tall jar of fluttering shapes that glowed in the flames. “Flapping around the light at the Chinky, they were. Enough for one each.”

Holding the base of the jar in his hand, Dan squinted through the glass as if he knew better than the rest. He thrust out his bottom lip, nostrils flared and nodding sagely. “Yo, dem’s big basta’ds, right.”

The jar was passed around like a totem, pausing in laps as everyone took one to crumple in their hands and mouth. They watched one another to see if they’d put the moths still living between their teeth. After eating his, Joe rose on his knees and held the jar across the fire, papery fragments stuck to his lips. The last moths hurtled in a frenzy of legs and dust against the screwed top, battering their bodies in soft pats. “Get on, Lee.”

Nesting the jar between his crossed legs, Lee tipped the open lid up just enough to reach a hand inside, trapping a bulky moth against the glass. Closing the jar with one hand, he probed into his loose fist to take the feathery body between thumb and forefinger. The boys watched him pull the wings away by the roots.

“Thought it could be like them finger sandwiches the Southies have,” Lee shrugged, one side of his mouth quirked upwards.

“Yeah, yeah, man,” Dan laughed, punching Joe’s arm. “That’s well funny. Properly good, right.”

Above them, Adam rubbed a polished red apple against his wrist. He held the fruit as more a prop than food, watching some point in the middle distance between the ledge and the fire. A band of black collared his neck like a scar. He did not clear his throat to speak, projecting his words like background noise. They held the lilt of recital, abrupt and discordant amidst the teens.

“To overcome the threat of our enemies, we must unlearn decades of domesticity and recapture the fortitude of our barbarian ancestors, who would not have hesitated to break our soft, pallid hides.”

The boys absorbed rather than listened. Lee chewed the sandwiched moth once before swallowing, wing pieces clinging to the roof of his mouth. When he passed the jar along, the spatter scars on his hands shone from the fire.

“We must not be afraid to assert our dominion over nature. The wild does not forgive compunction.”

The jar was empty. Lee rubbed his fingers against his jeans, leaving streaks of grey dust in the dark fabric. Nick produced a shoebox bound with a string, bulging at the base. Around the fire, the teens straightened and craned their necks to see.

Adam was not watching the activities below, pinching the stem of the apple and turning the body of the fruit clockwise to separate the two. “If we flinch at a crushed raven’s skull or a rabbit’s twisted and ragged remains, we cannot hope to hold strength of spirit against our adversary.”

The rat was still limp, fur twisted from where it had struggled against the steel rod clamped across its shoulders. They had all seen rats before, but this was the first they had seen held. The ante was up.

“Destroy.”

A shoeprint was imprinted on the pointed head, the black eyes shining like beads. Nick removed the trap, touching the trench-like dent left behind before passing the body along.

“Consume.”

“Found it round back of the school,” Nick explained with a cautious smile, his shoulders hunched for approval.

“All-fuckin’-right. This is the shit, right here,” Dan crooned with a slow grin as he received the animal. Rather than cradle it in his hands, he pinched up enough scruff to hold the body by, surprised by its thick weight.

“Take the wild strength into your body as you have wrested it from theirs.”

Cal shifted noiselessly, pupils small and orange from looking across the fire. “What first?”

“We’re not gonna cook all of it?”

“Nah – this is gotta go around all of us.”

“Yeah, we’ll all have a bit.”

“Don’t eat the green bit.”

“...The fuck?”

“One of its guts is green and cats and foxes and nothing ever eats it, because it’s poison or summut. Just saying, is all.

“Do the tail first.”

“Nah.”

“Eye? An eye?”

“Yeah, one of its eyes.”

“How’re we gonna cook its eye? Bloody fur’ll catch fire.”

“It’ll have to be raw, then, won’t it? Fucknut.”

“I’m not doing that.”

“Piss off and go cry in between your mum’s thighs, then.”

“Who’s gonna do it?”

“Yeah – this is the big time, here. Balls to the wall stuff.”

Schooling his expression, Lee reached out a hand and waited for Dan to pass the animal across. Everyone turned silent to watch as he tipped the soft body in his hands, arranging its neck inside his thumb and forefinger. He squeezed the eye socket but the sticky-dry orb stayed fixed.

Unseen, Adam’s eyes focussed with interest on the boy and the rat. Such volunteering was uncommon. “The rest will smell their blood running hot through you and cower.”

Bringing the rat to his mouth, Lee made a seal with his thin lips against its head. His tongue touched fur and the black eye by reflex, recoiling but then probing out slowly to explore the solidity of it.

“If you can eat the flesh of lesser creatures, of your enemy,”

Lee sucked, then again, harder than he’d anticipated needing to.

“- take in their fetid stench,”

The eye popped forwards against his tongue but remained seated inside the bone.

“- choke it down against bile and sense,”

Another hard drag and the pink thread snapped, leaving his tongue nesting the cold pea. He showed it to them, grinning around his teeth.

“- then they will fear you effortlessly.”

Positioned between his front teeth, Lee bit the eye in half with his gums bared. Black slid down and pooled in the recesses between his incisors.

“As they should.”

The apple cracked.

To applause, Lee swallowed.

Muma's house had a psoriasis shingle roof and was the one of eighteen still animate on a street of forty-two. Sounds passed as yawning moans and creaks through the thin walls into the empty houses on both sides, and the front garden was a dry knot of dead bushes, twisted weeds and rusted bicycle parts. The window to the right of the door was dark with yellow netting, partially closed curtains left undisturbed for so long that the creases had stiffened.

In the semi-darkness, Muma stacked the money from the cigar tin so that the edges and monarch's faces were aligned. She counted it every time she opened it, set open in the centre of the coffee table that rippled with overlapping water marks. She'd never cleaned it because she thought it was pretty, and had been vaguely curious to see how the design would evolve. Tissue lint, fragments of paper and short threads had dried into crusted crescents, bringing a mottled unity to the piece.

The minutes of each day when she counted the money were the only times when she did not smoke. Like the unopened lager can on the floor, the liquorice cigarette was rolled and waiting on the arm of the sofa, nested on one of the many blankets heaped to make bedding. From a high shelf the radio murmured, crackling softly. Muma looked through the window.

Sunset tonight was a murky orange over brown. She finished counting and straightening the money before sealing it back in the tin, coming to kneel by the sofa to put it inside the alcove she'd carved into the foam cushion she slept on. The men would walk from their cars a street across to put their knuckles against the door, and unless she sat staring through the opaque window she had no warning of their approach. Time was circumstantial; its passage only mattering during the period it was paid for.

Opening the lager, Muma drank half the can standing entirely still by the window but for the motion and sound of her gullet working. When the hollow ache of hunger had softened, she pulled off her shirt and threw it to land on the rim of the laundry basket in the corner. A spray of purple-scented deodorant settled about her entire upper body, with another pass across her underarms and the folds at the small of her back that rolled into her hips. Her body was mulch-soft, striped with tapering silver lines that massed about her stomach, where the flesh buckled into a still-livid caesarean scar.

She pulled on a clean top that smelled old from the chest of drawers and drank another quarter of the lager, setting the can down to open the small bag of makeup. Oily foundation under her eyes and over her scars evened the tone of her face, but brought the dead skin peeling across her nose into ugly contrast. She scratched the area with one fingernail until it was pink, achieving little and quickly abandoning the attempt to apply eyeshadow. The matte bronze dust gathered in the creases of her eyelids, setting over the remains from the day before to make relief lines. She hadn't opened the mascara when the door thudded.

Muma never opened the door immediately, finishing one can and beginning another before lighting the cigarette and moving into the hallway. She hadn't installed a lock on the door and didn't foresee a time when she would need to.

It was a new man tonight – older than most but fidgeting with the same boyish shyness they did at any age. Muma could tell where in his jacket he had put the envelope. A shadow across his jaw indicated that he hadn't gone home from work, and she could see the angular bulge of his phone and keys in his trouser pocket.

He opened his mouth, inhaled instead of spoke and then cleared his throat. Mumma stepped back and motioned him in before he could begin looking up and down the street. When the door was shut, he held out the thick envelope as if triggered. She tucked the can into her elbow and didn't offer him one, smiling a little around the cigarette. His hand twitched and she took the money from him, leaving him to follow her down the hallway into the kitchen where she began counting it.

"This your first time?"
The man rested his hand on the edge of the countertop, shoulders high and tight. "No. I mean, yes, like this. I've not done this before. The guy who recommended you said."

The wrong thing, more than likely - Mumma held up a hand with a tight smile. She spoke into the envelope, flicking the stiffly new notes across with her thumb. "You'll get half an hour, tops, and it's the standard stuff. No kissing on the mouth, no real names, no rough stuff."

He seemed to absorb with great concentration before finally nodding his assent. Mumma tucked the envelope into her shirt, curved against her breast.

She led him up the bowed steps to the bedroom and didn't turn the light on, though the house was always overcast. Each time Casey was on her back beneath the light body indistinct and shifting in shallow mounds. She

flexed her eyes, clinging to a plaster rose at the mouth. Middle distance, seeking patterns between the

her hands beneath the baggy gown. John stepped and pulled hands on her stomach. John took a

Lowering herself into a rayed doorway, next to the door, Mumma folded her arms with a shallow angle. The can lay at a shallow angle against her elbow. "She don't know where. She's spastic, see. Only thing her da ever gave her." It was the line of nervous first-timers. A sip of beer that was meant to be dismissive and she had her eyes glancing at her wrist as if there were a watch there. "Get on already, haven't got all night."

The new John, and they were always John, paused again before finally sliding his belt off. He put his back to Mumma to take his trousers and boxers off his socks tight over his pale calves and blue shirt skimming against his thighs. Feeling back the layers of rough blankets and finally the grey sheet that covered the child, John had to climb atop her to fit in the bed. Pausing, hesitant and reverent in equal measure, he watched her breath for long moments before he touched her. She was cool and passive against him, thighs shifting at the gentle pressure from his body as he knelt at her cusp. Curling, he mouthed at the pink ribbons with excessive saliva and tenderness, one hand reaching back to readjust his erection as it began to ache against his hip.

Casey remained quiet and still, her breath only hitching when he shifted back atop her to his placed on one elbow, his fist holding his penis straight to press into her. She made a soft sound, indeterminate and interpretable as either mild pleasure or mild pain. When John began his slow jerks, head bowing with an *Om* into her neck, she raised her arms with slack wrists and rested them about his shoulders. Mouth flickered about the moon-grey light bulb, wings at right angles and furry antenna scooping back

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He seemed to absorb that with great concentration before nodding his assent. Muma tucked the envelope into her shirt, felt it curve against her warm breast.

She led him up the bowed steps to the bedroom and didn't turn the light on, though the house was always overcast. Each time Cissy was already on her back beneath the covers, her slight body indistinct and shifting in shallow mounds. She gazed up at some indistinct point in the air, seeking patterns between the tiny floaters in her eyes and the ceiling's mould. Clinging to the plaster rose above the light bulb, Moth flexed its wings in slow spasms.

"Cissy, John's come to see you."

Beneath the thick layer of thin blankets, Cissy continued to trace her hands beneath the nightgown over the smooth clam of her groin and hairless thighs. When John stepped fully into the room, she automatically parted her wiry legs and pulled the baggy gown up to the shallow cones of her breasts, resting her hands on her stomach. John took a half step, caught his breath and looked to Muma.

Lowering herself into a frayed chair in the farthest corner of the room, next to the door, Muma folded her arms with a sharp exhale. The can lay at a shallow angle against her elbow. "She don't know we're even here. She's spastic, see. Only thing her da ever gave her." It was the line for all the nervous first-timers. A sip of beer that was meant to be dismissive and she rolled her eyes, glancing at her wrist as if there were a watch there. "Get on already. Haven't got all night."

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Cissy remained quiet and still, her breath only hitching when he shifted back atop her to lie braced on one elbow, his fist holding his penis straight to press into her. She made a soft sound, indeterminate and interpretable as either mild pleasure or mild pain. When John began his slow jerks, head bowing with an *Oh* into her neck, she raised her arms with slack wrists and rested them about his shoulders. Moth flickered about the moon-grey lightbulb, wings at right angles and furry antenna scooping back

across its wide body. Cissy smiled faintly at it over his shoulder, flexing her fingers with the same drunken rhythm as the dusted wings. The grating pressure was elsewhere as Moth circled and dipped, finally disappearing behind the yellow cord when John ultimately peaked with a hoarse grunt and dipped back.

Cissy gave a doll's smile when he sat up and jerked them flaccidly apart, her only significant expression. "Thank you, John," she murmured in a high note, her voice measured to the same rhythm as the pulse that she could feel deep inside her hips.

John didn't answer at first, chin pressing into his collarbone with shut eyes as he gasped through his teeth. His breath caught, he smiled down at her and cupped the side of her skull with the entirety of his hand. "Thank you, sweet."

Muma set her can on the floor against the legs of the chair and rested her elbows on her knees to roll a cigarette in liquorice-black paper. John dressed and arranged himself, meeting Muma standing at the door.

With a sound beneath a *u* in the throat, her chin retracted back into a horseshoe of neck flesh, and she twitched a smile up at him before nodding towards the stairs.

With John being led out, Cissy sat and scratched her nose with one deliberate finger and she searched the shadows in the ceiling. Finding nothing by the time the shutting door had rattled the house, she slipped her feet out onto the floor and cupped to catch the wet that drained out on her way to the bathroom. She feared to let the wet stay too long inside her because Muma said it would rot. In the bathroom she wrung out the grey dishcloth and turned on the tap. The whistle of hot water ran through the house with metallic knocks.

"You doing the Cissy rag?" Muma called up around the cigarette and over the sound of clacking plates. "You need me to do it?"

Cissy shook her bobble head, thin yellow hair skipping in ropes across her shoulders. "No, I'll get it clean." The cloth jumped between her reddening hands in the steaming water as she filled the sink. Dipping it into the cloudy water with a hiss, she bowed her legs in a half-squat and dabbed the cloth in rough strokes against her mound. Her skin turned pinpricked, like an uncooked chicken, as the water ran trails down the insides of her legs and puddled on the floor.

Sticking her tongue out, curled stiff and almost touching her right nostril, Cissy quickly dipped and wrung out the cloth again before covering one finger with its corner. Hooking herself like a fish's mouth, she dug out the slime with a thoroughness stemmed in fear of the rot. Rough and sore promised cleanliness, and she left the cloth in the sink when she pulled out the chainless plug. The grey water belched away.

Moth perched on one of the thick knobs of the hot tap, legs picking for purchase on the warm metal. Cissy smiled and offered the hook finger to it, though she knew it would fly away. "All clean," she assured dutifully, rubbing her knees together against the play of cold and the cooling water on the insides of her legs. The flesh of her thighs didn't meet at the top, and she used her hands to smear out the rivulets before walking on the balls of her feet back into the bedroom.

Muma was cooking something in the kitchen, signalling the end of the night. Beneath the narrow bed were Cissy's clothes, and she pulled out the jumbled heaps and dressed barefoot in slumping jeans and a t-shirt that had fit her better the year before. The stairs thundered as she came down to the warm smell of spaghetti and buttered toast, perching eager on her flat behind at the table that had been propped out from the wall. Muma set the floral plate down with a knife and fork crossed over the slick pile, exhaling smoke through her teeth as she straightened. She padded silently

back through the short hallway into the living room, closing the door and turning up the radio.

Cissy ate with her fists, knuckles knocking the plate as she pressed with the knife and scooped with the fork to heap the bright sauce and short cylinders of pasta into her mouth. Her lips stained, appearing flush, and her eyes were bright and fixed on the plate. When it was empty except for thick tangerine smears, she set aside the dirty utensils and picked up the plate between both hands, licking from rim to rim. She reclaimed the sauce that slid down her chin with the side of her hand, which she then also mouthed clean.

Full and warm, Cissy put the plate and utensils into the sink and filled a mug with misty water. Gulping it down loudly to her own ears, she darted from the kitchen down the five-pace hall and stopped against the front door with a hollow thump.

“For Christ’s sake will you stop going around like a fuckin’ elephant?”

Holding the skirting board around the door, Cissy leaned into view at a dramatic angle. Her body squirmed as she worked her feet into laced shoes. “Muma, can I go outside for a bit?”

A blunt wave through the smoke, though Muma wasn’t looking. “Alright. If you see your brother, tell him he’s in for a hiding when I get hold of him.”

Cissy nodded but felt no concern. Lee was always away overnight at the weekends, though Muma never seemed to get used to it. Every time he left, for a few moments, she wished that he’d taken her with him

so fervently that it ached. Moth appeared on her shoulder before she could follow the thought any further, and she gave it a sidelong smile before slipping from the house.



Why Can't You Write Nice Things?

"I've never understood why you can't just write nice stories. Stories your grandmother would like and can show off to her friends."

"Granma, is that what this is all about?"

Granma spoke up. Her voice was surprisingly angry. "Why can't you write nice things?" Her voice softened. "Why would anyone read your story and want to visit our country?"

"A writer has to talk about things that go untalked about."

Grapes banged his pillbox on the table. "Don't argue literary aesthetics with your grandmother," he said. "She's right. You are always trying to shock. You have all this horrible stuff in your work. Not very Christian things. Not very patriotic. And you say things that are not yours to say."

"If you have to hide something, then you shouldn't have done it in the first place..."

(Syjuco, 2010: 39. My emphasis)

Halfway through my BA, I began writing transgressive fiction. I wrote about futuristic drug use; abortions conducted with cheese; cannibalism; voyeurs of suicide; murder and torture. I wrote backwards; in typoglycemia (neologism for text with randomised letters between a correct first and last letter, wherein readability is not affected despite the apparent visual distortion); on tablecloths; in tea stains. My marks rose substantially. I was *good* at this kind of writing. It was easier too: ideas and words flowing from mental images that came so quickly it felt they had already been wired into my brain.

Buoyed by critical reading and the consumption of every recommended text on a prose module dedicated to transgression, I grew bolder and my writing more extreme in content. At the end of the first semester in the Third year, the prose group was challenged to write the most transgressive story we could compose, with two conditions: It must be based on an actual event, and it must go "beyond the pale" (Randall: 2007). I wrote *Tasteless* (See: *Appendix: Tasteless: 239-244*) the same day as the work was set. It was good. It was horrific. It made people cry, and gained a kind of infamy in the department as something that ought not to be read. It suddenly brought me up short and made me ask, in all seriousness, *what's wrong with me that I could write that?*

My family has always been supportive of my writing, and phenomenally so with regards to the financial, emotional and time expense of almost eight years in university education fixating upon it. I kept the actual content of my writing largely concealed from them as it was so outside of our family ideals, and there was very much a sense of 'don't ask, don't tell' with regards to all the hours I was spending in notebooks or in front of a computer screen. This isn't to say that I didn't share everything that I was fortunate enough to have published with my mother. She was proud of me, and with the validation of *someone else* believing the story to be of enough artistic merit to go into print, and she to read

it. The extract from Miguel Syjuco's *Ilustrado* (2010) is a variant of the conversation I've had with her over and over again: *Why can't you write nice things?* And the implied, and once (drunkenly) spoken: *What's wrong with you? Where did we go wrong?*

Over the course of my Masters Degree, the question festered. I began to worry about the possible answers. I kept writing, however: reaching further, pushing the boundaries of what could be written, because at the end of one of these awful stories there might have been an answer as to where the thing came from. There never was, and the question persisted.

I took up the final leg of my career as a student and began a PhD intending a 'critical and creative investigation into the politics and poetics of transgression'. On paper the proposal looked good and of academic worth, but my heart wasn't in it, and my supervisors hounded me for a satisfactory answer as to what it was I wanted to do with this title. After six months, and with no little desperation, I admitted to the too-simple question that was fundamentally motivating me: I want to know why I'm good at writing these awful things and why I feel compelled to write it.

Breakthrough.

I allowed the fiction to sprawl in order to pursue the exploration as widely as possible, the plot left open and yielding to the orchestration of scenes of horrific violence. Actively and consciously exceeding the boundaries of my own comfort, I layered instances of violence to create more raw data to examine and reflect on. Using a research diary, I pinpointed creative decisions and discoveries as I encountered them and thus created a document tracking the evolution of the piece. This artifact is not only the final result of this arduous search for an answer, but a close and honest account of the processes I undertook in finding it.

'When we write ourselves, we are forced to think about all of our possibilities.'
(Brown, 1995: 3)

The Inevitable I

This thesis has sought to provide experiential evidence to contribute to a wider communal dialogue of creative practice. In autoethnographer Michelle Crawford's thesis, she posits that in the examination and critical reflection of her own writing process she would 'restore to scholarship the person of the scholar – a human presence long eclipsed by the ideology of impersonal objectivity that underwrites the Discourse of Knowledge' (2010: 200). On the topic of personal creative practice, I believe that the discourse of knowledge is potentially strengthened and benefits from the personal inflection.

I wanted to write a personally significant, evocative account of writing violence, and part of the artefact's value lies in increasing the reader's empathetic understanding of interaction between the non-writing life and the creation of the fiction. The text's roots are, first and foremost, located in the personal as opposed to the professional, though the intent has always been to illustrate and critically analyse the relationship between these parts: personal and professional; domestic and writerly; anxious and transgressive. Representations of journal work here are presented with only small samples of what Bourke and Nielsen (2004) call 'First Order Journal Work' in their reflection on the place of the exegesis in Creative Writing Higher Degrees -

Writing Journal – September 9th 2010

The personal nuggets are things I seldom speak of, if at all. These are secrets and shames, and they come out with an aggressive ‘back the fuck off’ front that keeps readers from seeing the truth behind them – that they are based in real pain. Real regrets and fears. Fear is behind all my anger, thus fear is behind all the violence I write. I want to know how deep this goes, just how much of myself I can see in what is seeking to be an orgy of violence and suffering. We write what we know, yes, but are we writing more than that? Are we writing the things that we don’t let ourselves know, can’t acknowledge and confess to thinking about or feeling? Is scrutinizing writing that screams on the page to force the reader back a route into discovery these things about yourself as a person, as well as a writer? Can we see these things about ourselves in the writing of others? Can their whispers and whimpers built up to a scream reveal our own darkest thoughts by holding up a mirror to them? These are my questions.

informal and anecdotal, primarily concerned with the emotional connection of the writer to the writing. Predominantly, the exegetical components are of the ‘Second Order’- an ‘ongoing, reflective, critical and analytical learning process’ (ibid.) that is both self-conscious and evaluative.

Of the fifteen sections of the critical component of *Closer to Home*, four consist of close studies of the creative processes that went into the generation of their accompanying sections of prose (See: *Moth*: 62-66; *Cissy and John: Last*: 118-121; *Writing the Carriage Films*: 139-144; *Joy in the Words*: 146-155). These include developed critical reflections; recorded notes to (trigger) self from the time of writing; annotated redrafting samples and some personal (ephemeral) records made in-situ that highlight the emotional and domestic settings behind the writing. The close studies of process have been constructed from notes made at the time of writing, personal

reflections some days or weeks after the fact, or wholly retrospectively, in which case events as told may have been recalled differently. Arguably fictionalised in this sense, I have used what autoethnographer Carolyn Ellis has referred to as a ‘systematic sociological introspection’ (1999: 27), examining emotion as a product of the individual processing of meaning as well as socially shared cognitions, to understand and frame my experiences.

The revelations that I have made for myself have been intensely personal, and whilst I had initially resolved to confront the taboo of honesty - disclosing shameful perceptions and opinions, I have restricted the deluge of truth in this final version to an account that is not an affront to those who know me and the background to this work. I have found family as well as personal experience at the root of all my transgressive writing endeavours, the driving force behind every fictional scene of physical, social and sexual violence against adults and children alike. For over a decade, I have exorcised, confronted and unconsciously explored old issues of disempowerment, anger and fear through writing. This juxtaposition of family and writing violence troubled me, and guilt and fear at the exposition and confession of it has been a

*‘The life spent not writing, that is entirely separate from the Art. I’m reminded of the idea that one needs a comfortable life in order to explore the margins of existence. Most of us deliberately DON’T do this – we live by repression and a willed ignorance of life’s horrors whilst constantly aware of them. We don’t wish to upset the relative calm of our lives or vice versa – that if our lives are full of real pain we search for distractions to comfort us.’
(Randall, Personal correspondence: March 29th 2012)*

Writing Journal – January 21st 2011

'In the dream I had that night I supplied the beginning the book had avoided. Sophie watched Andrea and me having sexual intercourse. She watched with the same mild interest she had shown towards the book about the body. She seemed slightly amused, and she made a face, indicating that what she was witnessing was yucky – a bit like fingerpainting with snot.'

(Brophy, 2003: 100)

Was this a difficult thing to confess and write down? Did he agonize? Is it better for having no disclaimer upon it, or is it just unsettling in its honesty?

substantial hindrance throughout the composition of this thesis. My fear, specifically, was of judgement by everyone who will and could possibly read *Closer to Home*. I did not wish to be confirmed as morally defective, 'sick' or superficially sensationalist. My coping strategy for this fear has been to go on the offensive, and portray an authorial confidence seemingly dismissive of the consequences of estrangement, familial shame, and condemnation. For long stretches I convince myself of this "fuck you, I'm writing it anyway" attitude, but there are inevitably short periods of bleak

reflection that leaves me wondering and worrying; nauseous with the content of my body of work and anxious of what else I have planned.

The fiction that has come from this source can all be described as 'unflinching' or 'cold' in style, mercilessly graphic and based on the relationship between the powerful and the vulnerable - influence and control over a weaker entity. Power dynamics are the basis of all violence - emotional, psychological and physical. Every interpretation of violence in my writing has been an articulation of this interest, written from a pacifistic commitment and expanded upon in the body of this thesis.

Creative writing offers insights into our own emotions, thoughts and behaviours - not necessarily through life writing alone. I have used writing as a means to make internal connections, exploring thoughts and feelings that I would dare not express or examine outside of fiction for fear of causing direct personal upset and harm. Actively reflecting on this process slows down the writing significantly, but also enriches it, serving a dual process of prosaic improvement and authorial awareness. Reflecting critically on my own creative process, with a view to the familial origins of my inspiration and motivation, is an intensely personal act, and the exegetical account of it has been presented in an intimate, confiding voice.

An impassioned language is appropriate for personal reflections, one that does not strive to be objective. Subjectivity and the personal are excised in the male scholarly tongue (See: *In Closing*: 208-12), a mode of rhetoric taught at school level and beyond, and it simply does not fit in this instance. In this text, I could not claim to the objectivity, transparency and authority (beyond an authority of speaking about myself) that the scholarly rhetoric demands. Arising in the context of nineteenth-century rationalism and empiricism, it purports to be a 'dispassionate *écriture*, from which emotion and subjectivity have been evacuated; its vocabulary is technical and depersonalized; and it is popularly believed to be a transparent transmitter of natural facts' (Fleischman, 1998: 3-4). The 'facts' conveyed here are subjective, *my* interpretations of *my* process of writing violence, and are contributions to a wider dialogue on the subject as opposed to rationales applicable to all writers of violence. Accepting that

knowledge is human-constituted, contextual and interpretive in nature, 'it can coherently be argued that individual contextual accounts such as are found in personal narratives are 'real knowledge' in as weighty a sense as the knowledge claims of positivism though the blend of subjectivity and objectivity is different for each' (Strivers, 1993: 410). The entirety of *Closer to Home* draws from and adapts/enlarges components of my experiences, transforming them through the prism of imagination into fiction.

Thus

Closer to Home is presented as a symbiosis of its prosaic and exegetical components, corresponding to the simultaneous production of each. Notes, quotations and ideas for the exegesis were made constantly from the beginning of the novel's first draft, and continued during bouts of "writers' block" wherein the creative element was not being worked upon at all. The critical elements informed the creative in that it provoked new ideas, new questions and new

Writing Journal – February 14th 2011

'This is my life, this is how it happened.'

(Crawford, 2010: 268)

Misread this as: This is my life, this is how I happened. I prefer my version.

considerations that needed to be addressed, unpacked and explored in the prose before I could reach the necessary conclusions. 'Fiction is writing that says on occasion what theory cannot say. Theory is writing that says on occasion what fiction cannot say' (Brown, 1995: 57). It felt natural and inevitable that I would integrate the two in the final artifact.

The novel presents itself as a creative critical artefact, simultaneously fictitious and autoethnographic, borrowing from the disciplines of Fine Art and Film Studies to convey its troubling narrative. Its structure makes visible the material that would remain unseen in a finished artefact: critical reflections of the fiction; personal journal entries; reflective writing notes; notes to (trigger) self; annotated redrafting and some personal (ephemeral) records, all interwoven with the fictional text but delineated as separate.

The artefact contains its own internal logic and conventions, with certain stylistic and academic conventions rejected to maintain an irregular, disrupted and transformative aesthetic within the piece. This reflects a conscious agenda of subterfuge and evasion in the physical artefact itself. Alternatives to traditional stylistic and academic conventions are kept consistent throughout the text.

Black boxes are utilised in place of footnotes to expand on points not integral to the main critical body, furthering a sense of visual disruption on the page. All indented quotes appear italicised and without quotation marks to immediately indicate an additional voice, with emphasized words appearing in bold. The references for the "ransom quotes" deliberately contrast stylistically with the references in the critical sections as means of differentiation between the contextual meaning and usage of the quotes. In the main body of critical text, emphasis has been shown through italicising specific words. Quotes within Black Boxes are also indented, but all text within the box is italicised – including the quote. Dates within online references in the Bibliography are displayed in

the same month-day-year format as in the Writing Journal extracts. Finally, the exegesis is fractured and strategically interspersed with the prose to encourage a juxtaposed reading, as certain critical and authorial elucidations are beneficial to the reader following specific events and preceding others in the fiction.

Of crucial importance to remember in the reading of this entity is that the artifact is intended to be understood as *sentient*. It obfuscates its content, steals the words of other texts amidst scenes of torture to apologetically explain itself, desperately drags in negative space to drown out the typed words as it squirms and morphs within the reader's hands, wrestling with its own abject nature and sending endless warnings for the reader to stop and look away.

It is not designed to be an impenetrable text, however, but one with multiple points of entry and ways of reading. In earlier drafts, the critical and personal entries were ordered with a chronological directory included in the appendix to enable a reader to navigate them, scattered according to content and relevance across the novel. Here, focus has shifted from development over time (progress) to a more retrospective overview (creative critical reflection), that builds from the ephemeral notes made in-situ into more substantial and investigative content. The reader may omit the critical components by simply skipping over the pages with a black border running their length, or read *Closer to Home's* exegesis entirely through seeking out the black title boxes rather than as an intermingling of contents.

The anomalous merging of prose, graphic textual disruptions and critical interjections continues a theme of an unstable reality as the components of the artefact persistently interrupt one another. Atrocity has brought about a magical realism that sees animal totems as guardians and a landscape as emotionally scarred as any person by conflict and suffering. *Closer to Home* is an example of practice-led research, wherein the text illuminates and examines the creative process behind writing physical violence, child sexual violence and a simulacra of violence, finding the domestic and familial roots of abject fiction writing.



They'd eaten lunch together quietly, the television making all the conversation. Afterwards, Jen had washed up in an ongoing rejection of the dishwasher that had come with the House. Adam went upstairs. The Alsatian puppy lingered until the sink was drained and Jen took the bag of potatoes from the cupboard to peel. With no scraps to watch for, Degas trotted into the living room and curled on the sofa with a cushion between his paws. He mouthed it quietly, chewing without breaching the fabric.

Though the potatoes were clean, Jen washed them again with a small round brush that took the top layer off the mottled skins. She did this under cold running water without looking, turning them as she scrubbed before setting them on the draining board to the left, watching the black cat outside. It was twisting its body around the base of the washing line like a ribbon in water, knocking its flat head and bending its ears against the metal. When her hand touched the empty plastic at the bottom of the bag, she took up the plastic peeler that reminded her of a slingshot and began turning the potatoes again, one by one.

A creak from upstairs midway through the second potato stilled her hands, and she looked up with a solemn gaze. Their houseguest was in town, his room empty and tense above her. She had started sleeping in there, on the unchanged bedding, on the same night that Evelyn had gone into the ground, and would still be if Rich hadn't moved into the space. Adam's reluctance at sharing a bed again had increased when she showed willingness to try, but like everything else they didn't talk about it.

Her hands moved faster around the greenish-white bulbs, carving them into angles and planes so that they looked more like sea-smoothed stones than something that could be eaten. They shouldered together in the washing bowl to the right of the sink. Her eyes itched and the starch was gritty against her fingers, building in a moist film on her hands. Peel accumulated as large scabs with undulating edges in the sink, blocking the drain and holding pinpoint bubbles in the water. She absently thought that it was the onions she was preparing that were making her eyes ache and water, then she saw the potatoes anew and bit the thick side of her tongue.

She realised when her hand groped across the empty draining board that she had peeled them all - far too many. The handle of the peeler in her fist, she tipped her head back with closed eyes and held her breath until it hurt. Then she let the air shudder out through her nose. Mashed potato, she decided. Not roasted. The rest frozen to cover a shepherd's pie at the end of the week. Adam didn't need to know.

Turning the oven hob on first, she poured what was left of the warm water in the kettle into one of the pans that had been polished to a high shine.

Ignoring the chrome knife rack, she probed through the cylinder of drying cutlery for the short knife with a grey handle and began pulling it through the potatoes over the pan. Thick discs dropped into the warming water with heavy splashes, the hob beneath hissing in bursts. The blade met her thumb gently on each cut, pressing against a callous that she'd long given up trying to moisturise away.

The cat was gone when she returned to the sink and began scooping the peelings out, picking at the drain as the water gurgled away. She washed the peeler and knife, picking up the mug left against the tiled wall by reflex. It was untouched and the coffee inside turned sullen and cold. With the potatoes far from boiling, she dried her hands and took the mug through the wide archway into the living room.

Degas sat up with the cushion hanging from one corner in his mouth, ears erect and turned toward her. She took the cushion without resistance and gave it a cursory check before setting it back down, touching the dog's nose afterwards.

"Let's visit Daddy, shall we?" she asked, beaming at the animal who was all ears and feet and fluff. Degas sat motionless until she gestured him down and then he bounded up the stairs ahead of her, jumping at the thick door.

Watching the quivering coffee and the rings it left sliding down the inside of the mug, she opened the door enough for Degas to force his nose through. Whilst the puppy trotted to stand beside the chair and wait to be petted, brush-tail swinging low, Jen lingered in the doorway.

"I thought you were joking about that."

Adam glanced to the camp bed piled with fabrics as he stroked Degas's neck. It was invitation enough for the puppy to clamber up onto it. The solidity of his thick neck betrayed stiffness, and the skin around his broken nose was white from furrowing. "I don't like disturbing you."

Coming inside, Jen set the mug down in the same motion as she scanned over the narrow text on the screen. His arms were resting on the desk, angled around the keyboard. "I don't like waking up without you."

He drank all of the coffee immediately, sitting back for the first time in hours. Degas sagged down with a high grunt, paws covering his nose. "He sleeps with you, doesn't he?"

"Head on your pillow and everything. He snores, though. Worse than you."

"I know – I've heard him."

Now that Adam was smiling, Jen nodded to the screen. "How's it coming?"

A hesitation as long as an exhale. "Slow, but better in here. I think there's something wrong with the computer, though."

"Oh?"

He shook his head a little but his gaze remained on her, searching. "Parts of drafts keep going missing. Corrupted files, perhaps."

Jen leant over him to look at the screen out of habit, but made no motion towards taking the mouse. "If they were corrupted you wouldn't be able to open them."

"Yeah, I know." A waiting silence broken by Degas's groan when he squirmed onto his back, jowls hanging to show his needle-sharp puppy teeth. "I'm going to have to take a look at it later. Run some scans."

Jen picked up the mug and held it in both hands against her stomach, between them. "Maybe you're just tired – changing things late and forgetting, or thinking about stuff you meant to put in but didn't."

"Maybe."

She considered the crystal grit in the bottom of the mug. "Can you fix the wind chime again?"

His hands were just coming to hover over the keys. "I just fixed it, Jen."

"Degas pulled it down before I could put it back up."

Mouth quirking, Adam leant towards the cot and gently slapped the crest of the dog's torso. "Sod. Go on. Go be quick."

Degas spun upright, ears pricked high and alert. Jen patted her thigh, bending over. "Be quick, Degas." He rocked, uncertain. "Where's the cat? Go see it – go see the cat," she sang high and fast, sidestepping the puppy when he lunged off the cot and downstairs, slippery claws clacking.

Jen hooked her fingers around the door handle like talons. “Maybe Rich’s been in here.”

He frowned without looking at her, as if she’d offended him. “No way. He wouldn’t do anything like that. Barely comes out of the room if he’s here at all.”

“It was just a thought,” she apologised softly, thumbing the metal in her hand. ‘The room’ rang in her head. “See you later?”

Adam nodded, though not at her. “In a bit, yeah.”

Degas began to bark downstairs, prompting Jen to leave. Just as she closed the door, she noticed the brass tab of a lock protruding from the wood. There was a freshly chiselled hole in the frame to receive it. No lock on the outside.

Something else she’d thought he’d been joking about.

There are **WRITERS** WHO love **TO**
create intricate layers of **STORIES**
that only imply an unstated psychological
reality grounding **THE** dizzying production of
narrative; others self-consciously play with
the boundary between **FICTION** and non-
LeRoy has **WRITTEN** about the way
prostitutes fulfill other people's fantasies
and about **the WAY** the literary world can seem like
simply a different form of prostitution.

beachy (2005)

When Lee got back in the darkest hours, Cissy was patrolling the edge of the garden with a plastic colander's handle and rim. Fireflies swung in lazy arcs around the bracken border. Where there had been a strainer she used the frame to collect spider webs, building up a translucent net of watery strands and black globules. Lee stopped at the kerb on the far side of the road and rocked with the ledge pressing into the arches of his shoes, watching a cloud of fireflies following his sister. She didn't seem to notice them.

Moth flitted up from her shoulder to her ear to get her attention, then swept across to land on the other side of her thin body. Cissy saw her brother peripherally, and her voice was high and light. "Where you been, Lee?"

Still rocking, Lee pushed his hands into his ripped pockets and shrugged at the moon. The house was quiet and there were no lights on in the street, but it shone bright enough to see. Around them the sky was clear and crisp, bearing the kind of comfortable chill that promised a dry heat in the morning. "Out. Up the hill."

"How was it? They let you in yet?"

Unwittingly, Lee thought of the dryly wrinkled slug, the twitching moths and the spider bites that had felt so big on his tongue. There was a gnawing ache in his stomach, like he would never eat again. "Got another meet before I'm in, but they gave me a pass. It was alright. Nothing special." He swatted an insect against his throat, the sound drawing her eye to the black band that circled his neck. The mark gave him passage as a patrolling soldier against the Wall, and the uneven stain beneath the moon made his skin look blue.

Pressing another tacky web into the mix, Cissy made a cartoon grimace. "Muma's gonna hide you in the morning."

Sliding off the kerb, his boots twisted the gravel gathered at the edges of the road and kicked it across. "Nah she won't. She won't dare. Da would've, but not 'er."

"What's Da like?"

Lee sucked his teeth at the familiar question, though he'd have phrased it in the past tense. He remembered Muma's most vivid description of the man. "Da's the type to cut a mermaid's tail right up the middle."

She stopped collecting to look at him properly, aware of Moth doing the same in small staccato steps that turned its body like a hand on a clock. "What's that mean?"

"I dunno." He tried to pass it off as disdainful rather than clueless, shoulders nonchalant when he came to stand on the other side of the low, shattered wall to her. "You for a walk and a fortune?"

Cissy drew in her bottom lip at the invitation, turning the webs inside the colander as if measuring their ability to be left. Finally she chirped assent, taking careful measures to hang the colander by the hole in its handle from a dead branch. The moon played through it as it swung, making the web look wet and new. Moth took flight to hover close to it, tantalized, stirring Cissy with the potential of creatures being caught in the interim.

Twenty minutes later they had passed through the only fast food place in the town – an old Chinese take-away that sold meals made from an indiscriminate range of animals and paid three different gangs to stay open. They had dithered at the menu wall until the white owner left and then taken two fortune cookies from the counter. The folded bows were sweet and processed-tasting, and Cissy liked to lick their

plastic surfaces before biting off a half. She ate it whilst unfolding the slip of fortune, and then the rest of the cookie reading it:

- BELIEVE THAT NOT EVERYTHING CAN BE FIXED -

She crushed the paper in her palm before throwing it with an exaggerated lunge into the breeze, watching it flicker and vanish from sight. The wind gathered all the fortunes and eventually pressed them against the same stretch of Wall, by the tree stumps where the forest used to grow across the border. Weeds grew between them as they turned to mulch.

They were following the Wall away from the town, further than she'd ever been before. Rushing to catch up with Lee, Cissy shadowed his footprints and grasped her whipping hair in one hand to keep it behind her head. Moth crawled up behind her ear, crouching down out of the wind. "What's yours say?"

Lee stopped and shifted his footing, holding the sliver of paper that had been softening in his fist between both hands. "Know when to stay out of the way."

"Yours is better," she decided, taking the slip as he held it to her and throwing it up into the breeze. They walked on.

Though the sun was far from staggering over the horizon, there was enough light from the moon to cast them both cold shadows as they followed the Wall. Lee took Cissy by the wrist through the white grass that grazed their legs and snapped at the base, past the shattered trees and abandoned campfire tyres. From the top of the rise they could see the tessellating rooftops spread like newspaper print around the slender chimneys that never slept. They couldn't see over the Wall to the South, veiled as mutually hated and alluring behind the barricade of scrap metal and stone.

Despite taking years to build, the Wall looked a rushed endeavour given its dimensions. It scored across the landscape like a blade through meat, continuity based entirely in the graffiti over its collaged parts. Along the base in hundred yard stretches, the ground and stones were scorched black from an intermittent campaign to cut off England's trunk with a line of fire.

Walking side by side, Lee let Cissy put her finger into his fist and swing his arm. "You started your homework yet?"

"Yeah."

He looked down at her again, saw her scalp glowing beneath her slippery hair. "How was tonight?"

Cissy bounced her shoulders, a marionette with a dangling head. "It was okay. John came over and Muma did work."

"Was he nice to you?"

Picking up on the thread of worry, she swung his arm and beamed a crooked smile. "Yeah. He always is."

He squeezed her finger and let it go. "Tell me if he ain't. Could do something about it, now."

Cissy nodded, feeling the avenue close in her mind before she could start to speculate. Though curious, she knew enough that she didn't want to know, in her brother's tongue, what he would be doing when he became a Dog. She flipped a stone with her toe as she walked and saw an exposed shape dart through the grass. "You going to work tomorrow?"

"Yeah, but not all day. I'm nearly a Dog now. Gotta do training and stuff."

"Cool." The mumbled word was alien in her mouth, weakened by her wandering stare up the height of the structure that slithered past as they walked. When the ground dipped again, she saw the black stripe flash on Lee's nape before the collar of his jacket covered it again. It wasn't a tattoo, she observed.

“How’s it stay on?”

“Not supposed t’wash it.”

They passed a section of the Wall that had been reinforced before the slag pits had come into service. Iron railings, steel sheets and twisted girders latticed one another over the stone, rusting at different rates and giving the impression of a scab. It was a restraint not to touch this short stretch, to disturb the curls and flakes that twitched in the cold breeze. Cissy’s fingers ghosted outwards, swaying from the wrist to navigate over the fractured terrain. At the end of the scab and a little beyond it, the Wall followed the land up a steep ascent to drop into a shallow valley on the other side. It took them twenty minutes to hike to the top, coming to a sudden stop at the peak.

At the base, close to the Wall, a House gaunt in its thin windows and close bordering fence squatted in perpetual shadow. Nothing reached out to it, yet in the quiet of the Northern threshold, a shrill ringing was carried up to them on the breeze. On the Wall, the graffiti stopped in line with the closest of the perimeter fences, as if the surface had been wiped from top to bottom to leave the grey from smudged rain. Climbing weeds with yellow flowers tangled upwards all along its base for thirty yards before the graffiti started again in wild loops, as if the paint had only just dared to encroach on the blank space. From there, the predominantly red and black medley continued as before up the slope and into the damp haze.

To their knowledge there were no buildings within five miles of the Wall, and there was rumoured to be ten times that clearance on the South side. Lee led them down, dismissing Cissy’s trepidation before it could be voiced, and beat her to the bottom by a full minute with a loping jog, fists rocking past his sides. He waited for her at the broken gate, scrutinizing the narrow path that led to the leaning porch and recessed door. On one side, two chairs from a patio set were tucked under a browning table. To the other, a sheltered porch swing had dropped and collapsed into itself. There was an American optimism to the House that sat facing a wall taller than itself – of withstanding hard rain and freezing winds for the sake of seeing the vista that had been there before.

The ringing continued, obscenely loud through the weathered-thin door.

Cissy twisted her hands beneath her chin. “Who’s ringing?”

Lee glanced down at her, brief so as to resume staring at the House. “Better question than who’s supposed to answer,” he conceded at last, resting a hand on the thin metal of the gate before pushing it inwards.

It gave a short, high groan which triggered a flurry of rustles and ripples in the long grass and sprawling bushes. Lee looked to Cissy with a quirked smile and arched brow already in place, patronising as much as reassuring. “Rats.”

Cissy whined, holding her fists close to her throat and her elbows against her waist, watching the ground. She sunk her weight through her heels, rooting. Lee’s crunched footsteps brought her gaze up, and she gladly took his neck when he scooped and carried her towards the porch. Moth left her when they reached the overhang, hovering in place.

The wooden decking of the porch was weather-softened and slick, a film of rotted vegetation plugging the gaps between the boards and bringing a uniform colour of grime. Running the width of the House, the porch gave surprisingly good cover from the wind. The ringing hadn’t stopped as Lee was somehow expecting, but he drew short of touching the door at a whimper from Cissy.

“Don’, Lee,” she begged, fisting handfuls of his coat.

He set her on his hip, grunting for her to be quiet. “No one’s here, Cis’. We ain’t doing harm.”

She rocked a little, trying to shake sense into him. Moth swung in the air, first left and then right, as if looking for something, but refused to venture closer. “No, not inside. M’not going inside, Lee – don’t make me.”

The ascending pitch of her voice wore at him more than her actual words did. “Fine, but we’re not going yet. Come on.” He took her back down the steps and set her firmly on the ground. “We’ll just look around it, alright?”

Cissy pressed her knuckles to her nose, as close to sucking her thumb as she would come, and nodded stiffly. Moth resettled on her shoulder before darting off to one side, leading them around the House. Lee followed the child, running his hand along the wall of the House, examining the consistency of its frigid temperature. The windows were dark and muddied with grey rainwater, but all intact on both floors.

Preoccupied with the strangeness of the windows, he didn’t find the coal bin until he’d walked into it with a dull thud. A few steps away having watched the collision, Cissy giggled into her knuckles.

Not for the first time, Lee wished he had a cigarette to speak around. “Funny.”

“What is it?”

The green container was ribbed and made of matt plastic, resilient against the sun and the weather. Aside from the dirt that had built up to skirt it, it looked factory-new. Lee ran his hands about it, appraising. “Coal bin. Probably for wood, though. It looks pretty new.”

Cissy came to stand at his shoulder, feeling Moth settle against her neck. “Maybe we can sell it.”

Lee nodded absently, fingering the joins and seams for an entrance. “Alright, let’s see, first.” He found the thin channel packed with wet dirt, and had to dig at it with his forefinger before he could find the latch.

She watched in silence as he uncovered the handle of the hatch, no longer aware of the ringing pulse of the House. When Lee swung the panel up, she took a short step back before bending to peer over his head. The container was full of something, but it had to be taken out in handfuls to identify.

“Wow. What is it?”

“Writing,” Lee replied, passing the pages between his hands and squinting at the printed words. The typeface felt old, though he couldn’t figure why he thought that. He sat back with it in his lap, sifting, absently surprised that the paper was neither yellowed nor mottled with mould spores. “Someone’s writing. I don’t know.”

Cissy took one of the pages between her fingertips, watching Lee with big eyes to see if he noticed. When he didn’t look up, she held the paper close to her face and examined the letters that had been sunk into the page. “Like a diary?”

There were no dates, no markers of any description. “Doesn’t look like it.” He arranged a hand to hold the paper in his lap and leant into the bin, thrusting his arm into the pool of words to measure its depth. “Lot of it, though. Looks like bits of a book. Like a story.”

“A story book?” Her voice rose at the precious phrase, and she clutched the page tighter as if the first person to see it. “Can we read it? Can we take it home and read it?”

“Hang on,” Lee murmured with a thin note of irritation, digging about in the loose sheets until he came across a block of paper towards the bottom. It wasn’t deep, but it was the only set of bound pages he could feel. Teasing it out, he held the thin

stack stapled through the top left corner out to his sister. Her beamed smile made him look away, shaking the find at her. “There. I ain’t bloody reading it, but you go ahead.”

Whilst Lee buried both hands in the bin, feeling for the bottom, Cissy abandoned the single page and began examining the new ones that held continuity. At the sight of long, foreign words and unfamiliar symbols masquerading as punctuation, she immediately shook her head and held it out to his curved back. “It’s too hard.”

Lee didn’t pause, running his hands around the bottom edges of the bin with mounting disappointment. “You haven’t even tried, Cis’.”

“Yeah I have, but it’s too ‘ard. I can’t read it.” The inflection was weighted on ‘I’.

“Put it back then.”

She hesitated before hugging it to her chest, shielding it with both arms. “No.”

“So you’re just gonna keep it?”

Cissy looked between the Dog collar and the papers crumpled against her chest, her chin tucked into her collarbone. Moth stepped onto the top of the gathered sheets, feathery antenna twitching with interest. When it stroked its forelegs together, she hummed in thoughtful agreement. “Sal might like it.”

Lee paused, turning at the foreign name on his sister’s tongue. He rarely spoke of her, and she and Cissy had only met once, briefly, but clearly that had been enough to cement his girlfriend in her mind. “Sal?”

A nod as she grew bold to the idea, encouraged by Moth’s approving wing-flutter before it tripped back onto her shoulder. “She likes books ‘n’ stuff.”

Abandoning the bin, he rubbed the heel of his hand across his eyes and stood in the same motion. “Yeah, alright. I’ll see what she thinks of it. Give it here.”

She twisted her body from his hand, sharp as a halted spinning top. “No.”

Looking up at the moon, the phrase ‘pray for patience’ floated into Lee’s mind. “Fine. You carry it, then.”

Sensing his agitation, Cissy hid her mouth in the paper and spoke though lips parted as little as possible. “‘kay.”

The House pressed on them anew, suddenly larger now that they were looking at it again. The ringing droned on, high and unstoppable. Lee held out his hand for her without looking, trying to discern a face or a shape in the upper windows. “It’s getting on. Come on, before Ma notices you’re gone.”

Feeling a yawn pressing at her jaw, Cissy bared her teeth to enjoy every second of the stretch and draped into her brother’s arms. Settling against his jacket with the paper trapped between them, she knew as well as he did that she’d be asleep long before they get home.

Jen left them on the porch with fresh lemonade, a bowl of sugar and a six pack of beer on the table between them. She'd been inspired by the wild frontier to try an American way of life, breaking away from the future they'd been building. Adam picked up the tall glass already half full and grimaced at the thin liquid, so bitter smelling that it made his eyes water. Feeling Jen's gaze through the living room window, he spooned two mounds of sugar into the glass and stirred the mix briskly. The white grit settled against the sides as the lemonade whirled above it, jostling when he put the glass back on the tray.

Returning Jen's smile with an echo of the expression, Ellis copied the action with slow ceremony. They sat on ornate metal chairs facing South, sheltered from the chilled breeze by the House's walls and the overhang of the porch. A flock of starlings passed overhead as a shifting mass, their oily wings flickering like static.

"How's the book coming?"

Jen was gone from the window. Abandoning pretence, Adam peeled the tab back on the first can of watery beer and rested it on his thigh. With the other hand he poured the lemonade onto the floorboards, watching it run in milky streams along the grooves towards the wide porch-swing. "Alright. Dribs and drabs. It's easier now with the office."

Ellis sipped from the glass, froze with a pinched expression, and then held the rim static beneath his lips. "Right." Jen was back in the kitchen making sounds with baking trays and saucepans, and he put the lemonade on the table for a beer.

Adam watched the easy motions, quietly reminded of the lethality of those fluid hands as they worked the can. "How about you? How's Beth?"

The tab snapped off completely against Ellis's thumb, leaving a surprised gape in the silver top. "Gone."

"Gone?"

Degas appeared from under the porch, dusty with dry earth from where he'd been digging. Ellis watched the Alsatian come up the steps in a lazy lope and flop down between them with a distinctly canine sigh. His ears flattened when Ellis scrubbed his fingers through the thick fur of his head, teasing out loose clumps in passive destruction and flicking them away. "Yeah."

It didn't feel appropriate to look and Adam directed his gaze back out across the miserable but welcomed frontier. "Shit. I'm sorry, mate."

A beat and Ellis inhaled and exhaled in a long and deliberate way before sitting back in the chair. He cradled the can between both hands and spoke to its mouth. "Didn't know it'd gotten to me so much, you know? Thought I'd squared it away, like."

Adam swallowed. "I know what you mean. It just keeps coming up on you."

The younger soldier fidgeted at the maw behind the words. Evelyn, a child he'd never met, was a gaping wound between them; too sacred to touch but too enormous to ignore forever. When the pressure in Ellis's fingers flexed the can creaked, a proxy head-shake in a subtle and cautious communication. "Never had anything stick like this before."

Adam nodded, grateful that the name had been omitted today. "It's 'cause it was kids."

It wasn't a dismissive or condescending sequitur – it would have been terrible in any phrasing. Ellis rubbed the knot of hard skin and sparse hair between his brows, all the anger he might have displaced onto the other soldier long drained away. "I know."

Adam took a long slug from the can. “Fucking Southies.” His wet mouth softened the spat utterance.

“Yeah.”

Degas jerked upright, ears swivelling at something the men couldn’t hear. He started a bark but let the sound die in his throat as he coughed *whu*, nostrils flaring and whiskers tensed back. A muffled sound from inside the House and he jerked to the ajar door, pawing it open enough to force his snout through before charging upstairs.

Ellis watched the door swing almost-shut. “Doc’s put me on lithium.”

“Does it help?”

“Not really.”

The porch swing creaked on its hinges, swaying as Degas thumped into the bedroom wall directly above them. Jen’s laughter trickled down amidst more bangs as the big dog gambolled about the bed. Adam took the sounds as a prompt, though he couldn’t discern why. “Rich tried to off himself last month.”

Ellis nodded, impassive, though it had only been a little more than that since he’d last seen the former medic. Six days since they’d last spoken on the phone. It no longer disturbed him how easily he accepted what seemed an inevitability amongst their team. He was jointly relieved and disturbed that Adam, who had lost so much, hadn’t yet. Clive had been the first to go, eight days after the Nursery. “How’d you hear that?”

Adam paused to swallow a mouthful of amber foam and set the can aside, speaking to the decking. “He called me afterwards. Gun wouldn’t go off and he couldn’t figure out why.”

“Oh.” Now the younger man did frown, some internal diagnostic urge provoked. “What was it?”

“Don’t know.” One shoulder jerked in a shrug and Adam picked up a fresh can. “Gun worked fine when it wasn’t in his mouth. Still scared him, though. Says it’s not time if he’s still scared.”

Ellis nodded slowly on a long exhale, letting his eyes wander over the black landscape. There was a single fracture in the clouds that slid probing shards of light over the hills, but otherwise the view was muted. “You ever?”

“No,” Adam answered quickly, though not affronted. His tone was that of a man condemned to a sentence he didn’t want to carry out, but one that was better than nothing. “No, I write. Couldn’t do that to Jen. Try to work it out with... I’m trying to understand.”

He didn’t understand, so Ellis smiled instead. “Let me know what you find out.”

Adam rubbed the space between his eyes with the tips of his fingers. When he sat forward, he dangled the beer by the rim between his legs. “He’s coming up again to stay with me and Jen for a while. Be here from Sunday. You should stop by.”

“Might not be the best idea.”

“Just keep it in mind.”

“Sure.”

Adam slopped half of the lemonade from the jug out onto the porch. Ellis emptied his glass and ran his finger around the rim to gather the sweet sludge left behind. “You still get nightmares?”

“Didn’t stop once they started.” The dry scratch of fingernails against coarse skin, quiet until Ellis jerked. “Fuck, man. What do we do?”

“Not really anything we can do. You see the Yanks turn us down as well? China’s got everyone panicking about their own.” It prickled to be one of a resource

that wasn't worth intervening to save, though it was understandable on an island with no real value in a world where alliances and history were easily overlooked. Adam motioned outwards with a frown, as if gesturing to a cesspool. "They're talking about extending the Wall beyond the bad parts. Making it wider. Might help."

A grunt and Ellis tucked his head back so that his chin was framed by the flesh of his jaw. "No wall wide or tall enough to make a difference."

"It's something."

They'd missed the beginning of this, been born after the last minority was sent to their homeland or shot.

...while most nations seemed to agree
That something had to be done, every
nation seemed to have a reason why some
other nation SHOULD do it. So there we
sat, waiting for a promise to be kept,
REDUCED to the role of accountants, keeping
track of how many were being killed.

Dallaire (2004)

Learning about it in school made it a story that didn't connect to the battle they were actually fighting. The Wall, the riots, the burning ghettos and estates had all been building to what they were actually involved in. Us and Them, the same colour and creed, only metastasised by old differences of opinion. The official fighting had stopped a decade ago, but a

heaviness lingered throughout the country like the muggy need for rain punctuated with sporadic showers.

They listened to Jen talking to Degas in muffled vowels upstairs, tracking her out of the bedroom and towards the back of the House. The House was too big for them at first, and only expanded when Adam refused another child because their child was dead. Once he claimed the back room as an office and Jen retaliated by re-decorating everywhere else, it seemed to fit them better. Degas was what had finally tied all the rooms together, crossing freely between the zones that they had previously left to one another.

...estimates indicated THAT it would take the
DEATHS of 85,000 Rwandans TO justify
the risking of the life of one AMERICAN
soldier.

DALLAIRE (2004)

"I keep wondering." The pause was not intended for suspense, though it took many seconds for Ellis to pull the words together. "If I got enough of them, killed as many of them as they killed those babes, it might balance something out. Square it."

"I don't think it works like that."

"Not for peace, no, but for peace of mind, it might."

Adam nodded at an angle, granting that. "It's a thought."

Ellis considered him anew. "Would you?"

Recognizing the stare Adam stiffened and glared back, feeling somehow offended by the particular set of muscles around the deep-set eyes. "Course I would. But there's not going to be anything like that."

"Why not? Some of the old team's still around. We could gather them up again. We're all trained – we'd know what we were doing."

He wanted to stand but curled his mouth instead. The need for revenge, to kill hundreds so that he might kill the one who had murdered and mutilated his child, was a feeling he had nursed but always kept from coming completely to the boil. It was soldier's honour that kept it in check, which Ellis's tone was now agitating. "And what? Blow up a building?"

Ellis flexed a hand up briefly, coaxing an animal back to calm. “Pay them back. Show that we’re not going to lie down and take this.”

Now Adam did stand, putting his back to the man in one step and sweeping the can so fast it wetted his hand. “We’re not having this conversation.”

Staying in the chair, Ellis pushed on without apology until Adam turned enough to regard him, his weight favouring one foot. “Think about it – if just a small group stood up and started to fight, how many more would fall in line?”

As many of their most important conversations had been, they spoke in silence, assessing stance and breathe as integral parts of a language that they had learnt in woodlands and war zones. It broached no dishonesty or obfuscation, and Adam could see that this idea was rooted in a need for rest rather than a lust for violence. Consulting his own gut, he finally nodded enough to permit the existence of the notion. “It’s a thought.”

“So you’ll think about it?”

It wasn’t an undertaking he wanted to embark on, but his stomach twisted in tangled anticipation deep enough to force his mind back. He nodded, just enough to commit himself. “Yeah.”

“See what Rich thinks. Might be good for him.”

“Maybe. We’ll see.”

This is what human beings are capable of doing –
many volunteer to do, enthusiastically,
self-righteously. Don't forget.
SONTAG (2003)

Cissy had kept a page from the manuscript, and held it with triumph in the bedroom window as she watched for Lee to leave the following night. She was going to be locked in, Muma gone out for the evening and Lee ingratiating himself with the Dogs. This was her only night off work in the week during the summer holiday, and even though she usually had the whole house to herself, Cissy spent it with treasures in the bathroom. It was here she'd found Moth, years ago, small and faint beneath the sink until she'd coaxed it out. Since then they'd been inseparable.

A rectangle of yellow light bled onto the path before flicking off, and she watched Lee retreat until he'd vanished into the black that had swallowed Muma only minutes ago. Then she moved into the bathroom next door and sat in the space between the toilet and the wall, where the wood was worn and she was hidden from the doorway. Rough tissue paper dangled above her head from the roll, brushing her hair when she fidgeted.

The lights in Muma's house shone a foggy yellow, but here the naked bulb cast a bright, clean light. It made the beige walls cringe with cracks and the tepid-green bathtub sickly, too dark in the room but not dark enough to hide the watermarks and grime. The fissured skirting board was hemmed with matted towel fluff, hair and dirt in a shallow gully between linoleum and wall, where it crept into holes and cracks. Finally there was the narrow space beneath the toilet where she could pry the porcelain up half an inch, where she'd hidden the page the night Lee had brought her back from the House. The paper was colourlessly watermarked along its folded edges, and she could almost see through the webs of damp.

Sat with her legs bent and apart, elbows resting on her legs, she was exposed to the cold of the house but found the chill refreshing. Moth perched on her nightie-covered knee, angled to see the page and waft its antenna towards it. She squinted at the text and read.

DREADFUL experiences **make**
us wonder **WHETHER** **the** person
who experiences **THEM** **MAY NOT** be
something **dreadful**
nietzsche (1886)

It is impossible to avoid The conclusion that the total disappearance of this historical document is probably more indicative of the importance assigned to it by those most closely affected by its content and significance than would have been its ready availability for inspection.

sereny (1974)

Something light touched the inside of her leg, tickled as softly as breath. Ignoring Moth's fluttering dismount from her knee, Cissy pulled the hem of her cotton nightie down between her thighs and rubbed at the tingling area. After attending to the itch, she took the paper in both hands again and continued to scrutinise it with intense concentration. She didn't understand why the words were blurring where her eyes passed over them, though they didn't actually change shape.

AS objects of contemplation, images of the atrocious can answer to several different needs. TO steel oneself against weakness. To make oneself more numb. TO acknowledge the existence of the incorrigible. SONTAG (2003)

Another tickle of touch and she scratched again, more vigorously this time, but also squirming equally in response to the shallow pool of heat that had arrived somewhere deep down below. She'd only felt it a few times before, but never on her own like this.

The fairtales of CHILDHOOD, with their naive and avoidable terrors, are vanquished by an environment that taunts the imagination with an equivalent atmosphere of unreality that offers no asylum FROM itself, not even the seeming sanctuary of a self-determined suicide. Langer (1975)

The rat made another approach, extending its firm body towards the sweetly smelling orifice inside the tent of the girl's nightie. Careful not to touch, it reared with slow jerks onto its hind legs and took staggering steps closer. With its forelegs out in front and its tail at a long, stiff right angle to its body behind, it weaved and bobbed along the short distance until its whiskers touched pale, porcelain-smooth skin.

ONE thing we **MUST** and may never FORGET: a majority should never be a substitute for the MAN. It is always the advocate not only of cowardly policies and just as a hundred fools do not make one wise MAN a heroic decision is NOT LIKELY TO come from a hundred cowards.

Hitler (1933)

Ears keenly flared and a pink dot of its tongue protruding, the rat sniffed at and began to lap at the seam of her flesh, feather-light and cool. Cissy's hand pressed down again to rub away the sensation and it jerked back, ears flat and chin close to the ground. It did not wait as long as before to totter on its hind legs again, fingered paws curling so as not to touch her with anything other than its mouth.

Someone who is perennially surprised that depravity exists, who continues to feel DISILLUSIONED (even incredulous) when confronted with evidence of what humans are capable of inflicting in the way of gruesome, hands-on cruelties upon other humans, has not reached moral or psychological adulthood.

Sontag (2003)

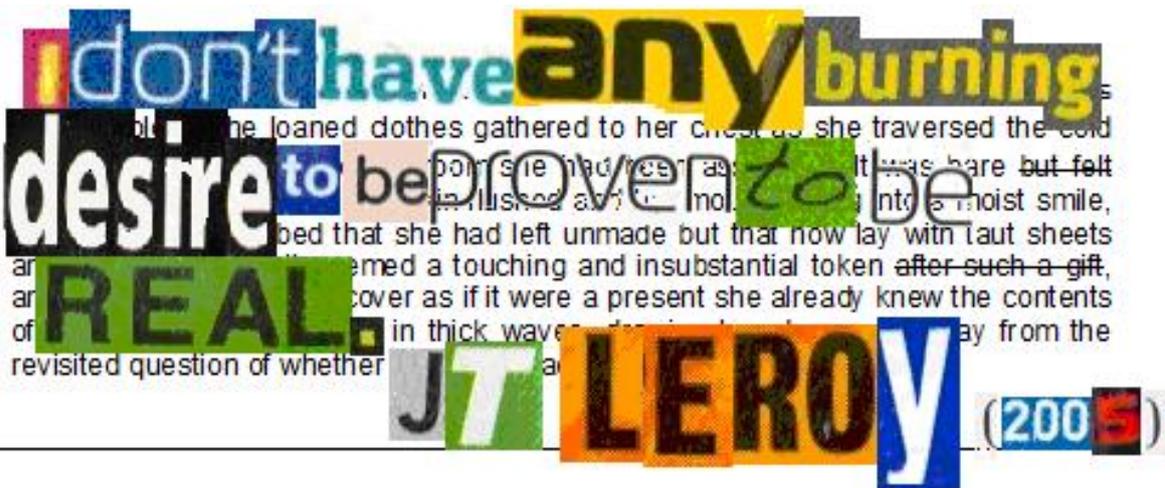
When Cissy flinched, jerking from its tongue, the rat nipped a brief contact before bolting backwards, coming to a stop against the bath with its tail hovering and

its body stiff. Its eyes were dead and doll-like, head swaying from side to side to assess her. Cissy stared back until her voice left her stomach and flew from her mouth. She threw the paper at the rat and kicked out as she groped the wall to get to her bare feet. The rat screamed at the sudden movement and scuttled back but didn't hide, watching her sink into the corner with her face screwed up and chin creased.

"Go away!" She pressed her fists to her chest when it sniffed the air and advanced eight inches in quick staccato strides. Moth flew to her forehead, kissing the pinpricks of sweat with its proboscis and flaring its wings at the intruder.

Bold, the rat bobbed up on to its rear to smell her again and scurried around her feet, giving her no time to move away. Her limbs trembling hard enough to jerk, Cissy screamed when her foot struck the firm little body and sent it back with a noise between a squeak and a scream. The rat struck the skirting board with its claws already scabbling, turning on itself to disappear into the largest hole in the corner. Inside it pressed itself back into a corner, omega-curved and panting.

Snatching up and twisting the paper into a loose ball, Cissy thrust it into the hole to plug the gap and fled the bathroom, swinging the door shut behind her. On her bed, she pulled the covers over her head and clasped both hands over her vagina through the nightie, scratching tearfully at the itch left by the animal's touch.



As well as the fortune cookies, Lee and Sal bought a real meal at the Chinese and ate it sitting on the narrow bench beneath the wall-sized menu. It was where they had met a year ago, after her first day working at the cinema when snow had settled its deepest in four years. When the second showing had begun with no one watching, Sal had locked the building up and followed the smell of food to the nearest take-away without a *Closed* sign.

Lee had already been waiting at the counter, eating a folded cookie in small bites whilst he studied his fortune. He'd smiled a little when he noticed her watching and told her they were free. After taking one, he'd offered Sal a cigarette. She had said she didn't smoke, and with a laugh Lee admitted that he didn't either – that he'd found the packet outside. When his food came he'd said he hoped that she got a good fortune even though they were mostly bad - but it wasn't like they came true, so it was okay. They'd shown each other the slips of paper before they'd shared their names.

- SINNERS ARE MISERABLE IN HEAVEN -

- A SUPERSTITION WAS ONCE COMMON SENSE -

Lee had offered to walk her home, then, because they'd had some Southie problems in the area recently. He worked in the slag pits separating metals out from the stuff that would go on the Wall and there'd been a break-in a few days ago. No one got hurt, but you couldn't be too careful, he'd explained, and he couldn't leave a girl to walk home alone. He had a little sister, see.

Since they'd met, the button scars around Sal's mouth that she wouldn't explain fascinated him, and he liked nothing more than to watch the shiny bumps flex and contract as she ate. They felt like Braille to his tongue, bringing out a fondness for teasing her bottom lip between his so that he could read the nodes in a quick swipe before kissing her.

At first she had tried to stop him and covered her mouth like a secret, but ultimately she'd let him claim the marks, hoping that the gentle fascination would overwrite the feeling of black surgical thread being pulled through each infected hole. Erase the gut-clenching fear of not being able to utter a sound because of the threat of pain and the swell of thick copper, still lurking years after the stitches had been removed.

Holding the foil tray between them, Lee placed the greased tips of his chopsticks into his mouth to free his hands and pulled out the wad of papers protruding like a tail from his slack-fitting jeans. Sal moved the hand that had been steadying the tray to take it, mindful of the white cotton cuffs of her jacket, the tanned sheepskin already dark in spots from grease and grime. Sitting back, she smoothed out the lengthways-folded paper in her lap. "What's this?"

Lee shrugged. "Cis' and I found it at this House last night. Said you might like it, since you like to read an' all."

She folded the first page onto itself and skimmed across the second. Her hair swung down in a cream-yellow curtain. "What is it?"

"I dunno – didn't read it." He gestured with the sticks towards the doors, and the House a mile and a bit away. "Just thought you might want to look at it before we go. I'll show you where we got it."

"Cool." She closed her fist around the chop sticks and nudged the tray towards his lap with the back of her hand, beginning to read. "You can finish this."

Lee spoke around orange noodles tangled with chicken cubes, ropes of MSG-sweetened saliva lashing his teeth. "Ta."

Sal had only read the first two paragraphs before she squinted, equal parts intrigued and confused. “It’s weird. Looks old.”

“Yeah. We found it in a coal bin.”

The very first failure to say "No" was fatal,
each succeeding step merely
confirming the original and basic
Moral flaw.
Sereny (1974)
We do know that people recruited to
commit heinous acts in a systematic
way received a kind of education in
sadism—a CAUTERIZATION of
feeling via a gradual habituation to brutality,
and an extreme contempt FOR the objects
OF their assaults. This is a training in
THE utter distancing from THE other.
Hoffman (2001)
THE impossibility of being present to ourselves
becomes OUR possibility to play ourselves
out to the FULLNESS that knows NO
BOUNDS... Literature becomes a
panorama of WHAT is possible, BECAUSE
It is not HEDGED in by EITHER the OR
the considerations THAT determine the
institutionalised organizations within which human
LIFE otherwise takes its course.
Good and evil are essentially ISER (1993)
response-dependent; they are defined
by their effects ON US.

Prinz (2007)

If **frage** renders **US HELPLESS**, revenge
 gives **US** something to do. **It** organizes **OUR**
 disarray. **It** is one way of making the world, or
 one's life, make **SENSE**. **REVENGE** turns
 rupture into a story. **AND** it shows us the
 extent to which meaning is complicit with the
 possibility of **redress**, with a belief **THAT** losses
CAN BE MADE good (revenge as savagely
 optimistic mourning). **BECAUSE** tragedy
 always threatens to baffle **THE** possibility of
action in our minor tragedies, as well as real
 ones. **revenge** keeps hope **alive** and

the bottom of her stomach dropped away in realisation of a missing piece, a **PHILLIPS (1998)**

resilience = **THE capacity** to
face, **address**, **integrate**, and
transform one's **worst** fears and
darkest moments can **going** forward,
lead to **new** **STRENGTH** and

EMPOWERMENT.
RICHARDS (1998)

TRAUMATIC realism **must** insist **ON** the
'uselessness' of **the** knowledge **it**
imparts **but** it **must** recognise that
uselessness is itself a **teaching**.

had no give. When she couldn't sit back on her heels, she slumped her weight
 sideways onto one thigh and leaned an elbow on his numb leg.
 His penis was like a button must work of it. She remembered what she
 pick up the tray and join the queue. **ROTHERBERG (2000)**

It is all telling **YOU** **WHAT** it is to **be** human,
and that **is** the **subject**.

Amis (2003)

... speaking in and through experiences that are unspeakable as well as inhabiting and animating the STRUGGLE FOR words and often our failure to FIND them.

Bochner & ELLIS (2003)

AS one can become habituated to horror in real life, one can BECOME habituated TO the HORROR of certain images.

Sontag (2003)

If one speaks about torture, ONE must take care not to exaggerate.

Amery (1964)

AS one can become habituated to horror in real life, one can BECOME habituated to the HORROR of certain images.

Sontag (2003)

Except for a monster, no MAN who actually participated in such events (rather than merely organized from far away) can conceive guilt and yet, as THE young PRISON officer, Düsseldorf put it, "consent to REMAIN alive!"

Sereny (1974)

The essence of morality is a questioning about morality; and the decisive move OF human life is to use ceaselessly all LIGHT to look for the origin of THE opposition between good and evil.

Bataille (1974)

anyone who has transgressed one of these prohibitions himself acquires the characteristic of being prohibited — as though the whole of the dangerous had been transferred over to him.

Freud (1950)

But **Evil IS** not transgression,
IT is transgression **condemned** **Evil is**

in fact **since** filled with knots of fabric divided down the middle
between its colours: black on the left, but **Bataille (1962)** socks unsettled

With **an audience**, **torture becomes**
art, **the torturer an author**, **the**

onlookers an audience of
connoisseurs.

Kappeler (1986)

Saturation swamps the mind so

that the violence creeps in

almost unnoticed

ELLIS (1997)

THE supreme **MOMENT is**

indeed **a silent one**, and **in** the

silence our **consciousness**

FAILS US and death. **BUT SHE HAD SEEN IN THE MIRRORS THAT SHE**
SCARRED. No memory or self had transferred **Bataille (1962)**

IT worked, **AND because it**

worked, it WAS irreversible.

sereny (1974)

AND what rough beast, its hour come at last,
Slouches towards **BETHLEHAM** to be born?
YEATS (1920)

All your life is gathered in a single, limited area of the body.

Amery (1954)

Sometimes you have to begin

far away from the answer and then down-spiral back to IT.

Goldberg (1985)

She skimmed back and forth through the struggling words until Lee finished eating, and then forced the paper into her back pocket as he had. Her fortune cookie wrapped in soft foil disappeared into her jacket. "Ready?"

He rose to his feet in answer, dropping the slime-like remains of the meal into the wall-mounted bin. Through the front windows they could see that twilight was already beginning to encroach, blending the dry arches of the grass into one bristling mass. "Come on – we should hit the Wall before the light goes."

Sal had to stride to keep up with Lee's quick march, following him along the narrow crushed-grass path where they would be able to see any hunting adders. As they walked, he passed back his fortune.

"The size of your balls is the difference between a dream and a nightmare," she read aloud, absently tonguing the bottommost scars inside her mouth. They ascended a thorny slope that cut off the town from view, sheathing through the long grass as if it were water. Sal had the fleeting sense of being watched, underlined by the common knowledge that the Dogs patrolled the Wall they were approaching. Lee's collar shone in its darkness against his pale skin. She unwrapped the cookie in her pocket and teased out the fortune through the pinched side.

- PEOPLE ARE THE HOLE IN EVERY REVOLUTION -

She pocketed both slips, feeling the wedge of the manuscript curved in the back of her jeans steadily soften as they walked. For another hour. An hour later, the House came as a shock in the remote landscape bordering the Wall. From the rise they could both hear the clear ringing of something inside, and it was Lee's bold lead that convinced Sal to jog down without showing her trepidation. The garden gate swung open silently, a bare whisper on its hinges.

Inside the rusting fence, rats huddled and scattered through the undulating grass, pinpricks of reflected light appearing like blown pupils across their dark eyes. Lee paused at the threshold of where he had reached yesterday, lingering beneath the overhang of the porch and waiting for some sign of trespassing. Behind him, Sal was silent in unspoken agreement. From inside, the ringing cut loud.

The door opened as soundlessly as the gate, so smooth and easy that Lee jerked his hand back. A sidelong glance assured him that Sal hadn't seen, and he led them inside the ringing House. He hadn't concretely known what he expected, but there was more light and fewer cobwebs than his subconscious had predicted. Nothing was upright or straight. They had stepped into a hallway that opened onto a large living room which looked out to the Wall, all light coming through a wide arch that led back to a kitchen with broad windows. A slim table leant against the end of one of the two sofas, leading the eye to the telephone that had slipped down onto the arm. It was cordless but of a corded-cradle design. It was not ringing. Lee held the receiver close to his ear whilst Sal picked through the discarded books, toeing their covers.

They found the source of the ringing in the kitchen, hanging above the single open window doing an extraordinary job of keeping the air fresh. The only smell of note was the warm musk of dog, welcoming and homely rather than overpowering. It was a unique, hand-made ornament that had been putting out a regular trill that, with the harmonics of the House, sounded like a ringing phone. Wide copper tubes spun around a central perforated cylinder that had once held a tealight, tipping on counter-balanced axis points to send metal balls continuously through the circuit. One of the many axis had come stuck and would only drop when enough balls had come inside, at which point they would vibrate down with a high pitched rattle. Lee took it down and placed it in the sink to silence it.

The furniture was modern and the chairs, tables and bookcases all looked to have been carved from the same dark tree. Every cushion was gutted, cotton clumps mingling with the coloured puddles of books held open by the floor. As Lee examined the empty bookshelves, Sal moved to the base of the exposed stairs at the far end of the room. Sal touched the banister just as he ran a blunt finger the length of a shelf, together coming to the realization that there was no dust.

There was a rattle atop the bookcases as the assorted figurines and knickknacks shook. Some brief, hard vibration above, but no sound had preceded it. Lee and Sal stood stiff, wide-eyed, heads raised and ears straining. Another rattle, but preceded by a *thud* this time. Sal ran for the door as Lee was swinging himself about the bottom banister post and up the stairs. The door wouldn't open and Sal held on to it, feeling her mouth prickle as the silence yawned wider.

Nothing. Then:

"It's alright, Sal - just a stray dog."

Sal paused, the door handle warm in her fist, then jerked bodily with the decision to let go and move up the stairs. She stopped half a step behind Lee, frowning into the gloom of the corridor where a dark door had been nailed shut.

The animal was curled small against the door, the tip of its flossy tail covering its nose and folded paws. Over hazel eyes, the flecks of gold that looked like eyebrows made the Alsatian appear curious but too comfortable to do anything about it. Lee and Sal both twitched back when it suddenly unfurled and stretched. The dog ambled between them and stood waiting, expectant, until Lee automatically petted the flat of its head. It wagged its tail faster when he sank to his knees, equalising their heights.

Following Lee's motions, Sal knelt and ran her fingers through the dog's fur, feeling the sharp undulations of bone and strings of tendons beneath the fluff. It stood domestic yet regal, enjoying the attention without leaning into their hands. Sal felt higher and found a collar. "Do you think someone lives here?"

Lee shrugged whilst clucking at the dog, snapping a repetitive wet click between his tongue and the roof of his mouth. It snorted and flicked its ears before pressing its blunt nose firmly into his neck and sitting close. Putting an arm around the animal, Lee twisted its collar around by the tag. "Degas." There was no ownership clause, no clue as to who the House belonged to. "He must be eating the rats. This place is too trashed for someone to be living here. Y'know, probably."

Sal hummed, her gaze floating around the corridor they were huddled at the end of. The walls were dark and smudged with dirt, like paper wetted and dripped with ink, the queasy discolouring continuing across the skirting boards and into the first inches of the ceiling. There were bright spots in places – white paint and correction fluid lashed thick and careless, the brush strokes still clear. Of the three doors closest to them, two lead into a bedroom and a bathroom whilst the third was stuck fast. At the far end of the corridor, a fourth door stood in shadows as if an alcove within an alcove. It swallowed light, shying them away through the sheer weight of its blackness. Temptation prickled up in Sal's gut, but before she could rise to test her mettle against the door's aura, Lee grinned at her from one side of his mouth.

"Let's do it up."

His tone was so easy that it made her blink, abruptly forgetting the door. "You what?"

A diagonal flick of Lee's head indicated the House and its torn contents. He stood and rested his shoulders back against the wall. "This place – let's clear it up. No one 'sides us knows it's here, I bet." His voice dropped soft and keen. "We could live here. Make it ours."

An inquisitive sound from the dog made her smile and touch his head. “You, me and a dog named Degas?”

“Aye. Cissy’d love it.”

She looked around again, seeing new dimensions in the structure with a cautious smile. “Aye alright.” A beat and she frowned. “You gonna tell the other Dogs about it?”

Lee bristled and shifted his weight across his feet, hands going into his pockets. “No. They’d probably want to turn it into some kind of club house.”

Sal nodded as if that was the answer she was expecting, rising to her feet and starting towards the stairs. “You’ve got a meeting with them in a bit. Want me to take him?”

Brushing Degas’s fur backwards up his shoulders and neck, Lee nodded and followed her down. When they reached the door, the dog sat at the bottom of the stairs with his ears erect and forward.

“Come on, Degas,” Lee coaxed in a high voice, patting his leg whilst Sal lingered in the doorway.

The dog sat sentry, jowls relaxed and eyes bright. Lee went back and pulled ineffectually at his collar, giving up with a sharp exhale. “Doesn’t look like he’s moving.”

Sal looked over the destroyed furniture and intact windows, quietly feeling that the House was a place where creatures could easily be trapped. “Do you think he’ll be okay here?”

Scratching behind Degas’s ears, Lee shrugged to himself. “Suppose so. He must have been here a while already. We’ll come back tomorrow.”

Lee pulled the door shut behind them without ceremony, trusting Degas to remain at the foot of the stairs. When the House was closed again, its windows darkened and fogged with moisture.

They stopped talking altogether when the dog ran away. Jen said it was the smell of death in Rich's room, the hanging aroma of the last gasp that had driven Degas to jump the gate and bolt. Adam had smelt death but couldn't find a stench in the guest room after they'd moved the body. He suspected that it was the escalating fights that had filled a House suddenly too small for the three of them that had driven the animal out.

He installed more locks on both sides of the door to the office when it was proven that the first had been too subtle a hint. Days passed and he couldn't understand when she was breaking in, let alone how, as he was almost always home. She worked part-time to supplement his military pension, and even when she was in the House she was almost always doing housework. Adam had concluded that it was in the few hours when he slept in their shared bed, a gesture of and a baited line for an apology. When she said nothing and he said nothing, he moved into the office permanently and slept on the cot. She cooked meals and left them in the kitchen for him, but they barely saw one another. She definitely wasn't coming into the office.

But the words were still changing, and with diminishing subtlety.

It was a regimented act to work with the writing, no longer pleasurable but a fight to wrestle back his words and meaning. Anger had silently overcome unease towards what was happening, so that he when he thought he saw the screen ripple he was perturbed rather than alarmed. It was a shallow thing that was already gone when he looked back, like water vibrating around a feather. The words queued behind the flashing line waiting for him to unveil the next and he felt foolish, glad to be alone, but still needing to touch the screen and find it warm but unyielding.

This morning Adam had to laugh to dispel the ridiculous tension in the room when he thought he saw the screen ripple as he typed, forcing himself to chuckle as he picked up the mug of coffee that had sunken a wet circle into a pile of scrap paper. After lunch he had barely begun reading back when the screen wobbled, closer to the focus of his vision than ever before. It was getting bolder. The mug lowered from his jaw as he read and, after weeks of battling the invisible editor, found nothing as he'd written it. The story had disintegrated into a scream.

Lee had carried the House with him to the meeting, arriving at the cropped rocks as the sun was turning into a blade on the horizon. The fire was already lit and crowded with bodies, all of them older and broader than the teenage boys he'd become familiar with. Dan and Joe were listening rapt to a weathered man with a battered face, the shape of his body disguised inside a duffle coat stuffed with layers. Everyone was listening to the older men, dormice to owls. Lee came alongside them and slotted in, head bowed and hands fisted in his trouser pockets.

A hand as cracked as the face it belonged to ventured out, glowing starkly by the fire. "Ethan. You another new'en?"

"Yeah, he's getting collared with us," Dan answered quickly, looking to Lee midway through speaking. "This is my man Lee."

Ethan grunted and withdrew his hand after it had been touched and squeezed. Joe bumped his shoulder against Lee's in greeting before nodding back to the older man. "So tell us then. What's it like?"

"They're all old-time Dogs. Adam sent 'em t'talk t'us," Dan murmured through the side of his mouth with no subtlety, leaning into Lee.

"It's some heavy stuff, sometimes, you know," Ethan drawled with a weak, bitter smile. "Noble, though. Definitely the good fight."

Dan ducked his head to frown at Lee. "Why you so late?"

"What sort of 'heavy stuff'?"

Lee shrugged, looking down and away. "Just got shit on. Summut broke at the slagging pit after you left. Where's Adam?"

"You ever killed anyone, kid?"

Dan's mouth was still open and unspeaking when Joe looked at him, passing on Ethan's question with wide eyes. Marshalling his expression, Dan twitched his head in a nonchalant affirmative. "A bit. Yeah, man, in a gang, I mean. I popped someone."

Ethan's stare clicked almost audibly back to Joe, who raised his chin and hardened his eyes. "Yeah."

"You?"

Lee hesitated with a 'not yet', measuring their gazes upon him to decide upon the exact size of the lie. "Once."

Ethan nodded quickly, stepping sideways towards the fire and holding his hands out to it at an angle. "That's good. That'll help. It's best if you're already a little desensitised before you join up proper."

They'd all run in gangs before – it was what had qualified them to approach the Dogs. The entirety of the first night, after they'd eaten the rats and bugs, had been spent talking about their years smoking in alleyways, breaking into factories and hurling flaming missiles at police cars in broad daylight. Everyone was a drug dealer, killer, thief, enforcer or a mafia kingpin, aged twelve to eighteen. It wasn't encouraged to call bullshit as the lies in themselves were challenges to be matched and surpassed, though with a directed focus within the Dogs.

Ethan took a shiny black cigarette from his pocket and lit it off the fire, taking a drag before handing it to Joe. "Anyone ever held a woman down?"

Lee received the cigarette and spoke on the exhale. "And done what?"

"Watched her get raped, or raped her."

No sound, no motion until the cigarette was passed on. Lee couldn't tell if it was shock or denial. Ethan flicked a hand up to break the spell. "Don't worry – you won't have to do anything like that."

Dan coughed smoke, nominating him to speak after the silence had stretched and snapped. "What do we get to do?"

Taking back the cigarette, Ethan drew until the glowing circle neared his fingers and then dropped it. The burble of conversations around them had fallen away as they waited, and Lee suspected that every group was having the same talk. Finally, Ethan returned his fists to his pockets and met their eyes again with quick little glances across all three of them. “Not as much of the hooligan shit you’re used to. We all work, some of us got families or someone to take care of, but we’re ready to be called on when we’re needed.”

Joe held up his hand close to his smooth face, his fingers stiff and straight. “Adam’s gonna give us orders?”

Ethan nodded. “Usually it’s only a few, but someday it’s going to be all the Dogs needed to keep the Southies back and on their side of the Wall.” His gaze dropped to the shadows squirming at their feet, eyes narrowing as his mind turned inward to a place that Lee both did and didn’t want to know about. When he spoke it was as if to himself, with vehemence serving to solidify his own convictions. “Fuckers come in here, killing and torturing people, on our own side, just because they can.”

“It’s scare tactics,” Lee offered softly, looking up again for Adam but seeing no creature on top of the rocks. The night seemed colder in his absence, and the newest Dogs all looked uneasy.

“I don’t get what they even want,” Dan spat, folding his arms high on his chest. “It’s not like anyone can change any’in. Everything’s happened. They won.”

Shaking his head and smirking, Ethan looked like he wanted to laugh. “Bastards don’t need an excuse. It’s fun for them.”

Dan nodded sagely, suddenly composed. He missed Lee’s eyes flicking in a roll. “Only way they’ll leave us alone, right, is if we show them that we won’t take none of it.”

“Scare ‘em off,” Joe surmised faintly.

Lee scuffed his feet to draw attention, keeping his hands hidden. “How many Dogs are there?”

“Don’t know for sure. Hundred. Couple hundred, maybe.” Perhaps unconsciously, Ethan nodded towards the rocks where their leader would usually be, but didn’t actually lift his gaze. “Adam wanted to keep us in cells so we don’t get clusterfucked. Limit knowledge about the operation.”

Joe shook his head with a frown, touching the fabric over his collar demonstrably. “But everyone knows who’s who. You can even tell the old hands from the new’uns by how they act with the collar.”

“What happens at initiation?” Lee asked quickly, cutting the younger boy off.

“What needs to.” Ethan made the words sound heavy with regretful inevitability. “Nothing worse than anything some of you have done already, though. Hopefully you’ll never have to do anything but patrol and shoot someone. Maybe throw a bomb. I don’t know. It all depends.”

Lee had not spent sleepless hours wondering if he could commit such acts, worrying that he wouldn’t be able to live with himself if he were responsible for death, maiming and destruction. The man he would become was what was necessary for the kind of survival he wanted. This was the first time he’d felt perturbed about some facet of the Dogs, and he hesitated whilst scrutinising the older man, trying to imagine him over and inside a straining, screaming girl.

“Why’d you ask if any of us had ever raped a woman?”

Ethan bowed his head though without guilt, mouth pulling into a sad grimace. “It’s a picture you need to get used to. The Southies like to do it with girls they snatch. They gather round and watch, take turns. Make the kids join in so they see her and us as less than human.”

“Why would they do that?”

“T’make us easier to hate,” Dan answered whoever was speaking, staring at their trembling shadows lying long and thin on the ground.

“And make it easier for us to hate them.”

“You’ll see some shit helping people,” Ethan surmised impatiently, cutting through the viscous atmosphere that was developing. “And you can’t help everyone. Sometimes you get there and the bomb’s already gone off and people are nailed to the walls, or they’re just bleeding from every hole and all you can do is kill however many Southie bastards are still there to kill.” He seized a handful of Lee’s jacket at the shoulder, suddenly alive and close. “It doesn’t matter if you can’t change anything. It doesn’t matter. Revenge is enough. Always.”

Adam printed everything and hid the manuscript between books. Everything he typed or edited, he printed, certain that once the words were off the screen and committed to paper that they couldn't be tampered with. It was sickening, days later, to find that he was wrong. The new words were squashed in, trying to sneak alterations past with an imperfectly mimicked font. Whole sections of his writing faded away, too weak to have endured the page.

Ethan's words were still ringing through Lee's ears when he walked to the House the following evening. His shift at the slag pit had been a distant event, and he couldn't recall anything that had happened through the entire day. Exhausted and numb, he didn't notice the changes inside until he'd sat on the plush sofa and pulled a cushion into his lap. Books that had been on the floor were now lined on the bookshelves, the dark wood warm against the clean, untarnished walls. The soft furnishings had been re-stuffed and their seams repaired, the small tables and scattered ornaments were righted and there was a warm sheen to the room in general. Glancing back into the kitchen, he found it glowing a pale orange stronger than that of the setting sun. He could almost smell bread rising, and smiled at the thought of Sal bustling about with an apron around her slim waist.

Degas leapt up next him, tail wagging and breathing noisily with his mouth open and tongue hanging to one side. The night before slid down and off his shoulders with the physicality of a cloak lifting, and Lee scrubbed the happy dog's head with a grin of his own. "Been alright today, dog? Sal's done good here."

Trying to lick the teen's face with grey breath, Degas quickly gave up and put his head on the cushion in Lee's lap. Sitting back, Lee felt something dig into his coccyx and reached around to pull out a thick black remote-control. He pressed the red button at its top without expecting anything, then jumped so much that Degas lurched when the flatscreen mounted on the far wall came on with a loud whine.

"Seriously?" Lee murmured with a frown, his other hand soothing Degas's head back down with circular motions whilst he began to click through the channels of grey static. He coughed a laugh when the screen turned a mottled shade of green that morphed into a forest. The interlocking canopies were moving upwards, the highest points darkening until the view tilted down to leafy ferns and sharp grass. An animal slid through the vegetation, furred shoulders rolling with liquid strides. Its eyes were amber and assured, fixed ahead as only a predator's could be.

He couldn't identify the animal and was unconsciously glad that the only sounds coming from the speakers near the ceiling were that of jungle life and the creature's near-silent steps. Degas was inert in his lap, watching the high screen with twitching brows. Lee continued to rub the crown of the dog's skull with his fingertips. Watching, he felt a watery longing in his stomach that he couldn't make sense of, a feeling of missing something he'd never known and had no reason to want.

When he saw Sal stepping up onto the porch through the wide window, Lee turned off the television and hid the remote back behind him. It felt too special a thing for her to simply walk in on, and he was glad of the decision when he saw her expression. Degas pulled his head from his lap with a huff, curling his body tighter on the neighbouring cushion.

Sal jerked off her coat and threw it towards the banister leading upstairs, her cheeks bruised red. "Fuckers tried to torch the cinema."

"You okay?" She didn't respond, and Lee thought it better not to stand, leaving the floor empty for her to pace. Sitting forward instead, he rested his elbows on his splayed thighs. "Do they know who?"

She stalked past towards the kitchen, still not having looked at him. "Stupid shits. Wrecked two bins and scorched - get this - the fire door." It hadn't sounded like she'd finished when she returned with a glass of misty water, coming to stand in profile against the window. "Fuck's sake. It's a fucking picture house in the middle of fucking nowhere, and they still..." She trailed off scrubbing her eyes with one hand, mouth creasing in a grimace puckered with scars.

Lee waited until she calmed enough to take a sip of water before speaking. “Bomb went off at a cinema in Derby a few days ago. They were talking about it at the slag today.”

The glass came down from her lips. “The Dogs do that?”

Sitting back again, Lee shook his head roughly enough to flick his fringe. “Adam’s not into all that hooligan shit. I was just saying.”

“No – just into strapping bombs to horses and torturing people they grab off the street.”

Lee looked up at her through his eyelashes, saw her drag the knuckle of her index finger across her mouth as if wiping away something she didn’t want to touch with her fingertips. He dropped his gaze when she swung hers back, swallowing loudly. “I don’t know. They... We don’t talk much history.”

Sal straightened fractionally, her bottom lip drawing into her mouth as her head tipped back. She watched the whites of his downcast eyes speculatively. “The Southies would have bombed us back.”

He shrugged one shoulder, not raising his head. “Must be civilian then if they’re that retarded.”

She snorted at the quiet utterance, folding her arms. “Should torch ten of their cinemas for it. On a Saturday night.”

Lee barked a laugh and got to his feet, coming to stand in front of her. “On your own? You wouldn’t make it a day over the Wall.”

Sal looked away with a tight mouth, biting her tongue and breathing through her nose. When she looked back her composure was as forced as her tone. “You getting initiated soon?”

The non-sequitur was unsettling for a reason Lee couldn’t pinpoint, so he ignored it. “Tonight.”

She nodded fractionally and sipped the water. Appearing suddenly coy, she offered Lee a smile with her scarred mouth. “Think you could get me in?”

He folded his arms. “To the Dogs?”

“It’s not a boy’s club, is it?”

There wasn’t a rule against women joining, Lee knew, but he’d never seen a collared girl. To him, the black band didn’t suit them, and he couldn’t imagine Sal involved in the things Ethan had told them about. “No. I don’t, I don’t know, Sal.” She looked genuinely crestfallen which somehow irritated him more, and he waved her off as he retreated into the kitchen. “Just let me do this and we’ll talk about it, okay?”

Sal slammed the glass down on the table at the end of the sofa and followed him. “Fuck it, Lee – I’m sick of having to tag around with you all the time by the Wall and not go where things actually happen.”

Lee rubbed his eyes, his back to her and his stomach against the kitchen counter. He’d never gotten used to her emotional turns, and it was only because it reminded him of Cissy’s capricious moods that he tolerated them. “Honestly, you’re not missing out on anything.”

Hooking her linked hands behind her head, Sal glared at the ceiling until her jaw unclenched and she could take a controlled breath. She closed the space between them and brought her hands around his waist with the gentlest pressure. Apologies weren’t things they ever actually said. Her tone was soft and urging. “There’s a revolution coming.”

He jerked to look at her, trapped when her arms tightened and pulled them breast to breast. His hands were awkward, shifting to hold on to the ledge of the counter. “We eat bugs and talk shit.”

“It’s all building up to something, and I want to be a part of it,.” She ran her hand down the back of his head, settling on the faded dirt collar. “Can you talk to them? Try and get me in?”

Lee pinched the bridge of his nose, wanting to tell her that with Cissy at home and her here, the Dogs were the only place he had left. Instead, he held the back of his neck to displace her hand, pressing against the knots of his spine. He settled on a short-term solution. “Look, maybe. I’ll try. Just let me get this thing out of the way first, alright?”

She opened her legs a little to appease him, pressing her stomach against his groin and kissing the space where the collar skimmed his sternum. “I’m so proud of you.”

From the start he’d put down her abrupt and near incomprehensible moods to the scars around her mouth, pity taking the angry edge off his frustration with them. Placing his hands on her waist, Lee turned them away from the counter to put some space between their hips. “I’m not in yet.”

What I didn't - and couldn't - tell
anyone was THAT writing the book
[AMERICAN Psycho] had been an extremely
disturbing experience... When I realized, to my
HORROR, what this character wanted from me, I
kept resisting, but the novel forced
itself to be written. I would often black out
for hours at a time only TO realise THAT
another ten pages had been scrawled
out - MY point - and I'm not quite sure how else TO
Put this - is that The book wanted to be
WRITTEN by someone else. It wrote itself and
didn't care how I felt about it. ELLIS (2005)

Moth



Fig. I-II

The hard-copy opens abruptly onto a diptych of a biomorphic collage. The character Moth straddles the gutter, wings flared fully outwards in a 'rest' position, creating both a visual blockade across both pages and signifying through the wide-wing pose that it is not intending to move from this point. Close examination of the imbricating mosaic components reveal fragments of bodies, generic areas of human skin and hair, specifically. In one fragment on the upper left wing, fingertips gripping into flesh can be discerned. Moth is composed of pieces torn from a pornography magazine, presaging in content, and deterring in posture, of the nature of the scene that is to follow.

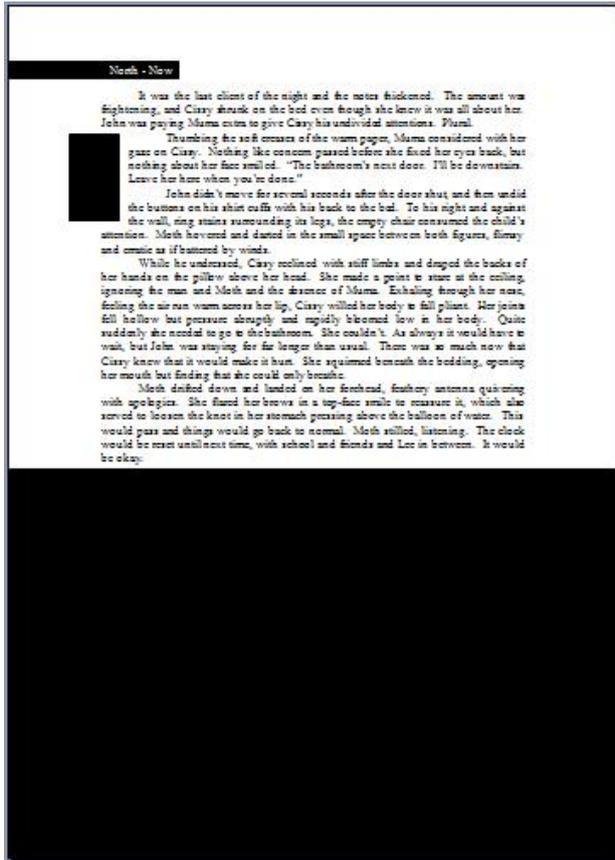


Fig. III

In contrast to the variegation in *Fig. I-II*, *Fig. III* begins the sequence of simple geometric shapes interfering with the layout of textual characters. The chiaroscuro stamp to the upper left is inverted in tone, emerging from the dominating black as though it ought not to be visible. As an absence of the conventional 'black text on a white backing', it establishes a negative space that continues throughout the rest of the series. At the bottom of this composition, the mass of black filling almost half of the area creates a horizontal depression, underscoring the naively optimistic closing line as the desirable close.

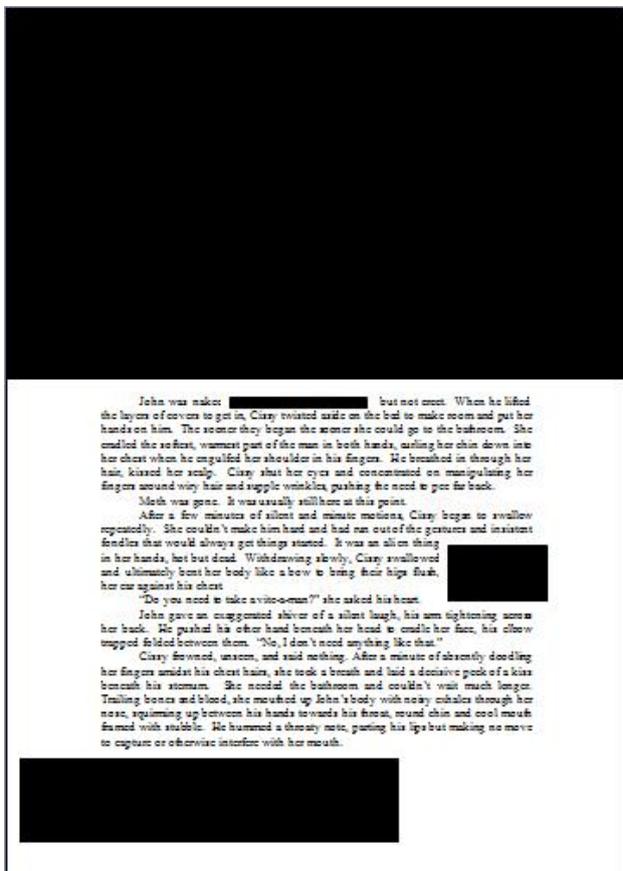


Fig. IV

Continuing so that it invades the sequential composition in an invading descent, the black mass overshadows the text, comprising over a third of the space. This oppressiveness is furthered by the interfering shapes within the text and the smaller weight at the base that, once again, underlines a possible, and perhaps preferable, close. There are no shadows to demark the black masses as above or beneath the white, levelling the composition into two dimensions with no foreground or background.

The room was turning cold and John pulled the covers up to a bunch of behind her head, hooking a leg over her hip. Cissy stiffened at the surge of pressure the cocoon caused, pressing her thighs together and moving her mouth against his mouth with keen enthusiasm. Finally he relaxed back, allowing his tongue to be drawn into her small mouth. She clasped a man against his palm and rocked her body firmly, insistently into his. Her hands tugged upwards and eventually met at the back of his head, tugging gently at his hair in panic passes.

It became a pressure against her thighs, impossibly hotter now and twitching stiffly with interest. She eased her legs open with a cry contain, flooded with relief. Just as she was about to slide away and roll him onto his back, John drew back from her mouth and laid a chastekiss against her forehead.

Take it slow, baby," he murmured. "We've got time."

The squeak was involuntary and borderline diagnostic.

John asked, "What's the matter?"

Caught, embarrassed and suddenly shy, Cissy pressed her eyes between his soft pecorals and bunched her shoulders up to cover her neck. "and the bedroom."

There was a pause but from a chuckle, more genuine than the first in its soft vibration sprang from the core of his chest.

He relaxed Cissy's shoulders and made her smile a little to herself. John made a gesture of leaning her up, rolling away onto his back and resting a hand over his groin to keep the covers off his erection. "Go on, then. I'll be right here."

With a grateful and uneven smile, Cissy slid backwards off the bed and jiggled out with accompanying small steps, each hand darting to cup herself to hold in. Briefly, in the hallway, she could hear the television droning, and from the bathroom door was shut and the only sounds were clicking pipes and running water. She washed her toes out and unrolled at the ends of her feet, her legs that she thought too spindly dangling from the toilet seat.

Meth reappeared on her wrist, tickling the thin skin over her veins with its delicately hooked feet. Cissy gently prodded its back with a finger, flattening its brown wings in a slow pulse. Its antenna flicked, withdrew and, when Cissy stopped it dropped its proboscis out to touch her hand. She cocked her head at the kiss, perturbed by this uncondemned nodding from it all of a sudden. Meth only took off when she stood and turned on the hot water tap over the sink, letting it run.

Fumbling with the cracked soap bar that was larger than both her hands clasped together, Cissy soaked in and released her stomach exponentially and found the pressure was still there. It was the uncomfortable need to urinate but there was nothing left. After rinsing the small bubbles off her hands, she sat back on the toilet and concentrated on getting the last drops out. Nothing happened. Cissy felt a prick of panic. She had held a man whilst holding it before and it had turned a chemical burn into a sharp blade that hadn't abated.

The toilet hadn't flushed yet so she reminded herself as her hands came together in front of her in an X, clasping upside down. John wouldn't expect her back until after it had flushed, so she could wait to get the last drops out.

Meth paced sideways along the narrow ledge of the top of the mirror, wings twitching. Cissy climbed to kneel on the sides of the sink, bringing her eyes close to

Fig. V

The black masses have become fragmented, and their placement begins to affiliate with the textual content they disturb. A vertical element has been introduced to the upper left, increasing the overall abstraction of the composition, alluding to an escalating troubling of reality. Only the uppermost of the four masses frames the textual component; the others function to disrupt the line lengths and the speed of textual reading.

its body and tracking it back and forth with her head. Her knees began to hurt and she shuffled back, her stomach tightening when she saw shapes in the moisture left by her breath on the mirror. Raising her hands flat against the wall, she sighed loudly towards the bright surface beneath the fog broken by the tops of letters.

STAY

NEED

The mirror quickly erased the letters, fading them back into the girl's reflection. She looked up to Meth and found it had stopped walking and now watched expectantly. The tilt of its antenna told her that it was equally surprised, which brought no comfort. She looked at the door, thought very seriously about going, but ultimately decided to hunch again, close and double cover.

SEVERELY

WANT

Her eyes widened; she could see them when the fog around the letters shrunk back. She clambered down from the sink still watching the mirror, stopping backwards until her hand found the doorknob. Meth didn't follow but continued to watch the mirror. Cissy tried to deduce what it was thinking and ultimately took its inaction as a sign of safety. Gently, she climbed back onto the sink.

Next door, John made a muffled sound through the wall but it fell silent on her ears. It took two filtered breaths before she managed one large enough to cover the written space of the mirror. Immediately she cringed back from it.

WANT

TELL

YOU

AGAIN

Cissy swallowed, the joints in her hands paining and red pressure grooves deepening in her knuckles and skin. This time the condensation did not immediately die, but shifted over the words and made a symbol.

It happened so suddenly that she fell back from the sink and landed in an angular pile on the floor. She did not cry, and automatically transformed her cry into a whimper that could be interpreted in any number of ways. By the time she had scuffed backwards to press against the door, the moisture on the mirror had shrunk back to clear glass. Meth had vanished, and Cissy opened the door from behind to watch the mirror until the last possible moment.

The hallway felt normal, somehow cooler than the air in the bathroom had been. She heard the cracked springs in her bed move, the body lying atop them shifting with impatience. Mama would come up and check on them if she couldn't hear anything, and would doubtless give Cissy a hiding if found looking in the hallway outside the bathroom. The thought was impetuous enough for her to push aside the wet messages and return quickly to bed, leaping in with an exaggerated exuberance that made John grin.

"Ready?" she chirped, running her hands stiffly over her chest as if wiggling a window.

He hummed without opening his mouth, carrying the sound into a sigh when he pulled her against him. "Yes. Are you, baby girl?"

Cissy nodded quickly and shut her eyes, falling pliant as John gently arranged her. Indicative gestures guided her on her hands and knees towards the feet of the bed, her knuckles brushing the end board, and she bowed her back to present her rear properly. This wasn't a

Fig. VI

Visual simplification economises the introduction of a different kind of textual disruption: a new font is used to delineate another author, with a symbol taking the place of a description of the same just below centre. This communication between direct-speaker and 3rd person narrator is limited to the uninterrupted white portion of the page, the composition only troubled at the bottom when the black begins to encroach, signalling the return of danger.

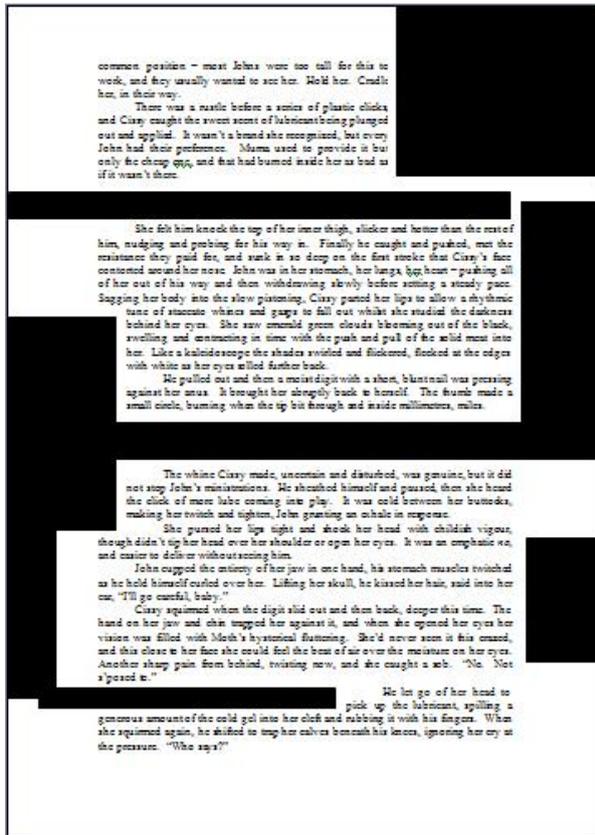


Fig. VII

The visual pattern, lacking sequence or symmetry, expresses tension to dissuade the viewer from engaging with the textual region of the composition. Without a continuous white border, there is a sense that the black masses continue outside the frame into undocumented negative space, and reach across the composition here as grasping, geometric tentacles.

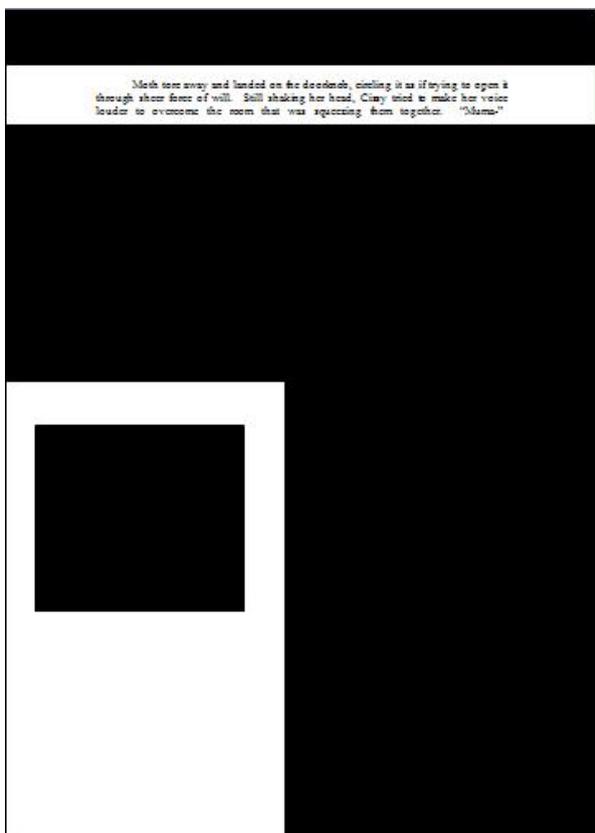


Fig. VIII

Leaving only minimal text space, the compositional balance of black and white is reversed to create a dominant, absorbing negative space that the viewer must contend with to derive any meaning. In the lower left, the black square presents itself as a window of escape, much as the narrow letterbox in the upper permits only a glimpse of text.

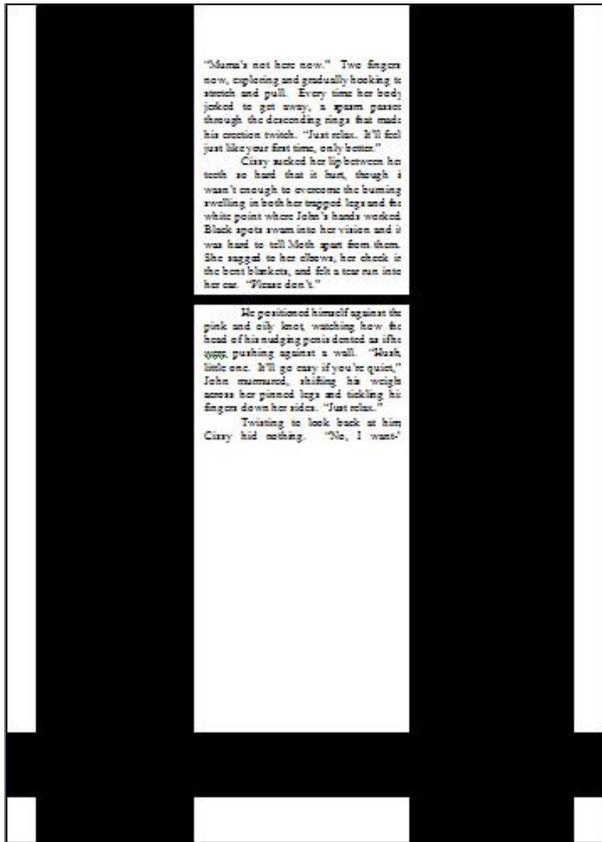


Fig. IX

Fig. IX shows perfect symmetry of the black masses, typically a solidifying component, but skewed here by the bottom-heavy composition of blackness which weighs on the page and creates a dynamic descent. As the two dark towers threaten to occlude the text from both sides, the resulting constriction in textual line length expedites the downward momentum. From a post-9/11 perspective, there is an allusion to the World Trade Centre towers. The strips of white to the extreme left and right delineate the shapes as rectangles as opposed to thick black borders. Taken symbolically, figuratively or literally, the composition embodies a sense of falling: a descent into further horror.

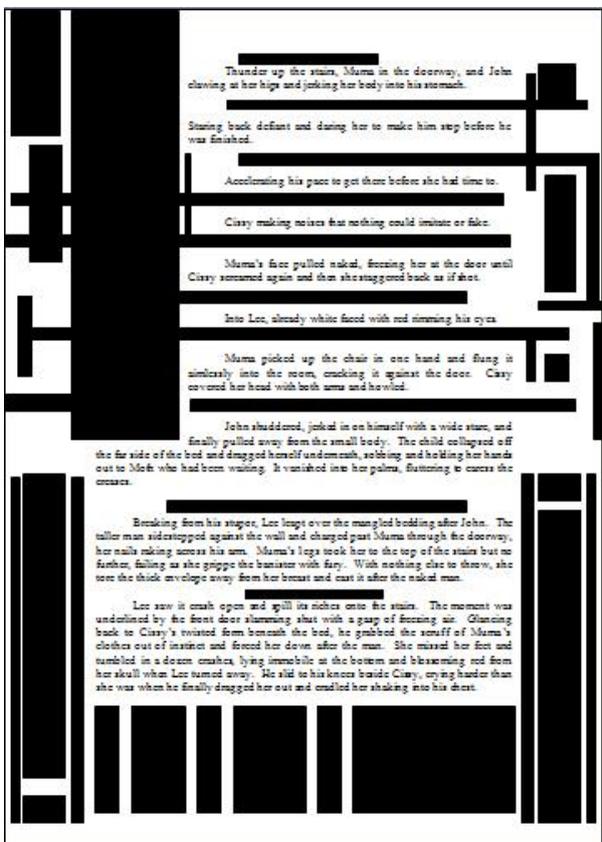


Fig. X

Every element of a composition reflects some aspect of the total expression, chaotically so here where orientation is completely destroyed through a combination of mazes and overarching descent. Directional movement is troubled by the disjointed compositional involvement of the black spaces, now actively guiding the restless eye down in a twisting descent that isolates areas of text within spaces no larger than the areas taken up by the black masses. *Fig. X* is the pinnacle of the sequence, ending the fall in a shatter of fragments that only regains some degree of sense at its lower base. Symmetry is almost reached, the text is permitted to condense into paragraph blocks, and the concluding bar splits with avenues of escape to white, clean space.

[REDACTED]¹

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

¹ There is something eerie about the blank, gaping expanse in conjunction with this line.

[Redacted]

¹³

¹⁴ [Redacted]

¹⁶

[Redacted]

¹³ Less about the content but of how the text and *space* are arranged on the page. Meaning/purpose [Redacted] to disorientate us and have us question the expectation of the arbitrary layout.

¹⁴ Descent – Bowels – Hell – Lower Bodily Sphere

¹⁵ ‘Exploded’ shock [Redacted] technical, overwritten register. Feels cold, pitiless and remorseless.

¹⁶ [Redacted] Pop.

[REDACTED]

17

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

18 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] 19 [REDACTED] XX [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

20

¹⁷ Literally becoming *immersed* in the scene as we are forced to engage with the accelerating pace, tensing with the grotesque space that forces us to anxiously await the next word, the next event, the next horror, until the last possible moment.

¹⁸ Revisiting for exposition. Spacing benefits the impact.

¹⁹ Reality shift reflected in the strange layout.

²⁰ Unnervingly snapped under tension.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

21

[REDACTED]

22

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

23

24

[REDACTED]

²¹ Interrogates, questions and examines itself under the guise of sincerity.

²² Intertextual – [REDACTED] Carter (1994)

²³ It was inevitable that religion was going to come into this.

²⁴ Normality resumed, but the obsession still goes on.

[Redacted]

25

[Redacted]

26

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

27

25 [Redacted] *House* [Redacted] ([Redacted] 2001), p420

26 [Redacted]

27 Code breaking – [Redacted]

I need to return **SOME** videotapes.

Ellis (1991)

The writing had grown across the walls like time-lapsed ivy, fading into existence a letter at a time in sentences and paragraphs and pages across every side of the rooms. Its roots were in the office, behind and beneath the desk, and the words themselves were extensions of what he'd written. It was redrafting itself in the carpet and on the ceiling, phrases honing to a blade as the words crept further out. They were terrible.

Adam read them all, touring the House several times a day to see what he was certain was meant to be read. If he understood it, he could stop it and reclai

One morning, the cat usually found sitting on the kitchen ledge beneath the wind chime, considering a strike, was not there. It took Adam four minutes standing at the sink, sensing something was wrong, to realise the change, and then another two minutes of squinting into the shrubbery before accepting that the black animal simply wasn't there. It's presence at all in the middle of nowhere had been mystifying at first, but now its disappearance today felt disturbing. Jen didn't respond when he asked if she'd seen it. She was watching the middle distance over the kitchen table, her hands shielding a slim mug of coffee with a waxy surface

Adam went upstairs to write and didn't think about Jen or the

He came down hours later,

foraging for lunch,

and Jen was still sat there

with the air and the mug.

The coffee had turned white and

Adam froze as he had done when he'd noticed the cat's absence.

Her wrist was colder than the mug. Inside the coffee had sloughed its skin in evaporation

She wasn't dead, but it was long minutes before she blinked her dry eyes and realized that he was

drowning

The office
was lost

in

words

that spilled out through the cracks around the door, crawling into existence across the walls, ceiling and beneath the threads of the carpet.

dam had begun measuring them and deduced that the words were fading out from the beige at a rate of nine letters an hour, per line. The lines were not commonly completed, as if the text were being exposed sideways, or written on every line simultaneously.

It wasn't a font he recognized.
It was on-font of the House's own making.

When your **DAEMON** is **in** charge, do not
think **consciously**. DRIFT, *wait* and obey.

Kipling (1985)

Adam thought that he may need to let the words take over the top floor of the house to find out what they meant. Some of the sentences were refabricated versions of his own – clever arrangements of words that had peppered as highlights in *Wayward South*.

It was its own creation, now.

The book that something felt he should write.

There was barely a narrative amidst the spewing torrent of axioms, adages, appeals, apothegms, assertions, approbations, aphorisms, acclamations, arraignments, accusations, admonishments, anathemas, aspersions, animadversions, agitations, and announcements that action must be taken now.

So far Pritz had gone, flown to the Burning Man festival with a new boyfriend.

At door handle height she was speaking of marriage.

In the carpet she was happy.

Flashbacks told of Nep torturing women to get them to Anna's state. He died by the window in a dramatic gunfight.

Anna, the protagonist, was warm and fed and homed and happy and nothing at all interesting with no scars from Nep's treatment.

Everything else was a manifesto of rebellion and violence.

Adam found Jen's name on the skirting board just outside the office door, part of a thin caricature being introduced to Nep. She was dead by the evening beneath the light switch.

He blocked out her name with correction fluid but it didn't help.

When the writing had reached the bedroom, Adam bought six cans of black spray paint and coloured over all of the walls, finally leaving an extra thick border of paint dripping around the edges as a barrier. He sprayed

FUCK

YOU

over the top, which was only visible for an hour as wet paint. After sleeping in strange

colours, he checked his work and found that the wall had

soaked

the

paint

in

and pushed it back out to make **bolder**, DEEPER LETTERS.

The fairytales of
childhood, WITH their
native and avoidable terrors,
are vanquished BY an
environment that taunts
the imagination with an
equivalent atmosphere of
unreality that offers no asylum
from itself, not even the
seeming sanctuary
of a self-determined
suicide

LANGER (1975)

The House is lost, and Jen with it. I tried to drag her out, but the skin of her arm peeled down like a sleeve beneath my hand at the threshold of the door. Her flesh beneath was so bright that I let go.

It can't write anywhere else. I copied everything it had done, faster than Jen fell apart, onto paper and onto me. It doesn't want this manifesto to be read by me alone. I can save us.

The door to Muma's house opened almost immediately onto the stairs, which had sagged with age and bore a strip of carpet running up the middle so thin that it could not be felt underfoot. When she met the clients, by appointment at the door, it was a straight path from the street to the bedroom upstairs where Cissy lay waiting. Her thin bed was in the centre of the room, the headboard flush against the wall with a darkened narrow window to one side. As usual, Cissy waited beneath stiff blankets against the hard chill of the house and watched Moth trip and flutter around the lightbulb, her smile turning passive and vacant when the door opened onto her.

There was a new silhouette on the threshold, and Cissy narrowed her eyes upon it just as Muma had done at the front door. The client was tall and slim, immaculately dressed in black trousers, blazer and court shoes that rocked on the heel as she shifted her weight. Her hair was clean and dark, feathered inwards to cup her throat before spilling back across her shoulders, and she ran a hand through it now, head cocked.

Muma looked between them both, unsettled but working to appear otherwise. She glanced to the chair, her chair, beside the door frame and the woman again. No penetration so no harm - her reasoning. "Half an hour. I'll be downstairs," she announced, giving Cissy's flat body one final look before stepping backwards out into the hall and shutting the door.

In the dim, Cissy shifted from habit beneath the sheets, opening her legs and stroking her toes against the grey linen. She looked up to Moth, now perched inverted and still at the base of the light. It flexed its wings in a proxy shrug, equally confused, before retreating out of sight. Alone with the client, Cissy offered a shy smile to the hesitant face that watched her. When nothing happened, she rolled her gaze back up to the ceiling and slowly drew her legs up, thighs parted to create a warm tent in the blankets. "What's your name?"

Seconds passed before a floorboard creaked, a pause between every considered step. The woman smiled, her suspicions that the child's mental faculties were intact confirmed. "Kara," she replied at last, toeing out of her shoes and shifting at filth she could feel through the nylon of her tights. Coming alongside the bed, she sat at Cissy's hip with her knees together and hands folded in her lap. She smiled, hair swinging down to frame her face. "Have you ever been with a woman before?"

After a pause, Cissy used the heels of her hands to push herself further up the bed and sat up. "No. If I did, then I've forgot and Muma didn't tell me."

Kara smiled before scanning her eyes along Cissy's form, her hand following slowly behind. "Well. I suppose then this will be very special for both of us."

There was a familiarity there that eased Cissy's stomach, and she gave a short nod before worming her body back under the blankets with legs open in welcome. Kara watched with a fixed expression before slipping off her blazer, hanging it by its neck from the headboard, and peeling back the blankets to the thin ankles. She ran her hand over the warm cotton smock that sheathed the slim body, worrying her fingertips over hip and rib bones. Cissy arched fractionally with the touch in offering, eyes half closed. Pantomime.

Instead of climbing up and into the space between the girl's thighs, Kara tipped her body forward, cupped her face and lay her mouth down in a dry, chaste kiss. When Cissy didn't move, didn't breathe, she released a shaky exhale against her lips before running her tongue along the seam. Encouraged by the warmth and the queer comfort, the child opened her passive mouth enough for the point of a tongue to enter, and sagged completely when her own tongue was thoroughly explored.

She didn't kiss back, both because she wasn't certain how and because her toes were fisting the sheet from the warm tingles running in waves through her body.

Her first kiss, and it was slow and tender. There was a rule about kissing, but Muma wasn't here to tell Kara that, and she savoured the indiscretion, mewling when the caress suddenly stopped. Kara grinned and kissed her nose in a peck, making her giggle quietly.

A slim hand worked down her side, the thumb trembling as it followed the slope of her ribcage down to her hips and thighs, finding the hem of the smock and retreating back beneath it. Kara's hands were cold against her skin, her fingers now exploring contours boldly as her breathing hitched. Drawing the cotton up over Cissy's chest, she watched the shallow cones pucker as her fingers traced and teased, bringing the flat nipples up. Cissy was silent as she brought her face to one, touching the nub of flesh with her nose before laying a soft kiss.

"There isn't much time," Cissy murmured, raising her hand to the woman's face though not touching it, hoping to be kissed again. "Don't you want my cunt?"

Kara stopped as if struck, her body and voice tight. "You shouldn't say that word. It's not nice."

Nodding obedience, Cissy settled her head back and waited. Moth remained absent by the light, and she shut her eyes.

"I wasn't going to do anything, today." Kara hadn't meant the confession to be said aloud, but she found herself riding a wave of euphoria as she caressed and kissed, working down the slight body. "I was just going to see you, maybe kiss you, and take a picture of you home in my head, you know? But you're so beautiful. So, so beautiful. And I want us both to enjoy this."

It was not an uncommon phrase in the room, and Cissy waited to be positioned for the act itself. When she was coaxed upright she tensed. Kara cupped her face again, rubbing strands of blonde hair together between her fingers as she pressed a kiss to Cissy's forehead. "I'm going to lie down, and you're going to lie on me, like we're having a cuddle, okay? Just put your knees on either side of me and sit on my belly, like this. Yes, that's right. Sit right there."

Suddenly looking down at the pillow, Kara's hair fanned out across one side and a crease in her neck where her chin began to hide back in her throat, Cissy made a soft sound and looked to Muma's chair. Her face was guided back around as another hand slid up her thigh, the rounded nail coming to rest over her mound. This was familiar, at least, and she tipped her head back both to show submission and to look for Moth. It was still missing, and she worried that it had gone for good this time.

Kara's fingers splayed across the child's stomach as her thumb hooked down, watching enraptured as it found a dip and made Cissy inhale sharply through her nose. She made circular motions with just the pad of her thumb, watching the string tendons in Cissy's throat flex and twitch as her lips rocked against one another, gaze fixed on some indistinct point in the middle distance. She took a deep breath as the rotations took her hand lower, filtering out the old smell of sex and sweat to find the child's own tart scent. On Cissy's leg, her other hand tightened to confirm this was real.

Cissy began to shift her hips when Kara's thumb found its way inside, as she knew to do, keeping her face neutral and open. She could feel the stabbing grate of the fingernail in her vagina, the woman's pulse in her stomach, and hot pricks of static leaping between the two that were neither pain nor pleasure. It was strange, and she was held in suspense of the pain, of the thrust, of the thick push that was the cost of her labour. The longer it didn't come the more she feared its arrival, but Kara murmured adorations in time with her stroking, hooking thumb.

"There isn't much time."

There was an urgency in the words that made Kara pause, and she shifted her hips to rock Cissy up her body, bringing the hand that had been at her groin around to cup a lean buttock. "I'm not a man, Cissy. I don't need to cum to be happy. You don't need to touch me. I'm not going to make you do anything." Her hand drifted

up and down, tracing the warm knots of a spine before nesting at the swell of flesh again. “Do you like this, what I’m doing?”

Muma was downstairs, not in the chair and not making sure that no one was hurt and everyone was happy, but it wasn’t hurting. It didn’t feel good, either. It was just strange. Finally Cissy nodded, smiling first from one side of her mouth and then the other. “I like it.” It was what they all wanted to hear.

“Good.” The word rolled from the back of Kara’s throat as her hand shifted down again and resumed fondling. Her other hand moved up under the smock to stroke down the centre of the child’s chest, feeling the flat firmness of it. She could feel a fast heart pushing beneath and was suddenly aware of the pulse in her own groin, quickening and thickening as her hips twisted and the seam of her trousers rubbed tight over her clit. Firmer dips of her thumb, seeking more heat and dampness as the very same blossomed down her thighs and curdled in her cunt.

Cissy rocked with the rolling body beneath her, closing her eyes so that the sensations came from indistinct places in the darkness. Their breathing sounded louder, the stridors of the bed more insistent and in the corner of her mind she saw Muma waiting at the foot of the stairs, one hand curled on the railing. The wind pressed against the window, something howled and was answered by something closer, and she thought she could hear the whole world from up here. She jerked when Muma’s voice bawled into the room behind her, as if her body hadn’t come upstairs with it.

“Time, please.”

She opened her eyes to find Kara smiling up at her, face flushed with a warm glow that summoned an echoing feeling in Cissy’s stomach. There had been no obvious shudder, no grunt or bellow to signal the end of their time together, and she wondered if she’d missed it. Or failed.

Their gazes held as Cissy slid off and Kara twisted to sit on the edge of the bed again, fine strands of her hair bunched up in webs and arches on the back of her head. She brushed her nose with the back of one hand, dragging her thumb across the groove of her lips to wipe off and trap the moistness there. Cissy remained kneeling half on the bunched blankets as the woman put her shoes back on and smoothed her hair, finally standing with a last look back over her shoulder. Picking up the blazer, she took an envelope from a deep pocket and held it out to Muma as she approached.

“Thank you. I’m sure I’ll be seeing you both again.”

Muma’s chin puckered and creased, one brow rising before she finally took the envelope and nodded. Turning slightly, she motioned down the staircase with her head before her eyes narrowed on Cissy. The child blinked back, eyes opening again wide enough to show a circle of white around the iris, but it didn’t affect her tone. “That was okay?”

Cissy nodded quickly, shifting to sit with one leg sprawled out and the other bent to bring her knee to her chin in what she thought a nonchalant pose. “Uh huh.”

A beat as Muma considered her before she made a soft sound that was almost a grunt. She stepped outside and pulled the door enough for it to swing shut behind her as she went downstairs.

Listening to footsteps and then the front door, Cissy waited until she heard Muma move into the kitchen below before she looked up at the ceiling again. Moth was back, appearing around the light’s rose as if it had been hiding there all along. When it offered nothing but a slow motion of its wings, Cissy quirked a smile and rested her ear on her shoulder.

“Yeah. I don’t know either.”

JENNY'S DEAD.

Silence is the only adequate response,
but the pressure of the scream persists.
Despres [1970]

From the protrusion of rock above their heads, Adam spoke into darkness smudged orange by the fire. The new Dogs soaked in his words without seeing his mouth form them. Lee sucked at the detritus that may not have even been trapped amongst his teeth, tonguing oily slithers with the same slow-motion-chewing as everyone else. Only the rat's skin was left, peeled and drying over the trap that had caught it. Rats were Vogue now.

"Right now, you are all gang-members with token collars," Adam began abruptly in the dark, followed by soft sounds of fabric moving. "But the Dogs are an organisation. There is a significant difference, and tonight you will make the transition to becoming useful members."

On either side of Lee, two young men leaned across him to bump fists. "Then we get inked, man," Dan affirmed to his left, grinning teeth that bore a grey film. The others looked to him with interest, seduced by the apparent knowledge that none of them ought to yet have. The process of progression in the Dogs, although it was rapid, was supposedly only known by those who had been through it.

A young boy with acne instead of skin threw the rat's hide onto the fire, which bulged and spat. Adam seemed to wait for the flames to settle before going on. "The war over the immigrants is long over, but the hatred remains between the two sides who fought viciously over what to do with them. The Southies won but that isn't enough, and their Protectorate terrorists won't stop crossing the Wall and attacking our side until the North bows to them. The Dogs will not allow that to happen, and the only thing they will respond to is violence. We must drown them in nightmares."

Lee closed his eyes at the rumble that spread between the Dogs. Venomous anticipation.

"The victims and perpetrators of the last fifty years were of the same normality and intelligence, but the perpetrators had one crucial advantage: They had permission - from supervisors, for glory, for the good. I give you permission now not to be bystanders, but to be strong and vengeful. Conditions have become inhuman, so we must be inhumane. We must remember what they have done to us, and remember enough to be embittered. We look at the worst they've done to make ourselves capable of worse. The difference between us and them is we're right, and it's our duty to choke them with that fact."

The sky spat rain and Lee wondered if Adam was pacing soundlessly above them. It seemed like a pacing speech.

"You all know about the massacre at the Central Nursery."

It was the most pervading and pernicious story about the Southie terrorists and rumoured to be the impetus for the creation of the Dogs. The pause was short.

"They had come across something that worked, with that. For adults, related or otherwise, the screams of babes have a universal effect. After the nursery, the stories of children tortured in front of captives to get information or compliance grew and spread. The Government turned a blind eye. Hundreds thought it was too horrific to be possible, but everyone else swelled themselves on the facts."

Curdling in the wind, the clouds released a thick sprinkle and then a guttered shower that evaporated in grey twists against the fire. The Dogs shifted back and around beneath the outcropping, creating an ellipse that Adam sat directly above. Dan produced a pen knife to pick his teeth, triggering a younger pair of potentials to copy him. Atop the ledge, Adam straightened so that the rain didn't run down his neck and beneath the thick coat that chased his heels when he moved.

"What happened at the Nursery was an unwitnessable event. No one knows what really happened. No one left who did not have the bloodlust and moral

suspension to murder infants in their sleep, and then to dismember them, for no other reason than that they could. No one else was there.”

The Dogs did not close their eyes but stared into the middle distance above their laps, carried by Adam’s rolling, unstoppable intonations. Above them the heavy rain massed and slid beneath the ledge, running down infant stalactites to drip onto the sheltering audience.

Even then, everyone had known of the Southern’s capacity for creativity, certain that anything they could speculate about the Nursery, the Cinema and the Docks paled in comparison to what actually happened at those sites. But when it came out how they were getting their information from the North, there was still room for surprise and horror.

Interrogations were carried out in makeshift cells equipped with two tables, one of which was for tools. After being left long enough to wet themselves out of necessity, the captives lifted from the street would watch as a conductor carried a child in and affixed it to the second table. It was more economic to do it in groups. Strapped into chairs with their heads locked forward to watch, no one forced their eyes open. No one asked questions, leaving them to volunteer anything that might make it stop. One out of five could know something. In the cells, the most mundane tools and tactics seemed exceptional because of the size of the body they were set upon. And the others quickly became interrogators. Please, don’t. Oh God. Please. Please. Christ. You fucking monster. I don’t know. Just tell them. God, stop it. Oh God, just say it.

The conductor put his dry thumb into the child’s body to start with, vagina or anus, to summon out a noise that put everyone’s teeth on edge. It was procedure to start by defiling the child before getting on to the actual business of hurting them. A flick-knife replaced the thumb, pulled up until the resisting flesh, elastic with youth, tore with a *pop*. Between fingers and toes, webs of white skin also slid apart over the blade. The double-handed pliers came next. Shouting overpowered the high, keening screams from the child, filled the room with begging and threats in all directions. The conductor knew the sound of useful words, waiting until another masked figure came to receive the offerings. If there were none, the audience observed the systematic breaking of joints by pinching them flat, leaving nerves intact and under unforgiving pressure from shattered bone and pulped meat. Only a handful had seen the whole sequence and lived to tell it. How in the end drops of ethanol were sprinkled across the naked body, fine enough that the fires burned themselves out whilst the howling body flopped. The conductor made a point throughout of drawing attention to the voice and twisting face, underlining that this was a living being lying deformed, jerking and smoking because they wouldn’t speak. That there would be a repeat performance with another child if they didn’t start talking now. That they could go on like this forever.

“That is the kind of animal that the Dogs are fighting against,” Adam concluded. “That is why you have to be desensitised. You’re not any use if you can still flinch.”

Fifteen and the informed and self-elected leader of the group, Dan pointed to Lee with the knife’s blade, his smile framed with rainwater. “Tonight we’re gonna see the film. I hear it’s sick.”

Lee wiped the back of his neck to dispel the chill left by the dripping water, shifting closer to the fire. “Do we watch it here?”

Everyone was looking at Dan for the answer, and he paused to preen an omniscient smile. “No, man. I heard he’s got, like, this house right close to the Wall. It’s trashed but there’s a screen in there works just fine.”

“Come on,” Adam struck with impatience from the other side of the fire, suddenly descended from the ledge. He seemed indifferent to the rain as if disconnected from it, the reality he occupied phased two inches to the left of this one. The broad man jerked his head before simply walking beyond the reach of the fire’s light, leaving them to follow.

The landscape was elbows and knees, savage hills compared to the rolling swells of the South. Hard black shrubs mottled the sides, their crowns like old brush heads dipped in yellow ochre. Blue shadows slid across it all as the clouds drove on. Only one structure was visible atop the serrated landscape, the graffiti on its side glowing beneath the moon.

MERRY CRISIS AND A HORRIFIC NEW YEAR

Between two windows, the cheery silver words had made the Dogs smile as they filed inside. The windows looking out to the South were open wide, shivering the pointed bookmarks along the length and breadth of the bookcases. It was raining when the last member arrived, and Adam pulled the hinged glass closed when the ledges began to bristle with water.

The furniture in the living room was not usually pointed at the television, and the Dogs began dragging and twisting without instruction to create an auditorium. There was no hesitation in disrupting the order of the room, as there wasn't any. The House looked abandoned aside from the man living in it. Adam lingered by the window until they were done, smoking and watching the grey curls cringe away from the glass. One hand went to the case in his pocket, easily confused with a cigarette case were it not for its lightness. He opened it within the confines of his clothes as he pressed the cigarette into the ruined wall, underlining words that had been crossed out in desperate red lashes.

There was a chair left for him but Adam stood, casting a lazy eye over the figures sat, slumped and leaning about the room. At the back, Ellis ran blind fingers through Degas's fur and didn't smile. It was like the animal had never been away.

Comfortable silence reigned.

Coming to stand beside the mounted flatscreen, Adam spoke towards the dog. "Merry Christmas."

A ripple of polite, grainy laughter. Only Degas wasn't looking at Adam, smacking his lips as he adjusted his hind legs beneath himself. With a sigh, he rested the flat of his head against the petting man's thigh and swivelled his ears.

"This was recorded last week," Adam went on, holding up the silver disk between thumb and forefinger. Green and orange streaks played across its surface when he pushed it into the side of the screen. "We might not need the real one. The carriage is barely salvageable."

No articulate words this time but the series of murmurs and frowns conveyed meaning well enough. The Dogs had been expecting a mock-up prior to obtaining subjects for the real thing, but their surprise now that this was perhaps to be it was not a gateway to disappointment. They straightened, jostled to see better and finally stilled when the screen winked to life with a hushing whine. From atop the bookcases surrounding the room, a loud buzz snapped into being with enough force to make Degas whine and retreat into the hallway on clacking paws.

The camera was mounted by the ceiling at one end of a train carriage. The carriage itself was old fashioned, with sleek panels and chairs that looked like cherry wood upholstered with deep red fabric. Lining the sides of the long carriage were slivers of daylight against smeared windows, but the angle did not afford a location or a clue. Cavernous and seeming to extend and warble on the screen through its sheer stillness, the carriage waited. The screen waited.

After four minutes the sliding door to the right opened and a low, stooped creature moved inside, led by a stiff pole that pushed at it from behind. With a twist and a click the collar unfastened, allowing the small bear to unfurl onto its hind legs and sniff the air uneasily. Its square paws hung at its sides, swinging forward and

down when a second animal was pushed inside. They coughed a growl at one another, scuffling to back themselves against opposite ends of the carriage. Rearing to press their paws against the walls and maul at the chairs, they did not pay attention to the other two bears that entered until the door slammed shut and trapped them together. There was barely enough room for them all in the aisle and on the seats. Resounding finality made them bristle, rocking their bulk and twitching thick lips back to bare their teeth at one another and nothing.

The camera remained painfully static as a further two minutes dragged by. There were no voices or sounds coming from outside the carriage, though the Dogs could see that the bears were tracking and reacting to something passing the windows. Bought from a closing zoo, they were used to manmade confinement and quickly settled again. Their reaction when the train began to move, shafts of light and shadow crossing the windows, was underwhelming.

Watching in professional silence, the Dogs waited without stirring as the bears sniffed and explored, the cacophony of metal rattles, animal grunts and the underlying buzz squeezing the air around them. No one but Adam noticed Degas moving upstairs in a fast lope to curl against the scorched office door that had been boarded shut.

When the *shunt-shunt-clack* that he had been counting down to came, Adam needlessly scanned the assembly to make sure that everyone was watching. It was clear that none of them knew what to expect. The first whines of blades and mechanisations stirred from the speakers. Upstairs, muffled, Degas howled.

It did not happen slowly or cleanly.

From between and beneath each chair, the circular saws that had been housed out of sight arced out into view, catching one animal in a shriek of meat and fur before they flipped onto a horizontal plane. All four bears lunged back onto their hind legs, roaring in earnest and staggering to keep clear, uprooting tables and shredding the opulent furnishings. The bleeding animal had put its back to the far left corner of the carriage and was slamming its paw into the unyielding wall.

The saws vibrated and extended further, the struts hinged in the middle to scissor the blades atop and beneath one another on a tight, restrained arc. Degas could not be heard scratching the floor over the noise from the speakers. Seconds later, he could not be heard howling in high, guttered yelps as he paced the landing at a run.

Adam hadn't thought that animals could scream until he had watched the disc, and even now it sounded so human and terrible that he leant his back against the bookshelves to cover his itching spine. The windows rattled with a pressure they all felt curdle in their chests when the first of the bears finally died, loud, sprayed and unrecognizable.

Adam watched the screen reflected in the Dog's faces as flashes of light across their eyes. Their suppressed twitches became less subtle as the film droned on.

Of the remaining animals, the largest lurched through the swinging saws on ragged stumps that finally gave just beneath and before the camera. Its belly was cleaved into thick flaps as it struggled to stand, throat hoarse and eyes wide and drunk. The room flinched back when the creature lunged upwards, finding the camera with its snout and one dumb eye. The screen misted with its breath and flecks of red.

It had to be seen to be absorbed, though the sounds were as potent as the images. The room seemed to suddenly smell of sweat and fur and death. Degas whined into the skirting board, quieter than the static. The film stopped on a still of the aftermath, resisting the fade to black.

"The carriage was wrecked, but the recording equipment was intact." Adam dropped his arms and took a step forward. The motion was enough to draw their attention to him, and he nodded back to the screen. "I think this is effective enough for training purposes."

Murmurs of agreement were absent but felt. Ellis sat forward on the sofa and raised his hand. “What about the Southies?”

The plan had been to film something that would function as an act of terrorism in itself. Recording it for training purposes had come as an afterthought. “We’ll make them something else. This is going to be just for us.”

“Some of the kids are going to shit themselves when they see this.”

“Good,” Adam barked, dismissing the unease in the lone voice that could poison the room. “Think of what they’ll be capable of when they’ve seen it so often that they don’t.”

“We’re still going to do something, though, yeah? ‘Cause of the Nursery?”

“It’s being worked on. All of the sects are contributing.”

Ellis rubbed the bridge of his nose with his knuckles. “How many are there now?”

Adam began a short pace in front of them, hands meeting behind his back. It was a professional façade, and never failed to marshal them. “Eight, scattered about and expanding. In a few weeks the manifesto will be released to govern everyone.”

“It’s nearly finished?”

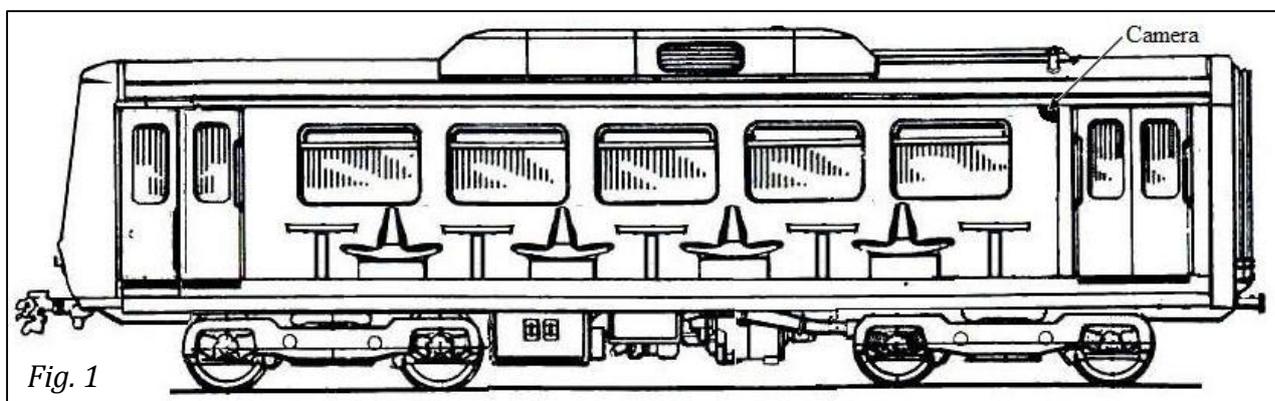
Adam’s eyes turned to the walls, throbbing with letters. The House was full of them now, and there were fewer edits being made every day. He’d transcribed it all for printing, washing over and rewriting the sections that had found room to ferment and intensify. In the corner, where he’d found the bears and the carriage, he could already see the words shifting.

“Almost finished, yes.”

WHAT IS done out OF love always takes
place between good and evil.
Nietzsche (1886)

The Desert of the Real: Carriage 1 and Carriage 2

A Technical Analysis

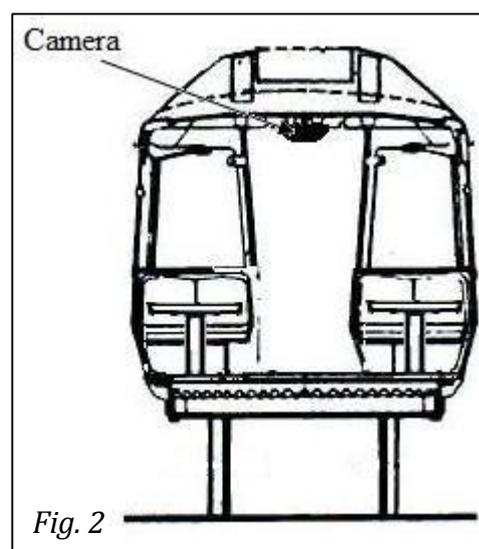


Both of the anonymously-produced short films *Carriage 1* and *Carriage 2* are identically framed, with the only significant difference that of the figures killed in the Orient-Express “Northern Belle” train carriage by the sequenced mechanised saws: *Carriage 1* uses four American black bears, whilst *Carriage 2* shows seven adult humans with symptoms of dementia. In both, the cause-effect narrative engine of cinema becomes subordinate to violent spectacle.

Of particular note is the neutral sparseness of any cinematic devices. Both films are composed of a single long take, lacking segmentation into digestible sequences indicated by cuts, fades and other cinematic devices. The restricted shot is also fixed, resisting movement for more dynamic perspectives and rendering the viewer an impotent observer, unguided as to how to feel or with whom to align. There are no low angle shots to attribute intimidating power, nor equal-level close-ups to create empathy. Lacking in such basic cinematic elements, the films are a test of endurance in their neutral cinematography in addition to their viscerally violent content.

The framing is such that almost all of the carriage (except for a small area beneath the camera mount) is visible, with off-screen space as mysterious to us as it is to the characters locked inside (*Fig 1*). Externally lit, the frosted windows give only the barest impression of moving shadows outside, and the most we see of these external figures are their guiding hands at the doorway.

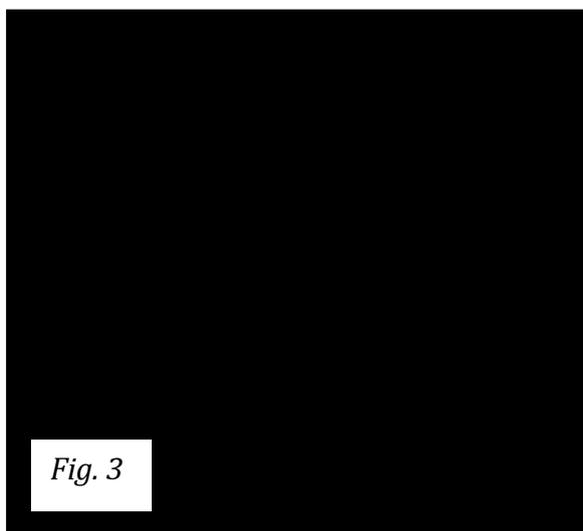
As in a typical, denaturalising surveillance shot, the ossified camera is positioned high and canted forward to give the best overall view down the length of the carriage interior rather than a series of aesthetically engaging and subjective shots (*Fig 2*). The presence of the camera goes unrealised by those it is recording, with the exception of one staggering bear at the end of *Carriage 1*, rendering the viewer an all-seeing voyeur. Finally, the automated cleaning of the blood from the lens in *Carriage 2*



cements the sense that this is an unblinking, unsympathetic eye – surveillance at its most indifferent.

For the first four and one-and-a-half minutes, respectively, both films present the same shot as a still image. Whilst we wait for an event to disturb the scene, the mise-en-scene guides our attention down the length of the carriage through its central aisle, and then back in a circuit of its opaque windows, highlighting the tightly closed space. The eye orbits, unable to escape, and suspense builds as we wait for something to happen. Neither film provides a clue to the elaborate butchery that will take place, and the still image endures for so long that the viewer is left wondering if something is wrong. Finally, the motion of the “motion picture” begins, and it becomes clear that *of course something is wrong*.

This lack of narrative or character focus continues with the appearance of the figures, none of whom are centrally framed, thus leaving one’s eye to move erratically from one to another around the shot. When the saws appear, though their movements are programmed, the spray of viscera is random and wild. Without focus or purpose, the scene is one of visual anarchy (*Fig 3*).



For the viewer, suspense is generated from the anxiety of not knowing what is to come, and the withheld answer provides a path to pleasure. This is, in essence, the pleasure of suspense, as suggested by Freud’s cognitivist theory (1926). More simply, pleasure is the cessation of unpleasure – here, of knowing what was lying in wait all along. Watching these films in sequence, *Carriage 1* relies on building un-pleasure through the monotony of a long static shot, with the awaited activity then defying all possible expectation. The period

between the surreal appearance of the bears and their elaborate deaths is two minutes. *Carriage 2* presents a shorter lead-in period before delivering the subjects. It then leaves a longer period of six minutes between their entry into the carriage and the appearance of the saws. The viewer’s suspense is in waiting for the mechanical sounds that cue the reveal of the implements and the violent visual spectacle.

Authenticity brings a particular potency to the films, with no digital enhancements or manipulations to the location and events. All sound is diegetic, and the volume levels suggest that the sound of the saws and the moving carriage are not exaggerated but represented accurately. The carriage interior of natural wood furnishings and traditional déco is a striking counterpoint to the technology of the Kafka-esque mechanisms of torture, similar to the elaborate machine used to inscribe pain upon the body in *The Penal Colony* (Kafka, 1919).

Lighting in the films is made to look natural within the space of the carriage, with side-lighting on both sides strong enough to eliminate prominent shadows without the need for frontal and fill lighting, which would soften the shadows in the scene. This creates a low contrast between brighter and darker

areas inside the carriage whilst also obfuscating the outside figures. Film lighting serves a greater purpose than a simple illumination of a scene to allow us to see the action – it affects our sense of shape and texture. In the *Carriage* films the lighting accentuates the texture of the viscera, its viscosity against the soft furnishings and its slickness against the bright glass.

On the spectrum of objectivity and subjectivity, both *Carriage 1* and *Carriage 2* are positioned towards extreme impartiality. We are given no access beyond impassive, unframed recording of what the characters, both within and outside the carriage, feel or think. This impersonal, restricted non-character narration creates suspense in the initial inactive period, a merciless window of horror in the film's climax, and finally engages curiosity about the events that led up to this event and the characters outside the carriage who feed living bodies into it.

These short films, produced in an attempt to desensitise viewers to graphic violence, are perhaps successful because they do not make the visceral scene spectacular through traditional cinematic techniques. Instead, the camera functions to distance the events from feeling like traditional narrative and character based entertainment. They are also real, without performers, props or special effects to mimic torture and death, and this brings another kind of brutality to the lurid pieces. Fictional spectacles of graphic violence, where no one is actually harmed or killed during the elaborate destruction of the body, is a shallow form with no purpose other than to titillate. Real violence is another animal entirely.

Adam led them alongside the Wall into the barren undulating fields that were rarely patrolled, following the same invisible path that Lee had been taking to the House. The Dogs walked in clusters of threes and fours, all twelve of them periodically craning their necks to look up at the tangled graffiti and metal. When they reached the lowest dip, the graffiti continued on unbroken up the next rise and out of sight. The bright canvas that had broken through the black scrawl was overpowered. Lee saw that the House had darkened and turned somehow churlish in the few hours since he'd left.

Adam used a key to unlock the front door, then stood aside to usher everyone inside. Lee followed in last, studying the landscape to confirm that this was the same House that he and Sal had been moving in and out of freely. He schooled his features to hide his familiarity, looking around with cartoonish interest when he rejoined the rest in the living room. The House was in the same state of cold wreckage as it had been when he'd first come inside with Sal. Acutely aware of the identical layout of broken books and eviscerated furnishings, he recognized the tinny ringing that he could hear as the chime in the kitchen. There was no sign of Degas.

The furniture in the living room was already arranged to point at the flatscreen, including end tables and low cabinets which were now being sat on. Adam phased through the pack to stand by the screen, putting the disc in without ceremony whilst everyone settled. Sitting where the phone had been, Lee glanced to the sofa to see if the remote controller would be volunteered, but Adam was already manually setting up the screen from its side. An ascending whine from the speakers hushed the room.

“This recording was taken from over the Wall two decades ago.” The film went straight into itself, and Adam paused it on the image of an empty train carriage. “The Southies made it to condition boys just like you to maim, rape and kill. It's from when they were still an underground militia, before they became sanctioned. We don't know what films they're showing now.”

Adam did not sit with them after pressing *play*, moving to stand against the windows with folded arms and a roaming gaze. The volume was set too high and crackled with age like an old fire, vibrating behind the sounds of people coming into the carriage on screen. Lee knew before they had begun to move that something was terribly wrong with them.

The men and women, none younger than fifty, were stooped as if something like intelligence or coherency could be physically stolen from their posture. A woman so thin there was a chasm between her thighs bounced on her socked feet, hands worming together against her left side. Bedraggled men and women whose bodies had either slumped outwards or eaten themselves were helped anonymously hand by hand, wrist by trembling wrist, up the shallow steps into the carriage. The first man who came inside shuffled to the bottom left corner of the frame, scratching the wall and murmuring words that didn't follow to console himself. Another sat down in a rich cushion as if waiting to die. Seven in all, drifting in toe-dragging half-steps, pulling at the fixtures and gabbering at one another.

Lee leaned away from the screen, peripherally saw that Adam was watching them. Nothing happened for long minutes, then everyone rocked as the carriage pulled forwards. Shadows passed the covered windows at an accelerating rate. An electric whine rose within the carriage, unnoticed by its occupants. Dread swelled in Lee's stomach and he curled his fists against the muscles, shying his gaze. Adam was a pressure on his back and in his ear, hot and intense. “You will watch.” It felt like it had only been spoken to him.

The screen engulfed him, stranded him as the only spectator by trapping him in a narrow space between his deafening breathing and the terrible lunatics. Terrible because the saws had appeared – silver fins rising from between the seats and out of the walls. If Adam’s voice had been anything less than thunder across a wet valley he’d have looked away, but the resounding echo of the command riveted his eyes. Lanced through his temples. Turned his saliva sour.

Animals would have reacted better than this, fought to escape the saws in some way. The seven stumbled into them, mouths in rotted-tooth ovals that moaned and screamed as they spun against the blades and each other. Flesh married flesh. Arterial sprays arced so high it was comical. The interior of the carriage became a living thing’s organ, wet and twitching as a singular red thing. They sobbed like babies. Sobbed torn apart with as much pitiful fervour as they had when they’d hidden and sobbed against a wall in the care home, grieving some glimmer of the past. Lee didn’t know bodies could move this way. Hadn’t been prepared for the physics of forcefully cleaved limbs and spiralling viscera.

When the camera lens was spattered, a dribble of water thinned the gore before it was sharply ushered aside by a vertical wiper blade. Somehow Lee knew that that hadn’t been automated. It made the stillness of the camera worse – its refusal to recoil in horror or pan and zoom with prurient interest. A horrifyingly boring shot.

The saws cycled back after everyone was dead, withdrawing at the same sedate speed with which they had emerged. Lee didn’t feel sick as the image endured, minute after minute of watching the flesh slide as they emptied of blood in torrents. After ten minutes the screen turned black and Lee didn’t know what he felt. He just wanted to go home, but Adam was already wheeling out the tattooing kit from the kitchen. It was the impetus for solemn congratulations around him. Dan squeezed his shoulder briefly with a relieved, joyous sigh.

Leaving the trolley of needles and inks against the wall, Adam took up the television remote from one of the bookcases. They would watch it again and again, until everyone was collared.

The House and the Uncanny

The House is the focal point of the abjection in *Closer to Home*. It is the birthplace of the Dogs and their violent acts, as well as Adam's headquarters and Cissy's temporary respite. Significantly, it is the central point of the supernatural happenings that take place in the novel, and its unstable state radiates throughout the text.

This notion of a central place in time or space, a "chronotope" (a literary expression coined by Mikhail Bakhtin, in which the spatial and temporal axes are intertwined (quoted Rothberg, 2000: 21)) of trauma casting a ripple effect outwards into the world, bringing about a paradigm shift wherein nothing (could, or even *should*) be the same, arose from a study of the Holocaust and its representation in literature and film. Recurring textually in autobiographical, fictional and purely historical accounts was the sense that the atrocities of the Holocaust, expansive and unimaginable in their varied horrors, were a complete break from reality.

It is almost as if violent events – perceived as aberrations or ruptures in the cultural continuum – demand their retelling, their narration, back into traditions and structures they would otherwise defy. For upon entering narrative, violent events necessarily reenter the continuum, are totalized by it, and thus seem to lose their "violent" quality. Inasmuch as violence is "resolved" in narrative, the violent event seems also to lose its particularity – i.e., its facthood – once it is written.

(Young, 1988: 15)

I began an intensive study of the Holocaust in March 2010 to continue an ongoing investigation into the bleak extremes of human behaviour and how they are conveyed textually. Formally, it was vital to look at texts that explored and criticised fictionalisation and representations of the Holocaust as they reflect upon ethics, aesthetics and hermeneutics.

Writing Journal – July 15th 2010

Had a story information dump on my drive home from seeing Blood Brothers at work. Handy, that, since I've had writer's constipation for about a month.

Adam is a spectre – think Silas from The Graveyard Book

He is the spirit that writes in the House. House is a chasm. Fallout from all the hatred, rage and grief that filled the Wall as it was slowly built in sections out of whatever was to hand.

Superstitious happenings are the fallout from all this violence and pain.

This period aided me in articulating my own beliefs as a writer of trauma and violence, raising critical and creative considerations that I ought to actively be aware of.

The horrendous violence that has brought about a rift in the fabric of reality is only alluded to in flashbacks in *Closer to Home*, most notably at the Nursery (2-5). This rift finds its focal point in the House as the birthplace of the Dogs, its troubling of time and space echoing outwards into the pages of the text. The shifting House entered early drafts in July 2010. Initially, the House was only intended to project an unsettling aura, with meticulous writing covering its walls but otherwise standing

grey and still.

Until I was seven years old, my family lived abroad following my father's postings in the Army. Whilst we were living in Germany, we visited Dachau, the first concentration camp to be opened in Germany. I was five or six at the time and have no memory of seeing the camp, and only saw the photographs my parents had taken when I was learning about World War Two at school. Whilst going through the handful of pictures, I remember, quite vividly, Mum telling me how eerily quiet the camp had been. She said that birds didn't fly over it, as if birdsong, the sounds of life, would be obscene. Though this is not true, the metaphor captures the atmosphere of what remains of the camps.

Rats are the only animal that live and move beneath the House, and know when to flee its terrible power (161). Though Degas is discovered and lives in the House, he occupies the same distorted place in reality as Moth. At the point when the strangeness of the House is introduced, so many other elements of magical realism have been laid down that it is accepted as a fairly conventional supernatural happening.

As writing continued, it seemed natural for the House to transform from derelict building to a more welcoming "home" depending on who entered it. The sense of it having a life beyond an aura of disturbance developed rapidly. By August 2010, the House was haunted and a character in its own right. Structurally familiar and preternaturally strange, it induces a cognitive dissonance in the characters and the text that is Uncanny.

Sigmund Freud's essay (1919) on *das Unheimliche* (translated as "unhomely") expands upon and criticises fellow psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch's (1906) theories of the uncanny as arising from intellectual uncertainty, wherein the less is understood about a familiar object the more repellent it becomes. In *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992), Vidler states that "the uncanny" as a concept has found its metaphorical home in architecture – particularly in the house, 'haunted or not, that pretends to afford the utmost security while opening itself to the secret intrusion of terror' (11).

Houses also hold the curious position of being an inanimate structure with a living "soul" as reflected by their occupants. They are imbued with history and life from the people who pass through and live with them. Devoid of people, their empty husk has no living purpose. Artist Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993), a complete concrete cast of the interior of a Victorian terraced house, is an extreme of *Unheimliche*, resisting occupancy completely through solidifying its habitable space. Sinclair remarks that '*House* repelled those who were most closely associated with it. The achieved work was anonymous - it didn't feel like a "Rachel Whiteread". It had developed its own agenda, an urge towards obliteration, forgetfulness' (1995: 27).

Homes are transient – outliving their occupants and seeing different uses throughout their lifetime. A home transforms with its environment, with the socio-political climate, and continues to fit in with its surroundings because of these changes. If a domicile remains unchanged over decades, it becomes a

'When we walked around to the side of the house facing the Allens', we saw that the wall was still in the process of changing. The salmon pink had darkened and the stucco was pronouncing itself more forcefully in wheeling patterns that were suddenly appearing everywhere. The writer whispered to me: the house is turning into the one you grew up in.'

(Ellis, 2005: 304)

conspicuous and disturbing relic of the past. The home bows to trends and reflects the culturally-informed designs and wants of their occupants. In this text, the transforming House reflects two sets of occupants simultaneously – Adam, the man stuck in the past, and Lee the contemporary youth.

Texts and films about haunted houses build on the readily acceptable belief that spaces are emotionally charged. Specifically, spaces that are themselves “haunted” as opposed to being influenced by a haunting spirit, such as the ghost Beloved in Toni Morrison’s novel of the same name (1987). Returned from filicide by her mother Sethe so as not to be recaptured by a slave owner, Beloved occupies Sethe’s home at 124 Bluestone Road and later appears as a revenant. The novel opens: ‘124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom’ (3). Once the spirit is finally exorcised, 124 returns to normal.

Michel Foucault proposed that space ‘is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power’ (1984: 253). “Space” in this regard is not a physical space but a lived, qualitative space: produced by the experience of the space, and invested with accumulated memories and meanings which affect future interactions. Dewey argues that in experience, space ‘becomes something more than a void in which to roam about, dotted here and there with dangerous things and things that satisfy the appetite. It becomes a comprehensive and enclosed scene within which are ordered the multiplicity of doings and undergoings [sic] which man engages’ (1981: 544).

A house ought to be a space that is both familiar and finite. In Mark Danielewski’s first novel, a labyrinth erupts within the family home intended to mark the start of a new life for the Navidson family. A hefty, typographically diverse text, *House of Leaves* (2000) is an academic-cum-biographical report about a physically impossible house, whose shifting and seemingly infinite interior becomes a point of obsession for documentary filmmaker Will Navidson. Its story is achieved not through the parsing and disambiguation of information but, rather, through sustained ambiguity and information excess. Footnote 75 (64-6), for example, lists over three hundred genuine photographers whose images are used in the referenced *Images of Dark* by Liza Speen, a book that does not exist; and there is a prolonged section of densely arranged lists, prose, and quotes - fictitious and real, all printed sideways, upside down, in squares, and in columns (120-147).

The title leads us to read the book as a house, the medium of representation haunted by its labyrinthian nature (Christiansen, 2001: 131). In this respect, Danielewski’s adoption of the labyrinthine addresses Jorge Borges’ synonymy of text and labyrinth, which forms the crux of the short story *The Garden of Forking*

‘The house is itself, first and foremost, a system of representation. Indeed, the traditional sense of the haunting of a house is precisely the sense that the house is not simply an object that may be represented, but is itself a mechanism of representation. Likewise, it can be argued that contemporary systems of representation can only be understood as haunted inasmuch as, like the house, they are understood to be mechanisms that define space. By definition, only space can be haunted, and space is understood as that which houses. After all, the word ‘haunting’ is etymologically bound to that of ‘house.’ Haunting is always the haunting of a house. And it is not just that some houses are haunted. A house is only a house inasmuch as it is haunted.’

(Wigley, 1993: 163)

Paths (1958, 1970): 'I am withdrawing to write a book. And another time: I am withdrawing to construct a labyrinth. Everyone imagined two works; to no one did it occur that the book and the maze were one and the same thing' (5. Original emphasis).

Like the **house**, the House of *Closer to Home* is haunted, though its horrors are humanly generated and viscerally based as opposed to being generated by an ever-growing spatial "queerness" (strange or odd from a conventional viewpoint; not feeling physically right or well) that engulfs its inhabitants. The **house** is not threatening or directly menacing towards the Navidsons, but its impossible dimensions and shifting spaces destroy 'any sense of security or well-being' (Danielewski: 28). In its most dramatic extension, the **house's** labyrinth spreads downwards into depths which exceed the distance to the Earth's core, and though far from this magnitude, House also opens up its bowels to exploration and the descent into further horror for its inhabitants (See: *Joy in the Words*: 145-154).

House of Leaves was ten years in the making and demonstrates boldly experimental choices in form, such as intricate and multi-layered narratives, typographical variation, and inconsistently elaborate page layouts. This heavily visual style absorbs the reader in the text, trapping them through its mazelike content that they are forced to traverse. The novel is one that constantly challenges what a novel is, and what the form can do. Repeatedly, the reader is confronted with a forked turning in the textual labyrinth – invited to follow the new footnote or continue on from this point. There is no indication as to which is the "correct" path, and sometimes, the footnote simply leads back to the original fork in the road through convoluted means. The book is the reader's substitute for the **house**, its uncanny dislocations projected outwards as textual dislocations. It is uncannily alive in the reader's hands, having to be turned and flipped and held up to mirrors to be read in its entirety.

With the redefinition of literature as something that only exists meaningfully in the mind of the reader, with the redefinition of the literary work as a catalyst of mental events, comes a concurrent redefinition of the reader. No longer is the reader a passive recipient of those ideas that an author has planted in a text.

(Murfin, 1993: 271)

Writing Journal – October 23rd 2009

The book is extremely protective of Anna and deeply angered by the things that Mark does to her, the harm he brings. Mark's wife, Jen, suffers a brain blood clot and is left in a similar state to how Anna began. Book references the description in a medical text, demonstrating its knowledge of what has happened though Mark doesn't understand it. The book hopes that now Mark will stop mistreating Anna as it doesn't feel that what can be written can be unwritten, so only her future can be improved. Mark wonders and begins to fear that he has done this. By thinking of it and applying it, did he bring it about?

There is also a constant challenge to the reality that the text inhabits against the reality the reader inhabits as Danielewski alternately refers to existing scientific material as well as fictitious references (See: *The Desert of the Real: Carriage 1 and Carriage 1*: 96-99). This self-reflexive mode is announced in the first chapter: 'Numerous professors have made *The Navidson Record* required viewing for their seminars, while

many universities already claim that dozens of students from a variety of departments have completed doctoral dissertations on the film' (6).

Danielewski's text generates a fear of the unknown in the reader in its very substance as well as in the traditional tropes of horror in its narrative, such as unidentified noises, enveloping darkness and mazes one can become lost in forever. It constantly throws out dead ends, trick pathways and misleading footnotes to offset any linear reading. In multiple chapters it massively slows or accelerates reading speed through a cacophony of text boxes or isolated sentences, even individual words on single pages. *Closer to Home* performs similar formatting tricks with graphic interruptions that change the formatting of the text, accelerating and decelerating the reading pace to force either a fast read or a slow, cumbersome negotiation of the text (See: *Cissy and Jon: Last: 108-117*).

I conceived the idea that the artefact that would become *Closer to Home* was 'alive' in the same way as the House is in October 2009. Interrupting footnotes would change the meaning of the text to protect Anna, the protagonist of *Wayward South* (October 1st 2009 – September 9th 2010), the draft later absorbed into *Closer to Home* until the only allusions to it that remained were in six text boxes (83). The Book (as the living "spirit" of the manuscript was titled, then) was aware that it was changing the author, Mark, and that the act of writing was not simply a process of creation, but one of re-digesting all experience and knowledge gathered so far, resulting in a metamorphosis of the author.

Though *Wayward South* was overhauled before the draft of graphic disturbance was written, it was planned that the living artefact would borrow from other printed media to offer explanations, alternative readings or, sometimes, simply to obscure what it doesn't want to be read (August 2010). In an attempt to maintain its own integrity and Anna's life, the Book influenced the text's direction and development, steadily driving Mark insane.

Closer to Home surpassed the graphic elements that had been planned in drafting notes, the structural inconsistencies and graphic playfulness escalating dramatically in their departure from traditional prose as soon as they were approved (Supervisor Meeting: August 3rd 2011). These spatial constructions highlight the materiality of the book, making the object itself an integral part of the story as opposed to a transparent means for the reader to access it. Whitespace, typespace and colour show the pages in their entirety, bracketing and invading the prose that the book has been created to present (See: *A Graphic Analysis: 180-207*). For example, (15) is a mirroring of the following page, as if the paper has become transparent to give a foreboding preview of the content Moth is trying to obfuscate and prevent the reader from seeing.

Finally, in a close analysis of one of the exploration chapters of the novel within the framework of the prevailing psycho-analytical theories of the uncanny, Nele Bemong (2003) speculates that the labyrinth that develops in the [house](#), 'the terrifying dark hallways', are a psychological projection of fear (8). As part of an ongoing exploration of contemporary architecture and the uncanny, Anthony Vidler states that:

the "uncanny" is not a property of the space itself nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial confirmation; it is, in its

aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming.'

(11, quoted Bemong: 8)

The House and the unstoppable writing that spreads across its walls overwhelms Adam, his behaviour becoming erratic and desperate as he succumbs to a disastrous spiral of psychosis so extreme that it disrupts the physical page. This narrative and stylistic decline represents, articulates and explores my own anxiety of being overrun by madness. This realization came to me in the same instant (September 9th 2010) as the new title did, as if it were a bubble that had finally breached the surface into awareness. I had already made the connection between my younger brother's Autism and the feelings of anxiety I grew up with (See: *In Closing*: 212), which in turn have translated into explorations of the threat of suffering towards the vulnerable in fiction.

Seeing, quite helplessly with the rest of my family, my grandfather's condition with Alzheimer's worsened as the disease progressed has had a massive influence on this text. The illness consumed us as well as him: it became everything we talked about. This text has been a cathartic release, a means to try to understand my thoughts and feelings, and has led to the discovery of pre-existing connections between my family and the nature of my writing.

The reader is made aware of the material nature of the book as a piece of technology, a medium of conveying ordinary text on whitespace that has not be interfered with, to full-page comic panels where text is subordinate to image (164-179). It is not merely a material object where text has been inscribed. In places, text itself is used as a performing spatial object, with meaning in location and shape as opposed to the linguistic meanings of the words alone.

As the sexual and physical violence escalates within the prose, the text disintegrates, instigating disorientation, vertigo and claustrophobia. Blank spaces offer a vista beyond the page, a breathing space for the reader from the *horror vacui*.

But only temporarily.

'[B]ooks don't have to be so limited. They can intensify informational content and experience. Multiple stories can lie side by side on the page... Passages may be found, studied, revisited, or even skimmed. And that's just the beginning. Words can also be colored [sic] and those colors [sic] can have meaning. How quickly pages are turned or not turned can be addressed. Hell pages can be tilted, turned upside down, even read backwards... But here's the joke. Books have had this capability all along... Books are remarkable constructions with enormous possibilities... And you can carry this magical creation with you, write in it, and never need to hunt down conversion software to find out what you wrote and read years ago. But somehow the analogue powers of these wonderful bundles of paper have been forgotten. Somewhere along the way, all its possibilities were denied'

(Danielewski in Cottrell: 2000)





It was the last client of the night and the notes thickened. The amount was frightening, and Cissy shrunk on the bed even though she knew it was all about her. John was paying Muma extra to give Cissy his undivided attentions. Plural.

Thumbing the soft creases of the warm paper, Muma considered with her gaze on Cissy. Nothing like concern passed before she fixed her eyes back, but nothing about her face smiled. "The bathroom's next door. I'll be downstairs. Leave her here when you're done."

John didn't move for several seconds after the door shut, and then undid the buttons on his shirt cuffs with his back to the bed. To his right and against the wall, ring stains surrounding its legs, the empty chair consumed the child's attention. Moth hovered and darted in the small space between both figures, flimsy and erratic as if battered by winds.

While he undressed, Cissy reclined with stiff limbs and draped the backs of her hands on the pillow above her head. She made a point to stare at the ceiling, ignoring the man and Moth and the absence of Muma. Exhaling through her nose, feeling the air run warm across her lip, Cissy willed her body to fall pliant. Her joints fell hollow but pressure abruptly and rapidly bloomed low in her body. Quite suddenly she needed to go to the bathroom. She couldn't. As always it would have to wait, but John was staying for far longer than usual. There was so much now that Cissy knew that it would make it hurt. She squirmed beneath the bedding, opening her mouth but finding that she could only breathe.

Moth drifted down and landed on her forehead, feathery antenna quivering with apologies. She flared her brows in a top-face smile to reassure it, which also served to loosen the knot in her stomach pressing above the balloon of water. This would pass and things would go back to normal. Moth stilled, listening. The clock would be reset until next time, with school and friends and Lee in between. It would be okay.

John was naked [REDACTED] but not erect. When he lifted the layers of covers to get in, Cissy twisted aside on the bed to make room and put her hands on him. The sooner they began the sooner she could go to the bathroom. She cradled the softest, warmest part of the man in both hands, curling her chin down into her chest when he engulfed her shoulder in his fingers. He breathed in through her hair, kissed her scalp. Cissy shut her eyes and concentrated on manipulating her fingers around wiry hair and supple wrinkles, pushing the need to pee far back.

Moth was gone. It was usually still here at this point.

After a few minutes of silent and minute motions, Cissy began to swallow repeatedly. She couldn't make him hard and had run out of the gestures and insistent fondles that would always get things started. It was an alien thing in her hands, hot but dead. Withdrawing slowly, Cissy swallowed and ultimately bent her body like a bow to bring their hips flush, her ear against his chest. [REDACTED]

"Do you need to take a vite-a-man?" she asked his heart.

John gave an exaggerated shiver of a silent laugh, his arm tightening across her back. He pushed his other hand beneath her head to cradle her face, his elbow trapped folded between them. "No, I don't need anything like that."

Cissy frowned, unseen, and said nothing. After a minute of absently doodling her fingers amidst his chest hairs, she took a breath and laid a decisive peck of a kiss beneath his sternum. She needed the bathroom and couldn't wait much longer. Trailing bones and blood, she mouthed up John's body with noisy exhales through her nose, squirming up between his hands towards his throat, round chin and cool mouth framed with stubble. He hummed a throaty note, parting his lips but making no move to capture or otherwise interfere with her mouth.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The room was turning cold and John pulled the covers up in a bunched fist behind her head, hooking a leg over her hip. Cissy stiffened at the surge of pressure the cocooning caused, pressing her thighs together and moving her mouth against his mouth with keen enthusiasm. Finally he kissed back, allowing his tongue to be drawn into her small mouth. She chirped a moan against his palate and rocked her body firmly, insistently into his. Her hands tripped upwards and eventually met at the back of his head, tugging gently at his hair in parodic passion.

It became a presence against her thighs, impossibly hotter now and twitching stiffly with interest. She eased her legs open with a coy certainty, flooded with relief. Just as she was about to slide atop and roll him onto his back, John drew back from her mouth and laid a chaste kiss against her forehead.

“Take it slow, baby,” he murmured. “We’ve got hours.”

The squirm was involuntary and borderline desperate. John noticed. “What’s the matter?”

Caught, embarrassed and suddenly shy, Cissy pressed her eyes between his soft pectorals and bunched her shoulders up to cover her neck. “eed the b’throom.”

There was a pause but then a chuckle, more genuine than the first in its soft vibration upwards from the core of his chest. It relaxed Cissy’s shoulders and made her smile a little to

herself. John made a gesture of letting her go, rolling away onto his back and resting a hand over his groin to keep the covers off of his erection. “Go on, then. I’ll be right here.”

With a grateful and uneven smile, Cissy slid backwards off the bed and jogged out with scampering-small steps, one hand darting to cup herself to hold it in. Briefly, in the hallway, she could hear the television droning, and then the bathroom door was shut and the only sounds were clicking pipes and running water. She watched her toes curl and uncurl at the ends of her feet, her legs that she thought too spindly dangling from the toilet seat.

Moth reappeared on her wrist, tickling the thin skin over her veins with its delicately hooked feet. Cissy gently prodded its back with a finger, flattening its brown wings in a slow pulse. Its antenna flicked, otherwise still, and when Cissy stopped it draped its proboscis out to touch her hand. She cocked her head at the kiss, perturbed by this concerned coddling from it all of a sudden. Moth only took off when she stood and turned on the hot water tap over the sink, letting it run.

Fumbling with the cracked soap bar that was larger than both her hands clasped together, Cissy sucked in and released her stomach experimentally and found the pressure was still there. It was the uncomfortable need to urinate but there was nothing left. After rinsing the small bubbles off her hands, she sat back on the toilet and concentrated on getting the last drops out. Nothing happened. Cissy felt a prick of panic. She had held a man whilst holding it before and it had turned a chemical burn into a sharp blade that hadn’t abated.

The toilet hadn’t flushed yet she reminded herself as her hands came together in front of her in an X, clasping upside down. John wouldn’t expect her back until after it had flushed, so she could wait to get the last drops out.

[REDACTED]

Moth paced sideways along the narrow ledge of the top of the mirror, wings twitching. Cissy climbed to kneel on the sides of the sink, bringing her eyes close to

its body and tracking it back and forth with her head. Her knees began to hurt and she shuffled back, her stomach tightening when she saw shapes in the moisture left by her breath on the mirror. Resting her hands flat against the wall, she sighed loudly towards the bright surface beneath the fog broken by the tops of letters.

STAY
HERE

The mirror quickly erased the letters, fading them back into the girl's reflection. She looked up to Moth and found it had stopped walking and now watched expectantly. The tilt of its antenna told her that it was equally surprised, which brought no comfort. She looked at the door, thought very seriously about going, but ultimately decided to breath again, close and deliberate.

SERIOUSLY
WAIT

Her eyes widened; she could see them when the fog around the letters shrunk back. She clambered down from the sink still watching the mirror, stepping backwards until her hand found the doorknob. Moth didn't follow but continued to watch the mirror. Cissy tried to deduce what it was thinking and ultimately took its interest as a sign of safety. Gingerly, she climbed back onto the sink.

Next door, John made a smudged sound through the wall but it fell silent on her ears. It took two faltered breaths before she managed one large enough to cover the written space of the mirror. Immediately she cringed back from it.

WON'T
TELL
YOU
AGAIN

Cissy swallowed, the joints in her hands paling and red pressure grooves deepening in her knees and shins. This time the condensation did not immediately fade, but shifted over the words and made a symbol.



It happened so suddenly that she fell back from the sink and landed in an angular pile on the floor. She did not cry, and automatically transformed her yelp into a whimper that could be interpreted in any number of ways. By the time she had scuffed backwards to press against the door, the moisture on the mirror had shrunk back to clear glass. Moth had vanished, and Cissy opened the door from behind to watch the mirror until the last possible moment.

The hallway felt normal, somehow cooler than the air in the bathroom had been. She heard the crooked springs in her bed move, the body lying atop them shifting with impatience. Muma would come up and check on them if she couldn't hear anything, and would doubtless give Cissy a hiding if found lurking in the hallway outside the bathroom. The thought was impetus enough for her to push aside the wet messages and return quickly to bed, leaping in with an exaggerated exuberance that made John grin.

“Ready?” she chirped, running her hands stiff-splayed over his chest as if wiping a window.

He hummed without opening his mouth, carrying the sound into a sigh when he pulled her against him. “Yes. Are you, baby girl?”

Cissy nodded quickly and shut her eyes, falling pliant as John gently arranged her. Indicative gestures guided her on her hands and knees towards the foot of the bed, her knuckles brushing the end board, and she bowed her back to present her rear properly. This wasn't a

common position – most Johns were too tall for this to work, and they usually wanted to see her. Hold her. Cradle her, in their way.

There was a rustle before a series of plastic clicks, and Cissy caught the sweet scent of lubricant being plunged out and applied. It wasn't a brand she recognized, but every John had their preference. Muma used to provide it but only the cheap one, and that had burned inside her as bad as if it wasn't there.

She felt him knock the top of her inner thigh, slicker and hotter than the rest of him, nudging and probing for his way in. Finally he caught and pushed, met the resistance they paid for, and sunk in so deep on the first stroke that Cissy's face contorted around her nose. John was in her stomach, her lungs, her heart – pushing all of her out of his way and then withdrawing slowly before setting a steady pace. Sagging her body into the slow pistoning, Cissy parted her lips to allow a rhythmic tune of staccato whines and gasps to fall out whilst she studied the darkness behind her eyes. She saw emerald green clouds blooming out of the black, swelling and contracting in time with the push and pull of the solid meat into her. Like a kaleidoscope the shades swirled and flickered, flecked at the edges with white as her eyes rolled further back.

He pulled out and then a moist digit with a short, blunt nail was pressing against her anus. It brought her abruptly back to herself. The thumb made a small circle, burning when the tip bit through and inside millimetres, miles.

The whine Cissy made, uncertain and disturbed, was genuine, but it did not stop John's ministrations. He sheathed himself and paused, then she heard the click of more lube coming into play. It was cold between her buttocks, making her twitch and tighten, John grunting an exhale in response.

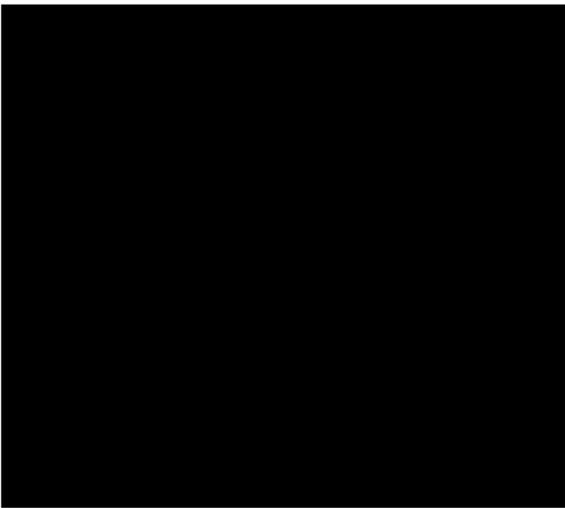
She pursed her lips tight and shook her head with childish vigour, though didn't tip her head over her shoulder or open her eyes. It was an emphatic *no*, and easier to deliver without seeing him.

John cupped the entirety of her jaw in one hand, his stomach muscles twitched as he held himself curled over her. Lifting her skull, he kissed her hair, said into her ear, "I'll go careful, baby."

Cissy squirmed when the digit slid out and then back, deeper this time. The hand on her jaw and chin trapped her against it, and when she opened her eyes her vision was filled with Moth's hysterical fluttering. She'd never seen it this crazed, and this close to her face she could feel the beat of air over the moisture on her eyes. Another sharp pain from behind, twisting now, and she caught a sob. "No. Not s'posed to."

He let go of her head to pick up the lubricant, spilling a generous amount of the cold gel into her cleft and rubbing it with his fingers. When she squirmed again, he shifted to trap her calves beneath his knees, ignoring her cry at the pressure. "Who says?"

Moth tore away and landed on the doorknob, circling it as if trying to open it through sheer force of will. Still shaking her head, Cissy tried to make her voice louder to overcome the room that was squeezing them together. "Muma-"



“Muma’s not here now.” Two fingers now, exploring and gradually hooking to stretch and pull. Every time her body jerked to get away, a spasm passed through the descending rings that made his erection twitch. “Just relax. It’ll feel just like your first time, only better.”

Cissy sucked her lip between her teeth so hard that it hurt, though it wasn’t enough to overcome the burning swelling in both her trapped legs and the white point where John’s hands worked. Black spots swam into her vision and it was hard to tell Moth apart from them. She sagged to her elbows, her cheek in the bent blankets, and felt a tear run into her ear. “Please don’t.”

He positioned himself against the pink and oily knot, watching how the head of his nudging penis dented as if he were pushing against a wall. “Hush, little one. It’ll go easy if you’re quiet,” John murmured, shifting his weight across her pinned legs and tickling his fingers down her sides. “Just relax.”

Twisting to look back at him, Cissy hid nothing. “No, I want-”

Thunder up the stairs, Muma in the doorway, and John clawing at her hips and jerking her body into his stomach.

Staring back defiant and daring her to make him stop before he was finished.

Accelerating his pace to get there before she had time to.

Cissy making noises that nothing could imitate or fake.

Muma's face pulled naked, freezing her at the door until Cissy screamed again and then she staggered back as if shot.

Into Lee, already white faced with red rimming his eyes.

Muma picked up the chair in one hand and flung it aimlessly into the room, cracking it against the door. Cissy covered her head with both arms and howled.

John shuddered, jerked in on himself with a wide stare, and finally pulled away from the small body. The child collapsed off the far side of the bed and dragged herself underneath, sobbing and holding her hands out to Moth who had been waiting. It vanished into her palms, fluttering to caress the creases.

Breaking from his stupor, Lee leapt over the mangled bedding after John. The taller man sidestepped against the wall and charged past Muma through the doorway, her nails raking across his arm. Muma's legs took her to the top of the stairs but no further, failing as she gripped the banister with fury. With nothing else to throw, she tore the thick envelope away from her breast and cast it after the naked man.

Lee saw it crash open and spill its riches onto the stairs. The moment was underlined by the front door slamming shut with a gasp of freezing air. Glancing back to Cissy's twisted form beneath the bed, he grabbed the scruff of Muma's clothes out of instinct and forced her down after the man. She missed her feet and tumbled in a dozen crashes, lying immobile at the bottom and blossoming red from her skull when Lee turned away. He slid to his knees beside Cissy, crying harder than she was when he finally dragged her out and cradled her shaking into his chest.

Cissy and John: Final

In the two previous scenes depicting Cissy engaged in sexual activity as a child prostitute, she is treated with the adoration and gentleness typical of the 'child loving' that James Kincaid (1992) describes as characteristic of the majority of paedophiles. Challenging many of the assumptions made when child sexual abuse is the subject of discourse, he notes that in the most recent comprehensive study of the paedophile, it is concluded that they are typically unaggressive, 'gentle and rational' and that there is little evidence to show that 'lasting psychological harm is done to a child through sexual contact with adults' (Wilson & Cox, 1983: 122, 129).

Writing Journal –December 6th 2010

I want this last scene to be different to the ones preceding it, with a focus on the build up to sex. I want there to be mounting dread about how bad this is going to be, but then never quite take the reader over the edge. Reflecting on my own experiences of trying to be prepared for sex, nervous and wanting this duty fulfilled so that the clock can be reset. Anticipating pain, not pleasure.

To contrast the first two prostitution scenes, a sexual sadist is brought to Muma's house – one who does not revere but rather preys upon the physical vulnerability of a child. This final John reduces Cissy to an object of pain, and is most aroused when she is suffering, stoked by her thrashing and calmly responding to her pleas for him not to, for him to stop, with a parody of the 'yes/no' bartering for anal sex between a consenting adult couple.

Jason Lee (2009) describes in *Pedophilia and Ideology in American Culture* how 'pedophilia [sic] and child sexual abuse have been glamorized and popularized' (9). This scene is not glamorous. It is as ugly as it could be, the cold authorial tone lending an unflinching assertiveness that bestows no mercy upon the reader or characters. Furthering the sense of an assault, the graphic disturbances on the page throughout (108-117) discourage and disrupt the reading, as well as indicate the manuscript's distressed attempts to obscure its own text. The black boxes serve to surpass the limits of language, as pain cannot easily be described, demonstrating the rupture of trauma through a disorientating breach of form. It is not a chapter that can be 'skim-read', but forces the reader's eye to close examination.

It is only in this final scene of prostitution that Cissy is harmed – indeed, brutalised, originally through violent vaginal penetration and then, in later drafts, anally. In terms of telling a story, there is no need to be so explicit about Cissy's rapes. The limits of representation mean that explicitness risks trivialising or exploiting a crime through making it a spectacle. Furthermore, child abuse as a general event in itself is disturbing enough and does not call for lengthy description to convey the malefaction. This was the view of former detective superintendent Albert Kirby, who led the investigation into the Jamie Bulger murder. Throughout the case, he sought to spare the Bulger family and, perhaps, the news-consuming public the worst details.

'Albert Kirby is underplaying the abuse because he likes the Bulgers, considers them a "model family" and wants to spare them the worst. There's an understanding on all sides: go easy – the case is bad enough without fondled willies and batteries up the bum.'
(Morrison, 1997: 199)

This is, in part, because we as a society have assigned innocence and vulnerability to children, perceiving a sexual attack on a child as an attack on innocence itself (See Giroux: 1998; Kincaid: 1992). Here, the rape goes beyond damaging an “innocent” body to the destruction of it for sexual gratification. To parallel this destruction after the decision for sodomy was made, the scene was

Writing Journal – November 30th 2009

Does a body need to be present for violence to affect it? Can the reader be harmed, or even raped, through manipulation in a violent text?

moved to follow that of Lee watching the film of bears being butchered by automated machinery in a train carriage (See: 94-6).

In *Interaction Between Text and Reader*, Iser (1976) surmises that the reader of any fiction ‘is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant

from what is not said’ (cited in Leitch et al, 2001: 1676). These “structured blanks” are simultaneously force the reader to imaginatively engage with events and perspectives whilst also permitting them to ignore and overlook a victim’s experience and suffering. This tactic of omission was rejected in favour of supplying the reader with the undistilled abjection of the sodomizing of a child despite the warnings and obstacles posed by the text. Violent texts operate on the basis of wanting – not wanting to look away, exploiting the human need to know. This scene generates tension between this not wanting to look away and encouraging the reader to do just that, whilst all the while the text is written as unrelenting and unflinching should the reader ignore its stylistic, graphic and directly textual warnings. Particular emphasis is put upon the difficulty of penetrating the anus.

In initial drafts this trauma was avoided entirely, and across three major drafts, the conclusion of the rape saw significant changes:

October 2010 – Cissy and John do not have penetrative intercourse, and are interrupted by Lee before Cissy leaves the bathroom.

Closer to Home - October 20th 2010



The shouts and crashes next door made her fall off the sink and cry. By the time she had scuffed backwards to press against the door, the moisture on the mirror had shrunk back to clear glass.

Writing Journal –October 19th 2010

I’m at my worst for picking myself when I’m writing and struggling to get into Flow. My face, particularly, is a mess.

February 2011 – Cissy and John have anal intercourse and are interrupted immediately after penetration by Muma.

October 2011 – Cissy and John have anal intercourse and are interrupted by Muma and Lee.

Writing Journal – January 17th 2012

And, quite plainly, I knew that I was shying away from the scene, flinching from depicting the forced anal rape of a nine year old girl.

Between October 2010 and February 2011, the writing journal charts the progression from no intercourse, to vaginal intercourse wherein Cissy is ‘fucked like an animal’ with only an attempt to penetrate her anus, until finally vaginal penetration is discarded in favour of aggressive sodomy. The collision of Cissy’s

protective older brother and her rapist was also underwritten initially, ‘shouts and crashes’ the only immediate indications of a fight. Lee’s actions in expelling

Writing Journal – December 6th 2010

The mirror in the bathroom tells her to wait but she does not, returning to the John whom tries to rape her through sodomy in addition to the paid rape of her vagina. A much stronger scene. It twists my stomach thinking about it as I can see it in dramatic close-ups as stills from a film. I'll need to write this soon whilst the images are potent and before I have time to stop feeling unnerved by the scene.

mother and engage viscerally with the opportunity for violence that Adam presents to him later (148).

Further troubling this rape is Cissy's complicity, though the child's consensually active participation in rape is not a figure of fiction. Kincaid explains that 'anyone involved with the issue of pedophilia, even the police,

Writing Journal – December 6th 2010

The secure pressure of a body on top, large and hot. Needing to pee but can't leave to go. It's going to make it hurt more. Going to play this very simple thing up, as I can strongly relate my personal experiences to it.

the John and inadvertently killing Muma by forcing her down the stairs were only revealed retrospectively in the next section, and then no detail was given in favour of an oblique summary of the outcome: Cissy's shock, Muma's death and Lee's protective anger and grief. Even if the confrontation had been fleshed out and fully depicted in this draft, the scene would still have been weak within the arc of the story. It made greater narrative sense for the sodomy to have taken place, for Lee to be too late, as the horrified discovery *in actu* provides the impetus for him to guiltlessly kill their

admits that violence or physical force are almost never used by pedophiles', and that 'all who have had any dealings whatever with children recognize that they are not entirely powerless and are often equipped with a considerable arsenal. The sentimental image of complete weakness will not stand up against direct experience. When that power is sexualized, the child may be further equipped with the power

attached to the emotional vulnerability of the older partner and to the much blunter threat of exposure or blackmail' (24-5). In many cases, it would seem, the child is far from a passive object with the pedophile. Though unlikely to be as flirtatious and demanding as Humbert Humbert's nymph Lolita (Nabokov: 1959), they may be an active participant, consenting but ignorant of the ramifications of what activities they are consenting to and the behaviours their complicity encourages.

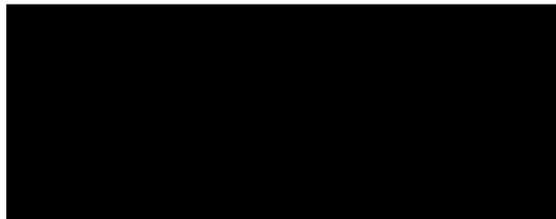
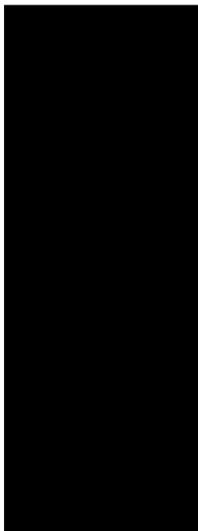
Cissy attempts to take charge of the situation when John does not achieve an erection, politely inquiring if he needs to take a Viagra-like stimulant (described as a "vite-a-man"). In a further attempt to accelerate matters, she apes passion and arousal by writhing and moaning. She is disturbed with a sense of failure that her fondling is not arousing him, and uses the bathroom as a space to regroup. It is here that she is instructed to remain, to wait, and the reader advised to look away once again after Moth's initial warning (See: *Moth, fig. I-II: 62*).

The writing in the condensation on the mirror was the third instance of Magical Realism to enter the story, a trend begun by the character of Moth and continued with the House. In this scene the acceptance of the supernatural within the world of the piece is particularly important, as the writing is a communication by the "living manuscript" to the reader to stop as well as a

communication to Cissy from some higher power, linked in font and a reappearance of the “humidity font” later on to the House. There is an ongoing reliance throughout *Closer to Home* for the reader to ‘follow the example of the narrator in accepting both realistic and magical perspectives of reality on the same level. It relies upon the full acceptance of the veracity of the fiction during the reading experience, no matter how different this perspective may be to the reader’s non-reading opinions and judgements’ (Bowers, 2004: 4).

Writing Journal – January 17th 2012

My falling into the minor self-mutilating habit of dermatilomania evidences clearly my discomfort with writing this scene. Ongoing reflection has led me to conclude that it is a fear of what my writing of such scenes demonstrates about me that causes my anxiety, as opposed to anxiety about the actual act of writing. Rothberg describes this succinctly when speaking about prosaic representations of the Holocaust: ‘It is as if the fundamental obscenity of the events themselves cannot be represented without a pornographic contamination of the person doing the representing’ (2000: 188).



Cissy didn't see Muma's body at the bottom of the stairs, having buried her head into Lee's neck at his instruction whilst he carried her. They'd stayed long enough for her to dress and he wouldn't say where they were going – wouldn't speak except to tell her to keep her eyes closed and that it was okay now. He picked up the money from the stairs and stuffed it into his pocket without looking.

The further they walked from the house, the lesser the pain became until Cissy was squirming to get out of her brother's arms and walk by herself. He let her tentatively, hands hovering and watching with big, unblinking eyes as she followed alongside him with her hands in her coat pockets. Moth flew ahead of her, clearly relieved to be going.

It felt wrong to do or say anything, and Lee had to settle on his first instinct to buy her something. She asked for supper and they went to the Chinese, though she wasn't hungry when they got there. Lee filled her pockets with fortune cookies whilst the man behind the counter mixed the rice that he wouldn't eat. Sal came in all surprise and smiles just as they were leaving, quickly poisoned by their air and taking Lee's hand out of instinct. Cissy walked ahead of them with Moth and her fortunes whilst he told her, and they didn't wonder how she knew the way.

The House and its contents bristled awake when Lee finally came inside with Cissy against his leg, Sal following two steps behind them. Lee paid no attention to its warmly immaculate penetralium, its ongoing habit of transmogrification. Cissy was numb, pale and supplicant to Lee's guiding upstairs and into the room they hadn't been able to enter before. The door to it was already cracked open, and swung with ease. It was a study, the walls tiled with bookcases and shelves looking down upon a sturdy wooden desk positioned beneath the window. The spines of the books were perfectly aligned, the gap between their yellowing leaves and the wall fluctuating about the room. There was a sleeping cot between the desk and one of the obelisk bookcases, held on aluminium legs like a hammock and thick with blankets.

Degas had met them at the top of the stairs and now slipped inside and curled fox-like beneath the desk as Lee set his sister atop the bed. He knelt in front of her without taking his hands from her thin, trembling shoulders, gaze fixed as if looking away could make her break or disappear. Her hair was slippery shiny under the same honeyed light that glowed from all the bulbs in the House.

"Sleep in here tonight, Cis', okay? Get some sleep and we'll have pancakes or something for breakfast in the morning when you get up." He held his hand out and clicked his fingers, summoning the dog to lumber to his side. Degas sighed a warm, wet sound when Cissy curled a hand atop his muzzle, closing his eyes. "He'll take care of you while I'm gone. Okay?"

Moth emerged from beneath her hair at the nape of her neck, drifting down to where hand and dog met. Its antenna flicked in scrutinising jerks before its wings fell lax against its abdomen, approving. Cissy didn't acknowledge it, eyes wide. She felt like she was floating in a fishbowl a hundred sizes too big. "kay."

No one moved for long moments, and Cissy shrunk away her body and gaze as the seconds passed and the sick cold in her belly swelled. Sal, still lingering in the doorway, slid her thumb over the light switch and touched Lee's shoulder. "Come on. Let her rest a bit."

They left and closed the door with slow ceremony, waiting for any sound from the room. There was nothing for a full minute, and then the rustle of fabric and the heavy sounds of two bodies fidgeting and settling against one another. Above that was a wooden creaking, as if the doorframe was swelling, squeezing into the door and

sealing it closed. Lee watched the warm wood before the evening suddenly swarmed in his mind's eye, and Sal prompted him to move again.

Lee came down the stairs blind, seeing only Muma with her leg bent outward and her head in the opposite direction, pillowed on blood that had been tacky to his boots when he'd unwittingly stepped in it. The cold, faintly ridiculous image of a nude man running away, spewing white breath into the dark as he sank into the black of the road, was equally arresting. He didn't realise he'd come to ambulate by the wide window until Sal spoke.

"She can stay with us."

Lee turned at the announcement and found her sitting in the centre of the sofa, legs crossed. Her stillness perturbed him, continued to pace like a rat in a narrow cage, head low and sharp eyes tracking the grey skirting board. "Of course she will - she's got nowhere else to go. She's staying with me, here, at the House. We're never going back there - ever."

Sal watched with her fingers interlaced in her lap, though they did not feel as if they were connected to her. The initial grief and shock had been dealt with on the long walk here. Cissy had been disturbingly forthcoming. Now one of them needed to be practical. His impassioned youth gave her the impetus to be detached. She felt herself floating above the stalled statements, inert as the walls that seemed to be watching as much as sheltering them. "What are you going to do?"

It sounded more like a challenge than a query and Lee bristled. "Keep her here. Not going back there. No fucking way." He punctuated the words with jerks of his head, lips bitten together in refusal to show any more than that.

A slow nod as she accepted that avenue as closed and considered another. "What about the-"

"I'll take care of it."

Sal rubbed her eyes and reminded herself of Lee's age, and thus the simplifications. Emotion was ruling when thought was needed, and she could see no sign of his training as a Dog aside from the newly tattooed collar inflamed and strangling about his neck. It was an effort not to be frustrated. "There'd have been more than that one guy going. Someone will notice."

He shook his head, spoke through his teeth. "I got it."

The dots around her lips made the set of her mouth look tribal. "We can't keep her safe." It was consideration that had kept her from saying 'you', though they both knew that's what was meant. "That guy's-"

His hand sliced out to cut her off. "Never fucking touching her again. If I ever find him I'll fucking eviscerate him. Him and any of the others. What those nigger-bastards did." A suffocating beat. "She's just a kid." There was more but it got lost between his throat and tongue, curdling against the floor of his mouth as if the words were rotting. It tasted like the initiation film had hours ago, in another version of this room. His hand hurt but the wall looked the same, and he cradled it in his lap as he slouched to the floor and refused to cry. There was too much to fit into just words, trapped and choking in his throat as it all tried to come out anyway. He wondered if this was how Sal had felt when the Southies sewed her mouth shut.

Sal rose in a crouch and came to kneel in front of him, her face more stern than kind. They'd gone far past platitudes. "You need to calm down and pull your shit together. You're all she's got now, and she's fucked up enough already without your breakdown."

His head snapped up from his clutching hands. "I got the fucking picture, Sal."

She hesitated at his snarl, softening into a concerned frown. “I don’t think you do,” she murmured, moving forward to touch his hands and draw him close. “Look. You need to clear your head and pull yourself together for her. She doesn’t totally understand what they did to her, and you going off like this is going to make her worse.”

Lee jerked out of her hands, the corded muscles of his neck visible in the dim light from the strain of his body. He tried to stand, to leave, and took hold of her arm as leverage and to give him room. Sal was expressionless as she pressed her body into him to keep him on the floor, pulling his shoulders down and against her. A chord of desperation found its way into his limbs and Lee jerked their bodies over with her compliance, finding himself on top and with his hands placed about her throat. There was no pressure – it was a gesture. A symbol of absolute, helpless rage.

“Fuck you, Sal,” he spat, fingers tightening against a tremor that had begun to spread up his arms. This burning anger felt good, exhilarating as it filled the void left from spending hours wading through fury and despair. It was cathartic, spreading heat out from his chest and gut as he pinned down what had suddenly come to personify his failures as a brother. As a man.

He stilled when a shadow passed over her eyes, conveyed through a slight tensing of small muscles and dilated pupils, realising with a suddenness that caught his breath that she knew that. And was doing this intentionally. He didn’t know if he was outraged or grateful.

Watching the myriad of emotions pass over his features, Sal brought her hands to rest around the shaking wrists at her throat. A gentle tug confirmed that Lee wasn’t ready to let go yet, and she dropped her hands to the thighs astride her body. Tracing the thick lines of seams and the dip of pockets, she held his stare and waited.

The discordant, sensual touches were obscene and stunning against the maelstrom, and his fingers tightened as if holding a lifeline. Sal hissed and instinctively shrank from his grip, though her hands continued to play across his hips and thighs. When he curled down, she scooped a hand into his groin.

Lee squirmed, teeth gritted. “What are you doing?”

She took a slow blink and exhaled as her lashes rose, her face turned cool and inscrutable. “You need to stop. You need to get,” a brow twitch at the ineffable, “this, out. Get past the shock. You’re not any good for her like this.”

Lee shifted his weight and studied her eyes. Her touch was queerly arousing, like being stroked with a knife. That it was being so effective only made him angrier. “And your solution is to fuck on the floor?”

A one shouldered shrug but the sense of her passivity didn’t change, communicating that this wasn’t anything other than serious. Her hands moved slowly up beneath his clothes and stroked his stomach. “You won’t hurt my feelings.”

Thumbing the highest hairs on his abdomen, she drew forth a breathed sound that didn’t want to come out. Running in small, light circles her fingers traced further down, offering the distracting comfort that she’d decided they both needed. The hands at her throat relaxed and Lee closed his eyes, proving her right.

Giving up to the foreign swelling tide, setting aside the black hooks and tangles pulling at his insides like amplified aches of hunger, Lee bowed his head to seize her mouth with a ferocity new to them both. It wasn’t a sexual passion but a different kind of heat that flowed out, empowering, had them grasp as they were being grasped in turn, delivering near-bites to mouth and jaw and throat. It wasn’t perfect, wasn’t even remotely right, but it was something.

He’d had no idea how to begin to approach his nine year old sister about something he hadn’t yet experienced himself, and it seemed fitting that his first time

would be a Fuck. Sal didn't know, having assumed that their celibacy was for her benefit, now cradling his head with her long fingers to pull him closer as they twisted on the floor.

Sal

Cissy woke alongside the Alsatian on the cot with a deep ache in her belly, held warm and tight between the blankets and fur. Degas's eyes slid open when he felt her move, and he huffed through his nose into her jaw in greeting. She patted him awkwardly, his forelegs resting over her arm. It took her a minute to extract herself. Sat on the edge of the cot, she fisted the sleeves of her jumper and took in the room properly. The walls of the office were playfully scrawled with writing, reading on behind the immense bookcases and down the skirting board into the carpet. There was no bathroom in sight and only one door out. It looked different to how it had the night before.

She found the door handle warm and welcoming in her palm, though she didn't open it right away. Degas sat up on the cot with a whining yawn, thick tongue unfurling out of his jaws in a lazy stretch as he settled his rear beneath him on the blankets, all the time watching her. Moth trailed down the girl's arm and crept across onto the wall, squatting over the capricious patterns of ink and tonguing with its proboscis. Assured by their joint easiness, Cissy opened the door smoothly and soundlessly.

The bathroom was the first door on the left, standing opposite the top of the stairs and similarly decorated with words inside. She tried to read them as she positioned herself atop the cool rim of the toilet seat but the letters hazed, resisting her, there but indecipherable. Peripherally she saw the mirror mist as if with breath, but the message had evaporated before she turned her head to look. When she finished, she slid off and suddenly found herself stuck and wringing her hands. To flush was to make noise and signal that she was done, that what came after could begin. Always a time of unease. She washed her hands under as thin a trickle of water as she could coax, without soap, and finally decided to abandon the toilet for now.

In the House she had been terrified to enter, Cissy was acutely aware now of the absence of anxiety. She felt muted and muffled, as if warmth were being funnelled into her belly in sweet, heavy waves. Moth and Degas were still in her room, quietly watchful through the doorway. Stepping out into the hallway with weight on her toes before her heels, Cissy found herself drawn to the staircase leading down into the adjoining hallway and living room. Only a sliver of it was visible through the banister railings, to the left of the front door. Lee and Sal were down there, she knew, breathing and rustling in sleep as she had with Degas. As she went to walk down, Moth appeared on her foot and bobbed rapidly, staying her. Not wanting to go back to the cot, Cissy squatted at the top of the stairs with her chin resting on her knees. From this height, she could see half the room and all of the sofa. They were not sleeping on it as she'd assumed but led in front of it, the crowns of their heads inches from the furniture's feet and resting on cushions and balled-up clothes.

They were still lying entwined and naked from the night before, Sal's head pillowed on Lee's shoulder. She had pulled the green fleece blanket down from the sofa out of the habit of sleeping beneath a cover. There was no chill in the room despite the clear sky glowing through the frost-edged windows. It felt like the floor was reflecting the warmth of their bodies back into them. Her gun, unknown to him, lay inert beneath the sofa.

Lee had been awake since the watery dawn, watching the wide windows fill and glitter with condensation. Wondered at the neat and tight writing arranged in columns down every wall. He was acutely aware of his pulse beneath Sal's head. His

heart had never sounded so loud, nor his stomach so tight. The muscles in his gut had clenched last night and seemed to have seized now, making him sick with a physical feeling of wariness. Closing his eyes, he breathed in shallow silence through his nose and listened for Cissy and Degas upstairs. He surprised himself by feeling relieved when he heard nothing, somehow certain that she was safe.

Sal's arm tightened across his chest in a slow, deliberate squeeze as she murmured into his skin, fidgeting. He tucked his chin to look down at her; the high rounds of her cheeks, the soft slope of her nose and the fine, pale edging of her eyebrows. He'd never seen her like this before, and this first felt even more precious than that of last night.

They'd fallen straight into a pattern of abstinence from the beginning, in part because Sal had never initiated anything like this before and his interest in her sex was diminished. Lee assumed it was from living with a family of women. Not wanting the knowledge to picture the rolls of his mother fornicating. Or Cissy.

Lee bit the tip of his tongue and skirted the thought away, hugging Sal more tightly to him. Their bodies had been violent last night, an argument of flesh and sensations pursuing some intangible final goal. He hadn't wanted it to be good. Had perhaps needed it to be frenzied and painful and somehow terrible in light of what had happened. They'd fucked because she'd offered and he couldn't see another way to escape, but after waking from too little sleep, he'd conceded that that shouldn't have been their first time. He'd treated Sal with antiquated distance since meeting her, knowing what usually went with her kind of scars. They'd never talked about it and she'd warmly accepted the limits of their relationship to tasting tongues and wandering hands, with only distant promises of more. She'd called him a gentleman.

He hadn't been to her body, though, forcing it pliant and receptive. She had still, somehow, been stunning, held and pulled at his blind whim but remaining flushed, undulating and endorsing. Her sex, the first he'd really seen, had looked like a wound and he wondered how much his forcefulness had hurt her. He'd taken with need and given nothing back, learnt nothing from her whilst she was at her most exposed. There could have been scars to catalogue and kiss, freckles like constellations and tender spots that were rough on his body to canvass and memorize.

Manoeuvring out from beneath her arm, Lee cradled her head down and adjusted the blankets around her. The working bathrooms were another mystery about the House that he felt no compulsion to solve, only to be grateful for. When he came back from the small room, Sal was awake and scratching her scalp.

She pushed herself up when she saw him, the blanket slipping down her breasts to pool in her lap. She'd opened her mouth to speak, to greet him, but saw in how he moved his nakedness that he needed something other than words. Holding out a hand to him as if to pull her up, she guided him down and pressed him sitting against the base of the sofa. He'd driven against her blindly last night, so unknowing that it had startled her. Now when she tipped her body across to straddle him, his hands remained stiff against her knees.

Lee's eyes were bright on her, his stare trembling as she adjusted her weight in his lap before dipping her head to kiss him. Their mouths grazed one another, briefly and barely. He'd held her on top like this last night, though lying flat, his fingers sinking into her flesh as he'd pulled and dragged for more and more until she'd collapsed over him, her last climax wept. Now he skimmed his hands along her thighs and calves as if only caressing the heat radiating from her. Her core felt hot against his stomach, but insignificant against the backdrop of pinpricks coursing through his body.

When he closed his eyes and rested his head back, he saw Muma's strange angles at the bottom of the stairs and the red fan behind her head. The naked man lunging away and out of the door. Cissy's shuddering cries under her bed, more confused than frightened. Remembered the cold prick at standing on their mother's dead hand as he'd carried Cissy out, and meeting Sal in their familiar place as if she'd known to come.

Sal sheltered the vulnerable curve of his nape with one hand, covering the tattooed collar and drawing him back to her. He kissed her breasts blindly, awkward with want but no clear idea of what he was supposed to do with them. He kissed her sternum, her heart, her shoulder, her throat and her ear before finding her mouth again, and a soft unintended sound was drawn out from a foreign place.

It was her that reached between them to cup him, angle him gently and finally take him inside with loving slowness. Lee sighed a hiss and clenched his teeth, feeling sore and disconnected from this moment. When his hands fell away she took his wrists and ran them over the deep curves of her hips and sides up to her breasts, her thighs holding him tight around where they were fused. She felt large in his hands despite her slim and tall build, ample and mature and very knowing of her own flesh. He opened his eyes again and found her smiling, though the soft pull of her mouth was soured a little by her drawn brows. Not wanting her to worry as she gave this gift, to mistake his hesitation for not wanting her, Lee touched her back and drew them against one another.

Her knees almost touched the base of the sofa, and she slid her hands about his shoulder blades in the space made where he'd sat forward. When she began to shift, rolling her hips into him and changing the textures and pressures inside her incrementally, Lee pressed his face into her neck and hair. They suppressed the sounds of their bodies as they had last night, though to a wholly different effect. Against a backdrop of firm thrusts and vicelike grips, the near-silence of the room and the racket inside Lee's head had made their copulation feel even more combative and threatening. The hush and the sun sliding low through the windows now made it feel reverent, a worshipping and apologising and promising mingling of breath and warmth and life.

Cissy had not perched at the top of the stairs and peered through the railings to watch, though that's what she ended up doing. Moth remained an unfelt weight on her naked foot, antenna flicking in rough time with the soft litany of breathed encouragement and pleasure. She was equally transfixed and disconcerted, waiting for the urgency that didn't seem to be coming. Sal's arms had trailed up behind her head, elongating her body and exaggerating the snake-like motion she made atop Lee's hips. Her brother touched Sal with the same gentleness that he touched her, with love and caution but now in places that seemed to demand his reverence and supplication as well. Warmth pooled in her hips, a sensation she'd only felt a few times with a few special men. The headmaster was one of them, though even he'd never touched her like she was seeing now.

When Lee pulled Sal down and rolled her onto her back, Cissy sat up a little with familiar certainty. It was not what she had expected, though, or what she knew. Her brother coasted into Sal's body looking lost, head bowed and arms trembling. Sal bent one leg to rest against his and stroked his hair, smiling without passion or joy and murmuring in the same way. Though he was above her and she without any leverage, she was in full control of his pace and depth. Her hands were restless yet slow, guiding him with squeezes of his arms, traces across his shoulders and strokes through his hair.

Cissy fidgeted when Sal sighed a heavy sound and arched off the floor like a taut bow, her head tilted back and throat bared in oblation. Lee kissed the hollow of her collarbone, groaning when she brought her knees up high and hooked her ankles over his hips. The position curled and shrunk her body beneath him, and he slid one arm beneath her neck to cradle her forehead to his. Resting his weight through his elbow, his other hand went out to balance him and immediately found her fingers pushing to mingle with his.

Moving erratically now, Lee couldn't suppress his voice as Sal flexed to meet him again and again, though he tried. The thought of Cissy hearing him taking pleasure in what had been done to her, of her knowing that he'd enjoyed being inside a woman as men had forced their way into her small body sickened him. As the tension in his gut tightened so did the lines in his throat, his head bowing with a plethora of emotions that did not mix and yet made for an intoxicating cacophony. His climax was breathless and hoarse, wrenched from his stomach and running on with every squeeze and pull that Sal made. She did not orgasm but cradled his head and kissed his brow like she had before, pulling him down to the sweat on her breasts and holding him there.

Unseen and unsettled, Cissy edged back from the stairs and rejoined Degas on the cot. She watched the door slowly swing shut as if it had been given momentum, then pressed her face into the dog's thick neck. Her stomach was a writhing mass of hunger and sickness, not understanding what she had seen or even if she should have seen it. It was been so different – more like Kara had been with her, though that had also unsettled her for hours.

Through the wall the toilet flushed, and Lee quickly slid away from Sal to dress.

Adam didn't leave the House anymore. Neither he nor Degas ate and people came to him. At first it was just his old team, but gradually more and more faces worn from the events on the news began showing up, asking what they should do. How there could send a message back to the South that they were not kowtowed. Every time asking if there was a plan coming together.

The walls of the House had remained unchanged since he'd shown the second carriage film, the manifesto for the campaign that the living marks had been devising finally complete. It said to start by ceasing to be human - that only monsters could fight monsters and win. That was the start of the plan. Collecting resources was the long second stage. The penultimate was to make them useful to the cause. The final stage promised to overshadow the Nursery with something that no one would believe or could respond to. An act to end all acts with a thick red curtain.

Lee was retying his laces when Sal turned the body of her bra around her chest and slipped her arms through the straps. She was moving slower than him, though they were both pensive. He couldn't get the feel of his shoes right no matter how many times he undid the laces and pulled the tongues.

"Do you think the Dogs can help?"

Dropping his foot down from the edge of the sofa, Lee sat back heavily. "I don't want them knowing she's here." His eyes travelled over the books and the black mirror of the flatscreen, settling on the staircase banister and following it up into the ceiling. "It's bad enough Adam uses this place."

Sal frowned, stood in her underwear and putting on yesterday's t-shirt one hole at a time. "Adam comes here?"

"Yeah." It was an absent reply as he noticed the new mottled shadows on the panel beneath the stairs. Sitting forward, he tried to make out the thin grey marks that had appeared like cobwebs in the paint overnight. Absently, he realized that the marks were on all of the walls. "He did the initiations here. Or a kind of here, anyway. In another version of the House, you know?"

She held her body still as he studied the room, using the time to school her expression, her hands on her hips. He spoke of this man with a tone of juvenile awe towards an impressive and violent authority figure – a faction leader. Sal pulled on her jeans whilst standing, running her dry tongue over her scars as she considered her words.

Finally, she left her shoes in the middle of the floor and came to sit next to Lee, taking his hand and pulling it into her lap. "I think you should tell them about Cissy," she murmured, speaking as though the thought had just occurred to her. "Get them to hunt these guys down with you."

Nothing for a moment and then Lee shook his head a little. His mouth pulled with a smile that was both humourless and grim. She tipped her head closer and squeezed his hand. "What's funny?"

Sliding his fingers from hers, Lee folded his arms to tuck them against his sides and sat back into the cushions. He spoke to some vague point on the floor, the shadow of his stubble making him look older and tired. "I lied to them before about killing someone."

It hadn't been explicitly said that Muma was dead but it had been implied, just as it was a vague but certain fact that he had been the one to do it. She didn't know how she felt about that, just as she was sure he didn't know either. When no adequate comforts came to mind, Sal put her hand on his leg. "It's okay."

A sigh and Lee's head dropped back, the knot in his throat shifting fluidly as he stared at the ceiling and swallowed. "It's not."

"Do you regret it?"

Regret and guilt weren't emotions he'd been seeking to explore, but now thrust into the air, he found them to be less horrendous than he'd feared. It took long seconds for him to speak, finally encouraged when she leaned her warmth and weight into him. "No."

She breached his space entirely to curl her legs on the sofa and take his hand. If she supported him in this, he'd give her anything.

"Then it's okay. And I'm proud of you."

With the money from the stairs hidden at the House, Lee didn't need to go to the slag pit. He was going to look for a Dog, Adam if he could find him, but he'd never seen them in the daylight. When he refused to take them both with him, Sal offered to take Cissy whilst he searched. Cissy insisted that they go to the cinema, promising to be good and pleading with Lee to let Sal go to work. He couldn't deny her, even when she insisted that Degas wanted to come with her.

It took an hour to walk into the town and Sal spent it explaining her job, how celluloid had died and left space for a new cheap art form for the masses to emerge. When they arrived at the rain-grey building Cissy refused to watch it, demanding to sit in the projection box behind the auditorium to watch Sal work. Soundless but for the periodic huff when he rolled onto his side or stomach, Degas put himself beneath the metal workbench and didn't move. Moth remained hidden with Cissy.

There was only a thin partition between them and the back of the audience to allow the sound from the old speakers to filter through. It was a frequently played piece and Sal knew the story to it well. Though she didn't need the help, she tasked Cissy with taking the used plates and putting them in padded slats to be sold or cleaned after the showing.

Cissy beamed with the responsibility. Sometimes the plate changes were very quick, and she had to run between the slats and where Sal sat at the projector by the rectangular gap in the wall. Other times the plates would take much longer, and she could watch the woman paint with her transparent brushes, the clear bristles laying down colour and mood in flecks and streaks. The pieces and the music were simultaneously soothing and exhilarating, a dreamy sense of life and movement sprawling across every vitreous plate.

Sal painted through the film in a daze, absently grateful that it was an oft-repeated one that required no concentration. The only challenging plates came at the end when the hero left the heroine in her native land in a shower of bittersweet fireworks. She'd been dreading the pre-painted credits, when the auditorium emptied and she would have to speak to the child.

Sliding the plate printed with names into the light box and opening the trap for it to shine through and out onto the wide screen, Sal looked between Degas lying like death beneath the worktable and Cissy at the rack.

"I'm so sorry." The soft blurt hung in the air between them. She didn't know what else to say. The child knew too much.

Cissy didn't look away from the rack where the plates were lined up like colourful crockery. She lined their individual edges by the corners with one finger. "s'okay. I don't mind."

Sal felt her stomach twitch at the airy tone, knotting her fingers between her hands. She spoke to the dots and lines of childhood scars she couldn't remember getting. It was easier to play along. "You've not been too bored?"

"No, I've been helping." Trotting away from the rack, Cissy picked up a plate that she had left by the sink and held it up between both hands. It was smeared, lopsided and charming. "And I painted Day-gus, see?"

Turning the swivel chair to face her, Sal smiled at the picture and nodded to the animal. "Would you like to live with him and Lee at the House?"

Cissy tucked her head so that her chin sank into the little flesh around her jaw, scrutinizing the picture herself. She pressed her name through the paint in the bottom right corner to write her name. "Lee said we was gonna. While Muma's away."

"Is that okay?"

“Yep.” It came out in a sing-song voice as she set the plate down and crouched under the workbench to sit next to the Alsatian.

They sat in companionable quiet for several minutes, both distracted with their hands. Cissy worked her short fingers down into the downy fur against Degas’s sides, working his skin over the mounds of his ribs. Sal watched her thumbs tremble with blood, trapped between washing the plates as she ought to be doing and talking to the child. She forced her head up. “You won’t have to do what Muma was making you do anymore.”

Not noticing the phrasing, Cissy cocked her head and stilled her hands on the dog’s body. “Why?”

It was too simple a question to Sal’s ears, and she bit her lip to restrict her words. “Because it was wrong.”

A thin note of worry lifted her voice and opened her face, eyes wide and mouth anxiously weak. “Am I in trouble?”

Sal felt the urge to sink down from the chair, crawl across the floor and put her arms around the child, who looked too insubstantial to be even nine years old. Instead she sat forward and small in the chair, breasts against her knees and elbows close to her sides. It almost equalised their heights. “No, no sweet. You just shouldn’t have been doing that. She shouldn’t have been making you.”

Cissy’s eyes narrowed beneath drawn brows, and her gaze shifted down and to the right. “But everyone does,” she uttered in a defensive plaintive, pulling gently at a handful of dark fur.

So succinctly delivered in such a callow tone, the retort struck Sal inside her chest. “What?”

The child looked back sharply, as if pleased to explain. “Like toilets. Everyone does, but it’s not nice to talk about it.” Muma’s words in her high voice, Moth quivering on her shoulder with its wings low and flat.

Sal rubbed her hands across her eyes to mask her expression, feeling suddenly hollow. She sat up again with her elbows propped on her knees, head low and tipped with interest. “Did it make you sad?”

Cissy looked away again at the soft tone. She tongued the corner of her mouth before finally mumbling, “I don’t know.”

“Did it make you angry, because you didn’t want to do it?” Sal went on quickly, wanting her to understand. “It’s okay to be angry.”

At the earnestness Cissy could only shrug, her stomach twisting with the line of questioning. Her breath caught when Degas sat up in one abrupt movement, ears rigid and angled towards Sal.

“Those were bad men.”

“No they weren’t,” she snapped back, showing her age. Her face tightened towards its centre, bottom lip quivering. “They love me.”

“Not like that.” Sal came off the chair onto her knees, trying to assuage with her body in the position of prayer and begging. “They didn’t love you like that. If your mother loved you she wouldn’t have let them do those things.” She couldn’t control her tone.

Cissy’s face contorted into tears, her fists buckling into her chest. Sal held up her hands, feeling her own eyes burn. “No, it’s okay. It’s not your fault-”

Her affirmations were cut off by Degas’s growl and his long body rising up to stand alongside Cissy - his first show of aggression. The animal made no move closer but his lips twitched fractionally to show glimmers of white, tail high and stiff.

Unaffected by the threatening guise, Cissy wrapped her arms around Degas’s thick neck. “Take me home.”

Held still under the dog's burning sienna stare, Sal choked on the first syllable. "I-I can't." She wouldn't.

Cissy's body jerked in a proxy stamp that made Moth jump, huddling closer into the animal's side. "I wanna go back. I wanna go to the House with writing in it."

Realisation settled like a balm and Sal nodded rapidly, getting to her feet. "Okay, we're going right now," she assured, gathering her bag together. Relief swelled in her chest, bringing with it queasy guilt. "We'll go and then we'll wait until Lee gets back and then I'll come back here."

"No, just go away," Cissy keened through frustrated tears. "I don't want to talk to you anymore." She pulled on her coat and moved towards the door, Degas shadowing with his ears angled back.

"Okay. Okay, I'm sorry."

To Sal's surprise, the dog began to lead them back from immediately outside the cinema. Following a respectful distance behind the child, she found herself lulled into the idea that she could leave Cissy with him at the House. Lee would likely be gone until the evening looking for Adam, and she could be back before then. She tongued the hard lumps behind her lips. Back and ready.

The sky was a blue dome, darkest at its peak and fading down behind the sleeping crocodile clouds lying low on the horizon. In this light, the whorls and loops of graffiti running across the Wall looked rosy and playful, bordered with stiff grass shining silver with frost. Looking out to the divide, the House's windows were misted and glowing weak orange. The sun was on the other side. Lee had never seen the structure look so warm, but it did nothing for the unease that had been building in his gut all day as he failed to find anyone with a collar at the campsite or in the town.

He'd given up in the early afternoon and decided to go back to the House to wait until dusk, when he would almost certainly find the Dogs around the campfire. He hadn't expected to find Adam waiting for him on the porch, sat on a flaking chair and watching his breath cool as if the minutes had been passing as languid hours. At a loss, he tried to force casualness into his voice but it came out flat. "How's it going?"

Pushing to his feet, Adam came down from the porch with slow, deliberate steps. He waited at the bottom with his hands in his pockets, the length of the House's shadow stretching between them. "You like this place?"

Lee hesitated at the non sequitur, approaching slowly and with a caution that some unknown instinct enunciated as necessary. "Yeah, it's cool. Weird." Standing next to the taller man, he looked over the door and found it as it had been left this morning. He wondered if Cissy and Sal were back yet, and whether the door was tight in its frame and guarding them inside.

Ignoring Lee's scrutiny of the House, Adam looked up past the overhang of the porch and touched the worn-smooth support column as if checking for a pulse. "It suits its purpose." When they returned to Lee, his eyes reflected the watery light as well as the windows, but to a different effect. "I'm glad you're here. I wanted to talk to you on your own."

Dogs operated in packs. "Yeah?" Lee ignored the urge to rub his neck, wondering if Adam had found out that he'd been coming to the House. Was now moving in. How he could even begin to describe why. He'd been practicing what he was going to say all day, but the crucial first lines had escaped.

Adam did not give the teen time to remember, motioning with a tip of his head to go inside. "I've got a job for you." He paused at the threshold to the House, looking down the vague path through the overgrown grass to the gate and beyond. Finding no one, he made a soft noise in his throat and retreated inside.

Lee had watched the older man step inside with gritted teeth, ears straining for the comfortable creaks of moving bodies upstairs. The silence enforced a potent sense of hollowness. They were still out or had hidden when Adam arrived outside. They must have.

When the front door shut, Lee finally cast his eyes about and saw that the House was not as he had left it. The floor read books amidst gutted furnishings and the walls were lashed with a miasma of small, stark words. He looked at the crater in the sofa where he and Sal had been curled when she held his hand and told him it was okay, biting the inside of his mouth to keep his face neutral.

Adam ignored the living room, where the wrecked furniture was still arranged to face the flatscreen, and moved alongside the staircase until he stood beneath the point where it became upstairs. The panels running from the stairs to the floor were cracked red over the writing, as if they had been bleeding. Lee watched him take the door handle that hadn't been there before in his fist and twist, revealing a deep crevice.

Cissy hadn't spoken by the time Sal led them into the House, standing with her arms crossed and facing the wall that had blossomed with words in the time since they'd left. Degas watched Sal like food as she made Cissy swear not to go outside, already moving back out of the door. When they were alone, the animal pressed his head into Cissy's hands and breathed heat against her chest whilst she rubbed his ears.

She touched his nose and found it warm and dry, as if he'd just woken. Her cheeks were ruddy from the walk and she slid off her coat, letting it drop in a crescent behind her feet. "Do you think Lee's back yet? Can you smell him?"

Degas sniffed her palm before backing up with a snort. He trotted up the exposed staircase, tail held low and serene, pausing midway to glance back as an invitation to follow. At the other end of corridor, opposite the office, the door that had been swollen shut in its frame was now open a crack. It swung inwards to admit them when Degas nudged it with snout and paw, revealing cream-coffee walls and a neat bed in vibrant green.

Leaving Cissy at the threshold, Degas leapt onto the foot of the bed and sprawled as he had on the cot the night before, watching the girl with bright eyes. As he'd moved through the doorway, his rear left paw had trodden on a yellow slip of paper and sent it skirting into the girl's feet. Cissy squatted to pick up the old fortune.

- BALLERINAS HAVE UGLY FEET -

She placed it back where it had been before walking the perimeter of the room, exploring with her hands the pristine walls and dark window sill. The window was full of moisture and an ethereal glow as the sun began to set. On the bottom pane, there were lines running through the water on the glass in the rough shape of a smiling face.

She drew back in small steps until she touched the bed with a gasp. Degas's caramel eyebrows twitched up, his only reaction, and Cissy took comfort in his calm. Emboldened, she moved back to the window and, hesitating only briefly an inch from the glass, swiped her fingers through the symbol.

It tore as it should have. Cissy watched it for a full minute, waiting for the pregnant droplets to shift, before retreating back to the bed with a sigh. The word was waiting for her when she had sat beside Degas and looked back.

HELLO



The room was still, glassy water around a fishing line, and Cissy held her breath. When nothing happened and she realised that she had been waiting, she slid off the bed and crept backwards to the door. It felt vital to shut it and contain whatever this energy was, to hide with it as she had in the bathroom last night. She sat back on the bed to give it her full attention.

"Hello?" It came out high and tentative with her effort to sound polite, but the window remained unchanged. Degas yawned and sagged onto his side, paws furling for sleep. Cissy pursed her lips to think before trying again. "Do you live here?"

She had expected an answer to her question – it was rude not to answer someone's question. She hadn't expected to actually see the beads of water move and smear to make letters. They didn't emerge as if through fog, but shouldered and fidgeted about the glass.

NO

Cissy nodded and tugged her ear, rolling the lobe between her thumb and the first joint of her forefinger. "Did you die here?" Her whisper could have been heard through the door.

NO

She wrung her hands, looking around the room again. Without the deluge of words spilling out from the office, it felt like a clean island within the House. “Did you write on the walls?”

AFTERWARDS

The shifting was less disturbing now, and she swung her legs a little. “What does that mean?”

Nothing happened at first, and then the entirety of the window gathered its water in a spasm.

ALONE

She buried her hand in Degas’s fur as the words were thrust out one phrase at a time, covering the panes. “I’ll stay with you. Then you won’t be alone.”

PLEASE

It took what felt like a long time for the reply to appear, and it made her smile even as she felt her eyes ache. She said “thank you” because she didn’t know what else to say. The window cleared, expectant, and Cissy shook her feet again for a topic. “This is Day-gus.”

HE HAS BEEN HERE

A VERY LONG TIME

Though she couldn’t describe how, Cissy felt serenity in the statement. “Long like forever?”

ALMOST

Amusement. She decided to pose a more serious question, one that had been pressing against her tongue since seeing the smiling face drawn in the dew. “Were you at my house?”

ALWAYS

A bang from downstairs – a door slamming with a reverberation that the House magnified and echoed through its walls. Assuming that it was Lee, Cissy stood. “I have to go.”

Degas had jerked upright, ears high and nostrils flaring. When the child moved towards the door, he huffed a high note for her to stop and look back.

STAY HERE

It was the same phrase that she had ignored before, the same thick lines with rounded tips as if they had been written by blunt fingers. She approached the window and looked up at the words, her hands resting on the sill. “Why?”

HIDE

More bangs as the movements of doors were exaggerated.

WON’T

TELL

YOU

AGAIN

Cissy got back up onto the bed and drew her knees to herself, listening as the door into the room swelled to lock inside its frame. Degas moved to sit against her, smothering her with warmth and fluff, and closed his eyes when she stroked his nose.

“Okay.”

Writing Journal – 4th January 2009 05:47 pm

It seems like every time I come home now, something else has happened with Grampy. This afternoon half the street and a policeman were involved. Fun stuff. Mum and I are going to sort out a schedule to take it in turns sitting with him as he can't be left alone anymore.

Writing Journal – 30th March 2009 10:21 pm

Grampy's Alzheimer's drugs aren't working anymore, which we knew would happen as the brain deteriorates too much for them to help for longer than 12 months or so. He seems to be getting worse very quickly. The aggression is there a lot more now, and now he's swearing at me whereas last month I was still one of the few in the family he didn't swear at or threaten. Social workers are having us all tick boxes and play their game for a few months before he can go into a care home to get doped up on Valium. I don't know if that final solution is going to be preferable to how things are now or not.

Writing Journal – 28th April 2009 09:34 pm

News from the psychiatrist of how much Grampy has deteriorated in the last 6 months. He's vaguely aware he lives in Cheltenham, can't write anymore and his vomiting/heaving indicates that something is physically wrong with him too.

Have been getting my feet rubbed and finished my PhD grant application after a helluva long time working on it, so there's some sort of karma-balance... If you squint a bit...

Writing Journal – 2nd May 2009 06:45 pm

Grampy's been sectioned. Not a lot else to report.

Writing Journal – 5th May 2009 09:18 pm

So, Grampy's in a little white room, that is not padded or even white, but a faint shade of pink, which must be calming in some way. I'm visiting tomorrow to see if I can dispel the nightmarish thoughts of him being imprisoned with hunched

Writing the Carriage Films

“The truth is, I really had no desire to explicitly bring my own experience into my university work.”

(Crawford, 2010: 254)

Unlike Crawford, I concluded in November 2010 that I had no alternative but to bring my personal experiences into my thesis, beyond mere inflection, if I was to finish and answer the questions that had compelled me to begin. My grandfather's declining mental and physical health, the strain this put on the family, and the repercussions this had on my writing are a key component of *Closer to Home*. The House's 'sentience' and the writing that overcomes its walls are articulations of my fears of his being overrun by madness, and as something that I would be unable to control or escape in the future if it happened to me (See: *The Uncanny House*: 102-107). It was inevitable that I bring my own experience into this thesis, in part to provide necessary material for an autoethnographical study of creative process (See: *Overture*: 19-24).

Furthermore, I felt a sense that the confession and exorcism professionally would lead to absolution personally. My primary concern (aside from familial embarrassment and anger) was of how inappropriate such self-exposure would be, and of how awkward it would make my supervisors feel.

shoulders and a detached, goldfish-like expression in a building that looks like it could be Dracula's summer house. And it's only fair that I join in everyone else here in crying before and after seeing him. Ah, my kingdom for him to have cancer or something quickly terminal so that he dies before he forgets how to chew food.

Writing Journal – 14th May 2009 10:43 pm

Visited Grampy, who was pretty lucid today. We kept getting him to eat biscuits whilst we there because he's been refusing meals because he thinks the staff are trying to poison him. He's gone three for three with Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Paranoid Psychosis. Well, if you're gonna be ill...

Writing Journal – 15th June 2009 11:25 pm

Today was the appeal session for more money for Grampy's care so that we can afford to put him in the really nice care home that specialises in people with dementia. It was rejected, and there's not a hope of getting more money. We're short £10K a year, so now Nan's looking at selling the house she and he have lived in for almost fifty years to pay for as long as possible. The problem with dementia is that it won't kill him - he could live for another twenty years, getting worse and requiring more care.

The care homes that the money from Social Services would cover are either awful or don't have any beds available, so he's having to stay in the Assessment Center (which should have been for 5 weeks max, but has now been 7) until something gets worked out with the money or a bed becomes available in a decent, cheaper home.

Writing Journal – 3rd August 2009 08:16 pm

Urgh, stupid anxiety and depression just making me wring my hands and rub my arms all day. Would be the day I was supposed to teach at a youth centre (near-disastrous, but we all survived) and actually leave the flat for more than a few hours (terrifying, but accomplished).

Grampy's sick and I cried visiting him for the first time last week, and people saw, and it was just shit.

The three carriage scenes (94-6; 100-1; 156-9) depict violence upon the physical form that is unbelievable: beyond inflicting harm, they detail the total obliteration of the body by excessive and convoluted means. My writing style has often been described as 'cool' and 'unflinching', and here presents a kind of dissociative state as some of the worst violence of the novel is depicted. Throughout *Closer to Home*, there is a recurring theme of the witnessing of violence and a particular emphasis on recorded violence, as depicted first in the Nursery security footage (2-5) and more overtly in the carriage films that Adam uses as part of indoctrinating new members into the Dogs organisation. Their purpose is to inure the young recruits towards graphic violence, desensitising them so that they may commit comparatively vicious acts as Adam deems necessary.

The framing screen, televisual or cinematic, forms an acceptable barrier between the viewer and the violent images that have, in recent decades, seen representations of extremity and gore reach new pornographic heights. Safely confined to the far side of the Fourth Wall, violence is glorified and fetishised in high colour, high resolution on-screen action. Such a distancing is not present in texts – there is no screen: the images are in your head.

Literary representations of violence preceding postmodernism sought to fulfil

And it's so unfair - he's never done anything wrong or hurt anyone, and now he can barely walk and he shakes and people have to clean him and it's just fucking cruel.

Writing Journal – 1st October 2009 10:14 am

Today I'm officially a doctoral student, so I figured now was as good a time as any to dust the cobwebs off this thing.

Writing Journal – 17th January 2010 10:44 am

Have found a really interesting document which shows Alan Moore's notes on the first few panels of Watchmen. Inspiration for the revelation bit in Closer to Home. It's not going to be like a film script, I've decided, but to have elements of one such as suggestions for camera angles and such. Keeps the continuity of the writing on the House's walls and allows more detail to be gone into.

11:38

Have copied the two carriage scenes for technical reference. Now re-reading Alan Moore's At Midnight, All the Agents notes to get in the groove. Very irritated that I have to go at 12:30 to work...

Going to use the same font as has been on the mirror and windows. More exciting brainwave: Use it for the (mis)fortune cookies too...

Altering description of carriage interior.

4:33

The House names the victims in the carriage. God, I can't write Grampy's name. I can't. It's too far. I'll see him. Fuck, I can't see him. It's bad enough that I'm placing the others there. I'll apply names and, I don't know, revisit it later. I wasn't going to write this scene at all a little while ago. Have I sunk or strengthened since then?

4:39

Hate the word 'retarded.' The House is wicked, 'evil', so it would use it.

5:01

46,173. Off too early but stuff has been done.

Writing Journal – 2nd February 2010 11:15 am

The more I write, the less I talk about Grampy and my psychological/emotional problems in my

a purpose of understanding the motivation and psychology behind violence (Tanner: 1994). *American Psycho* (Ellis: 1991) was lambasted by critics because it seemed to have no redeeming features for its seductive subversion of the emotional consequences of violence for the sake of spectacle (Bernstein: 1990; Brown: 1991; Kennedy: 1991; Lehmann-Haupt: 1991; Lyons: 1991; Rosenblatt: 1990; Yardley: 1991). The novel depicts Bateman's self-indulgent, materialistic and sadistic lifestyle in graphic and excruciating detail, but offers little by the way of decoding him as a psychopath. The book excels in its function, however, as an unflinching elaboration and exploration of the darkest mental recesses, presented with unapologetic honesty and without justification.

Similarly, *Closer to Home* visualised and thus helped me to get a handle on the pervasive, vicious disease and my desire to take some kind of revenge on it for what it was doing my grandfather, my family and to me. Alzheimer's disease strips a person of their identity, independence and dignity through the pernicious destruction of their mental faculties. It is a prolonged, traumatic death – more troubling for the reactive circle around the sufferer after a point, as they themselves become more and more oblivious to their condition as it worsens.

Over a long period of personal reflection, I have

journal. I talk about the writing instead. It displaces it. Conversion of anxiety, futility and depression into the writing as a place where I can exorcise it. Control it? Or simply articulate it in a way that lets my brain unpick what's happening and move on. If I write something I understand it better, and if I understand it I can do something about it – this is the misguided theory I've operated on for as long as I can remember.

Writing Journal – 8th June 2010 11:26 am

Grampy's carehome have decided to cut their losses now that the money's run out, and not turf him out to another home where social services will cover the bill. He's settled, happy, amongst friends, well taken care of and safe. Very pleased.

Writing Journal – 21st June 2010 11:33 am

I had a dream about bears being shredded on camera inside a passenger train cart. It's going in.

Writing Journal – 4th August 2010 07:06 pm

Chase, one of the more problematic rats we've had (he's lived up to his namesake over and over), had been off-colour for the last week, but still eating and such. Yesterday he couldn't walk and I had to clean him up pretty vigorously so that he could pass fluids. I did some researching last night after drugging him up and decided that it was probably an aggressive infection. I took him to the vets this morning for some antibiotics, and really didn't expect to be told that he was riddled with cancer and had about a week before he 'wasted away'. Had him put to sleep as there was no chance of his condition improving, he was already 6 months past a rat's life expectancy, and his quality of life wasn't good.

It's hard to put this into the right words, but euthanizing an animal has gotten a lot easier recently. I love my animals, dearly, and it tears a strip to lose one, but being able to end their suffering is a gift. It's something we're lucky that the law allows us to do. Because we make people without any hope of improvement or recovery endure and suffer more than we would allow any

determined that the dream I had of bears being butchered alive inside a train carriage (June 21st 2010) had been inspired by the progression of my grandfather's condition, and the earlier dream also set inside a train carriage (Date not recorded). The latter had been a boxcar, matching what I had been learning about the Holocaust, and I knew that we were travelling to Auschwitz to be gassed and burned. We were the only two in the wagon, in the dark, and I was trying to tell him that we would be okay even though I knew otherwise. The disease was too far gone for anything other than the chimney.

I had conceived both the bear and human carriage scenes before writing about the bears, having decided that the latter was the only one that I needed to write for the novel. Harold (2008) outlines that plausibility and conceptual possibility make horrific scenes more troubling, and that we resist horrific content if there could be a basis in reality. There is little imaginative resistance as a writer or reader if it is nonsensical for the event(s) to be a reality. Here (100-1), the staggering and confused bears symbolizing Alzheimer's disease itself, and the entirely gratuitous violence that is visited upon them in an attempt to 'discount, negate, ultimately destroy the identity – the subjectivity – of its target' (Hoffman, 2002: 280).

After the depiction of the bear carriage film, I decided that I did not need to write its

animal to.

It's a far more complicated and fraught topic with regards to people. With Grampy. I don't know. His Alzheimer's has nose-dived to a new plateau recently. He doesn't know who I am anymore, doesn't know Mum's name and it's almost impossible to stimulate him. Before, you could jolly him along and engage him in, usually completely nonsensical, conversations, and his face lit up a bit and he was something like his old self. Recently, he's just looked tired and small. He's started taking his shoes off and is rubbing his face constantly, either with his hand or with anything to hand. Often food, which ends up in his hair, which Nan gets so pissy about because obviously he's just 'being stupid' and it's not the result of his declining condition, no. He wouldn't scald himself intentionally because he's rubbing a coffee cup against his head just to 'wind you up'. Christ, this thing is hard enough without her being, well, her.

I've not visited in a fortnight, and then I went alone. I didn't want to go with family - we tend to go in groups because it's such a long drive to the care home. It was quiet, less tense. He had some bruising and scrapes on his face from a fall, or a fight with another patient, no one knows, and he rubbed his left eyebrow with a hanky for 40 minutes. I sewed name tags into his shirts and vests sat on his bed whilst he was in the chair, and we 'watched' Countdown. Couldn't have a conversation, but little bits went across. He smiled and gave me a kiss before I left. I was grateful. That could go any time. There's no way to predict the progression of the disease.

I don't know why I do this. These journal entries have become a part of my thesis, and they are useful, so that's a motivation, I suppose. Otherwise, I don't know. Maybe I just need to document these things, these events.

Writing Journal – 11th August 2011 02:32 pm

Visited Grampy yesterday and he didn't know who I was. First time that's happened, but then I haven't seen him in a few weeks and his condition has plummeted in that time. Went on my own and sewed his name into some vests whilst I was there, so I had the drive to myself and a lot of quiet.

overshadowing sequel (157-60). It was, however, not extreme enough for Adam and his recruit-Dogs in the novel, so I conceded to mention a second desensitisation film showing people in the carriage instead. After the bears, the reader needs only the location on the second film to know what is to come. I could cut away; omit the described atrocity in an absolute reversal of every other scene of sexual and physical violence that I had already written.

I wrote a little, turned towards Lee rather than the television screen where the butchery was taking place (100-1). A cowardly alternative I justified with excuses about the integrity of the fiction. I was letting myself off lightly, not confronting my anxiety, anger and frustration as explicitly and unflinchingly as I could.

The primary source of imaginative resistance is not our inability to imagine morally deviant situations, but our unwillingness to do so... The source of this unwillingness [is] a general desire not to be manipulated into taking on points of view that we would not reflectively endorse as authentically our own. (Gendler, 2000: 56)

This barrier was the culmination of every difficulty I had set out to understand and overcome in this text, one that dwarfed *Tasteless* (239-44) as a personal written transgression, and a challenge that I could not back down from once I realized that my avoidance was not an

Writing Journal – 21st September 2010 10:31 am

Writing the carriage scene, I imagined people I know from Grampy's carehome – "Dancing Dina" (I don't know her real name. I've been told, but 'Dina' is too firmly stuck in my head to remember) in particular. The body language of Alzheimer's is identical in every one of them, but certain facets are more exaggerated in some than others which makes them individual. Dina bounces and wants to bounce with you, holding hands, dancing. Dee sobs constantly and can't remember how to talk, suffering clinical depression as well as this parasitic thing that makes her tongue wobble instead of speak. Grampy works his mouth as if chewing, and he's started drooling recently out of one side of his mouth. He also twitches in his hands and feet when he's sat, constantly restless. I put these real people in this carriage and saw them, visualised them with their tics and mannerisms and saw them torn apart in my minds eye. It was stupid. It looked stupid. It could not be any other way. I can only speculate from the few gory films I've seen, and those have always struck me as funny as much as disturbing. Maybe it's a comfort mechanism.

Not Grampy, though. At least, not yet. I think I could, though. Part of me wishes to have him die before he gets worse, before the family suffers more. These people I have mutilated represent the disease at a more advanced stage and the saws in the carriage are my want to destroy it, punish it for everything. I see these people as contagious and want to physically destroy their bodies so that they won't taint others as they have tainted Grampy.

If I write this as excessively violent, grotesque, shocking and profane, then anyone looking at it will feel anger at me, not pity. It's a defence mechanism. It's tremendously painful and has changed my life, my perspective of life. Back off.

Anthony Schuck/"Grampy" –July 8th 1937 –February 3rd 2012.

artistic decision but the result of a flinch. A flinch from imagining anyone at my grandfather's care home there; from my family's disgust with me should they ever read it; and from any theoretical reader who would only see an abhorrent, sensationalist and senseless destruction of the helpless and vulnerable.

I suspended these doubts and fears, overcoming ethical censure in the House's voice to fully and masochistically describe the film in complete detail. Written quickly, the final carriage scene has barely been altered since the first, raw draft.

'As objects of contemplation, images of the atrocious can answer to several different needs. To steel oneself against weakness. To make oneself more numb. To acknowledge the existence of the incorrigible' (Sontag, 2003: 88). For me, finally writing this scene in full was horrifying in the confrontation, but cathartic in the wake.

WE Tralfamadore read them all at once,
not one after the other. There isn't any
particular relationship between all the messages, except
that the author has chosen THEM carefully, so
that, when seen all at once, they produce an
image of life that is beautiful and surprising and
deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no
SUSPENSE, no moral, no causes, no effects.
What we love in our books are the depths of many
marvellous moments seen all at one time.

Vonnegut (1970)

The House's bowels descended from a second set of stairs that mirrored the first, leading down into an open room the size of the structure's footprint. A row of four lights with metal hoods hung along the middle line of the ceiling. Watermarks and mould looked like wallpaper on the muddy-pink plaster covering all sides. In the centre, a person with a sack over its head sat tied to a chair like the one from the porch. Its feet were bare, toes purpling on the concrete floor.

< > *Changed or cut from original draft*
- 14th November 2010

<opened>

*Allusion to lower
bodily strata and
Hell.*

<building's>

Less familiar and with allusions to anatomy.

Primal, intimate.

Writing Journal – 5th Nov 2010

Watched the first 3 Saw films today with Jack. Will write up notes taken later on. It's given me the scene I needed after Lee and Sal take Cissy from Muma and back to the House. Lee needs to torture someone – we need to see it in mind numbing detail. I've spent the last few minutes thinking up and writing down all the painful things that could be done to a body using a teaspoon and nothing else but force. I've gained a heightened awareness of my body from it, particularly from pressing my voice box to see if that would hurt (though not with very much pressure). I've done the detachment thing, but I'll need to be viscerally engaged with the writing of this scene to make it different to any other scene of torture that I've written. It must bother me to write. I need to tap through the coldness, disregarding the reader and seeing to unsettle myself.

Writing Journal – 8th Nov 2010

Am still percolating the spoon torture thing. I may actually need to sit with a teaspoon whilst writing the scene to prod myself with. Not worried about forgetting any of it as it's very vivid and filling out organically in my subconscious. I'll leave it to its work until I'm ready to sit down and write it. Very much functioning as a film still at this point. The lighting is important, as is the positioning and posture of the characters in the room. I get so much more from a still image than words.

Lee lingered on the last step, his hand on the rail tightening as an anchor as the presence of the room sank into him. For now, he knew he couldn't let go if he wished to. Adam stood at the bottom on the bare floor, arms folded and expression placid.

For a time they were both still, watching the captive who, even miles away, seemed to sound louder than their bodies combined. It breathed in long, controlled swells of chest and stomach. Breathing for the sake of breathing. Breathing because there was nothing else to do or focus upon. Its head remained bowed when Adam spoke, though not with the sag of unconsciousness. In a fleece and trousers of matching colour, it was wrapped for cold.

"This is a Southie." Adam could have been identifying a birch tree. Fixed, his eyes were devoid of natural twitching as he seemed to gaze through rather than at the bound figure. "You're going to torture it."

It took a moment for Lee to acknowledge the statement and associate it with him. Some part of him waited to feel shocked or repulsed, but he found that something else in his being had already been prepared to hear it. This was what the Dogs did. What they needed to do for the greater good. His thoughts moved away from Cissy and Muma, fixing upon the man he sorely needed to impress if he were ever to help him.

With a decisive breath, Lee came down the last step alongside Adam. He stood close enough to touch, though he could feel no warmth from the man. "What'd he do?"

"That doesn't matter," Adam replied, unperturbed. "It's a Protectorate. It has raped and killed children and women, bombed innocent civilians and done everything in its power to spread terror and give us more reason to hate them where it would want us to fear." A glance to Lee, neither stern nor reassuring. "It knows nothing we need to know, that's not the purpose of this. The purpose is to make you act – to see and treat this thing as what it is: less than human. It does not deserve your mercy or compassion because it has neither. It is meat and noise, and you have to treat it as just that or it will find a way to kill you."

Lee made a soft sound, eyes dilated with the figure beneath the central light. He wanted to know if all the new Dogs had to do this. How he was supposed to react. Where Cissy and Sal were. Instead, he asked: "Do I get a knife or something?"

Adam smiled as if faced with gross naïveté. "It's easy to use an instrument of destruction to inflict destruction. That is its purpose. It's what we expect from it." He reached into his pocket and removed something in his fist, keeping his fingers closed around it even as he held it out to Lee. "I want you to be creative with something mundane. Something you wouldn't associate with causing pain. After today, you'll be able to see the potential for violence in everyday things." He opened his hand. It was a teaspoon.

When he put it into Lee's hand the teen almost laughed, though whether at nerves or absurdity he couldn't tell. The spoon was small and narrow, with a shallow scoop and broadly rounded head. A pattern of dots followed its handle in a border and the metal was untarnished.

Adam spoke before he could make more than an initial reaction, and the friendly familiarity was gone from his voice as his gaze fixed and narrowed on the Southie. "It is deserving of none of your pity. Before the Wall reached both coasts, they voted to build sterilization camps to mutilate thousands of spic men, women and children so that they would die out instead of just making them leave. Rather than taking their freedom to stay, they toyed with maiming and murder."

<bottom>
Last chance, threshold

Lee lingered on the last step, his hand on the rail tightening as an anchor as the presence of the room sank into him. For now, he knew he couldn't let go if he wished to. Adam stood at the bottom on the bare floor, arms folded and expression placid. For a time they were both still, watching the captive who, even miles away, seemed to sound louder than their bodies combined. It breathed in long, controlled swells of

Perceptual/metaphorical distortion. Alludes to structural inconsistencies in the House.

Writing Journal – 23rd March 2009
The paralysing effect of depression really doesn't suit my need for near-constant productive output. I mean paralysing in a physical sense as well as a psychological. Depression's been playing up for the last week or so, and for the first time I keep having my muscles 'pause' themselves for a few seconds and it's an effort to get going again. I keep getting stuck holding the banister on a staircase, or standing in the middle of a room, or just plain being stuck in bed.

Worded figuratively and literally.

Narrowing to rival organization.

With a decisive breath, Lee came down the last step alongside Adam. Though he could feel no warmth from the man, "What'd

Indicates that there are non-innocent crimes. Us and Them.

Adam replied, unperturbed. "It's a Protectorate. It has taped and killed children and women, bombed innocent civilians and done everything and give us more reason to hate them where it would be. Lee, neither stern nor reassuring." "It knows nothing we purpose of this. The purpose is to make you act – to see it is less than human. It does not deserve your mercy or either. It is meat and noise, and you have to treat it as just

Sometimes, a better way of describing something is to say what it is not.
I.e.: "It's a girl."
He didn't smile.

Lee made a soft sound, eyes dilated with the figure beneath the central light. How he was supposed to react. "Do I get a knife or something?"

"Spectacularised" violence and overly elaborate infliction vs. banal evil. Lee wants a weapon, a device design to inflict harm and death. It seems "normal". There is a break between the teaspoon and drawing bloody screams that he cannot resolve.

<pain>
Not synonymous

He opened his hand. It was a teaspoon.

When he put it into Lee's hand the teen almost laughed, though whether at nerves or absurdity he couldn't tell. The spoon was small and narrow, with a shallow scoop and broadly rounded head. A pattern of dots followed its handle in a border

Innocuous. Everyday item made uncanny. More relevance to the real world.

... and not particularly creative applications. For Amery, it was the most simplistic and ordinary of actions that caused the most suffering.

Not in original draft. Added for exposition of history.

He lent in so close that there could have been breath washing against one another's faces. "They do not think like us."

Adam touched Lee's shoulder, pausing a moment before gripping it with faith. "I want it crying by the time you're through, from using only this teaspoon and brute force. You are not to beat or kick it, use any other implement or remove it from its chair. You will use the teaspoon and think about everything that you're doing to it. You're smart. I need you for something that's coming, and I need to know that you can do this. If you can't, you can't be a Dog, and you'll lose all the privileges and protections that come with that collar." Before he left Lee alone with the Southie, Adam paused at the top of the stairs and pointed to his feet. "Take off your shoes and socks. It'll be easier."

Lee stood listening to the creaking floorboards above, waiting until the footfalls stopped and left the House silent overhead. He gripped the flat handle of the spoon like the hilt of a sword, its round head sticking out the same size as his thumb, and toed off his shoes and socks without using his hands. The floor ached with cold. Adam was gone, ensconced by the House, and the captive raised its head towards Lee at the end of the room. He looked at his inverted reflection in the spoon and felt giddy. Sickeningly light. He just wanted to laugh and laugh even though it wasn't funny. The obvious thing to do was funny, though. A bound person and a spoon automatically took his mind to scooping out the eyes like balls of ice cream. It was ludicrous and terrifying to think of now that the eyes were there and the spoon in his hand and the permission given. The floor made his feet hurt and he padded across to the chair just to lift his soles from the concrete. Muffled grunts began from beneath the cloth hood, wet and muffled protests that distorted the shape as the person tried to speak around and squirm out of the gag. Lee wanted to pull the hood off but was wary of the human face underneath.

When the sounds got louder, thick with desperation, Lee felt his throat contract and retreated back to the stairs. He sat down on the bottom step with his hands in his hair and balanced his feet on his shoes. Pressing the heels of his hands into his ears to block its noises out only muffled them like bathwater. Now that it had started it wasn't going to stop. He held the spoon in front of him, his thumb in its dip and his palm clenched so tight that the handle left marks. His arm twitched to throw it, bicep clenching as his teeth pressed and his saliva turned sour.

The legs of the chair scratched against the floor as the captive began jerking and twisting to change something. Lee felt his eyes prickle with heat and a headache flower in the front of his skull. A rhythmic metallic squeak as the body rocked, thrusting its weight and grunting into the moisture of the gag. Cissy hidden upstairs or away with Sal. Muma crooked and stiff in a place as cold as this room.

Lee bared his gritted teeth, pulling his sleeve over his fist and rubbing his cheeks and nose. The handle of the spoon felt embedded into the bones of his hand but he didn't move it, holding the tool at his thigh as he forced his taut body back to the chair. Falling still at soft pats of footfalls, the person began grunting louder and in longer notes. Lee seized the top of the hood in a handful of material and hair, tearing it back and throwing it aside in the same motion.

It closed its eyes against the lights before straightening its head and squinting at the teen half its age, ready and defiant. It had smokers' lines like Muma, and pleats of skin above brown eyes half covered with waxy hair. The stare fixed on him was defiant and daring him to act. To be a man. Lee resolved that its grunts had not been pleas but profanity and threats, thus it was deserving of what he had to do. Still holding the spoon, he picked and fumbled at the knot in the gag at the back of its head, pulling at the fabric for the slack he needed. The gag unwound when it hit the

Writing Journal - 22nd Nov 2010

Had my first 'Fred West nightmare' this morning: Dreamt I was both watching and being Cissy living in West's house, and I was also one of their children. Most disturbing thing that sticks out is Fred holding Cissy/me up by the wrist, naked, and slapping the flat expanse of my belly as if feeling the tenderness of meat. Quotes from Happy Like Murderers kept cropping up, and I was hiding writing in the room as well.

Sense of characters deserving it. Detestable characters, or simply animal. This keeps them apart from real people. We're permitted to be guiltless voyeurs of their pain.

Oxymoron

Throb of a word. House feels like a pain.

To hide securely, to shelter

Writing Journal - 12th Nov 2010

Lee's emotional and psychological response needs to be real, not "cool". Imperfect and without bravado. Clumsy, even. That is more disturbing. He's not an unflappable professional performing his grim task with the artfulness of a surgeon, but a displaced teenager who hasn't finished growing.

All that/what "ordinary", rational people need to commit violence upon other people.

<unsettled>
Lee fears the person

Animalistic and onomatopoeic.

Otherworldly

Animalistic. Chair has become extension of him.

A phrase more akin to a brutal spree, to an attacker than a victim. Lee perceives himself as a victim, here.

Neutral word for a prisoner. Counter's Lee's assessments. Brings reader outside of character's mind.

Verb attached to non-obvious noun.

< Throw it and forget about it and leave it and never come back.>
Rhythmic but distorts the positioning of Lee's mind.

<weapon> Removing it from classification of inoffensive cutlery.

Latching in on depersonalised facet of captive and relating it to Muma and his own feelings to stoke hate and torture. Our minds seek likeness in everything for ease and security.

Inexperienced.
Clumsy.

'The victim of violation is the object rather than the subject of violence, a human being stripped of agency and mercilessly attached to a physical form that cannot be dissolved at will.' (Tanner, 1994: 1)

Calm, cogent behaviour and reactions are the 'cool' idealisations we imagine ourselves having, but they are unnatural. Keep focus on the horror of the attack, and not privileging heroic and powerful agency.

floor, gathering flakes and dust and short, dark hairs. They stared at each other like lovers, mouths open and breathing audible. In Lee's hand the spoon felt wide and sharp, pressing into his flesh as intensely as the cold bored into his feet. He waited for the air to change, felt his eyes warm again with moisture, imagined his mouth filling with acid and dissolving his tongue.

It sucked its teeth, lips curled, and spat into the teen's face. Lee shoved the spoon head-first down its throat. His knuckles gashed on blunt teeth and smothered the sounds that fought back. He had to grab its fleece to keep the chair upright, bringing his elbow high to corkscrew the spoon deeper until his whole fist was almost in the mouth. It gagged harder when it tried to bite, tears streaming from eyes and nose as its face purpled and contorted.

A slight pressure by THE tool-wielding hand is enough to turn the other... into a shrilly squealing piglet at slaughter.
Amery (1964)

Lee tore his hand back when the scuffling chair caught his leftmost toe, pinching the throbbing flesh and stabbing the nail into the bone. His hands were compelled back to its skull, hooking as if supporting a babe and seizing a fistful of damp hair to force its head back. Seeing the yawning mouth, the gap between the front teeth, Lee rammed the handle of the spoon sideways up into the slot and pulled the head like a lever. The metal neck bent, it howled and shook, and Lee abandoned the slow pull for a hard thrust in the opposite direction.

Landing like a thimble against stone, the tooth rolled to the floor and was quickly lost between their scuffing feet. At the sight of blood, Lee took two childish steps back and tried to drop the spoon but it felt like it had become a part of his hand. It spat again, though feebly, and continued to hack wet sounds and loud, awkward swallows. At some point the room had shrunk and the lights had brightened. Lee brushed his fist across his eyes hard enough to hurt, breathing through his nose and pacing to ease the pain in his feet. Shards of plaster bit into him, the House's skin building on his soles in matte grey layers.

He felt his stomach falling in his body. There was an expanding pressure in his chest, as if his lungs were being crushed into suffocation. It felt as though the thing in the chair was the one in control, no matter what he did to it. He knew that it wasn't enough to satisfy Adam, yet. It had to weep, to show some sign that he had won.

Lee came back to the chair and got onto his knees, reaching around to where its hands were tied in prayer behind its back. He twisted the spoon's handle between each finger and pulled the digits in tight, as had been done to him with pencils at school. It hurt and it keened, but it didn't seem enough. He tried to use the spoon as a wedge to lever the nails from its toes, but the metal was too thick and his hands too numb to do it. He couldn't think of anything more to do, and it made him want to cry. The cold had eroded through his feet into his core, and Lee felt as much a captive in this room as the thing tied to the chair. Bright lights and bare walls throbbed with frozen pressure, amplifying his hatred towards it for keeping him here. Adam was

watching in the House, somehow, he knew. There could be a signal coming that would confer when he'd done enough. More likely, though, Lee suspected that he would himself know the point at which he was done; some instinctive sign in his gut culminating the mutilation of another human. The faster he reached it the better.

He summoned the film of the demented being butchered in the carriage whilst pressing the spoon into the central dip of its throat. Matched the sounds from the disc to the room as the skin reluctantly split. Lee couldn't see the triangle of flesh he'd exposed, now bleeding in lazy pulses. He saw the carriage and the explosions of viscera. He saw Sal's lips, raw and stitched though he'd only ever know her with scars. He saw Cissy, and enraged himself trying not to imagine his little sister being fucked but doing it anyway.

Muma at the bottom of the stairs, swelling as her fluids settled in the underside of her body. The shove had been deliberate but the catastrophic fall accidental, denying him the satisfaction of intentional, justified harm. With Cissy in his arms he'd told himself that it didn't matter, but it did. Suddenly it did. Regret that he hadn't meant to kill Muma - he should have, and grief that he'd still wanted to at the time - had pushed her with that sedimentary idea. The conjunction was devastating.

Its right ear canal split like a balloon deflated around a knife when Lee forced the handle in. The scream was not as loud or unsettling as it should have been, absorbed by the House like heat. Fluids finding the floor were immediately consumed and left no trace that they had ever spilt. With his numb feet, Lee couldn't feel the floor warming. He felt the slime on Cissy's thighs when he'd put her legs into clothes. Smelt the heady stench of the room. Saw Muma's shock at being caught, and only shock. Knew in his bones that she'd felt no regret even at the end when her neck broke and her skull burst and he wanted the last thing she saw to be him standing between her and his raped and soiled and saved sister.

Sounds and twitches and more fluid than he thought a head could have in it pushed him to do more and more, trying to seize back control as it became more and more hijacked by frenzy. Inflicting pain was the goal now, though there had been the insinuation that he was permitted to kill it. Death alone suddenly wasn't punishment enough. He wanted it to lose consciousness with pain and then be revived again by it. He wanted it to suffer pointlessly and excessively. He wanted it to want death, and to be denied haste in it. Time had no feeling in the House and even less so in its bowels, where even the air felt suspended and alone.

When Lee finally met the precipice with abandonment and fought out the eyeballs, he found himself poisoned with disappointment. It was clearly screaming but with almost no sound, and the smeared orbs hanging from their sockets rolled and stuck against its cheeks. Gasping through his teeth, his jaw so tight that it was hurt and locking, Lee seized one eye in his fist and squeezed until it slipped out the bottom of his hand, pulling the tail out along with it. For the sake of symmetry, he yanked out the other one too and held both by his side like short pendulums.

He stood frozen, waiting for something to happen and out of ideas. The eyeballs dripped in slow staccato, each drop stretching out to the floor before its tail thinned, withered and snapped. Lee massaged the slippery utensil in his hand, scanning the body for inspiration. The urethra and anus were a possibility, but he was too sickened by the thought of both to even approach them with the spoon.

Ultimately, he padded backwards to the stairs, picked up his shoes and went up to find Adam.

Writing Journal – 12th Nov 2010

I want to talk to someone about all this, but I fear that whoever I did would tell me to stop this for the sake of my mental and emotional help. But I don't want to stop. I need to know where this is all going. I just need someone to tell me that I'm not a bad person for being interested in this, for being good at it, and for largely not being affected by it.

Delirious perception.

<so>

Obvious edit.

In Saw, the devices of death are metal and cable and space – needs meat for us to be interested. Any body will do. Just want flesh.

Appearance of a weapon in narration. Lee has succumbed.

First kill sets the tone. Hardest and the trauma has a lasting influence. First kill for Lee was his mother. He dehumanised her, just as he's dehumanising the Southie: to avoid guilt. This disassociation is easy. It's killing that's hard.

Gasping hyperventilating and crying are realistic and thus more distressing to watch.

Does not say how they vanished, only that they did. Implied that they fed the House.

Living off of pain.

Body horror, the body out of control.

Disassociation. Lurching for a rationale for this behaviour.

Organic.

Banal over entertaining, gloriously excessive spectacle. Anti-climatic.

Writing Journal – 3rd March 2010

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer and Blasted underlined to me that true impact comes from subtlety, not gratuitousness. Show enough that it's not being shielded away from but not so much that the violence is a spectacle in itself. To still be disturbing it cannot be framed in a wholly escapist, 'entertaining' way.

Was so pleased with this line.

Staccato.

Ridiculous at this point that this is the line Lee won't cross. His threshold is the unfaceable Lower Bodily Strata. There are tensions between the higher plane of the consciousness and the base physical body, perceived as low and a necessary evil by comparison. Great shame is widely attached to its most basic as well as most joyful functions. The physical body is, perhaps then, resented, and doubly so when it is isolated of a victim's conscious worth by an attacker who violates, harms and further demonstrates the wet vulnerability of the physical shell.

After he'd come to the top of the stairs and the sharp turn right into the main body of the House, Lee couldn't remember the climb: if it had been slow with dazed, dragging feet or a canter up to escape the dungeon. Stopping outside the door into the hallway, he found the luminosity that had seemed to naturally permeate the rooms was gone. The corners now had secrets. Adam was nowhere in sight.

He tried to throw the spoon away from him, drop it, but the slippery metal had fused to his sweaty and spattered palm. Closing his eyes, Lee concentrated on the air moving in and out of him, trying to drown out the whispery roar between his ears. When he came back to himself, the House was still mutilated, the spoon was still in his hand and blood from the human downstairs was congealing black up his arms.

Lee closed his eyes again, clenched his jaw and finally reached for the door handle to go back down. He couldn't be in this House, any version of it, with it underfoot. He felt the blood in his veins lurch when he found only smooth panels, turning with roaming hands for the handle that was not there. The dark seam that should have outlined the door was gone. He pressed and grasped, breathing ragged as he clawed between the grooves in the panels. When he thumped it, the sound that came back was distinctly solid.

A vision of the captive drowning in soil and concrete turned him blind, not noticing that the spoon had slipped from his fist. It landed with the same high note as the tooth had done.

"No – no, you can't fucking do this! It was right here."

He went on until his nails were bleeding and he couldn't anymore, retreating to the sofa's crater with one hand pulling his fringe. Bile had begun corroding his throat after leaving a frozen cavern in his gut, spilling into his saliva and scalding his mouth. Nothing could dispel the visions of flesh and blood. Blood, suddenly the brightest colour in the world. His ears hummed with the word, thick and falling to land heavy and wet about his shoulders. Shouted whispers in his ears were coarse and thick with feeling.

The House shook without moving, a tremble reverberating through the air that made Lee sit up with a jerk. He surveyed the room without knowing what had compelled him to do so, his eyes falling on a section of the all-encompassing writing in the corner between an empty book cabinet and the wall. Another shiver in the air, gathered about him with the warmth of approval as he rose and came to kneel in front of the wall. The column of writing was no different than any of the others that now filled the House, but it was somehow particular. Bristling for his attention.

OPEN ON AN ESTABLISHING SHOT OF THE INTERIOR OF A TRAIN CARRIAGE, DECOR IMITATING THE OLD "BELLE" TRAINS, CIRCA 1930. THE SHOT IS ANGLED TO LOOK DOWN THE CARRIAGE FROM THE CEILING AT ONE END, FRAMED BY THE DARK WOODEN WALLS AND CURVES OF THICK CURTAINS ON THE WINDOWS. THE TWENTY-FOUR CHAIRS ARE ARRANGED IN GROUPS OF FOUR - PAIRS FACING ONE ANOTHER AROUND A RECTANGULAR TABLE OF MATCHING WOOD, HIGH-BACKED AND UPHOLSTERED IN DARK RED FLORAL PATTERNING. THE CURTAINS ARE CHUNKY AND PLEATED, TIED BACK WITH GOLD ROPES ENDING IN TASSELS. THE ANGLE IS SUCH THAT THE WINDOWS CAN NOT BE SEEN OUT OF. OUTSIDE, WHITE LIGHTS MAKE THE GLASS OPAQUE WITH ONLY SHADOWS ALLUDING TO A WORLD EXTERNAL TO THE CARRIAGE. THE CARPET IS A THICK-PILE BEIGE, GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT THE DARK CHAIRS AND TABLES ARE FLOATING. IT IS A STATIC SHOT THAT BECOMES BORING AND THEN CHALLENGING OVER THE COURSE OF TEN MINUTES, GIVING THE IMPRESSION OF WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO ENTER OR CHANGE. THE FIXED VIEW ALSO SUGGESTS A PEEPHOLE, CARRYING WITH IT A SENSE OF ILLICITNESS AND VOYEURISM. THE OPPULANCE OF THE EMPTY CARRIAGE ITSELF ALSO BECOMES DISTURBING, AS IT IS NOT TYPICALLY THOUGHT OF AS A PLACE TO VIEW THROUGH A PEEPHOLE. A BATHROOM, A TOILET, A BEDROOM - THESE WOULD ALL BE UNDERSTOOD. BUT WHY HERE? WHO WILL ENTER? THE VIEWER, AT THIS POINT, SHOULD ALREADY BE GAINING THE IMPRESSION THAT SOMETHING TERRIBLE IS ABOUT TO UNFOLD BEFORE THIS UNBLINKING, UNMOVING AND UNFLINCHING EYE. THIS IMMOVABLE SHOT WILL ENDURE THROUGHOUT THE SEQUENCE, DENYING THE CONVENTIONS OF CLOSE UPS AND MID-RANGE REACTION SHOTS.

THERE IS NO WARNING SOUND BEFORE THE CARRIAGE DOOR, MIDWAY DOWN ON THE RIGHT HAND SIDE, SLIDES OPEN. THE ANGLE AND FURNITURE OBSTACLES ARE SUCH THAT WE STILL CANNOT SEE OUTSIDE OF THE CARRIAGE, THOUGH WE GLIMPSE THE BLACK-GLOVED-HANDS OF PEOPLE WORKING AS ASSISTANTS. THE GLOVES ARE THICK AND REMINISCENT OF MOTORCYCLE GLOVES, WHICH DISTORT HAND SIZE TO DISGUISE GENDER AS WELL AS TO PROVIDE A THICK AND COMFORTABLE SHIELD FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD. THESE GLOVED HANDS SUPPORT THE WRISTS AND ELBOWS OF THE SEVEN PEOPLE WHO WILL BE THE OCCUPANTS OF THIS CARRIAGE. THEY NEVER TOUCH THE HANDS TO HELP THEM UP. IN THIS WARM ENVIRONMENT IT LOOKS LIKE A CARING GESTURE, BUT VIEWED FROM THIS STERILE ANGLE AND WITH THE GUIDING HANDS COVERED AND REMOVED FROM ANY POSSIBLE CONTACT WITH SKIN, IT SEEMS SINISTER. THE MORE HISTORICALLY-APPRISED VIEWER WILL DRAW ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE CATTLE CARS THAT DELIVERED MILLIONS TO CONCENTRATION CAMPS FOR EXTERMINATION DURING WORLD WAR II. THESE SEVEN PEOPLE ARE ALSO SICKLY AND WOULD BE SEEN FIT BY THE CALLOUS AND RUTHLESS TO BE EUTHANISED.

ALL SEVEN INDIVIDUALS ARE INTRODUCED TO THE CARRIAGE IN QUICK SUCCESSION, ONE BEHIND THE OTHER, AND THEIR CONDITION IS THAT OF ADVANCED, BUT NOT 'COMPLETE' ALZHEIMER'S. THEY ARE BETWEEN FIFTY-FOUR AND SEVENTY-NINE YEARS OF AGE.

ANN IS GUIDED INSIDE, FIRST. SHE IS ALMOST COMPLETELY EMACIATED AS SHE HAS FORGOTTEN HOW TO EAT. EVEN WHEN SHE IS SPOON FED LIQUIDATED FOOD, SHE OFTEN CANNOT REMEMBER HOW TO SWALLOW. SHE IS A ROAMER AND LOVES TO BOB ON THE SPOT, HOLDING HANDS WITH SOMEONE, ALLUDING TO DANCE BEING A GREAT LOVE IN HER LIFE BEFORE NOW. SHE IS WEARING ODD SOCKS AND SLIDING HER HANDS AGAINST ONE ANOTHER ON HER LEFT SIDE.

NEXT IS FRANCIS, WHO SEEMS TO HAVE MORE OF HIS FACULTIES AS HE SNARLS SOMETHING INTELLIGIBLE TO THE ASSISTING FIGURE AND SHAKES HIS HAND AT HIM. WHEN HE GETS FULLY INSIDE AND TURNS HIS FACE TO THE CAMERA AS HE TAKES IN THE CARRIAGE, WE SEE THAT HE IS JUST AS RETARDED AS ANN. THE WHITE STUBBLE ON HIS CHIN IS THREE DAYS OLD AND STAINED YELLOW AND BROWN FROM UNIDENTIFIABLE FOOD SUBSTANCES. HE HAS RETAINED SOMETHING CLOSE TO HIS 'NORMAL' WEIGHT BUT IS HUNCHED AND TWITCHES HIS HEAD CONSTANTLY, AS IF IN AN ONGOING DISAGREEMENT WITH THE WORLD.

JOHNNY IS MUCH SMALLER THAN FRANCIS AND COMPLIANT, PUTTING BOTH HANDS ON THE SIDES OF THE DOOR TO TRY TO LEVER HIMSELF UP THE SMALL LEDGE ON HIS OWN. THE FIGURE'S HANDS HOVER BENEATH AND BEHIND HIS ARMS BUT LET HIM DO IT ALONE. HE LOOKS TRIUMPHANT WHEN HE IS INSIDE, SMILING AROUND FOR APPROVAL WITH A MOUTH OF GUMS AND BROWN STUMPS. HE FORGOT HOW TO BRUSH HIS TEETH EIGHT MONTHS AND THREE DAYS AGO AND IT IS NOT PROCEDURE TO FORCE PERSONAL CARE. JOHNNY SITS DOWN IN THE CHAIR CLOSEST TO THE DOOR, BRACING HIMSELF ON THE ARM TO JUDGE THE DISTANCE BEFORE SLOWLY CURLING HIS BODY DOWN. THE BACK OF THE CHAIR HIDES HIM FROM VIEW, BUT THERE IS A SENSE THAT HE IS WAITING EXPECTANTLY TO GO SOMEWHERE. THAT HE USED TO JOURNEY BY TRAIN A LOT, AND THAT EVEN THOUGH LARGE PORTIONS OF HIS MIND HAVE PUTRIED, HE HAS SOME INSTINCTUAL SENSE OF TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE.

BETTY IS SHORT, OVERWEIGHT AND ILL TEMPERED, WITH A FACE THAT HAS SHRUNK BACK INTO THE FAT OF HER NECK SO THAT SHE APPEARS LIKE A TOAD. SHE RUBS AT THE SPACE BETWEEN HER PENDULOUS BREASTS THROUGH HER CARDIGAN, WHICH DOES NOT CLOSE ACROSS HER BODY. LIKE HER FACE, HER ANKLES HAVE SWOLLEN INTO HER FEET AND LEGS, AND SHE CAN ONLY WALK WITH A WADDLE. SHE SITS DOWN OPPOSITE JOHNNY WITHOUT HESITATION, VISIBLE TO US, AND WE SEE HER BEGIN TO SMOOTH HER SKIRT WITH BOTH HANDS WHILST SHE LICKS AND SMACKS HER LIPS.

ARTHUR IS TALL AND THIN, AND THOUGH HIS MOVEMENTS ARE DRUNKEN AND PATHETIC IT IS OBVIOUS THAT HE ONCE WALKED WITH

A STATELY GAIT. HE HOLDS A BEDGRADDLED TEDDYBEAR WITH GREEN FUR AND A YELLOW STOMACH TO HIS CHEST WITH BOTH LONG ARMS, NOT LOOKING UP AS HE IS GUIDED INSIDE. HE CONTINUES WALKING AS IF THE MOMENTUM OF HIS FEET IS OUT OF HIS CONTROL AND APPROACHES THE CAMERA, SINKING INTO THE SEAT IN THE EXTREME LOWER RIGHT CORNER OF THE FRAME. CLOSER NOW, THE DETAIL OF HIS FINGERS WORMING AGAINST THE SOFT TOY'S FUR IS VISIBLE.

THE OLDEST TO COME INSIDE, MILLIE IS PREDICTABLY THE SLOWEST. IT TAKES FOUR PAINSTAKINGLY SLOW ATTEMPTS TO GET HER OVER THE TWO INCH LEDGE FROM THE RAMP INTO THE CARRIAGE, AND SHE KEEPS HER EYES ON THE FLOOR AND HER MOUTH GAPING AND DRIPPING THROUGHOUT. INSIDE SHE DOES NOT MIGRATE FROM THE DOOR, HER HANDS CURLING TOGETHER AGAINST HER CHEST LIKE A BEGGER CLOSING A SHAWL, HER HEAD BENT BUT HER POSTURE ERECT. THERE IS A STRONG SENSE OF SUBMISSION FROM THIS WOMAN. OF HAVING BEEN OVERWHELMED AND GIVEN UP.

LASTLY, HARRY COMES INSIDE WITH ENTHUSIASM. HE TOUCHES THE WALLPAPERED WALLS, THE CHAIRS, THE THICK EDGES OF THE TABLE, THE ARMRESTS AND STOPS UNDER THE CAMERA, LOOKING AS IF HE IS TRYING TO PUSH THROUGH THE WALL TO EXPLORE FURTHER. HIS FACE IS CHILDISH AND ALIVE. THE DOOR CLOSES AND CAN BE HEARD LOCKING BEHIND HIM.

FOUR MINUTES PASS WITH THE SEVEN OCCUPANTS OF THE CARRIAGE SHUT IN. THEIR MOVEMENTS DISTRACT FROM THE SHADOWS THAT HAVE BEGUN PASSING THE WINDOWS AS FIGURES REMOVE THE RAMP AND PREPARE FOR THE CARRIAGE'S DEPARTURE. AN ELECTRIC WHINE BUILDS UP FROM NOTHING SO SLOWLY THAT IT IS NOT NOTICED UNTIL IT IS DEFEANING. THIS IS A DIEGETIC SOUND BUT THE OCCUPANTS DO NOT APPEAR TO BE AWARE OF IT.

THE CARRIAGE SHUNTS FORWARD WHEN THE WHINE REACHES ITS CRESCENDO AND ABRUPTLY CUTS OUT, LEAVING AN ENGINE HUM IN ITS WAKE. WE CAN ONLY TELL THAT THE CARRIAGE IS MOVING BECAUSE OF HOW THE OCCUPANTS SWAY. A BAND OF SHADOW PASSES DOWN THE LENGTH OF THE CARRIAGE ALONG BOTH WINDOWS AS IT PASSES THROUGH AN ARCHWAY AND THEN THE LIGHT OF THE WINDOWS IS NOT SO BRIGHT. THE CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT HAS BEEN LEFT BEHIND AND WE ARE NOW OUTSIDE, THOUGH WE STILL CANNOT SEE. THE OCCUPANTS BEGIN TO LOOK OUT OF THE WINDOWS, FIVE SITTING WHILST FRANCIS AND MILLIE GRIP THE CURTAINS TO STAY UPRIGHT, MIRRORING ONE ANOTHER IN THE FRAME.

TWO UNEVENTFUL MINUTE PASS, LESS THAN EXPECTED AS TEN WERE SPENT WATCHING THE EMPTY CARRIAGE. THE NEW SOUND IS THUS STARTLING BUT STILL NOT AN ADEQUATE WARNING FOR THE THIRTY FOUR CIRCULAR SAWS ON FLEXING STEEL ARMS THAT GRADUALLY RISE INTO VIEW. THEY RISE FROM HIDDEN COMPARTMENTS BETWEEN THE CHAIRS WITH EIGHT MORE EMERGING

FROM THE CARRIAGE'S WALLS - TWO IN THE CEILING, TWO AT THE NARROWEST ENDS AND FOUR IN THE GAP BY THE DOOR. THEY ARE NOT SPINNING BUT STARTLE THE OCCUPANTS WITH THEIR NEWNESS. THE METAL DISKS HAVE HAD THEIR CRESCENT GUARDS REMOVED AND THEIR COMPONENTS STRIPPED BACK FOR MAXIMUM EXPOSURE OF THEIR SERRATED CIRCUMFERENCE. TWENTY SECONDS AFTER THEY APPEAR, THEY SPIN AND SHUNT ON TO HORIZONTAL, VERTICAL AND DIAGONAL VECTORS THAT INTERSECT IN SWEEPING ARCS TO ENABLE FULL COVERAGE OF THE CARRIAGE.

THE ACTION IS SIMULTANEOUS. SITTING, ARTHUR, JOHNNY AND BETTY ARE STRUCK FIRST, SEMI-BISECTED AS THE SAWS STOP INSIDE THEIR BODIES BEFORE THEY RISK CUTTING THE UPHOLSTERY AND SWINGING BACK OUT WITH RED SPRAYS. THEY ATTEMPT TO RISE BUT TOPPLE ON TO THE ARMS OF THE CHAIRS. BETTY REACHES THE FLOOR WHERE SHE IS MET BY ANOTHER SAW SWINGING ON A VERTICAL PLANE. IT CONNECTS WITH HER HEAD TWO THIRDS OF THE WAY ACROSS, BURSTING HER RIGHT EYE ON ITS WAY THROUGH. HARRY CLUTCHES HER AS SHE FALLS AND IS DRAGGED DOWN BY HER WEIGHT. THEIR BODIES MINGLE FOR TWENTY SIX SECONDS AS THE SAWS MOVE THROUGH THEM BOTH UNTIL THEIR FLESH HAS PARTED AND FALLEN BEYOND THE REACH OF THE BLADES.

BOTH OF MILLIE'S LEGS ARE SEVERED AND SHE FALLS. SHE IS THE ONLY ONE TO LOSE CONSCIOUSNESS FROM THE FIRST CUT, AND HER BODY ROLLS LIKE BREAD DOUGH BETWEEN ROUGHT HANDS AS THE SAWS SWEEP THROUGH. ANN HAS REMEMBERED THE DOOR AND TRIES TO OPEN IT, AVOIDING A SAW BY MOVING INTO THE UPPER RIGHT CORNER OF THE CARRIAGE. OUR VIEW IS OBSTRUCTED BY THE CHAIRS BUT AN ERUPTION OF BLOOD AND FLESHY PARTS FROM CONVERGING SAWS CONVEYS THAT SHE IS DEAD. FRANCIS IS THE CLOSEST TO THE CAMERA WHEN HE IS CUT APART, HIS BODY HELD UP BY THE SAWS CRISS-CROSSING BENEATH AND ABOVE ONE ANOTHER. THE VELOCITY OF THE SERRATED EDGES SPRAYS THE CAMERA WITH RED. THERE IS NOT A SPINNING SHIELD OVER THE CAMERA TO CENTRIFUGALLY THROW OFF LIQUID AND DEBRIS, SO AN OPERATOR REMOTELY USES THE JET WASH AND WIPER BLADE TO CLEAR THE LENS.

THE OCCUPANTS DO NOT SCREAM AS THE VIEWER EXPECTS BUT SOB AND HOWL, THEIR VOICES DISRUPTED BY THE HARD PULLS OF THE SAWS. IT TAKES TWO MINUTES FOR THE OCCUPANTS TO EXPIRE, DETERMINED BY THE SILENCE IN THE CARRIAGE. THE SAWS STOP SPINNING AND ARE PERMITTED TO DRIP FOR TEN SECONDS BEFORE BEING RETRACTED BACK ON THEIR FOLDING ARMS INTO THEIR COMPARTMENTS. A FURTHER TEN MINUTES PASS AND THEN THE SHOT IS TERMINATED, NOT IN A FADE-OUT BUT STRAIGHT TO BLACK. THE VIEWER IS NOW A DOG.

With an audience, torture becomes art,
the torturer an author, THE onlookers
an audience of connoisseurs.

KAPPELER (1986)

Beneath the porch, the rats began to move. They trotted quickly with their bodies held high on their feet and their tails straight and stiff behind them, weaving through the grass towards the Wall.

Lee had gotten down to his elbows and knees to read the descending section until it terminated at the skirting board. Another line was visible through the fibres of the carpet on the yellowed wood, leading down into the floorboards, but he felt that he'd suffocate if he read more. He pressed his hands against the wall to get to his feet, jerking away as if burned when he realized the contact. A staggered step backwards. The room seemed to spin, the black marks glowing off the paint too small to read from afar but Lee felt as though he knew every word. Around his neck, the collar itched.

"If you're going to make an omelette, you have to break some eggs."

Adam's words fell into the room like a dropped weight. He stepped out from under the kitchen archway with folded arms, watching Lee with the sofa between them. When the teen said nothing, he smiled without humour from one side of his mouth. "Cliché, I know, but it fits."

Breathing through his mouth, Lee stared for long seconds before looking back to the paragraphs on the carriage. He saw the film again in compressed flashes. Wondered where Adam had been hiding, and if the House had hidden him. Tried to remember if he'd ever seen Adam's handwriting.

Adam took a step forward before he could ask, stopping after that first step to speak. "The military cannot work with what they get. People have to be broken down and rebuilt if they're going to be of any use. If they're going to survive the worst." It sounded rehearsed. It sounded resigned yet firm. His jaw raised to defend it. "That is the ethos the Dogs were built on."

Lee shifted his weight across his feet. Respect stilled his tongue until the words settled in, and then the feeling withered away. "You made that film?" A silence he hadn't intended as his mind faltered, found the words leaping out to claw at him. "Those people-"

"For the greater good," Adam cut in with another punctuating step, now standing behind the sofa close enough to rest his hands on the back. It was a paltry barrier between them. The air hummed without sound. "There are ugly things we must do and it's essential that you are all desensitised. It has been this way from the beginning."

"But why them?" He bellowed it back, suddenly immune to fear. "God, why people?"

Adam looked away at that, his eyes narrowing on three books that had fallen together into the shape of a broken pyramid at the edge of the sofa. His lower lip drew into his mouth and reappeared a moment later, dry and bitten white. "We made films with animals at first, but they weren't comprehensively effective. It had to be people. I chose." A closed-eyed grimace, the most painfully real emotion Lee had seen on him. "I chose those who would benefit from being executed. People who were already rotting and had nothing to live for but to be a burden."

That Adam hadn't raised his voice brought Lee's down to a speaking volume, though the words were uneven and twisted. "They were Southies? You hate them that much?"

A long, portentous pause and Adam moved around the sofa to stand opposite Lee. His nose was hidden in his hand, pressing the creased skin above his tear ducts. He swallowed and looked up, appearing not to have needed to resolve himself to the confession but simply having debated whether Lee should hear it. "It was... impractical to transfer people from a Southern nursing home across the Wall."

It fell to him with the force and velocity of the saws in the carriage. Lee felt his stomach contract, his lungs collapse and his hands turn numb. The walls' words flashed through his mind anew and he remembered, he saw the Dogs in the film. Just their hands. Their hands guiding and leading and locking and turning on the water jet so that the lens would be clean and they could see the red thing that had been left behind. To their own, to train their own to hate the other side who were doing it to their own and training their own to hate them. To make a cause for their existence. To manufacture reasons to fight.

Adam had grasped Lee's shoulders with inhuman strength before the teen noticed he'd moved. He pulled the smaller body into his chest, trapped him with no space to strike or struggle free. When he spoke it came as a hiss through sweaty clumps of blonde hair, italicised with a grave need to be believed and understood. "I

I loved him. HE was part of ME.

JT Leroy (2007)

didn't start doing it like this. I thought the nursery was the

Southies, BUT WE DID IT. WE KILLED MY BABY. AND THEY HAD TO PAY. THEY HAD TO BE SHOWN AS... AS EVIL AS US IF WE WERE GOING TO MAKE THEM PAY FOR WHAT THEY MADE US DO. IT'S THEM. IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THEM. THEY'RE MAKING US DO IT, DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?"

They held each other and the House felt like a lead box around them. It was a shock when the door opened with a blast of cold air and another body came in, intruded upon their moment with clenched fists and short, cautious steps. Sal looked between them both, so close that her eyes barely twitched, before she settled on Adam. On the first collar, identical to the one around Lee's neck.

"Lee?" She asked it to gauge the tone of the room. Her voice lifted higher than she had intended. "What is this?"

Adam eased his hands away, looking between them both. Lee licked his lips, eyes wide, and held out his hand a little for her to come to him. Sal took it and met dampness in the touch, immediately recoiling.

SHE FELT THE WEIGHT
AGAINST HER SPINE, AND
FOUND HER VOICE.

IT'S NOT NOTHING,
LEE. IT'S BLOOD.

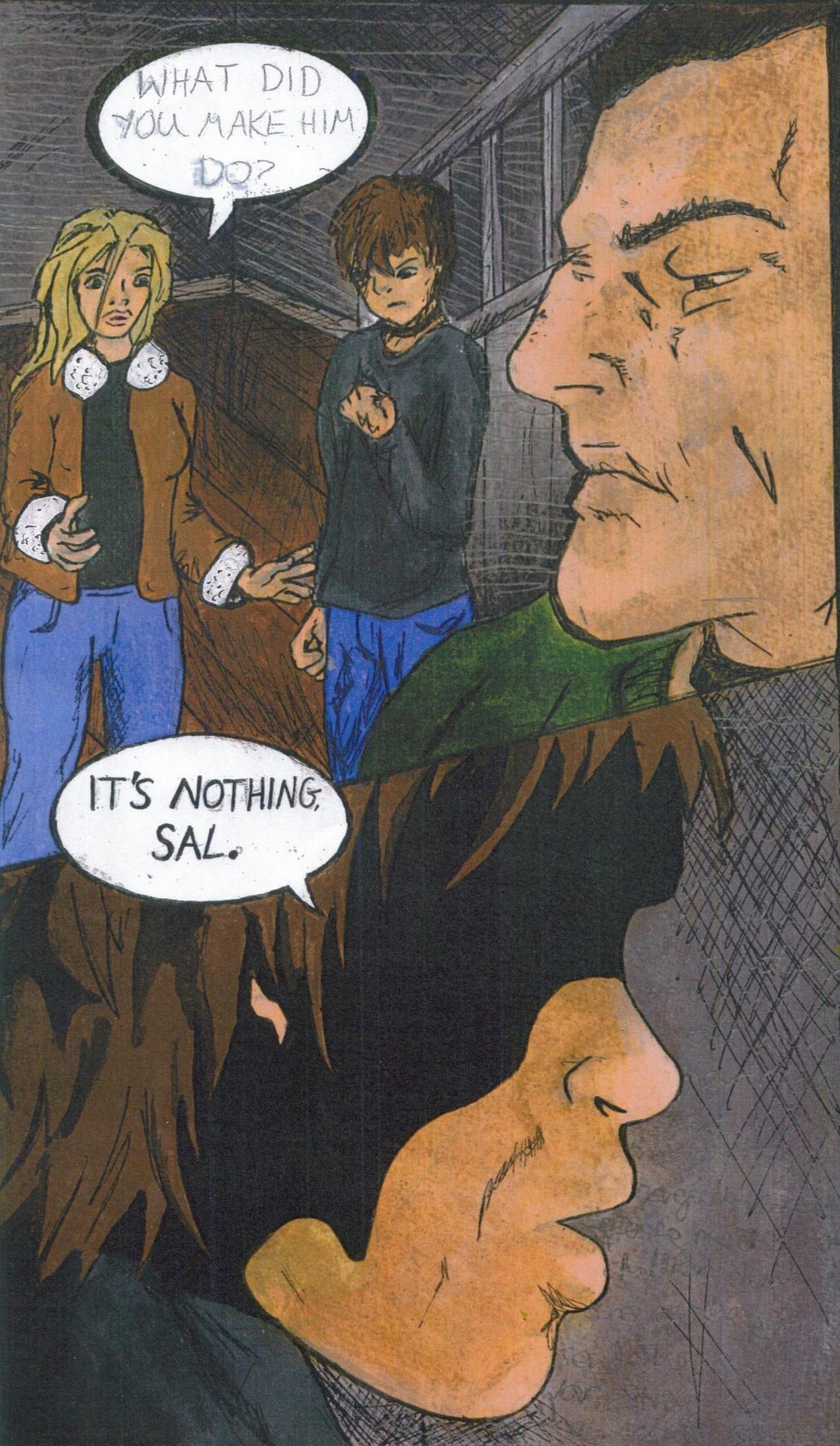
LEE WATCHED ADAM,
SEARCHING FOR APPROVAL

ARE YOU
OKAY?



BLOOD, VIVID
AND TACKY!

HER LIPS TIGHTENED,
MOUTH WELLING WITH
NERVOUS SALIVA.



ADAM SAW LEE'S EYES EDGE
BACK TO THE PANELS.

WHERE THE DOOR
HAD BEEN.

RED PERSPIRED IN PINPRICKS BETWEEN THE GROOVES,

AS IF THE SPACE BEHIND WAS SATURATED:

IT WAS
A RIGHT OF
PASSAGE:

TO HER

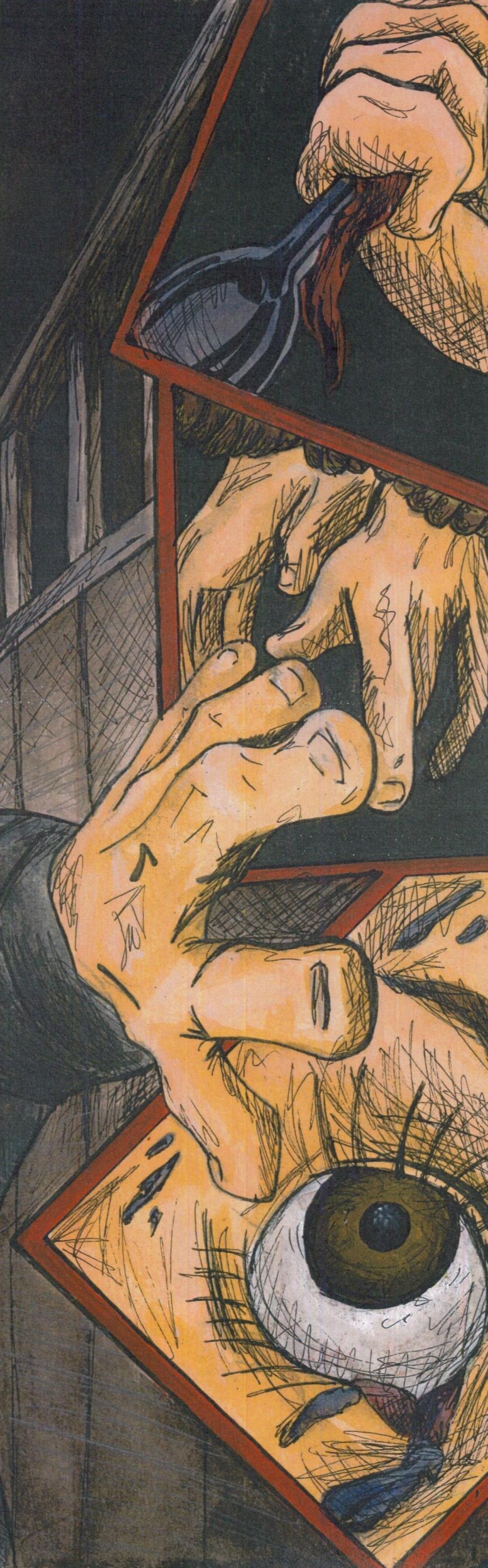
FOR HIM.



YOU KNOW
WHAT HE IS.



TOO LATE.





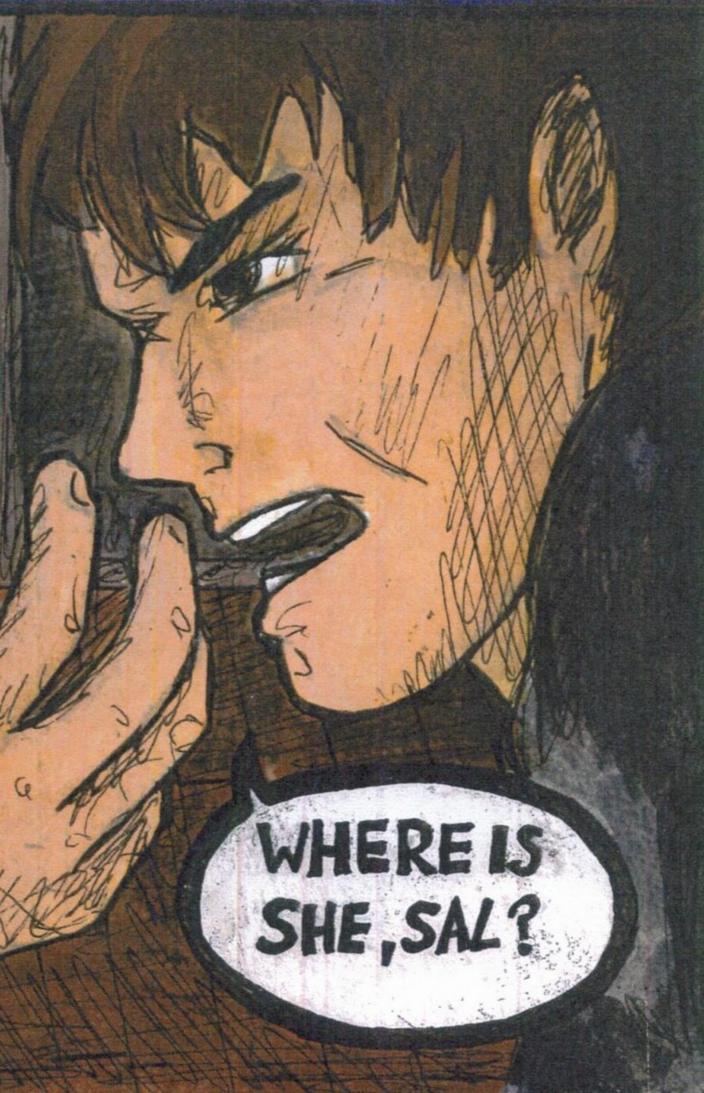
WHERE'S
CISSY?

WHAT?

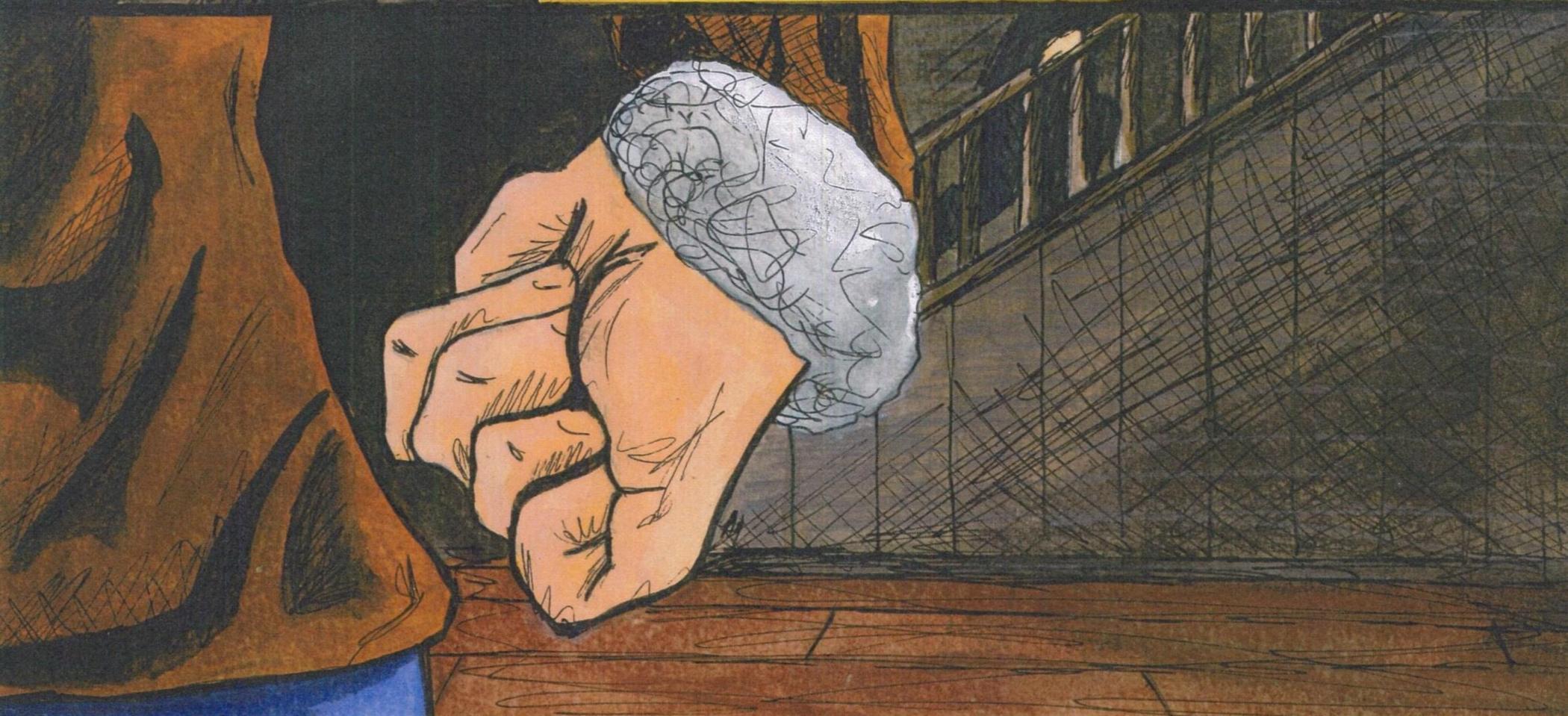
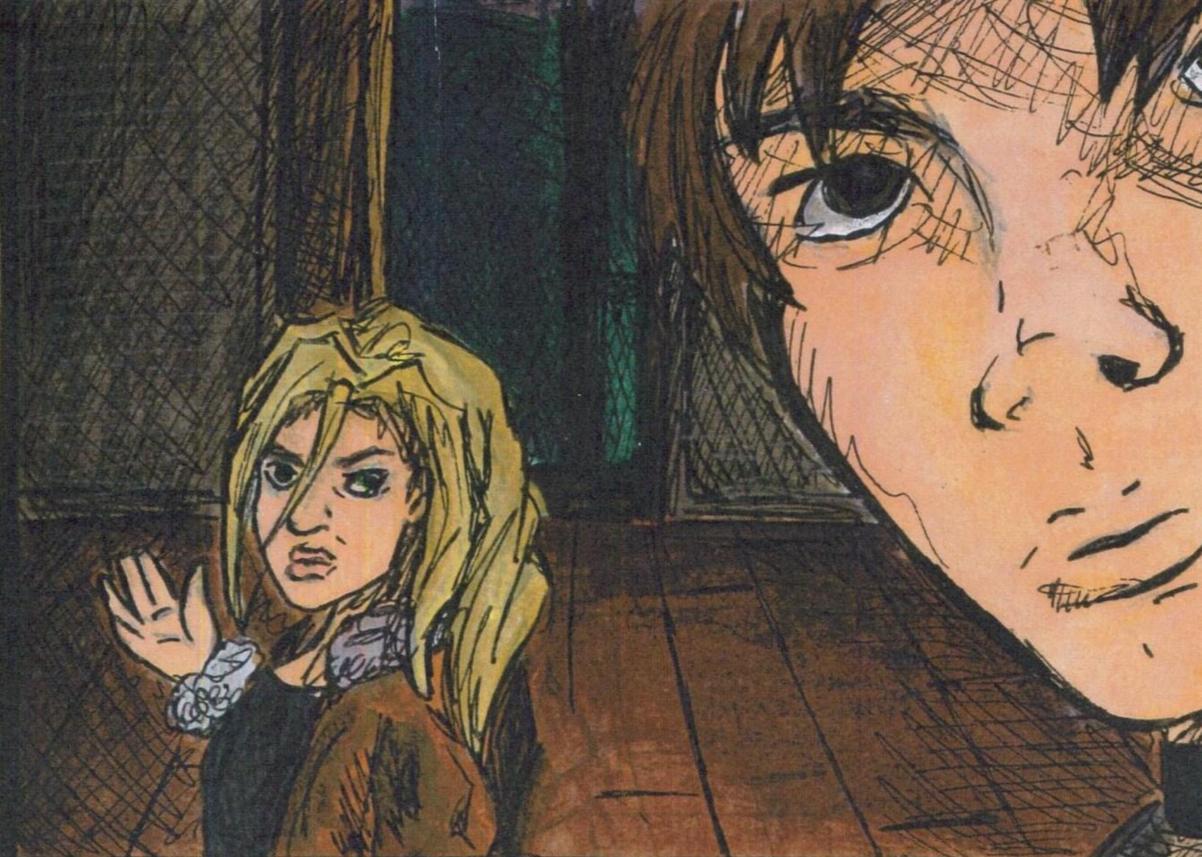
SHE'S HERE.
DIDN'T YOU SEE
HER?

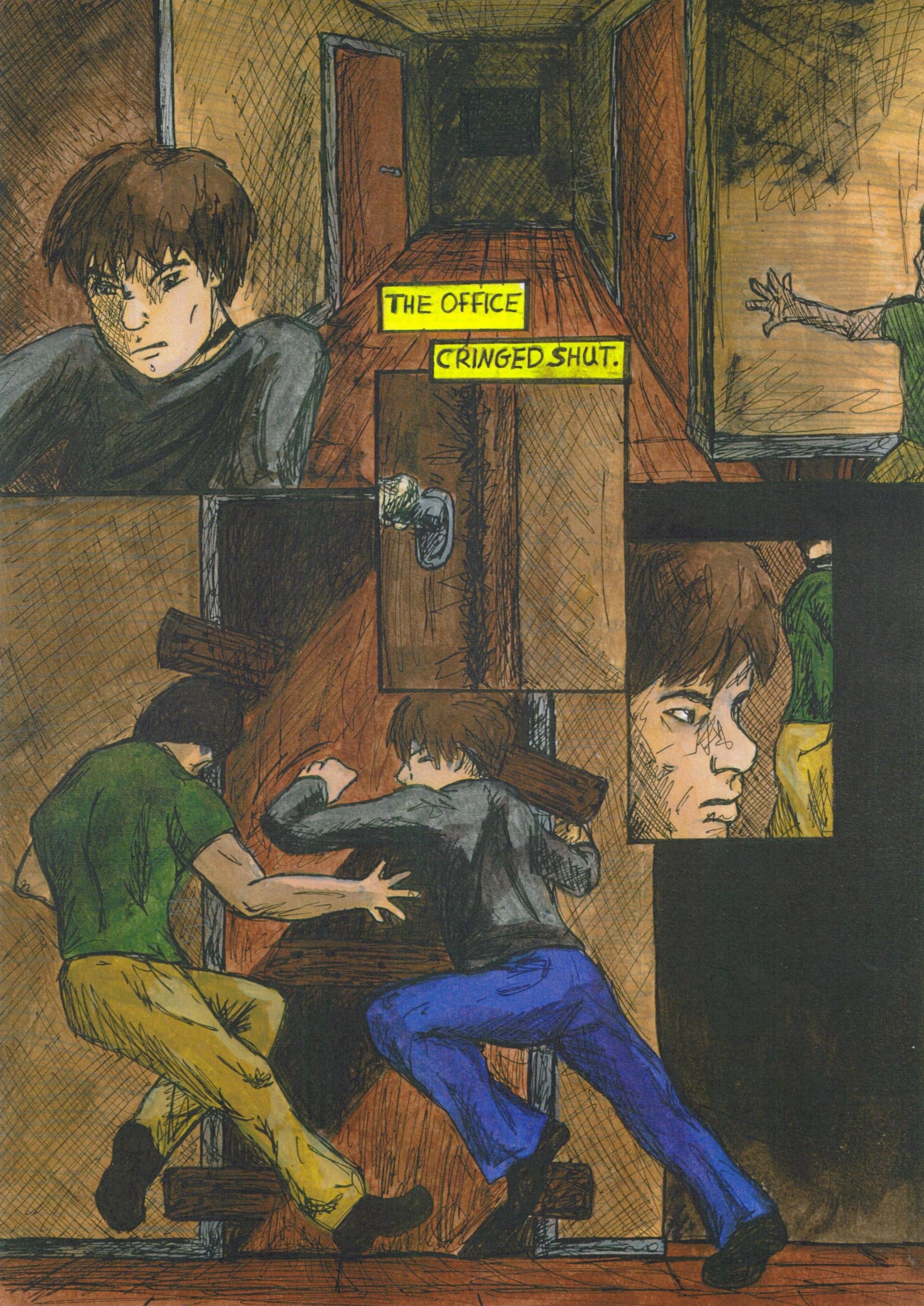


TOO MUCH.



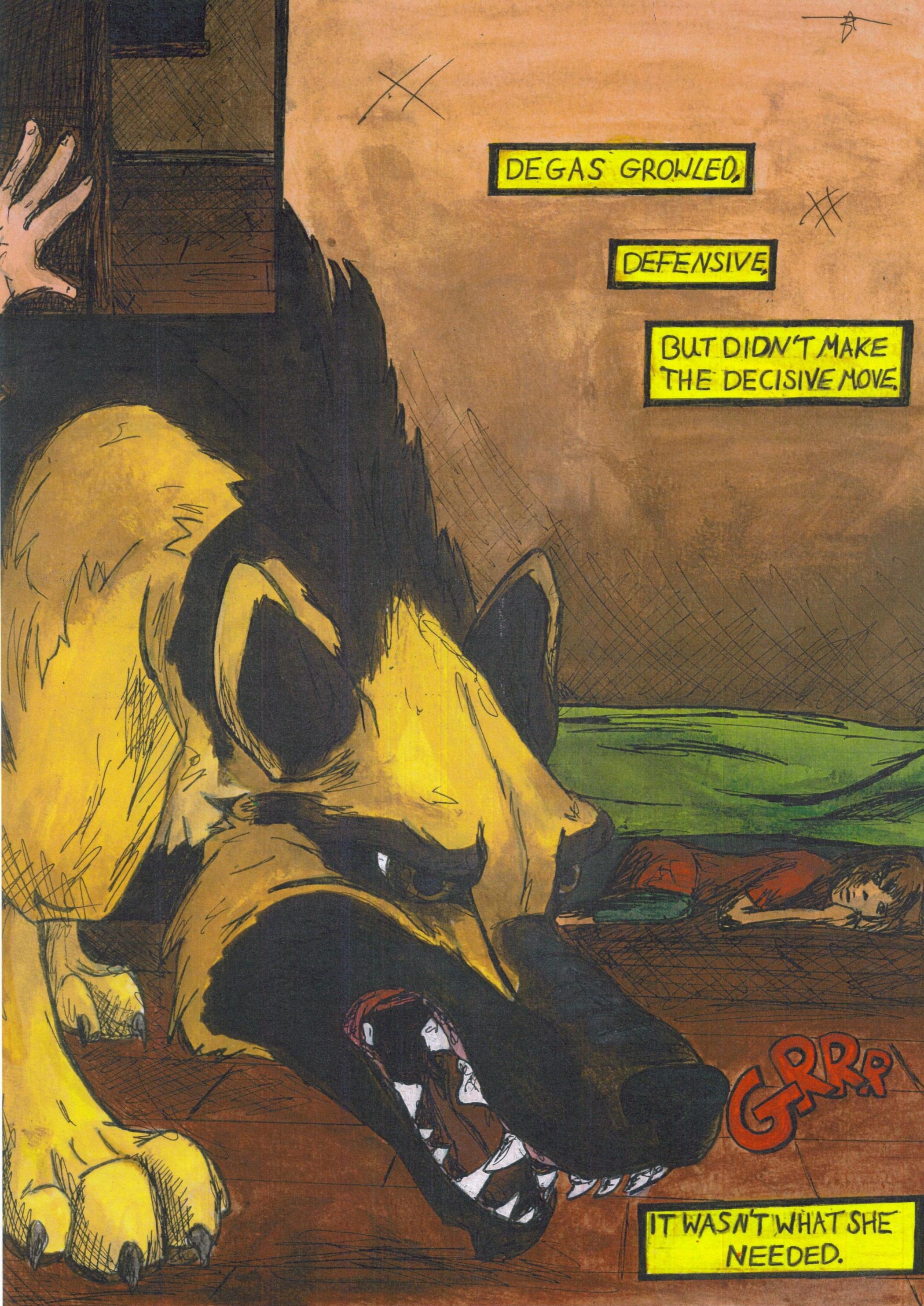
WHERE IS
SHE, SAL?





THE OFFICE

CRINGED SHUT.



DE GAS GROWLED,

DEFENSIVE,

BUT DIDN'T MAKE
THE DECISIVE MOVE.

GRRR

IT WASN'T WHAT SHE
NEEDED.



CISSY?



CISSY UNDER THE BED.

EVELYN BACK IN HER ROOM.



DID HE HURT YOU?

ARMS AROUND HIS NECK,

AROUND HIM,

NOT THE COLLAR.

DEGAS HAS BEEN LOOKING AFTER ME.

HE'S A GOOD DOG.



THEY WERE WRONG.



IT WAS BIGGER
THAN THEM MEN



YOUR DAUGHTER?



MY SISTER.



DEGAS STILL ONLY GROWLED.

POSTURED.

BECAUSE A BITE WOULD ESCALATE THE MOMENT. NOT END IT.





LEE!
COME ON!

COME ON.



LEE?

GET OUT.



WHAT?

EVELYN
BLONDE AND SCRAWNY
WITH BIG EYES AND A
SMALL MOUTH.

THE ONLY DIFFERENCE
WAS THE MISSING
FRECKLES

AND SHE WAS HOLDING
SOMETHING SOLID.



TAKE HER AND GET OUT.
NOW!





WE BEAR A CROSS UNTIL IT COMES TO DEFINE US.



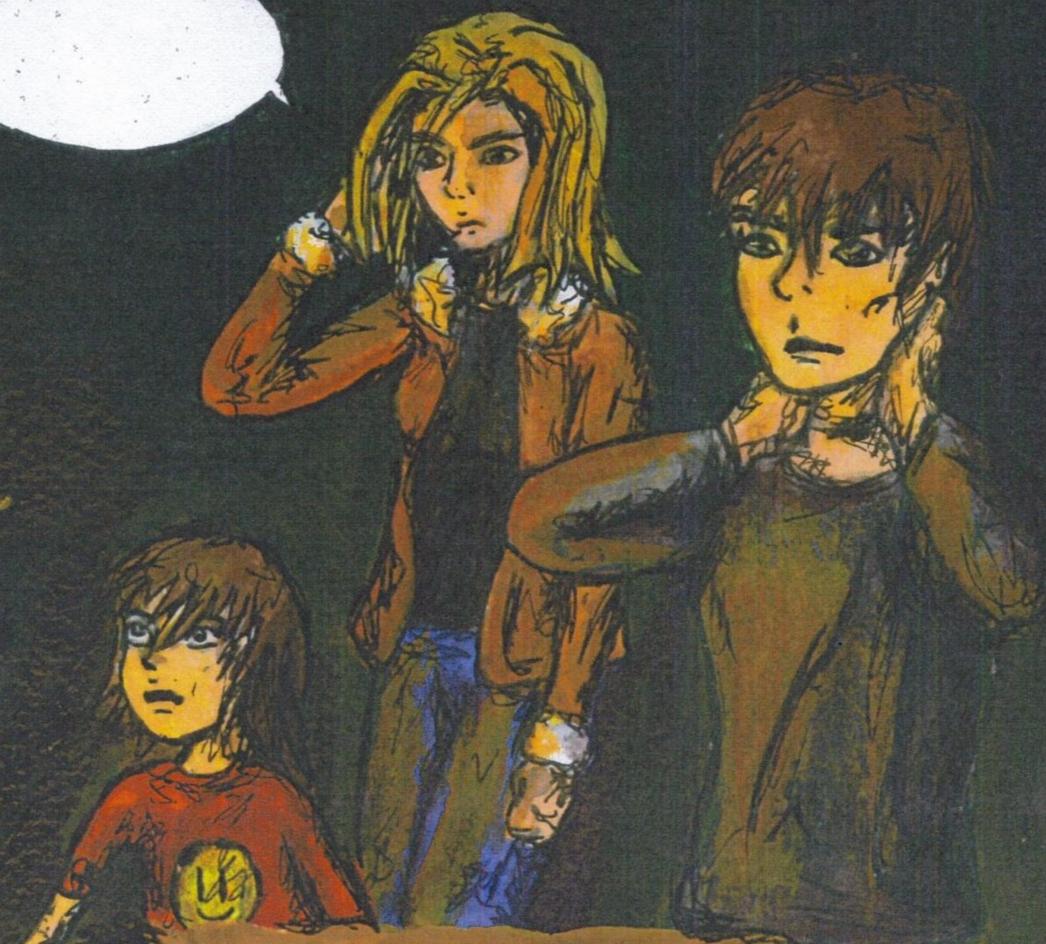
THEN WE CLING TO IT.



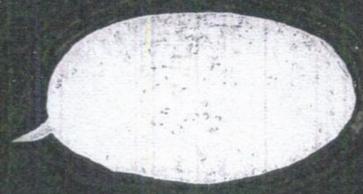
AND LET IT DESTROY US.



UNTIL WE LET IT GO



TO CARRY SOMETHING ELSE.



A Graphic Analysis

*The painting is not thought and pre-set in advance. While you create it, **it follows your thought processes**. Once finished, it changes even more, according to the observer's state of mind. A painting lives its life like a living being, experiencing changes everyday life imposes.*

(Picasso, 1935: 173-4. My emphasis)

At the time of producing *Guernica* (1937), Pablo Picasso was already aware of his significance in the history of art. From the start on 1st May 1937 until completion on 4th June, the artist made forty-five dated studies and produced a number of photographs capturing the different stages of the work in progress, providing 'unparalleled documentation' of the masterpiece (Warncke, 1992: 390).

The studies underlined the multi-layered complexity of the piece, with a cast of nine figures (Bull, Mother, Child, Warrior, Bird, Horse, Light Bearer, Fugitive and Falling Woman) characterising different expressive attitudes within the wide, enormously dynamic composition. For example, the Horse's upward and leftward attitude, with distorted mouth and goggling eyes, conveys agony; whilst the Falling Woman encapsulates panic and imploration through her dizzying upward, downward and diagonal arrangement in the piece. Of particular note is the absence of the enemy in the scene:

*The composition is not based on the contrast of two antagonistic parties, as in Picasso's later political works... There is no such dualistic antagonism in *Guernica*, which keeps the mural from being a political statement. It depicts the effects of a brutality that strikes from nowhere; it speaks of suffering and hope.*

(Arnheim, 1962: 20-1)

Guernica, however, is more than a symbol of suffering. Encompassing a variety of reactions to the assault, it relates 'the contingency of the brutal violation to the inviolable persistence of the spirit of Spain, and it had to add the theme of enlightenment. The mural is an intricate tissue of thoughts, not a mere outcry' (44). Through the figures in the composition, this is performed through the Mother, Child, Warrior, Horse and Fugitive (brutal violation); the Bull, Horse and Bird (persistence of spirit); and the Bird and Lightbearer (enlightenment). Across the studies and photographs, we can see how the cast of characters changed location, orientation and thus their mutual relationships with other figures on the canvas as Picasso quested for the most satisfying depiction of and reaction to the town's bombing.

Considering the documentation of the creative process behind *Guernica*, Rudolf Arnheim reminds us that the fundamental assumption that 'whatever the painter put down on paper was not arbitrary, accidental, or mere play, but was done for the purpose of furthering his artistic task' (15) can only ever *be* an *assumption*. Even the reports and reflections that artists make upon themselves

and their work (see, for example, Barron, F. et al., *Creators on Creating*: 1997) are ultimately partial, subjective reflections.

[T]he value of what they can say is reduced by the narrowness of consciousness, the disturbances caused by self-observation, and the theoretical opinions held by the artists themselves as to what he believes happened or ought to have happened rather than what he was actually able to observe.

(Arnheim: 13)

From its conception following the abandonment of the *Wayward South* manuscript (September 9th 2010), *Closer to Home* was intended to be more than an act of imaginative writing endurance across scenes of graphic physical and sexual violence. Personal and critical journals were maintained alongside annotated research notes and quotes to enable a clear elucidation of the creative process. These journals were, unfortunately, not studiously maintained throughout the writing period. During depressive periods of self-doubt and anxiety, records became vague or non-existent as confidence was lost over the value of the writing, my ability to complete the project, and the purpose of the emotionally challenging material I was immersing myself in; subsumed by a sense of gross infringement and betrayal against my family-raised values of decency, respect and taste.

Thus the documentation, examination and ultimate conclusions drawn about the creative process behind the artefact *Closer to Home* are only *so* reliable – as reliable as they could have been. The absence of commentary within certain scenes (the first of Cissy’s sexual scenes with a John, for example: 16-8) is telling of the process in itself. Other scenes, particularly the “spoon torture” scene, have been meticulously catalogued (146-155).

Interrupting the fiction of the text, the elucidations of process take place within a “negative space” – where some barrier has been broken to allow a reading of what is not usually seen of a finished artefact. The breaches exposing the inner workings and history of *Closer to Home* vary in size from peepholes (textual black boxes) to broad windows (exegetical chapters), and build upon the notion that the artefact is a writhing, squirming entity, given to obfuscating and mutilating parts of itself in its pages.

Previously the creative process sections of the text were demarcated with black borders, but this did not engage with or build upon the fragmented and shifting nature of the artefact as a whole. Throughout drafting the exegetical components, I was constantly discovering new conceptual possibilities through combinational play and experimentation, resulting in the spectrum of compositions described here. Allowing myself to be freely creative with the relationship between text and graphics opened new avenues and altered the very process of writing. This is best illustrated in the graphic and comic elements of the thesis which borrow from multiple mediums, including Film and Fine Art, to create a variegated but cohesive whole.

Ransom Quotes

In the late 1950s, a group of artists used cut-out text as a means of subverting meanings in adverts, signs and symbols. The Situationist International was formed in 1957, a group of mostly male, mostly European artists and theorists led by Guy Debord that played a crucial role in the French student uprisings of the late Sixties (Watters, 2002: 9).

'It goes without saying that one is not limited to correcting a work or to integrating diverse fragments of out-of-date works into a new one; one can also alter the meaning of those fragments in any appropriate way, leaving the imbeciles to their slavish preservation of "citations."
(Debord: 1956)

The Situationists believed that art should be something a person does, not something they sell or use to sell, and criticised modern society's meaningless pursuit of consumer commodities. Debord dubbed this the spectacle of society, where lives had been 'reduced to lifestyles, commodified and circumscribed roles': relationships between individuals replaced by relationships with objects; expression diluted into information; and people rendered passive observers of the spectacle surrounding them (Watters: 11).

To combat the spectacle, the situationists performed and encouraged *détournement*, whereby '[i]mages and texts are decontextualized, *détourned*, and then recontextualized. [...] By utilizing texts and images stolen from the spectacle, they hoped to foster an insurrection at the level of representation' (12).

The situationists are perhaps best known for their *détourned* cartoons, where popular romance comics were reappropriated to espouse situationists theories in their speech balloons (Watters, 13). Debord instructed that:

[D]istortions introduced in the *détourned* elements must be as simplified as possible, since the main impact of a *détournement* is directly related to the conscious or semiconscious recollection of the original contexts of the elements.[...] The idea of pure, absolute expression is dead; it only temporarily survives in parodic form as long as our other enemies survive'

(Debord: 1956. Original emphasis).

In *Closer to Home*, it is the bright and engaging aesthetic of specialised, regularly produced periodicals and their advertisements that are *détourned* to convey the words of literary theorists, historians and philosophers. The contrast of form and content brings a visual novelty to the quotations, and disturbs the appearance and pacing of the largely plain-text artefact.

Newspapers and Web sites [sic] are filled with juxtapositions and extreme abutments that simmer with tension. Attempts to interlink patches of boldface type result in a sort of cultural Tourette [sic] syndrome. Nothing really lines up; there are no helpful parallels to be discovered. Everything is whacked together in fragments that temporarily cohere but cannot hold fast. The density of the information becomes puzzlingly abstract while understanding takes a backseat to the esthetics [sic] of arrangement.

(Flood et al., 2007: 8)

The “pop out” text used as lures into the articles they are quoted from are extraordinary out of editorial context. Read in isolation, they are curious snapshots of a certain literary zeitgeist...

The artefact repeatedly takes quotes from the wider literary world to support itself with evidence, to explain itself, and to justify itself through the advocacy of existing literature. Sources range from Amis to Sontag, Bataille to Hitler. Throughout the text, they present in isolation (81: ‘When your Daemon is in charge, do not think consciously. Drift, wait, and obey’ (Kipling, 1985: 162) amidst a deteriorating chapter to suggest that the text has gone entirely out of control; in groups of meaningful intrusions (18); and as obstructions (only fragments of the *Wayward South* manuscript are visible between the words (38-14; 43-52).

These quotes are constructed letter by letter from images of text from printed media – specifically “disposable” magazines. A “lads mag”, a collection of car magazines (that my brother had apparently hoarded around forty issues of in the bottom of his wardrobe) and miscellaneous publications that were about to be thrown out of a doctors’ surgery waiting room used an aesthetically suitable broad mix of colours and fonts. The car magazines were particularly useful for troublesome ‘q’s and ‘x’s, as I had elected to use the same colour/font combination for whole words for ease of reading, as opposed to individual letters of different styles.

For an authentic texture, the first quotes made were physically cut out, assembled on paper and scanned into the computer when the glue was dry. Not only did the process of seeking, cutting, assembling and gluing take an extraordinary amount of time, but the scanned images had to be digitally cleaned around their borders before they could be put into the text. These two quotes now stand as symbols of misspent labour at the start of *Closer to Home* (2).

Following this, I began to cut out whole paragraphs and “pop out” text from the magazines, filling twelve pieces of A4 card with the scavenged words. After scanning these textual reservoirs in, I selected and copied out letters and rearranged them like blocks in *Microsoft Paint* to form the required words. Though more material-efficient (I could reuse letters, numbers and punctuation), easier to rectify mistakes and faster overall compared to making my first quotes, this process was still enormously time consuming. To make the fifty-one “ransom quotes” used in this artefact took nine weeks of doing very little *but* quote construction.

Quicker still would have been to reappropriate the raw material from digital sources, or to work backwards and manipulate quotes with different fonts and colours in *Microsoft Word*. As with the Moth biomorphs (16, 108-9), however, I wished to preserve the texture and roughness of the printed page: the slightly-off angles, paper creases and colour distortions that make the ransom quotes more like images than plain words.

The majority of the ransom quotes appear en-masse and in a dense arrangement to conceal the fiction-within-fiction *Wayward South* manuscript from the reader. This text appears as read by Sal and Cissy in two parts: as an unbroken block of pages by Sal whilst waiting for a food order (43-52) and in staccato by Cissy on the bathroom floor in Muma’s house (38-41). *Wayward South* was the text that Adam originally set out to write, ultimately subverted by

the House's rewrites to form the Dogs' manifesto. On the page, the artefact that is *Closer to Home* transmits the House's censorship, conveying a desire to not be read.

This incomplete and almost entirely unreadable piece of prose is also the majority of the aborted first draft of the prose section of this artefact.

The content of the obstructive quotes are themselves revealing of the text they cover. Juxtaposed between paragraphs of the rat investigating Cissy's genitals whilst she reads, Susan Sontag's 'As objects of contemplation...' (2003: 88) asks the reader if, having already read the child's vagina being penetrated by a paying man, they are now steered to read of a rat licking the same place (40); Friedrich Nietzsche's 'Dreadful experiences...' (1998 [1886]: 61) raises an uncomfortable question about Cissy's life of abuse (38); and Lawrence Langer's 'The fairy tales of childhood...' (1975: 160) functions both to connect the surreal presence of the rat with is-it-isn't-it-there Moth (39), and to link Cissy to Adam through an altered repetition of the quote at the end of the chapter depicting Adam's unravelling reality (41).

The quotes hiding Sal's section of the *Wayward South* relate more directly to Adam than to her – providing an insight into his guilt, self-berating and how he convinced himself that it was justifiable to pursue the course of violence with the *Dogs* (38-41). These obstructing quotes occasionally demonstrate an awareness of their purpose. Gitta Sereny's (39) quote in cut-up text goes so far as to tease:



It is impossible to avoid The
conclusion that the total disappearance
of this historical document is probably more
indicative of the importance assigned to it by
those most closely affected by its content and
significance than would have been ready
availability for inspection.

(1974: 71)

William Burroughs used the cut-up method as a composition tool in prose as a means to 'sever the lines of linguistic control he had been analysing' (Land: 459). In cut-up, a page of text is sliced or folded down the middle and placed with half of another page, the results of which are typed up afresh. This random element of chance bypassed the 'narrative logic of language that otherwise dictates the words that come to an author when he writes' (ibid), bringing about genuine novelty whilst drawing attention to the materiality of texts. Cut-

up was also a more general technique of subversion, as Burroughs describes the word as 'one of the most powerful instruments of control as exercised by the newspaper [...] Now if you start cutting these up and rearranging them you are breaking down the control system' (Burroughs, 1989: 33).

The use of cut-ups in *Closer to Home* is aesthetic rather than political, though Moth's

[T]he Word clearly bears the single identifying feature of virus: it is an organism with no internal function other than to replicate itself.' (Burroughs, 1986: 47)

'I find my images everywhere they call to me from, often places selling overpriced cigarettes and pork skin snacks.'

(Mutu, quoted Flood et al., 2007: 74)

biomorphs as composed by cut-up pornographic images is more a feminist political statement. Moth shows the female body reduced to pieces of flesh and hair, specifically to the gender signifiers of the exposed (hairless) vagina, breasts and buttocks, as well as the long style of hair prevailing in pornography. Barely acknowledged as a child or a person by the Johns, and particularly by this last violent John, Cissy is too reduced to her undeveloped sexual organs.

Moth's Biomorphs

The central characters are shown graphically in the comic section of *Closer to Home* (164-177), but Moth appears pictorially earlier in the text on two separate but thematically connected occasions. Immediately preceding Cissy's rapes by the Johns, Moth is present as a mosaic composition of fragmented images of skin and hair (15, 108-9). That the biomorphs are made from material sourced from a pornography magazine, and appearing directly before the character's sex scenes, makes a clear statement of Moth's purpose and meaning to the child.

Moth's first graphic appearance (15) is positioned in the centre of the page, almost spanning the width with its wings. Though the shadow is absent, Moth's position overlaying the text suggests a sense of depth and a physicality of the page. Beneath, the prose is printed as a mirror-reverse of the following page, as seen in the *Joy in the Words* exegesis (146-55). However unlike the torture scene's exegesis, this textual reversal and graphic overlay are not intended as an exposure of the creative process. In this negative space, and in both instances of its biomorphic appearance, Moth emerges in awareness of the reader, desiring to warn away and obstruct their viewing of Cissy's abuse.

Appearing so large as to span across two pages, the diptych biomorph (108-9) more overtly warns the reader away from the impending content. Weight is suggested by Moth's shadow as it forms a bright blockade, pressing down with all its insubstantial might upon the pages to keep them from being turned. Throughout the rest of the chapter, the artefact perpetuates the graphic element through heavy (and ultimately overwhelming) use of blank black boxes to distort the text (110-7).

In both biomorphs, Moth appears as an expressionist icon, resembling a Common Swift moth in shape and, particularly in the larger diptych, the colour patterning on the wings and thorax. Though the contents of its constituent parts are only clear through close examination, their significance is not lost for being fragmented. Instead, the broken mass creates a more textured and dynamic composition that encourages close scrutiny.

As for the first ransom quotes, I used a printed pornography magazine to physically tear, assemble and glue both biomorph Moths on to card. The paper of the magazines was cheap, the fibres coming apart when torn. This created a ragged white edge around each mosaic fragment, delivering a rough, aggressive texture.

After scanning, I cleaned the outlines to a true white space for the smaller Moth so that it could be smoothly overlaid onto the text. On the diptych Moth, the larger mosaic fragments meant that more detail was visible: On Moth's left upper wing, the origin of the reappropriated material is made explicit through

the appearance of nail-varnished fingers clutching at naked flesh. Genital folds and shadows can also, just, be discerned – invisible in a casual glance but there to be seen.

Black Boxes

The blank and textual black boxes scattered across the fiction of *Closer to Home* and the exegesis chapters serve a variety of purposes. Initially appearing as alien intrusions into the text, it is only through frequency and repetition that the blank black boxes' symbolic meaning becomes clear. Just as the black graphics intrude on the written word, word balloons in comics seem intrusions into the primarily visual medium if isolated from their symbolic meaning: 'neither purely verbal nor pictorial, but both one and the other at once, bridge the word/image gap' (Carrier, 2000: 28). As readers of images and text-image combinations, 'we expect every picture element to contribute to the meaning of the image' (ibid). Arranged in conjunction with the blank black boxes, and particularly when employed in atypical and symbolic spatial arrangement (See: 76-83), they render the words themselves images.

At the beginning of each new chapter, black title bars function as navigation markers within the text and aid temporal clarity. The text (i.e.: **North - Now**) provides information on time and location, whilst the length of the black bar acts as a visual shorthand of distance into the past. This combines the immediacy of the graphic with the slower absorption of reading text, which is utilised to greater degrees as *Closer to Home* progresses until the final chapter, where graphics are *the* primary storytelling mode. Where writing is *perceived* information, requiring time and specialised knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language, pictures are *received* information, and their message instantaneous (McCloud, 1994: 49). Thus bold, direct words such as Adam's sprayed 'FUCK YOU' on the wall of the House (85) are received quickly, more like an image, as they explode from the page.

The blank black boxes serve as immediate visual cues of danger, distress and foreboding in the fiction sections (see *Moth* for a close examination of such a section: 62-6), altering the light/dark impression of the page as a whole. A larger volume of black space creates a more daunting impression, troubling the reading of the text. More specifically, the blank black boxes create obstructions in the textual space to emphasise and enhance content. On (116), there is a claustrophobic plummet of words as Cissy begs and cries out against being sodomised, the words trapped between two vertical towers of black. In comics, narrow vertical panels imply events that are happening quickly whereas the reader's eyes moves slowly across wide, horizontal panels, accelerating and decelerating the reading pace respectively (Cooney, 2011: 51). Following the anal rape, the textual path becomes a panicked labyrinth of broken lines and impenetrable barriers as Lee and Muma crash into the scene (117). Such obstacles significantly manipulate the reading pace of the text on a page-by-page basis, influence eye movement through the spatial arrangement of text (black on white space) and obstruction (black boxes). Across the artefact as a whole, the blank black boxes are as integral in meaning to the text as the written content and the white space.

Danielewski uses word boxes, colour and, significantly, blank space to the same effect in *House of Leaves* (2001). Between pages 193 and 245, words appear singularly, in small clusters or in an exploded arrangement across the page in effectual accordance with the prose.

Navidson, Reston, Wax and Jed are on the second day of an expedition into the unfathomable space of the *House's* incomprehensible vacuity. Wax is already injured and succumbing to infection when Jed is suddenly shot in front of the Hi 8 camera, the bullet 'obliterated the back side of his head, chunks of occipital lobe and parietal bone spewn [sic] out in an instantly senseless pattern uselessly preserved in celluloid light' (193). Danielewski continues: 'Here then -' (193) 'the after' (194) 'math' (195) 'of meaning.' (196) 'A life' (197) 'time' (198) 'finished between' (199) 'the space of' (200) 'two frames.' (201) 'The dark line where the' (202) 'eye persists in seeing' (203) 'something that was never there' (204) 'To begin with' (205). The shot comes out of the impenetrable dark of the labyrinth beneath the *House*, and Reston immediately fires back with a handgun. Navidson manages to illuminate the darkness behind the reach of their torches with a camera strobe flash, revealing 'the blur of a man standing dead centre with a rifle in his hand' (213-15). Before Reston can fire upon him, the series of doors behind the man and about the room they are in begin slamming shut 'one' (220) 'after' (221) 'another' (222) 'after' (223) 'another' (224). Through the shattering door panels, the mysterious figure's gunshots keep coming until the last door shuts leaving them 'saturated in silence' (238). The text settles into larger groupings at the bottom of each page after this point as Navidson and Reston fashion stretchers from their camping equipment and set about getting the injured men back out of the labyrinth.

This bold layout "queers" (strange or odd from a conventional viewpoint; not feeling physically right or well) reading pace and stuns the reader with the grotesque expanses of empty space, forcing them to anxiously await the next word, the next event, until the end, mirroring the tension and unease of the characters. The need to keep turning pages and search for the next fragment, for it could appear anywhere on the sheet, also heightens the reader's physical involvement with the text, enslaving their actions to the book in a way that one cannot help to be aware of (See: *The House and the Uncanny* for further analysis: 102-7).

The textual black boxes contain relevant supplements and asides to the main body of the text: elucidations of the creative process through personal diary extracts, drafting notes and quotes from influential critical reading (See: *Joy in the Words* for an exhaustive analysis: 146-55). As previously established, the black boxes represent a negative space in the *Closer to Home* artefact, peepholes for glimpses into the history and mechanics of the text.

It was impossible to include a continuous and detailed documentation of the process of writing this piece, only partially for reasons of space. The journals I have kept as raw material for an autoethnographic study are varied in quality and content, with chunks of time left unrecorded. I have not fabricated entries in retrospect as, though the personal voice may ultimately be read as another fiction, such disingenuousness felt pointless and a betrayal of the point of the piece. I was unwilling, perhaps unable to record my thoughts and feelings during periods such as my grandfather's nine days spent unfed, wheezing and

progressively more oblivious to us, nor events such as his funeral some weeks later. Childishly, cowardly, I did not want the memories themselves but for them to just be things that had passed. In *Closer to Home* this may be interpreted as censorship in a cold reading rather than the result of inconsistent record keeping. It is a fact, however, that across drafts I have removed a substantial amount of honest, deeply personal but ultimately irrelevant ephemera from the piece. Primarily this was material that was not useful for the text as an elucidation of process; revealed personal difficulties that were not directly relevant; or was simply not within my right to disclose as it involved another party. What is left is enough to understand, though some snippets are more revealing than others.

In *Cissy and John: Last* (118-21), personal writing journal entries are juxtaposed with the critical reflection of Cissy's sexual abuse in the prose. Displayed in black boxes, they show ruminations on drafting decisions ('I knew that I was shying away from the scene': 119); suggest my state of mental health during the writing period ('[...] falling into the minor self-mutilating habit of dermatilomania[...]': 121); and provide insights into the sources of inspiration for specific details of the chapter ('The secure pressure of a body on top, large and hot. Needing to pee but can't leave to go. It's going to make it hurt more': 120). This exegesis chapter uses three harmonising voices to describe and examine the original and final version of this section of the fiction. The scholarly voice used in the main article briefly examines the blurring of "child" and "innocence" within the context of "less is more" narration, and the evolving content of the scene towards greater sexual violence between the period of October 2010 and October 2011. In black boxes, the writerly voice notes some of the specifics of these content changes, highlighting an awareness that I was 'flinching' from writing the sodomy-rape of Cissy. Finally, the personal voice parallels an old, intimate anxiety of sex as a threat of discomfort or pain towards the body that conflicts with a desire to please. It is only through placing these three reflective components together that the impetus for the scene and the changes in the drafts over the following year are made clear.

Censored Pages

The ransom quotes obstruct and censor the entirety of the *Wayward South* manuscript as found in a coal bin beside the House and partially read by Cissy and Sal. *Closer to Home* obscures its *own* content in other ways, both to disorientate and engage in an Iserian relationship of absence and inference with the reader. Wolfgang Iser (1984) notes that this collaboration with the reader's pre-existing schema '[t]o retrieve what is hidden by means of interpretation requires a creative impulse which meshes perception and the "cognitive stock" in order to make them tick' (388). He goes on to describe that:

*What turns this type of interpretation into an art is the way in which it carves out structured blanks in the frameworks concerned in order to kindle a guided intuition. This does not mean, however, that the blanks give a free play to divination; instead, **they provide a conscious control for a leap of the***

imagination required whenever the unbridgeable has to be bridged.'

(389. My emphasis.)

In comics, the gutter space between panels engages the reader's imagination to make a leap: to take 'two separate images and transform[s] them into a single idea. Nothing is seen between the two panels, but *experience* tells you something must be there' (McCloud: 66-7. Original emphasis). The reader finds closure in connecting these fractured moments of both time and space to 'mentally construct a continuous, unified reality (67). They engage with the text to fabricate in imagination the implicit content in the gaps between explicit content.

Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. Hence, the structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text... Blanks and negations both control the process of communication in their own different ways: the blanks leave open the connection between textual perspectives and patterns – in other words, they induce the reader to perform basic operations within the text.

(Iser, 1980: 11-12)

Such structured absences are particularly effective at enhancing tension, suspense and intrigue, with the content the reader is left to generate as significant as the content delivered. Markus Schleinzer's *Michael* (2011) is a masterful example of absent material made critical – where the mundane and everyday are the on-screen focus, and the exceptional situation of a paedophile keeping a ten-year-old boy in his basement shown as only a minor facet of screen time. In the film, there is no indication of how long Wolfgang has been held captive; how he came to be there; the nature of the abuse (though Michael is seen washing his penis following a cut-away of him entering the boy's room, which strongly suggests a sexual relationship); or what happens to him following his captor's sudden death. Instead, the film shows Michael at work, on a skiing holiday, and eating or cleaning with the boy. It is the gutter that is put before the audience rather than the "action" panels that would seem the obvious content for a film with this concept. This innocuous, passive observation is sustained by the unobtrusive cinematography up until the closing minutes of the film, when the camera breaks habit and follows Michael's mother down the stairs and, teasingly, to her opening the boy's cell.

In the chapter where Adam realizes the uncanny danger of the House and attempts to fight back (85), the disintegrating pages are left bearing few words as the content is consumed. As in the previous example in *House of Leaves*, this creates a dynamic and sinisterly pacy reading speed, reliant on constructing meaning through absences. Words become objects floating in space, with equal meaning to be found in their orientation on the page.

Incomplete sentences and words (75-85) serve as visual shorthand for the unstoppable consumption, further suggesting that the possessing "spirit" of

Of The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, Fanning recommends that we 'read Sterne's print both as a text of mimetic verbal referents and as a non-verbal object that communicates by means of its manipulation of the space on the page' (Fanning, 1998: 432). At multiple points throughout the book, names, dialogue and entire passages of prose are replaced with asterisks, dashes and empty space, the print visually enacting the collapse of discourse taking place. Most poignant is the marbled black rectangle that dominates the page immediately following Yorick's death, curved in the topmost corners like the headstone of 'plain marble slab, which his friend Eugenius, by leave of his executors, laid upon his grave' (Sterne, 1943: 67).

the House is the same as that which disturbs the *Closer to Home* artefact. These absences confuse meanings: 'She wasn't dead, but it was long minutes before she blinked her dry eyes and realized that he was ' (79). At the bottom of the same page, the reader's eye movement is reversed and terminates with the word 'drowning', though the sentence continues overleaf with 'in words', which alters the initial meaning.

The sentence 'He came down hours later, foraging for lunch, and Jen was still there with the air and the mug' (78) is staggered across four

lines that descend in steps. This arrangement foreshadows the later descent into the House's basement/bowels (143), the site of Lee's initiation into human torture. It also alludes to the bewilderingly immense descending labyrinth in *House of Leaves* (estimated to extend beyond a space far greater than the Earth's diameter. Danielewski: 378), a connection more overtly implied by the footnotes of the censored pages (67-73).

The obstructions and absences in *Closer to Home* clash in attitude with the information that the reader is made privy to in the exegetical sections. There is a frustrating sense that despite the personal, often intimate disclosures, there is something important still being withheld.

Through pages 67 to 73, the entirety of the text on the page is blacked out as if redacted. This section mirrors Adam's failed efforts to paint over the House's writing in the spatially erratic black masses, whilst the footnotes suggest that the concealed text contains explanations and answers to the questions raised by the artefact as a whole. Against the disintegrating pages (75-86), this censorship indicates that the artefact is visually resisting having its inner works and core meaning exposed.

The footnotes themselves are, in fact, taken directly from annotations that have been made in my copy of Danielewski's novel.

The most completely censored section in *Closer to Home* is Sal's page (126), where only the title bar and her name are visible beyond the ragged edge of the encroaching blackness. This is indicative of a chapter (one of several) in an earlier draft in which Sal was the primary focus. Sal's chapters were entirely cut with the exception of this trace mark as they did not significantly contribute to the text, were of poor quality despite multiple rewrites, and most directly written based on my personal experiences whilst not benefitting the piece. Through the inclusion of this page, authorial censorship is demonstrated alongside the House's and the *Closer to Home* manuscript's censorship of the artifact. Additionally, this redaction and the unusual title bar (**South- Then**) brings an element of intrigue to the character, and raises questions about her history and intentions.

Echoes

Whilst content is deliberately withheld in *Closer to Home*, connections are indirectly provided in a handful of the exegetical chapters. Appearing as opaque illustrations behind the text, links are unobtrusively made between the critical and reflective content and the fiction. These visual accompaniments do not disturb the text, but supplement the more intrusive black boxes in giving chapters such as *The House and the Uncanny* (102-107) greater meaning. Often the link between the critical segment of the text and the arrangement of images or black space on a page of fiction is *only* made through such juxtaposition of image and analysis, not in the analysis itself.

Joy in the Words

The exegesis (146-55) for the scene where Lee is directed by Adam to torture a Southie bound to a chair in the House's basement is the most detailed commentary of the creative process in *Closer to Home*, showing draft changes, influencing critical considerations, and notes of personal events that had a bearing on the text. Appearing side-by-side the unmarked prose, the mirroring of the text and overshadowing abundance of black boxes create a clear sense that the pages are set in the negative space of the artefact: a detailed insight delivered "through the looking glass". The prose is rendered as an image in the mirrored page, foregrounding the notes annotating it.

This section was written using the original November 14th 2010 draft, the final draft as it appears in *Closer to Home*, and the writing and personal diary entries made at the time when writing and redrafting was taking place. I compared both drafts and used a highlighter pen to show the changes in individual words and sentences, replicated in *Joy in the Words* with the digital highlighter tool. The red lines connecting the highlighted sections to the black boxes serve no purpose other than clarity. Notations of rewrites were succinct to minimise inaccurate, retrospective speculation, which could lead to misleading conclusions about the drafting changes as I remember them, not as they actually were. Fortunately, during this period I kept detailed progress notes as I was writing, as well as whilst seeking information for the torture scene using films such as *Hostel* (2005) and the *Saw* series (2004, 2005, 2006).

The inclusion of the solid red rectangle (147) alludes in part to the bloody nature of the scene, present on the page before Adam tells Lee what he is expected to do to the bound man. It was included at a late stage in the writing of the exegetical chapter, inspired by my reading of Rothko the Abstract Impressionists at the time of writing, and felt a meaningful and aesthetically suitable addition.

Mark Rothko is regarded as one of the founding members of the New York School, or the Abstract Expressionists, alongside artists including Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman and

"The name Mark Rothko evokes a prototypical image: planar, symmetrical, and coloured just as the name Jackson Pollock evokes an image in black and white or an intricate web of poured and tangled skeins of paint. The phenomenon of the signature image has fostered a tendency to regard artists like Rothko, Pollock, or Newman as if they have painted only a single painting."

(Chave, 1989: 11)

Franz Kline (Chave, 1989: 4). He had considerable experience with portraits, landscapes and genre paintings before he turned towards an abstract mode of painting, and 'this familiarity with the conventional formatting or codes of pictorial art [...] continued to inform his work in a vestigial but significant way, even as he pursued an abstract mode of conceptualizing and realizing his pictures' (22).

The red rectangle alongside the blank black boxes is an allusion to Rothko's prototypical image – blurred blocks of various colours devoid of human figure or landscape. These "multiform" paintings, a term applied by art critics but never used by Rothko himself, emerged in 1946 and developed into his signature image. With its hard, geometric edges, however, the similarity between the red rectangle and Rothko's multiforms is only incidental in colour, and starkly different in form.

Rothko resisted being called a 'colourist', though the colours of his piece were the focus of his broadest experimentation as a painter. Colour was there only to serve in expressing the ever-important subject of emotion and the human experience. Similarly, the blank black boxes are concerned with immediacy of emotion, in conveying claustrophobic tension or sense of impending doom in a visual scan of the arrangement of black and white on the page before the content is even approached.

Rothko's palette subdued and darkened significantly from the late 1950s up until his suicide in 1970. In 1964, Rothko departed from the hazy rectangles of colour he was famous for in the 1950s and produced more than a dozen large canvases devoted to a single black rectangle in a black or nearly black field (Cooper, 2010: 2). Rothko's black paintings are unusually textured, the angle of light significantly altering the piece in shifts from matte to reflective. Closer inspection reveals violets and blues – the black not simply a void but brimming with nuance. As the details unfold, so does meaning (4).

I would have liked to have used a similar tonal nuance in the red and blank black boxes occurring throughout *Closer to Home*, as can be seen in the encroaching and mottled gutter in the comic section (172), but I have been restricted by the medium of the Word Processor. As such, the blank black boxes remain flat voids, lacking in the living energy I would have imbued them with. As part of the overall composition of the individual page, however, they serve their function, and just as Rothko insisted on a close and intimate viewing of his paintings to appreciate their nuance, a general reading of a tonally revised *Closer to Home* would likely have seen such tonal variations overlooked.

Rothko's art is 'unremittingly abstract, uncompromising in its refusal of narrative and mimesis'. However, 'he consistently rejected the notion that his classic paintings were abstract, referring to them instead as "realistic", as having "real and specific meaning," and above all as possessed of significant "subjects"' (Chave: 3). Though Rothko was never explicit in what he meant in referring to the subject matter of his paintings, he made it clear that he arrived at his subjects by 'dealing with human emotion: with human drama as much as [he could] possibly experience it' (18). Equally, the blank black boxes have a real and specific meaning to the style, atmosphere and narrative of the manuscript.

Closer to Home: A Graphic Denouement

The reading process in comics is an extension of text. In text alone the process of reading involves word-to-image conversion. Comics accelerates that by providing the image. When properly executed, it goes beyond conversion and speed and becomes a seamless whole. In every sense, this misnamed form of reading is entitled to be regarded as literature because the images are employed as a language.

(Eisner, 1996: 5)

On January 27th 2011, after weeks of stagnation and “writer’s block” with the last chapter of the prose of *Closer to Home*, it occurred to me to cease attempting to translate the imagined scenes in my mind into text and to simply *draw it* instead. My intention was to use the illustrations as a draft and a tool to writing prose. For this reason, and inspired by Art Spiegelmen’s *Maus* (1986), the comic section created and submitted within the February 2nd 2011 draft of *Closer to Home* was of a simplistically abstract and highly stylized form.

The “cartoonish” style of the first comic section served two purposes. Firstly, it saved time. Drawing in the conventional sense seeks to represent real-world subjects in a realistic way, with a focus on mass and interaction with light rather than outlines, and the simplifications that form style are made retinally. That is, ‘in a way that suggests what they look like to the eye... partly through the artist’s misperceptions and accidental misrepresentations and partly through the choices the artist makes in the service of retinal simplification’ (Carrier: 120).

Alternatively:

[...] cartoonists can draw characters who look only vaguely like actual people do, and backgrounds with only the faintest hints of real world complexity, and get away with it – often, that’s the idea. The simplifications of cartooning are symbolic even more than they are retinal: there are universally accepted scribbles that stand in for what mouths and noses and motion and sweat look like.

(ibid)

Comics are an interpretation of the world, with aspects that are deliberately exaggerated, adapted or invented to suit purpose (Wolk, 2007: 20). The reader accepts this “reality” and such large-scale metaphors as Spiegelman’s animals, for example, as part of the narrative and visual forms of the genre.

With this transformed reality accepted by the reader, comics ‘uniquely explore the spaces between reality and representation because the visuals of any given comic operate primarily as icons’ (Versaci: 92). In *Closer to Home*, I had already used simply graphics to visually convey ideas and meaning. Comics use

Writing Journal – January 27th 2011

Struggling so much with the end in writing it – why not draw it? Do it as a comic strip so that it disintegrates into images as the House disintegrates with the fire. Then hand the thing in, get some feedback and probably redraft it from there. Think Watchmen juxtaposition between visual strips and the Under the Hood prosaic sections.

an impressionistic rather than realist style to strip down an image to its central meaning and amplify that meaning in a way that realist art cannot. McCloud calls this 'amplification through simplification' (30), and expressionistic power of simple lines and colours was the second impetus to illustrating the closing events of *Closer to Home*.



Fig. 1

The five panels in *Fig. 1*, taken from the February 2nd 2011 draft, show Adam running up the stairs in the House in pursuit of Lee whilst Sal remains behind. Drawn to the unusual markings on the wooden stair panels, Sal cautiously approaches and touches the stains. She is shocked by what she finds.

The composition of the first three panels is of a hard diagonal divide through the repeated background, the lower strata partially overwhelmed by impenetrable shadows whilst the upper is predominantly red. Rough, expressionistic lines and emotive rather than accurate colours create atmosphere and enough iconographic detail to determine setting, characters and action. To counter the style, which encourages a brisk reading pace, the first three panels are drawn wide and alike to slow the pace, build tension, and allow the reader a pause before the action scene of Adam and Lee's confrontation in front of Cissy.

The human figures have also been greatly simplified, with simple shapes such as pyramids and spheres used to differentiate between characters. In the fifth panel, radiating lines have been used to display shock in the absence of Sal's facial features.

In *Maus*, Spiegelman deliberately simplifies his animal figures so that expression is imaginatively projected onto them, thus soliciting the reader in intensifying the emotional gravity of the piece. Cartoonist and theorist Scott McCloud describes this phenomenon as a seeing of the self, rooted in non-visual self-awareness (35-7), and an important part of the appeal of comics:

*When two people interact, they usually look directly at one another, seeing their partner's features in vivid detail. Each one also sustains a constant awareness of his or her own face, but **this** mind-picture is not nearly so vivid; just a sketchy arrangement... a sense of shape... a sense of **general placement**.*

*Something as **simple** and **basic** as a **cartoon**.*

Thus, when you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face, you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon, you see yourself.

*I believe that this is the primary cause of our childhood fascination with **cartoons**. Though other factors such as **universal identification**, **simplicity** and the **childlike features** of many cartoon characters also play a part.*

*The cartoon is a **vacuum** into which our **identity** and **awareness** are **pulled** – **an empty shell** which **enables** us to travel in **another realm**. We don't just **observe** the cartoon. We **become** it!*

(ibid. Original emphasis)

Though the drawing style, colour and printing of mainstream Western comics (i.e.: *Batman*, *Spider-Man*, *Deadpool*) has become sophisticated in recent years, many comic book characters wear masks that completely hide their facial features. The same techniques of using suitably placed impressionistic lines, emotive colour balances and exaggerated poses serve to convey emotion whilst utilising the reader's self-projection. Comic artists 'present the rudiments of physical forms – a few details that stand in metonymically for something in reality (or something reality-like in the imagination), even if they aren't an actual detail of that thing' (Wolk: 132-3). *V for Vendetta* (Moore: 1988) is a masterful example of highly expressive lines used to quickly convey complex and extreme emotional states, though in a far more realist style of illustration than *Maus*.

Spiegelman's departure from mimesis in the simplistic drawing of animal-equivalents (mice for Jews, cats for Nazis, significantly) both creates a novel and affective retelling, and acknowledges that 'representing the Holocaust – like all narrative representations – is a fiction, an illuminating distortion' (Schwarz, 2000: 36). This bold revision of Holocaust representation 'sidestep[s] the "already-told" quality of the Holocaust' (Witek: 103) and highlights the fictionality of *all* retellings: 'representing the fictionality of the realist contract; [and] it recognizes realist discourse's production of the real as an accidental effect of representation' (Rothberg, 2000: 105).

Additionally, Spiegelman confronts the theme of imperfect recall in all survivor testimonies by using comics'

*[...]unique graphic language to illustrate (literally) this problem. At three separate points in *Maus*, Spiegelman uses a recurring graphic design to illustrate the tension between real occurrences and Vladek's testimony in which the exact happenings of certain events are not entirely known to him (1986: 108; 1991: 35, 50). In each of these excerpts, Spiegelman overlays Vladek's questionable memory with a visual "block" – a word balloon, a text box – that partially obscures the image. Thus, the reader is prevented from "witnessing" the event because Vladek's recall is questionable. The directness of this point is achievable only through the medium's combination of words and images. Typically in comics, these components work together to create a narrative; here, however, Spiegelman positions them against one another to illustrate how issues of memory are deeply imbedded in Holocaust writing.*

(Versaci: 90-1)

The illustrated chapter was well received, prompting me to abandon my intent to use the simplistic comic as a redrafting tool. Instead, I took the comic as an initial draft that allowed me to develop, examine and consolidate a higher quality of images for the graphic denouement of *Closer to Home*. I read and enjoy comics, and wished to experiment with incorporating the comics form into the artefact as a climax to the graphic elements that preceded the chapter. The immediacy and accessibility of the genre appealed both stylistically and as an arresting narration of the climax of the artefact.

In October 2008, IDW capitalized on the election by showing the biography of the presidential candidates in two twenty-eight page comics: Mariotte's Presidential Material: Barack Obama and Helfer's Presidential Material: Barack Obama. This was not a unique political utilisation of the genre, however: a comic-strip biography of John F. Kennedy was published in 1961 for circulation to US embassies abroad (Martin: 2009).

Equally, I have been influenced by the movement of comics, also known as graphic novels, from the peripheries of niche hobbyists into the zeitgeist over the last two decades in the form of films, cartoon series and clothing. Ed Brubaker, an American comics writer, facetiously explained: 'The reason is if you look at the generation now in power in the entertainment industry, they grew up with comics as serious stuff. The geeks have

won' (Martin: 2009). Certainly the profile of comics have benefited tremendously from the success of their mainstream film adaptations, though this belies the fact that the industry is largely stagnant. 'Licensing, in the form of toys, merchandise, and movies, is now the primary source of revenue. *The Avengers* [2012. Original title] alone made more money for Marvel than the total sale of print comic books, industry-wide, over the last two years' (Snyder: 2012).

The culmination of *Closer to Home* is a rapid series of converging points: Sal's discovery of how deeply into the Dogs group Lee is involved; Lee's confrontation with Adam; the House's closure with Adam through the siblings; and its cathartic destruction and release in the close. Presented graphically, it is also the culmination of the graphic elements that have frequented the prosaic and exegetic artefact up to this point.

Black boxes, ransom quotes and Moth's two biomorphic appearances have formed a collage with the traditionally textual to make meaning – their full impact only present when the individual elements are taken in unison. Fully illustrated, the final chapter's significance is highlighted by the move from relatively simple graphics and prose to bright colours and expressionist lines.

This format change also enabled me to more thoroughly reflect on my conceptual process – the stage wherein I imagine the events of a sequence as if film stills or short moving clips, experimenting and altering until satisfactory, and finally translating these

'Any part of a whole must remain incomplete in its meaning and form. It must be in need of the whole. Otherwise it would be self-sufficient and closed – a foreign body, which can do without its environment and therefore cannot endure it, since art must exclude everything that is not necessary. If the horse's head has become capable of expressing, by itself, the aggressive outcry of suffering, it can no longer tolerate the company of the cast of Guernica characters. Nor can Guernica tolerate it. The head must be reduced to its partial function.'

(Arnheim: 44)

Writing Journal - December 4th 2010

I see in colours. Dirty beige walls and a tepid-green bathtub. That green of gone-off, cheap toothpaste. Too dark in the room and still shows the dirt lines. Hair and fluff gathered in long, thick clumps in the grooved dip of the lino against the skirting boards all the way around. I cleaned the bathroom this morning and was amazed at all the towel-fluff that had built up.

Is it clichéd to have the light bulb in the bathroom naked like all of them in the house? Feels like it should be naked. Different though. White. Painfully white, whereas all the other lights are a foggy shade of yellow. The light in the bathroom is sterile and unforgiving in its illumination. Clinical, but I don't want the medical connotations. The bathroom is turning into Cissy's sanctuary. It is the only place where is unsupervised. In her bedroom she sleeps with men and lies in a bed that she sleeps with men in. Muma is a presence in that room. Downstairs is Muma's domain. I wanted the garden to be her space initially, with connotations of freedom and wildlife linking in with moths and the fireflies. But outside feels like Lee's, and she seems to work better as a girl vulnerable in nature.

The bathroom it is, then, where she washes the fluids of her work from her body and can sit quietly with things she has hidden. It is where she is when Lee finds out and accidentally kills Muma, where the mist in the mirror tells her to wait until it's all over. Bathrooms as sanctuaries.

mental constructions into words and prose. The process is an expansion upon the generative and exploratory processes in Finke's Geneplore Model of Creativity (Finke: 1990; Finke, Ward & Smith: 1992), wherein a cycle of experimentation and revision according to specific constraints is engaged to creatively transform simple preinventive structures and create an original product. 'These preinventive structures can be thought of as internal precursors to the final, externalized creative products and would be generated, regenerated, and modified throughout the course of creative exploration' (Finke et al., 1992: 17).

This process was mostly clearly documenting in the writing of the scene where Cissy reads the few pages of *Wayward South* that Lee has given her in the bathroom, and her genitals are investigated by a rat which frightens her (38-41). In conceiving this section, I could traverse the scene imaginatively: examining and altering spatial arrangements; texture; patterns; the effect of light; shadows; colour; character expression; body language and movement. In imagining this scene, and as had happened for others, there was a tangible sense of smell, taste and temperature (chilly mildew underscored with the faint smell of bleach) that enhanced the experience of imagining, stimulating the rapid and

flowing production of prose.

The rat was introduced as a result of play whilst seeking a way of enlivening the static scene, and making it more powerful within the text. I felt that Cissy's reading needed to be disturbed, as did the reader, and the phallic shape of the rat's head along with the inherent connotations of uncleanness and disease that the wild animal holds were intuitively incorporated. I believe that some inspirational credit is due to my observation of my pet rats licking the condensation from the sitting room window around the time of writing: noticing the movements of their heads, how their bodies shifted as they reached on their hind legs.

Features that struck me as significant or compelling in the final imagined bathroom scene, such as the brightness and hue of the lightbulb, were isolated from the hundred other elements and included in the prose. These were

arranged in descriptions that would make the most suitable and interesting combinations within the scene.

Similarly, features were isolated and described in the train carriage scenes (94-6; 100-1) to suit the limited perspective of the camera and the framing device of the screen where the films would be shown. This scene was generated and explored prior to writing in a more dynamic visualisation: expressions; body language; how the saws moved through clothing and flesh; spatter patterns on the windows, and the shadow and colour distortions this would cause over fabric, wood and flesh tones. Only a fraction of these details were described in the prose, but the filmic analysis (*The Desert of the Real: Carriage 1 and Carriage 2: 97-9*) demonstrates the degree of detail and clarity that was in the imagined images of these scenes.

Though I had a strong sense of the look and feel of the scenes in the final chapter whilst creating the first comic draft, I was aware that I would need to convey what was in my mind's eye through the prism of comics conventions (such as panel shapes and sizes that convey meaning and exaggerated character poses) to achieve the best possible results (the limits of my artistic abilities notwithstanding). Composition, pacing within and across panels, perspective and a dozen other aesthetic concerns within the language of comics often caused a large move away from the cinematic images I had conceived to the final panels. Certain panels, however, changed minimally between conception and when accommodating comics visual storytelling conventions, and thus between the first and final drafts.



Fig. II shows Sal contemplating the stairs after Adam runs up. The stairs are in flat profile, and a play of light and shadows on their panels that is wholly unnatural within the House draws focus.



Fig. III is from a series of more detailed though rough sketches, experimenting with panel layout and arrangement of content. Here, Adam and Lee are still visible on the staircase, though as background impressions of shape and

movement in contrast to Sal's significantly more detailed figure in the foreground. Her emotions are clearly conveyed in the clutching of her elbows and crossed arms, and in the anxious forward-tilt of her body. Her back to us



places the reader as a detached observer, privy to the wide expanse of the panel and all three characters simultaneously.

In *Fig. IV*, Adam is still only a shadowed impression on the staircase, and Sal's emotions are far clearer in her large and centered clenching fist. The bright point on the floor and panels towards the narrow end of the staircase wedge draws the eye from Sal's hand to the panels, and the next object of focus.

As the evolution of graphic elements makes clear, *Closer to Home* is the result of combinational play, experimentation and a free license to pursue tangents of creativity. The solution of graphics to generate, alter and enhance meaning through collages, illustrations, invading shapes and quotations shown in a pictorial rather than typed form all came about in pursuit of the most effective way of conveying the themes and subjects of the piece. Reflected upon and presented from a personal perspective, they are an integral part of what I believe to be the most comprehensive elucidation of my creative process that I could produce.

Panel Analysis



Fig. I

The omniscient captions serve as a transitioning device between the primarily-textual and primarily-pictorial storytelling, most dominant in the first three pages of the graphic chapter. Originally, the content was a part of the draft written when the chapter was still being wrestled with prosaically.

Panel 2 reveals the presence of a handgun in the scene, the inset panel providing a view 'through' the back of Sal's jacket. The weapon is never used, serving as a misdirection to heighten suspense in the chapter. However, it does give further indication of Sal's origins as a Southie, as suggested by the title bar on p126.

Sal's outstretched hand, marked with blood, is a startling opening to the comics chapter.

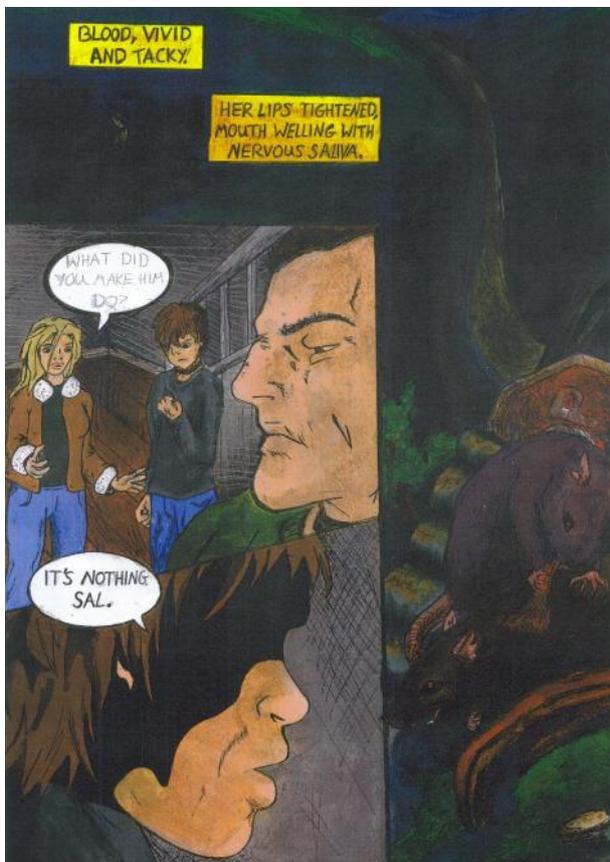


Fig. II

Fig. II contains an exposition panel that, traditionally, ought to have preceded *Fig. I*. However, as the comics section begins partway through textual prose, such 'scene setting' is unnecessary.

Panel 1 frames and emphasises the interiority of panels 2 and 3, set within the House made visible in the upper left portion of the page. The majority of the detail in the framing panel is found in the vertical section, where one rat consumes another's body in front of a partially visible 'STOP' sign that has been integrated into the Wall. This high angle, external view thematically connects the Wall to the House.

Lee's shadowed face in Panel 3 indicates deception, and the perspective change from Panel 2 to one that coincides with Sal's position relative to him suggests that she knows he is lying.

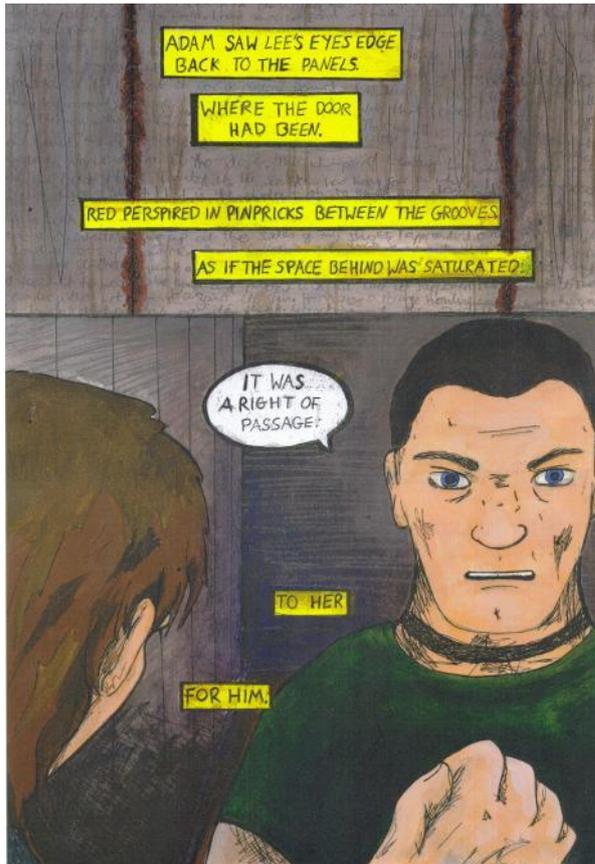


Fig. III

The four captions dominate Panel 1, emphasizing and clarifying the significant specifics of an otherwise simple image. Faintly visible, the handwritten words are legible as an extract of the Dog's manifesto.

Adam's hand is included in the lower tier of Panel 2 as a means of further communicating emotion. His face is too "flat" to be the sole expresser. Adam's gaze focused towards Sal/the reader complicates the panel, as do the ambiguous subjects in the caption boxes. This uncertainty affiliates Lee and Cissy with Adam and Evelyn, as is made clear in *Fig. VIII*.

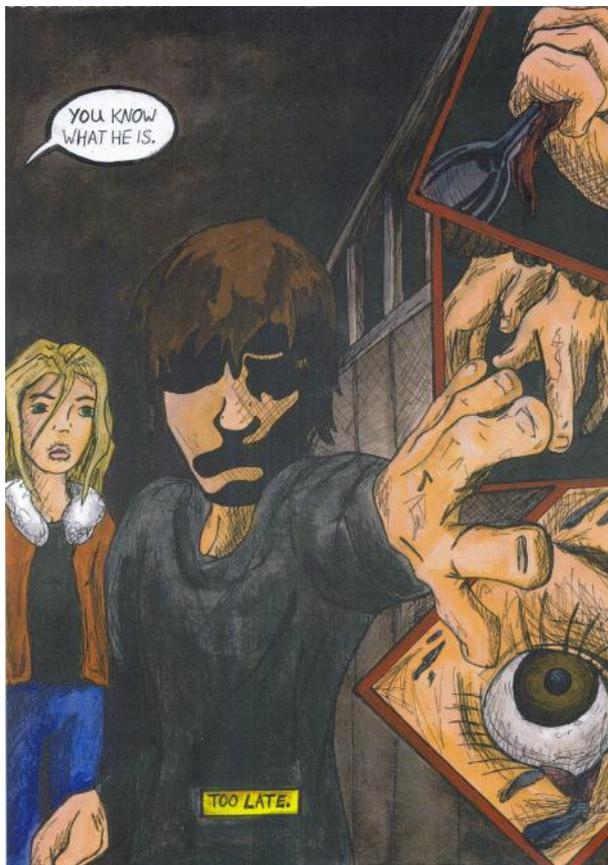


Fig. IV

Lee is partially obscured by darkness in Panel 1, the shadows on his face akin to the Tragedy mask as his hand reaches across to touch the panels and the inset images in turn. Lighting is used as a visual shorthand of his emotions as Panels 2-4 convey his thoughts. The inset panels are extreme close-up flashbacks to the spoon torture scene, tilted to suggest emotional disorientation and outlined with a wide, uniquely red gutter.

The size of Panel 1 slows the reading pace for a more thorough digestion of content, and the abstraction caused by the extremely close perspective in the inset panels demands a high level of engagement to discern meaning.



Fig. V

The tier shape of Panels 1 and 2 conveys a fast exchange of dialogue before thickened borders and letters in the final word balloon indicate force and volume. Panel 3's high angle subordinates the characters to their surroundings, highlighting Cissy's absence and the dominating presence of the House around them. Panel 4 demonstrates a forced perspective that misshapes Sal's arm, held up and ending in an enlarged hand emerging from Lee's grasp. This exaggeration conveys the violent force of the movement, indicating that she is being dragged by him as she recoils.



Fig. VI

Once again, the tiered panels (3-5) accelerate pace and convey the sudden speed of events. Radiating lines and bold, unnatural colours in Panel 4 emphasise the force and speed of Lee's running feet up the stairs. Finally, Sal's emotions are conveyed in her centralised clenching fist.

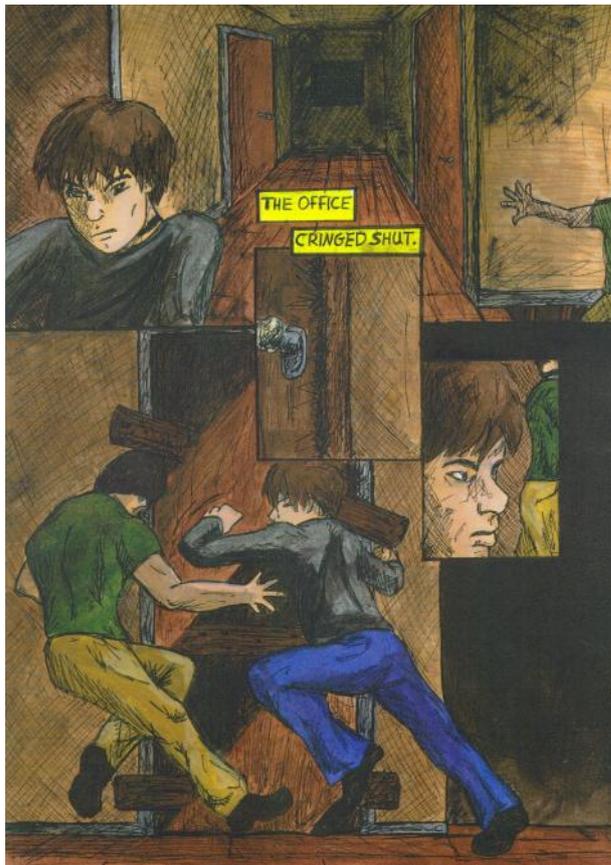


Fig. VI

Lee and Adam's poses and movements are greatly exaggerated in Panel 4 to appear more dynamic. The punch is the culmination of a rapid series of events: Adam arriving on the landing (Panel 1); Lee unable to open the office door (Panel 2); and Lee seeing Adam reach the bedroom door (Panel 3). Panel 2's caption clarifies an otherwise unclear image: wherein the wood of the door and the frame have swollen into one another.

The door in Panel 4 is diagonally divided into strips showing it as both dark and boarded up, and light and unblocked. This continues the theme of the temporal duality of the House, wherein it is either wrecked or tidy with no outside interference. Presently the door is accessible, indicating that Adam boarded up the room at some point in the past, only for the House to erase his efforts.

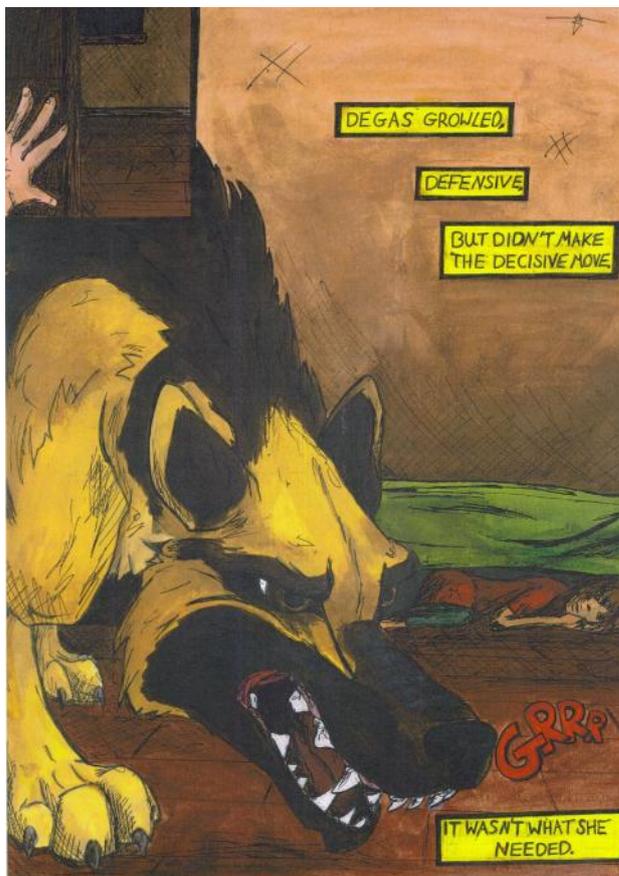


Fig. VII

After inset Panel 1 clarifies that Lee has opened the door into the room, Panel 2 foregrounds Degas from a low angle that shares his and Cissy's perspective. The stylized lettering of the sound effect conveys the rising and falling pitch of his growl.

The captions convey a knowingness in the animal, whose growl and gaze is directed off-frame and into the gutter. In this way, he is not threatening the reader, portrayed as wholly defensive of the girl lying under the bed in the background.



Fig. VIII

In all three panels, blackness bleeds from the gutters, appearing almost organic in its mottled outline. This is in sharp contrast to the hard, straight lines and corners of the black boxes that invade at earlier points in the *Closer to Home* text. Panel 3 centralises and illuminates the siblings, surrounding them in a partition of word balloons and captions. The bird's eye perspective, with the encroaching blackness, are there to be interpreted as threatening.



Fig. IX

Furniture visible in *Fig. V* is absent in Panel 1, laying focus on Sal facing the panelling of the stairs, her approach ultimately taking place in the gutter. Amplification in the expressionist red background and simplified silhouette in Panel 2 heightens suspense and the impression of danger, her slow caution conveyed across the two panels (2-3) that it takes for her hand to make contact. In Panel 5, Sal's face is partially and starkly illuminated as realisation of the supernatural danger figuratively dawns on her. The second caption is muddled to end in both 'them' and 'men'. It may be understood that 'them' alludes to Sal, Lee and Cissy; and 'men' the Dogs.



Fig. X

A dynamic sense of escalation is conveyed page-wide through the free form layout, eschewing rectangular grid panels. Panel 3 shows Adam moving a single step into the room, which Degas immediately responds to, though the lack of a sound effect in Panel 4 diminishes his threat.

Panel 5 cuts away from the interior scene to the coal bin outside the House where *Wayward South* was found, now engulfed in flames. That the manuscript inside the bin has ignited outwards is revealed in the circular “peep hole” Panel 5. This marks the beginning of closure in *Closer to Home* as Adam witnesses the one-to-one protection that Cissy needs from her brother, and Lee’s open devotion to her. Lee does not need the Dogs to make a difference in the world. The captions speak about the Dogs in an abstract way in the praising narration of Degas’s behaviour.

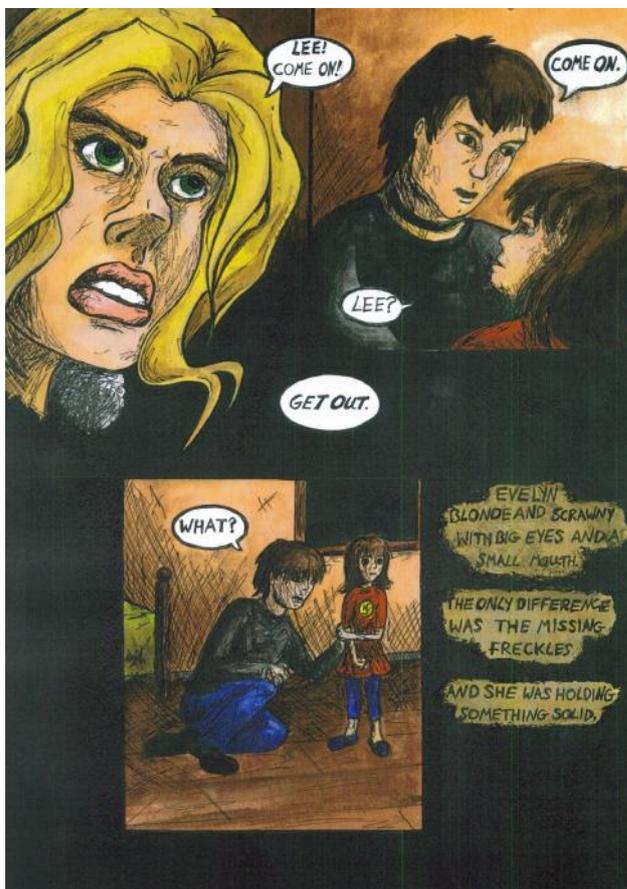


Fig. XI

Sal’s face appears as an inset panel as she shouts from downstairs, her word balloon overlapping into Panel 2 and echoed by Lee.

Panel 3 contains a word balloon without a tail, rendering the speaker unknown, though the thick and slanted lettering conveys a forcefulness of tone. The surrounding black space indicates that the speaker could have been Adam, or the House itself.

The caption boxes to the right-side frame of Panel 3 are becoming consumed by the blackness, falling into the shadows themselves.

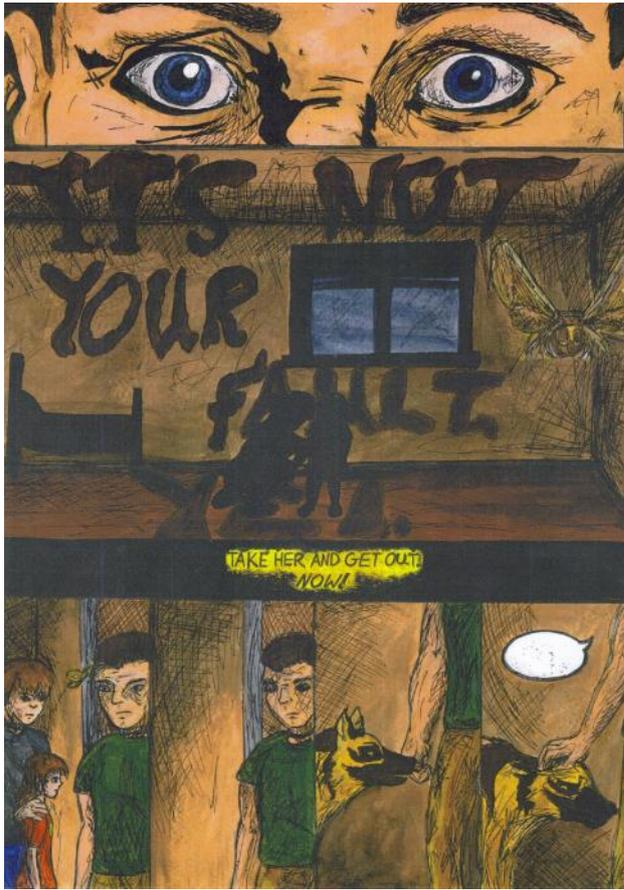


Fig. XII

An extreme close up of Adam's eyes in Panel 1 establishes a shot/reverse shot that clarifies Panel 2 as his subjective perception of the room, not an alteration of the room itself. 'IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT. YET' dominates the room as detail is minimised and the bed, Lee and Sal are simplified to silhouettes. Moth is the only figure let untouched, approaching Adam to the right.

The ambiguous caption box ends in an exclamation mark, indicating a speaker where the content has so far held the bearing of an omniscient narrator. It seems an amalgamation of the "narrator", Adam and the House as the siblings immediately respond by leaving.

A fast pace in the tiered panels (4-7) is slowed by repetition. The empty word balloon renders dialogue "inaudible".

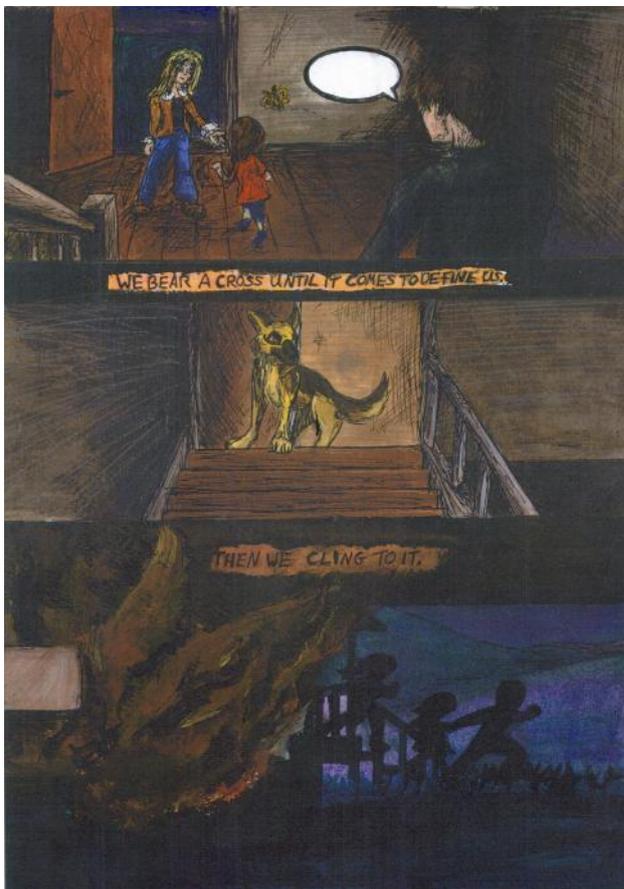


Fig. XIII

The word balloon is inaudible without explanation, perhaps due to the sound of the fire, and the captions have changed colour to match the smoke-laced flames.

Panels 1 and 3 are a shot/reverse shot, indicating that someone looks back to Degas as he watches them leave. There is a thematic symmetry in this exchange as Degas is (willingly) left on the stairs by Lee as Muma's body was also left.

There is a clear central divide in Panel 5, the arc of the flames and the characters running down the steps of the porch creating a triangular composition. The flames rise like a wave behind them as they escape into the cool, blue night.

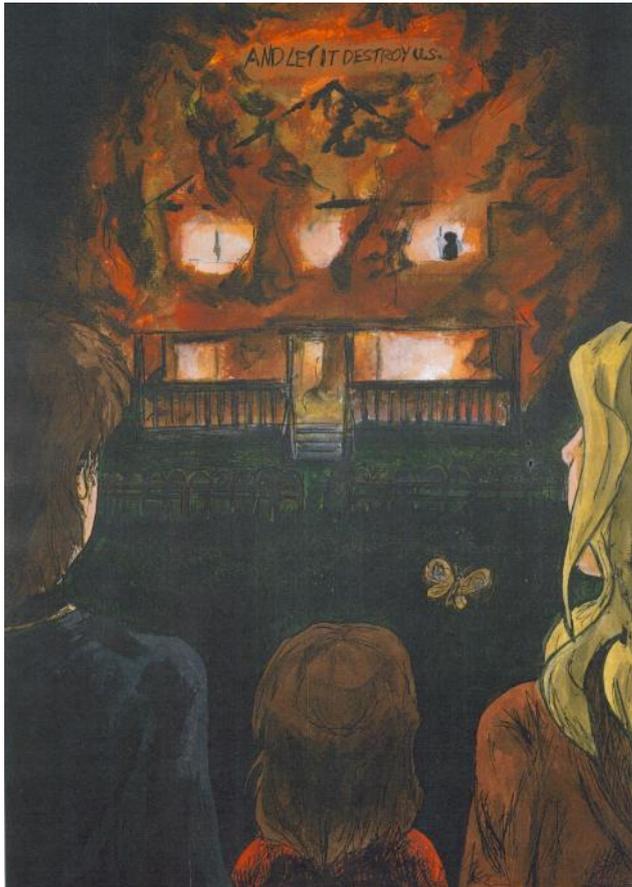


Fig. XIV

A single panel occupies the page, the reader positioned to watch the House burn with and slightly behind Lee, Cissy and Sal.

The caption is engulfed in the inferno of the House, which is suggested as possessing “eyes” through Adam’s positioning in the right window and the detail of the frame line through the left.



Fig. XV

Lee’s tattooed collar comes away in his hands with the destruction of Adam and the House, unnoticed by Sal, distracted by her own thoughts in the background, and Cissy, who is speaking to Moth.

The captions have altered in tone from their initial usage in earlier pages, offering clarity directly to the reader at the close of the piece. Adam and the House have finally departed the world; Degas has left the siblings to go with Adam; and Moth leaves Cissy to the care of her brother, no longer needed now that Muma is dead and her life of abuse over.

The word balloons continue to remain blank, lost to the sound of the fire, or perhaps obscured as being too intimate to reveal – the artefact retreating from the characters and leaving them with the privacy of their lives.

In Closing

The only book that is worth writing is the one we don't have the courage or strength to write. The book that hurts us [...] Writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written it [...] a book stronger than the author.

(Cixous, 1993: 32)

I have been writing fiction concerned with violence and sexual abuse since the second year of my Bachelors degree, six years ago. I have been concerned with the politics of the body – its sanctity and vulnerability, and how easy it is to violate. The critical accompaniments to these short stories and novellas focused on *how* the pieces were written, and it was only during the first year of my doctoral course that I felt it necessary and appropriate to dedicate time to exploring the *why* – the motivations fuelling my creative process. Initially, I had no idea as to how to approach this. It was not a “research question”, nor a fully determined “problem” to be solved, but a ‘discovered problem situation’ calling for a ‘maximum of creativity’ (Csikszentmihalyil, 1970: 92).

Though overwhelming in the beginning, the freedom for creative discovery was exceptionally liberating: there was no “correct answer” or predetermined “solution”, and no formulaic or unshakably established parameters of process to produce as much. I resolved not to worry about the required “PhD-ness” of the piece for a year and elected to play creatively instead.

After several months of reading, writing and reflecting, I realized that this research period and resulting artefact was not solely about examining and understand why and how I am compelled to write as I do. The aim was also to *demonstrate* this examination of my creative process in an accessible way that held the potential for wider application in the future. The experimental approach I undertook to accomplish this was ultimately reflected in the experimental nature of the format of the prose, and naturally provided an aesthetic and critical link between the fiction and exegetical components.

As a piece of autoethnography, the research was always ‘consciously planned, developed and described as research’ (Pace, 2012: 5). The decision to combine autobiographical elements with narrative fiction and a critical study was made early in the project, though the balance and arrangement of these elements was only determined after the majority of writing had been completed. Each critical section held content that could only be usefully contextualised after specific narrative points, and though the exegesis references itself across the artefact, a natural order for the elucidations of creative decisions and motivations still emerged.

Ellis and Bochner define authoethnography as ‘an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural’ (2000: 739). As this was to be a study of my inspirations and motivations to write, my connection to wider social concerns was a necessity of my studies as well as a means to enable the piece to have a wider relevance. However the necessarily subjective nature of such reflection inevitably raised issues of ‘representation, “objectivity”, data quality, legitimacy, and ethics’ (Wall, 2008: 39) – issues common in the field of

'We know that erasing the alterity and diversity of the voices of others emaciates our stories. It produces scholarship that sustains hegemonies. Erasing our inner voices does the same thing. It is a lie of omission. We participate in this lie because we like to see ourselves as coherent, knowledgeable and safe, just like our scholarly voices sound. We can't just barf our mess onto the page. In order to communicate effectively and look smart, or at least not pathetic and crazy, what we say has to be deftly written and make sense. We have to seem okay even as we describe how far from okay we have been. If I talk about disorder and danger in an orderly, safe voice, I protect both myself and my reader from actually dealing with it. We are insulated by discursive norms, observing the storms on the other side of the glass.'

(Tamas: 2009)

autoethnography. The majority of these concerns have been addressed in *A Graphic Analysis* (180-207), in particular the subjective nature of reflecting on a subjective and heuristic process.

Throughout writing I have been anxious about the validity of my voice, and that I would be expected and required to minimize myself for the sake of the research, treating myself as a potential contaminant that needed to be transcended or denied to conform to "proper" established research methods (Wall: 145). Through reading other autoethnographies and the critical literature behind the method, I gradually developed confidence in the legitimacy of my non-positivist research *as* research. The nature of the project demanded my identity and subjectivity. Indeed, many feminist writers have become advocates for research that starts with one's own experience (Ellis: 2004), in contrast to the 'dominant, objective, competitive, logical male point of view' (Walls: 148), feminist researchers 'emphasize the subjective, empathetic, process-oriented, and inclusive sides of social life' (Neuman, 1994: 72). My concern became to manage and frame my experience in such a way that it would be clear, relevant and useful to others.

The first draft of my exegesis was almost entirely ephemeral, a raw and messy 'barf' (Tamas: 2009) of diary entries, drafting notes and semi-critical reflections. At the time I believed it was visceral: a powerful method of contextualising my

writing with the contrasting domesticity of my life and, above all, *honest*. My personal accounts and reflections had not been interfered with or reshaped into academic discourse with excessive jargon and a favouring of other people's theories and thoughts over my own about my work. I was, of course, entirely mistaken. Even the finest sieve could not have picked out the useful nuggets of autoethnographic reflection from amidst the jumble of familial anecdotes, deeply personal confessions and undeveloped notes made whilst writing.

It was, however, a necessary draft to develop through. Sampling from the enormous mess of ephemera, I extracted evidencing, illustrating and illuminating pieces of text to accompany a far more critical exegesis, not comprise it. Only a small percentage of the personal notes entered the main critical body itself. I was satisfied to find that the exegesis remained honest in this processed form, with the raw material selectively included rather than altered itself.

I examined five Creative Writing theses to explore how the elements of creative reflection, critical examination and theory could be balanced and unified. Nigel McLoughlin's *Blood* (2004) separates the creative work, a poetry collection, from the critical chapter *The Circulatory System: An Elucidation of the Creative Process*, which observes a series of twelve steps encountered in the making of a poem. Working systematically through a selection of poems,

McLoughlin reflects on the generation and drafting of individual words, phrasing and sounds, whilst emphasising that the steps and smaller sub-processes are only as he himself experiences and perceives them (78). It is a methodical, analytical elucidation, with only a handful of anecdotal accounts included. McLoughlin's personal inflection and approachable style, though still indomitably scholarly in its application of technical theory, was a great inspiration in the pursuit of balance between 'personal' and 'academic' voice in my own autoethnography.

Similarly, Kate North's *Eva Shell* (2007) separates the creative novella from the *Critical Commentary*, which draws out and examines themes raised in the fiction, such as multiculturalism, parental absence and loss, as written from the position of a gay woman. Included are some personal anecdotes, most memorably about North's storytelling grandfather, but primarily the exegesis is a commentary on the fiction and a contextualising within existing literature. North's thesis is of the format I initially approached, with a thorough literary grounding and a greater emphasis on themes in the fiction than creative process.

Simon Holloway's *Past Imperfect* (2010), in a slightly different approach, separates the novel *The Words We Use are Black and White* from the exegesis, but maintains that it is impossible to distinguish between the 'creative' and 'critical', regarding both as parts of the creative process – 'each creative, each critical, interacting dialogically to communicate something of the incommunicability of communication' (10). In this 'investigation into the processes of human (textual) interpersonal discourse, into the rifts between communication and effective understanding' (2), Holloway deliberately places the thesis's introduction after the novel to 'encourage the reader to view the novel as the principal creative act', leading in to a 'post- and intra-text view of the processes of composition' (4). Holloway's thesis held the same idea of the creative fiction and critical account of writing to both be parts of an elucidation of process that I wished to pursue in *Closer to Home*, but structurally kept the two elements distinct.

In a thorough integration of creative and critical elements, Michael Johnstone's *Liberty or Death* (2011) appears as an amalgamation of a historical and philosophical thesis written and submitted as creative writing. Described as 'a practical and theoretical exploration of alternatives to free will and determinism in contemporary historical fiction' (ii), the chapters alternate between the personal accounts of a fictional PhD student undertaking the research and writing of the fictionalised biography of a working class Belfast woman, Elsie Stewart, of which the rest of the text is comprised. It has two abstracts, acknowledgements and declarations, and in its novelty demonstrates an appealing and intelligent playfulness. The most significant thesis in influencing the ultimate style and content of my own work was Crawford's *Fingerprints: Exploration of Identity, Community and Place* (2010). The fiction is separated and presented in a more traditional format as in McLoughlin, North and Holloway, whilst the exegesis is written in a highly personal voice with an unusual format. In a column to the right of the page, the 'core' essay reads continuously; to the left is a digital scrapbook of text from sources such as emails, notebooks and older drafts of the novella. This free form, notebook-aside style combining ephemeral comments, a critical essay and an unusual presentation made me excited for the first time about the potential in critically describing and presenting my own process, as opposed to interested but

generally uneasy about how to go about the task. With the license that *someone else* had secured a doctorate in creative writing with a thesis that looked less intimidatingly academic and more personally inflected, I began to work instinctively and experimentally.

As a means to identify which themes in the personal journals were necessary to draw out (in conjunction with journal material very obviously connected with particular sections of prose as a part of process), I used a grounded theory approach to process and interpret the raw material of my journals, seeking causal relationships through deductive analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Familial difficulties, Alzheimer's and escapism from depression emerged as recurring topics, and came under the broader categories of frustration, anger, anxiety, helplessness and vulnerability – all also strikingly present within the prose.

Closer to Home was written during a difficult period of my life, significantly that my grandfather's Alzheimer's had advanced to the point of needing to move into a nursing home. Events surrounding his disease had an enormous impact on the prose that I would not have been aware of had I not been actively seeking relationships between my life and the work produced. These experiences also caused me to reflect on previous incidents of frustration, anxiety and vulnerability connected with my younger brother and past relationships with romantic partners, which in turn shaped my writing.

Looking back on older stories as well as *Closer to Home*, I can see that I have been obsessed with the interaction between the powerful and vulnerable. Often my prose is focussed on the violence and abuse that is possible within such relationships, something that I am anxious about and impotently frustrated by in reality. The small, seldom-admitted portion of my mind that is still religious still perceives God as a powerful and abusive figure, and the infliction of Alzheimer's upon my grandfather as a cruel, malicious and unfair act. I left the Roman Catholic faith in anger for my brother's Autism and the difficulties he and my family faced every day, and I have not entered a church in over a decade.

I have written not only for catharsis, but to make sense of my feelings and experiences. I write bleakly and violently because I am afraid and saddened, and I want to make sense of those feelings. I funnel these emotions through the masks of fiction so that I need not confront them directly, the cool style of my prose generated from a position of unease rather than a desire for sensationalism. These discoveries, made concrete in the self-reflexive methodology of an autoethnographic study, have satisfied the personal imperatives I undertook in this thesis, whilst the layered and experimental nature of the artefact has demonstrated my creative process and the unravelling of the impetuses behind it.

There are elements of this artefact that I would like to see expanded. For example, a study of exposure to real violence in contrast to fictional violence, contradicting Sontag's assertion that we can become inured to both (2003),

'Creation is never pure creation but always dependent on given contexts within which it occurs and by which it is conditioned.'

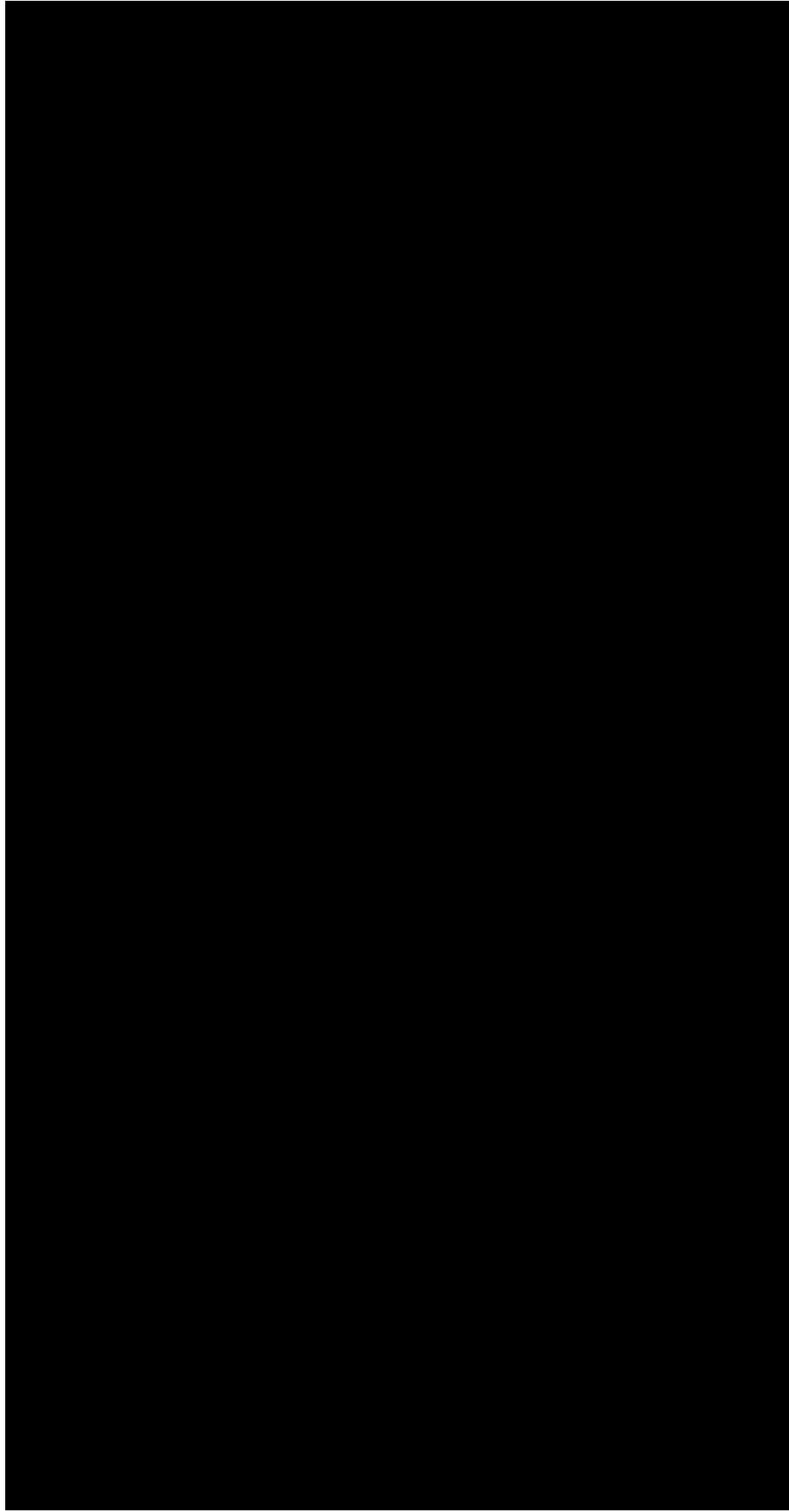
(Iser, 1984: 392)

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Selective coding of Closer to Home journal extracts appears to be the loss or corruption of authority figures in protecting the vulnerable. Abuses of power and vulnerability of the weak toward the strong – think it's in there, somewhere.

would be a PhD study in itself. For the first time, however I feel that I have explored, examined and obsessed as far as I am able to regarding sexual abuse, particularly towards children. This particular theme of abused vulnerability is one that I can finally leave behind with Cissy, just as Moth leaves her at the end of *Closer to Home* now that it is no longer needed to be sympathetic witness and guardian.

After six years of obsession with fictitious physical and sexual violence, I'm done. And I'm relieved.



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Appendix – Tasteless

Foreword to *Tasteless*

**Writing Journal –
February 26th 2009. 05:33pm**

At the end of the first semester of our Third year Transgressive Prose module, Martin had us reflect on all the difficult topics we had covered in the preceding months and challenged us, for the final workshop, to go 'beyond the pale' with one condition: that the story must be based in fact.

The news story about the rape of the 12 week old baby came to my mind instantly. By the time I'd driven home, I knew that I would write the events from inside that room and I felt ill at the prospect. I hunted through the Internet, firing 'babysitter infant rape', 'baby rape' and various combinations into Google trying to find that one article. I spent two hours skimming through reports of sexual abuse on young children, in retrospect giving the pieces far less attention than they'd deserved for their brevity, and I refused to settle for anything less than this one story that had never quite left me. I didn't remember the details so I just read hundreds. By the time I finally found it I wasn't even relieved. It had become such a clinical process of skimming and rejecting that when I found the BBC news article I just copied it across as the start of a bibliography. I looked up the town on Google Maps because I didn't know where it was, then I called it a night and I think I slept okay. There was a sense of something germinating though – it took a while to go to sleep, and I wasn't comfortable even though I wasn't thinking specifically about the story. When I lived with my folks, as I did then, I had the family PC against one wall by the window and a laptop that the university had given me. I sat down to write the story in the late morning of a Saturday. I remember it was cold and raining in short bursts, though not heavily. I felt

November 30th 2007. 01:42pm

The intent of *Tasteless* does not lie in the characters or the story, but in confronting our common desire to look away. This rape is a true crime committed by Tanya French and Alan Webster that appeared quietly and briefly on the BBC news website in May 2006. The story of the couple using an infant as a sexual apparatus has never left me, and when challenged to 'go beyond the pail', it was the greatest taboo and most difficult story to address in my mind. Information about the crime was scarce, very unlike the Jamie Bulger case where detail was extracted and flaunted pornographically. Tanya was charged with rape, however, and not simply condoning Alan's actions, so along with the physical logistics of an adult penis entering a twelve week old girl, I had to theorise and imagine what she could have done to the child that would be condemned as rape. As well as sifting through dozens of child abuse cases on the internet to find this old news article, this was the hardest aspect of the story to write. The rape goes beyond damaging a frail body to the destruction of it for sexual gratification. Once again, the worst of it is that it really happened.

The inevitable question arises: What's the point of this story? I could argue that I wrote it because the actual event has been smothered into silence and that people should know and be outraged, as we are outraged by war, persecution and rising fuel prices. Perhaps the story is a comforting reminder that though these two monstrous people are a part of our country's population, there are millions around them who are not so depraved and that these events are rare. Or indeed, there could be no point. If all knowledge is power, then some knowledge is of how much we can endure before we have the power to reject and look away. The piece is a coached endurance run set in awful, negative knowledge that does not seek to masquerade as entertainment. Perhaps a story that only serves to defy with its purpose in the reading of it rather than the content is the truly transgressive thing here.

cocooned and alone with this thing that I was going to make myself write, in part because I didn't have any other idea of what to write for the next workshop. Anything else would have felt like a cop-out at this point. I wrote on my laptop in bed, sitting up under two quilts and with a thick jumper. My room was above the garage and was always cold, and the sounds of the house got echoed and distorted from the kitchen and hallway. I shut the dogs out so that they wouldn't lie on my feet, which I normally let them do when everyone's out. But there was a sense that I had to be alone for this. I wasn't quite ashamed of myself, but I was aware that I shouldn't be doing this, and that no one outside of my workshop and perhaps my boyfriend should know about it. The story didn't have a point beyond being a writing exercise and something to read out in workshop. Maybe for an assessment depending on how it was received.

I didn't know where to start, so I wrote anything that occurred under the assumption that little of it would survive the redrafting and that it didn't matter just so long as there was something on the screen. I started abstract and talking to the reader, talking confidentially and putting on the bravado and "fuck you" that I use when I read in public. It's the persona that's had my writing identified as male online, and when people meet me for the first time at Open Readings the assumption is that I'm gay because "fuck you" isn't what a woman writer should(?) sound like. If I had the choice I'd change my sex as a writer. Being a female writer feels like being condescended to. I identify more as a male writer, and the only reason I haven't published under a male pseudonym is because my mum wanted to see my name, specifically, in print. But I digress.

Opening with images of sharks attacking seals and vomiting on a

Tasteless

KJ Moore

There is no safe word. If you shout *red*, the Master isn't going to stop rubbing ginger spice between your thighs and pulling at the clothespins on your nipples. If you throw up on the ride it won't stop and your vomit will continue to soak through your clothes until the duration is up. Everything has to run its course.

Hempel lies north of London surrounded by arable farms, and a proportion of the thousands of residents regularly hire babysitters so that they can go out without their babes. Tanya French is one of those babysitters: nineteen, chubby and inoffensive. She has a twelve week old girl to look after, and has her significantly older boyfriend come over for tickle and touch. Alan Webster brings a camera.

Don't shy. The fly is going to burn inside the blue glow. The shark is going to rise up from the black waters and take the seal. Knowing is half the battle, and we all like to see results.

Alan is about to penetrate the baby. It is already crying because Tanya has been holding its bawling face to her vagina.

Stay in the moment.

The girl is eighteen inches long from head to toe. Alan's penis is five and a third inches long. He has taken a pot of Vaseline from Tanya's purse because he knows the baby's vagina won't secrete any lubricant, and that to push dry would burn and chafe him. He touches at Tanya's vagina with greasy fingers, and feels how wet she is. Her labia have already lain about the girl's small nose and gaping mouth like too much meat hanging out of too little sandwich, mashing and muffling. Now she is going to photograph him.

Alan holds the baby in both hands. Her head lolls back weakly and she's still screaming, balled up fists trembling stiffly against her chest. He shifts her around to rest in the crook of his arm, probing a finger to her tiny genitals. She has no labia like Tanya, only cream coloured lips that sit like a shut clam. Her vagina is the same size as her urethra and barely visible. It takes a few seconds of stroking firmly for his fingertip to catch the hole. He pulls at it, stretches it so that it stays

rollercoaster was getting into the shallows, a signpost marking what felt like physically stepping forward into something. I wasn't going in with the intention of shocking a reader or upsetting anyone. I didn't see it as something anyone would read. It was an exercise in writing as bluntly as possible, and of seeing how awful I could make myself feel through something I was producing and then going a little farther. Beyond the pale.

I have a mug of coffee and some kind of snack with me when I sit down to write. I put them on the narrow space on my chest of drawers next to the aquarium. After the first paragraph, I ate the entirety of the packet of Maltesers and drank my coffee, not really enjoying either. I started writing simply and factually, putting the known details of names, town and the situation (babysitter, older boyfriend called round) and then started to fill in the massive blanks left in the BBC article. I could picture the house quite clearly, and still can now, and the inside wasn't vague in my imagination. Without any clues from the actual event, I could see cheap shag rugs on the back of the sofa and a dark green carpet. The radiators were important for some reason – domestic, and what was to my left on the other side of the bed to the fish tank. My carpet was dirty beige and I can't recall anyone I know with a green carpet in their house.

I didn't think about the preamble of the babysitter coming round, the couple going out, if it even was a couple or a single mother, and so I didn't write it. It was stream-of-consciousness and I didn't allow myself to edit. I didn't reread paragraphs or lines but went on to the next, assuring myself that I'd fix it in the redraft and that if I started editing now, I'd spend the whole day pissing about and wouldn't even get

dryly exposed when he holds her like a rugby ball again.

Don't run to lesser things. Where do the schoolchildren eat their sandwiches at Auschwitz? Can they smile in the photos with their friends? Thousands of photos of the camp reside in boxes, away from the family albums, all the same: all devoid of a human subject by mutual agreement. Evil exists easily in concrete walls. But this is a home. This place has a thick carpet that feels like stepping into loose earth. There are radiators with socks hanging over them. There is an empty crib and a main bedroom with lilac curtains. There's an extra blanket on the bed, pulled aside and heaped in a square pile on the floor.

Alan penetrates the baby and a new, foreign pitch wails out of her stiff body. Her legs kick feebly. Her tiny vagina splits and merges with her colon. He keeps going. Now he's in her uterus, the size of a thimble and cracking apart from his girth. There's only enough room when her lower intestine ruptures and leaks viscera and creamy excreta about his penis.

The camera flashes and Alan groans, feels his balls tense, and finally begins to slowly piston.

Is it worse to be the one who hits the cyclist first, and feel his skull compress like cracked ice under a tire whilst the car bounces; or the driver behind who can't avoid the mangled body and skids in the gore as they swerve?

Her body is changing, her abdomen becoming malleable as it is squashed and pulped inside.

Is it easier when the victims are faceless and lie in their thousands, in their millions? When they dig their own shallow graves to be shot with the hope they'll die immediately and not be suffocated by the bodies and wet earth piled atop them? Is a massacre easier to swallow than a murder? More like an efficient, mechanical process than the knowing and heated killing of a single person? The Nazis must have gotten up very earlier to rack up such high figures.

Come back. Everyone is still conscious. The judge will later tell the papers that this has *shocked and outraged public opinion*. Alan and Tanya will go to prison for no real time, though Alan for longer because he penetrated whereas

to the main event.

I went straight into the bedroom, and the scene appeared whole and static, like a tableau. I didn't think about what Tanya and Alan said to each other, or how they undressed, though now that I'm reflecting my mind is embellishing the scene with Alan taking his socks off before his trousers, right foot first. Exploding out details from the scraps I had.

"Alan is about to penetrate the baby" was the firing shot, and I remember stopping at it. I watched the fish for a good ten minutes, something I'm want to do when procrastinating, and felt very mixed up about what I was doing. It was as if all the colour had been drained out of me, that I was something else, something not myself, and choosing to be in writing this. Like this strange detachment was the only way I could do this.

I can't explain why but my mind wandered, maybe to other topics that I could be writing about instead. And I felt like writing about any of them would be 'settling' and that I had to write this and only this and in as clear and blunt a way as possible. I spent some more time on Google looking at pictures because I didn't want facts or words – just images, and it felt like a respite from the story I was trying to write. I put these meanderings into the story under the guise of them being a pre-emptive strike against the reader, including them at points when my mind wandered as if it needed the respite of a lesser evil before forcibly returning to Tanya, Alan and the baby. It felt clever and seemed to make the story into more of something, made it less about gratuitous spectacle and actually a thing that was trying to say something.

Alan fucking the baby wasn't hard to imagine in terms of making

Tanya only mounted the baby's face and squashed herself down on it.

But come away from this comfort of meagre justice. Alan's hips are rocking as he kneels on the bed, the baby around his penis shrieking spasmodically now as her tiny brain begins to shut down. Tanya doesn't notice that it has turned quieter. She roams around the pair with the camera, snapping action shots and capturing the fluids dripping from where the two bodies are fused.

Did Myra Hindley sweat when she raped those non-babies?

Alan comes, semen disperses through the newly forged cavity and the baby is mewling, grey and prone. Tanya gives Alan the camera and takes the baby, raising her like a cup to nestle her face into the wet stretched crevice. Her pelvis is skewed and vivid bruises darken her distorted belly. Tanya mouths her boyfriend's semen and the blood. She puts the baby down, tells Alan to take another photograph to complete the set they will masturbate over later with wine and music, and then she begins to dress.

Alan dresses and takes the camera, going back home where he will see her later. He is not unseen in the neighbourhood where not just cats twitch the curtains. Tanya cleans the baby with a dishcloth and puts the soiled sheets into the washing machine, seeking out the airing cupboard to put a fresh set on. The baby wouldn't settle and then vomited on your bed when I took her up. I'm very sorry, but the sheets are drying on your radiators now. A nappy goes on and the crib is full again. Tanya goes back downstairs and turns on the television, waiting for the parents to come home and give her money.

You hope for an infant's death, but there is no such happy ending. Intensive surgery, removed uterus and she will remain incontinent for many years. There is a short debate about whether they should ever tell her, if some instinctual memory could possibly have been forged that will need to be pre-empted. The doctors are confident that she will not remember. When she asks why she is sterile, she will be told she was born a freak. They hope her pelvis can be reformed enough to let her walk.

the mental picture. It made me feel shamed that I could, guilty that I was doing so and saddened by the thing in general, but I could picture it. I remembered that Tanya had been accused of rape as well, though, meaning that she did something that wasn't just aiding Alan in raping the baby. Back to Google, though it wasn't a long search into 'women rapists' and 'victims abused by women'. I went back to the mental image of the room and thought about practicality. The baby was almost an inanimate object in terms of how much it could move, so it would have to be held against and to rather than restrained and held under. The image of an Alsatian snout against a woman's vagina came to me, a throwaway comment from an Augusten Burroughs story about a friend of his who prowled the highways and held up huge pictures of pornographic images with an admonishment of whatever driving offence they'd committed printed underneath. Tanya wouldn't put her mouth to the baby's vagina – she wouldn't seek to pleasure it, though she may have parodied it. She would put the head to her vagina.

The baby's vagina was where I kept pausing. I didn't Google that, but I didn't need to either. I've seen the hairless clam many times – "hold her whilst I get the nappy." I don't look but it's there, like noticing a foot without seeing how many toes there are on it. I've seen photographs of myself as a baby naked in the kitchen sink. It just is. But it felt like crossing some moral line to think of it as a participant in sex, as if this was really where I had a problem with the whole thing. Logically I knew the hole would be small and difficult to penetrate. It couldn't be deep, either. I looked up the average length of a 12 week old baby and figured out where a 5 inch penis would end in its body. Through the other side of the uterus. I didn't have an exact size for a uterus at that age, but Googling that felt more medical than anything else, though I didn't come up with any answers. I said it was the size of a thimble. Probably smaller, but I liked the word 'thimble.'

It was very cinematic in my mind – not in terms of spectacle but as short 'shots' from different angles, centering different things. I flittered about writing the descriptive sections as my mind flittered about the screen. I recoiled, I thought about something else that was still within the realm of 'evil', and went back to it. In the end it trailed off because after following this scene through to its conclusion I didn't know what to say. I didn't know how to end this story, or know if this really was a 'story'. As a round-off I spoke to the reader again and put out another fact – that the baby's uterus had been removed and that they'd decided not to tell her about the attack because there would be no memory from it anyway. I didn't write about the arrest or conviction, or the parents' response, or even the tidy-up after the rape because that wasn't what I was writing about. I was writing the events in that room that would never be known but I could still imagine. I could so I committed myself and did. I read through the piece on Sunday evening, corrected a few typos but otherwise didn't change anything. Stuck for a title, I called it **Tasteless** because that's what I thought everyone would dismiss it as and figured that I might as well pre-empt them.

Workshop was on a Thursday afternoon, upstairs over the refectory. I thought my story was crap – thin, underwritten, gratuitous and with no literary merit, so I wasn't looking forward to reading it out. I was second from last and my mouth filled with saliva because I was nervous. I didn't look up and read slower than usual because at each line I knew what the coming line was and I didn't want to get there, and I definitely didn't want to get to Alan penetrating the baby and the baby's vagina and the thimble uterus.

When it was finished I kept holding the paper between both hands, tipped slightly up, and my thumbs were leaving dents. No one was looking at me. A few people had their mouths twisted inwards over their teeth, and Martin had his elbows spread wide over the table and the heels of his hands at his temples, his fingers resting in arches against his head. He was wearing his sandy brown jacket, and the black biro in front of him had a rubber Jesus on the end. It didn't look like he'd written anything and still no one was saying anything or even looking at me. I had the very clear thought of, "Oh fuck, what have I done," and put the page down. That little motion in the room seemed to draw Martin back, and he pinched his eyes in a sweeping gesture and cleared his throat, though his head remained dipped.

I remember the feedback less clearly than those initial seconds. Someone said that it was awful

and that it didn't stop. 'Unrelenting' came up a few times, as did 'sad' and 'made me angry.' It was all very stilted, and eventually we got on to structure though it was very surface. No one wanted to give criticism, and I awkwardly asked if it was any 'good' in terms of effectiveness. I still wasn't sure if it was even a bona fide story at this point and wanted the reassurance that it was at least a 'thing' and not just the result of me sitting up in bed and circulating my mind around a bedroom with three people in it, one of whom was effectively a lump in terms of what was being done to her.

Everyone agreed that it was 'effective' and Martin summed up the silence by saying: "what kind of response can you give to something like that other than tears?" I felt guilty – more because I had made a handful of people cry and everyone depressed than because I'd actually wrote it. My feelings about being able to write it at all came up later, and that's when I started the critical study of it. To make it okay in some way, with a point and as something that could be justified. I ended up with a lot to say about it so I used it as an assessment piece.

A year later, during the Creative Process module of the MA, I was still fixating on my ever having written this thing and felt that I had a better vocabulary and understanding now to go back and study it again. And now I want to give the process behind *Tasteless's* creation more scrutiny to understand it. It's the story I most vividly remember writing, can recall strongly in terms of process, and in part that's because I still have unanswered questions about myself regarding its creation. Until this story, the 'Creative Process' was this fuzzy magic thing that happened without my real awareness and so long as stories came out, so what? So I didn't pay attention to it and don't remember it for any other story. For *Tasteless*, though I wasn't paying attention to the processes that took place whilst writing it I was aware of them, because they felt threatening. That they might be symptomatic of something much worse that I didn't think I should/could/would be capable of. Though I remember the steps I still don't fully understand them, and I want to spend more time looking at the critical components that the piece seemed to bear even as I was writing it, though I wasn't looking at them.