

**EMPTY YOUR EYES AND BITE THE STAR:  
FRAGMENTS, ENTROPY, CONFABULATION, AND STRUCTURE IN CUT-  
UP METHODS**

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## Abstract

Cut-up method has been notably applied as an avant-garde form. It originated as a piece of anti-art and its most famous practitioner, William Burroughs, used its fragmentary aesthetic to complement his transgressive subject matter.

This thesis explores cut-up method's relationship with Surrealist painting and its application as a means to the marvellous; the method's ability to surprise both writers and readers. It addresses the central question: how can the Cut-up method be used to disassemble text and explore how the fragments can be constructed, reconstructed, or deliberately misconstrued to create a new text?

I have adopted a cognitive approach to the analytical essays, which draw upon cross-disciplinary material including art history, literary criticism, cognitive science, information theory, computing, and the neuroscience of memory.

The theoretical analysis and creative practice are integrated in both process and form. Discourses from the theoretical essays are mapped and remapped onto the creative practice and back again. Associated concepts such as fragments, entropy, confabulation, structure, and entrainment are examined both in the fiction and analysis.

*Empty your Eyes and Bite the Star* identifies how, when viewed as a way of writing, cut-up operates from the bottom up rather than top down as in conventional models of practice; and explores the resulting differences in process and structure. It demonstrates the method's usefulness as a means of generating original text but also shows how cognition imposes certain limitations on its effectiveness. It identifies areas that may be explored by practitioners to effectively target aleatory methods within new domains of creative practice and identifies how further research into the use of cut-up is possible using a quantitative analytical approach.

## 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.

Signed ..... Date ..... 29/09/2019 .....

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## Dedications

For my wife, Claire Smith, who persuaded me to start a research degree and has been a constant support and inspiration and who also helped with the proof reading.

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## 1. Introduction

Empty your eyes and bite the star  
That I placed between your teeth<sup>1</sup>  
Tristan Tzara

William Burroughs wrote in *The Third Mind*:

At a Surrealist rally in the 1920s Tristan Tzara the man from nowhere proposed to create a poem on the spot by pulling words out of a hat. A riot ensued [and] wrecked the theatre. André Breton expelled Tristan Tzara from the movement and grounded the cutups on the Freudian couch.<sup>2</sup>

My idea is to empty your eyes, to stop reflecting the external world, reflect what's inside: descend into the unconscious. I take a piece of free writing, psychic automatism in André Breton's terms, and fragment it, bite it, tear it up. Look for a something meaningful in the pieces. The more you do this the easier it is to find the hidden message.

I came to cut-up through the Surrealists, through painting. Right from when I started I used the method of splashing paint onto canvas or paper and seeing what shapes I could see. Leonardo Da Vinci described something similar in his 'Treatise on Painting' where he writes 'you should look at certain walls stained with damp, or at stones of uneven colour... you will be able to see in these the likeness of divine landscapes.'<sup>3</sup>

Da Vinci shows how representational images are suggested when looking at randomly generated marks. As my practice developed it took on a creative dialogue with various forms of psychoanalytic and psychological discourses.

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<sup>1</sup> Tristan Tzara and Mary Ann Caws, *Approximate Man, and Other Writings*. (Boston: Black Widow Press, 1973). p138

<sup>2</sup> William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (New York: Viking, 1978)' <<http://ubu.com/historical/burroughs/index.html>> [accessed 30/04/2015] p100

<sup>3</sup> E.H Gombrich, *Art And Illusion: A Study In The Psychology Of Pictorial Representation*, (London: Phaidon, 1977) p.159



If not the Freudian couch, I was certainly grounding my paintings in a Jungian one.

C. G. Jung incorporated the mythological and mystical, and I was happy to look at art as a swim in the collective unconscious.

This was before Stephen Pinker's *How the Mind Works*<sup>4</sup> Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*<sup>5</sup>, and before Bernard Baars' *In The Theatre of Consciousness*.<sup>6</sup> An influential book in the art colleges was Anton Ehrenzweig's *The Hidden Order of Art*<sup>7</sup> which used both cognitive science and Freudian psychoanalysis side by side to discuss what art does and how it works. At the time this didn't seem unusual; now it looks like a bizarre juxtaposition of science and fantasy.

By the time I graduated in fine art painting in 1990 I had incorporated collage and sometimes language into my paintings. I continued to paint intermittently and began to write a little more seriously. I had no idea how to write but experimented with cut-up and Surrealist games.

It was always the visions that cut-up induced that attracted me. The weird juxtapositions, the mysterious atmosphere, the suggestion of some hidden significance in the images. The same qualities had attracted me to surrealist paintings. J. G. Ballard described this as '[...]an area between the outer world of reality on the one hand and the inner world of the psyche on the other.'<sup>8</sup>

In other words, a liminal zone. It might be why so much of my writing features the sea and the beach, areas where the water and the land meet, as significant landscapes. This concern with liminal zones was always present in my painting too where the qualities of

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<sup>4</sup> Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, (London: Allen Lane, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Clement Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, (London: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Bernard J. Baars, *In the Theatre of Consciousness : The Workspace of the Mind*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, (London: Paladin, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> J.G. Ballard, S. Sellars, and D. O'Hara, *Extreme Metaphors*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2014). p6

the paint and landscape had to reflect each other. I felt that in writing too, the form and content should be linked.

By 2014 I had had several short stories and poems published that used my own variation of cut-up and formal strategies to turn the texts into something closer to normal narrative. In a novel length piece of writing I had found similar solutions to structure to those used by Burroughs and Michael Moorcock in repetition and self-reference.

I considered this something of a failure as it failed to produce a coherent narrative arc.

When I applied to study for a post-graduate qualification cut-up was an obvious area of study. I had little idea of the orthodox writing process beyond this method. This thesis was proposed with the following research questions:

1. How can the cut-up method be used to disassemble text and explore how the fragments can be constructed, reconstructed, or deliberately misconstrued to create a new text?
2. How do the entropic qualities of language and the confabulatory tendencies of the mind interact to produce new meanings from these reassembled fragments?
3. How can alternative forms of narrative structure emerge from these processes?
4. How can a cohesive end product result from the fragmentary starting point?

Positioning both creative and theoretical pieces in a Creative Writing thesis within an overarching epistemological theory has been identified by several writers as potentially dichotomous.

In my own practice this is a particularly extreme opposition. The creative process I use is rooted in the unconscious, irrational, and intuitive processes. My own preferred approach to theory is through a rational and analytical framework drawing on cognitive science.

Dominique Hecq writes in 'Beyond the Mirror':

Creative writing research is a triangulation of two seemingly mutually exclusive discourses, one recognising the reality of the unconscious, and the other the importance of rational and critical process.<sup>9</sup>

I decided that the research aims should address both in the theoretical commentary on the creative practice and within the themes and methods of the creative practices. Through this triangulation, through using each part as the source for the other I intend to deconstruct and synthesize the conscious and unconscious processes of the cut-up method. I will do this through multiple reflections between the creative practice and theoretical commentary.

I will explore the entanglement of discourses in this synthesis between the rational and irrational; and engage the two pieces of writing in a relationship which stands as proxy for the process of Creative Writing. A key method in achieving this will be mapping and remapping of discourses from the theoretical onto the creative practice. This will involve sourcing fragments of text and themes from the theoretical and engaging them with the creative through the cut-up method. The theoretical piece will reflect upon the creative method and results. It will explore the mechanics of language and composition exposed and highlighted through the various effects of the disruptive

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<sup>9</sup> Dominique Hecq, 'Beyond the Mirror: On Experiential Knowing as Research Mode in Creative Writing', *TEXT Vol 16 No 2 Beyond practice-led research Edited by Scott Brook and Paul Magee October*, (2012) <<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue14/Hecq.pdf>> [accessed 10/10/14]. p26

interventions of cut-up method. It will draw upon examples of cut-up text produced in the creative pieces.

The originality of the creative section this will stem from:

- 1) The method: one of the characteristics of cut-up is the high number of statistically unusual word combinations. The amount of original material generated from cut-up method necessitates a practitioner finding methods to restrain the effect. This forms the basis of my method. Rather than presenting a work of raw unedited piece of cut-up as a finished work, the disrupted text forms a basis for further development.
- 2) My process is substantially different from previous practitioners of cut-up method.
  - Tristan Tzara's<sup>10</sup> method used individual words pulled from a hat.
  - Brion Gysin<sup>11</sup> and in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*<sup>12</sup> cut holes in the text.
  - Burroughs used pages torn into quarters,<sup>13</sup> or folded into each other.<sup>14</sup> In *Naked Lunch*<sup>15</sup> Burroughs' novel was assembled from disparate sections. In *Cities of the Red Night*<sup>16</sup> the process was reversed and a coherent narrative was reassembled to resemble a cut-up.

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<sup>10</sup> Alastair Brotchie and Mel Gooding, *Surrealist Games*, (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1991). p36

<sup>11</sup> Burroughs and Gysin. p24

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Safran Foer and Bruno Schulz, *Tree of Codes (2010)*, (London: Visual Editions, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> William S Burroughs, 'The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin',

<[http://www.ubu.com/papers/burroughs\\_gysin.html](http://www.ubu.com/papers/burroughs_gysin.html)> [accessed 03/04/15].

<sup>14</sup> Burroughs and Gysin. p96

<sup>15</sup> William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch : The Restored Text*, 50th anniversary edn (London: Fourth Estate, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> William S. Burroughs, *Cities of the Red Night*, (London: Pan, 1981).

- The British novelist Alan Burns used a similarly method to Burroughs' cut-up. He describes his method as consisting of “a pair of scissors, paste and, most important, a large table top so I can place things side by side”<sup>17</sup>.
- Kathy Acker collaged other writers' work into her own to create her post-modern novels. This is as suggested by Burroughs<sup>18</sup> in his essay on 'Creative Reading'. Acker's *Great Expectations* quotes the first paragraph of Charles Dickens novel with 'Peter' replacing 'Pip'<sup>19</sup>. She edits and rewrites eight times “once for meaning, once for beauty, once for sound, once to the mirror to see how it looked, once for rhythm, once for structure, and so on.”<sup>20</sup>
- David Bowie in the film *Cracked Actor*<sup>21</sup> uses whole sentences/clauses to assemble lyrics.
- In Breton's related *Exquisite Corpses*<sup>22</sup> and its variations<sup>23</sup> individual words are provided by practitioners who maintain a predetermined syntactic order.

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<sup>17</sup> Alan Burns and Charles Sugnet, *The Imagination on Trial : British and American Writers Discuss Their Working Methods*, (London: Allison and Busby, 1981). p163

<sup>18</sup> William S. Burroughs, *The Adding Machine : Selected Essays*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1993). p42

<sup>19</sup> Kathy Acker and Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, (London: Penguin, 2018). p1

<sup>20</sup> P Wollen, 'Death (and Life) of the Author', *London Review of Books [Online]* 20 (1998) <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v20/n03/peter-wollen/death-and-life-of-the-author>> [accessed 03/03/2019].

<sup>21</sup> Alan Yentob, *David Bowie - Cracked Actor*, (BBC, 1975) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1InCrzGIPU>> [accessed 01/12/2018].

<sup>22</sup> André Breton and Simon Watson-Taylor, *Surrealism and Painting*, (London: Macdonald and Co., 1972).p288

<sup>23</sup> *Exquisite Corpse* exhibits similar properties to cut up text but is produced through ignorance of intention – information regarding each players contribution is withheld from their collaborators while composing the poem.

I work using word-processing software rather than from physical texts. Because of this I am able to use many iterations of the method. This is a process that would have been impossibly time consuming using a typewriter. This allows me to follow up an initial stage where a large scale cut-up using small fragments in the manner of Tzara, to continue using cut up through many iterations of the process and introduce small systematic disruptions into the text in order to generate original an output.

I will explore this using a cross-disciplinary analytical framework drawing particularly on cognitive science. When I started researching this project in 2014 there was no published literature in this area examining cut-up method. Cognitive and stylistic approaches are now a dominant means of approaching creative writing: for example Jeremy Scott's *Creative Writing and Stylistics*,<sup>24</sup> Will Storr's *The Science of Storytelling*,<sup>25</sup> and Lisa Cron's *Wired for Story*.<sup>26</sup> With the exception of Burroughs and Gysin in *The Third Mind*<sup>27</sup>, the published literature has approached cut-up method from a literary-historical perspective and through the theoretical frameworks of the avant-garde (for example Edward Robinson's *Shift Linguals*<sup>28</sup>). These focus primarily on the meaning of the method. This thesis will explore cut-up as a way of writing and ask the question: what does it do to the reader's brain?

I have structured the thesis as a series of alternating stories and essays. Each essay in the commentary draws on previous stories in the collection and examines aspects of cut-up method in relation to the creative practice from a cognitive perspective.

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<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Scott, *Creative Writing and Stylistics : Creative and Critical Approaches*, (London: Red Globe Press, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Will Storr, *The Science of Storytelling*, (London: HarperCollins, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Lisa Cron, *Wired for Story : The Writer's Guide to Using Brain Science to Hook Readers from the Very First Sentence*, (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Burroughs and Gysin.

<sup>28</sup> Edward S. Robinson and ProQuest, *Shift Linguals : Cut-up Narratives from William S. Burroughs to the Present*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

## 2.1 Frostiana

He hates that play. He hates witches. James, King of Great Britain, Ireland, and France awakes. Thank God. It was a dream. Not a nice dream. Not like the dream he had that he was, at last, the King of France. He bears the title, but it is a hereditary aspiration rather than factual description. His predecessors were intermittently at war over the issue for five hundred years with the other Kings of France.

James By-Grace-of-God, King of Great Britain, Ireland, and titled King of France is awake and his dream was not pleasant. Poor James. Damn that play. He should not have gone. He has a cold coming on. He hated the play. He may even have caught his death by attending. Why had Salisbury made him attend? Nobody had warned him even though everyone knows he hates witches. James knows why. It's because he is not wanted here. The play had spoken of the death of kings foretold by witches. He is a King and it should be obvious that he does not like to hear of the death of kings. They are trying to drive him away. He does not like predictions, horoscopes, and enchantments and the play was full of them. He sneezes. The play was also full of blood and traitors. There has been too much blood and too many traitors in his life already. James shivers beneath his woollen covers; there is a feather-down bolster beneath his head that feels like a rock; and he is desperate to keep warm. He opens an eye. Opposite him stands the old queen, Gloriana.

Gloriana is immortal, perfect, and invulnerable. She is also five years dead but still her eyes watch him from the wall. Although her body rots in a stone sepulchre in Westminster Abbey her image remains; the painting is her perfect counterfeit. How he hates that picture. How he hates the memory of her. How he hates this never-ending frost. He sneezes with increased vigour.

James wraps himself in the counterpane and strides across the room to stand before the painting. Gloriana, his predecessor, is resplendent in pearls and rubies: the

silver-grey of her dress cunningly painted, each detail rendered in perfect imitation of the fleshly substance and matter of the sublunary world. It is a wonder of the painter's art; everything is shown in minute and attentive detail; each encrustation of jewels, the spread of the farthingale, the half-smile of vermilion on the pale face. All is perfect and yet not of this world. James grasps the edge of the picture and pulls. He braces a leg against the wainscoting and he heaves, tugs; he applies the full force of his body, but she stays stuck. James tries to get his fingers under the frame, to get a purchase, to peel it away, but still it remains.

He is interrupted by a gentle cough at his shoulder: the Earl of Salisbury stands luxuriously immersed in a thick fur robe, full five foot two in his riding heels with his cousin, Francis Bacon, at his back like a somewhat taller evil shadow. The Earl, like James, has many titles. He is also known as Secretary of State, the Most Noble Lord Privy Seal, Premier Minister of the Crown, and Chief Advisor to King James, first of England, sixth of Scotland, nil of France. He is properly Robert Cecil, and Robert Cecil, for all his lack of inches and feet, has eyes and ears everywhere. For all his shortness of leg, he has greater reach than any other statesman in Europe; for all his weakness of limb, he has an unshakeable grasp upon his network of informants, upon the legislature, executive, and judiciary, and upon the kingdoms of Great Britain, Ireland, and, for all James knows, France.

"I beg your pardon majesty," Salisbury says, "I thought you had ordered her glorious memory remain undisturbed."

"I would fling the damned painting out of the window but the Queen's picture will not be moved."

"The portrait is like her in life then."

"My Lord Salisbury, you must help me. I can stand her no longer, the vile old witch..."



“Oh, Your Majesty,” says Bacon, “as you so wisely decreed, your beloved cousin’s memory is to be honoured, cherished. After all we must impress upon the kingdom that all is unchanged. You are the natural heir, and you mercifully promised that there is to be no recrimination, no revenge. We must not give plotters opportunities to slander the legitimacy of your blessed reign. The common folk love her, for they have known no other prince, and so they will love thee as they loved her.”

Bacon does not add ‘...when hell freezes over’ but James By-Grace-of-God knows.

“My subjects do not love me, they don’t even like me.”

Salisbury answers, “Without doubt thy subjects do love thee, Your Majesty, how could they not love thee? You who was born to be a King? They are familiar with Gloriana, that’s all, just a habit, a comfort.”

“What about the plots?” asks James, “we are beset by Papists, by Puritans, Anabaptists, Atheist Devils, Frenchmen, the Spaniards, the Dutch, and the Irish Rebels. There were five quarterdrawn at Tyburn last Wednesday, and thirty eight hanged in the last week.”

“A few malcontents” says Salisbury.

“There are so many traitors,” says James, “if they can’t hang them any faster, the dungeons will burst from their numerical excess.”

“Then,” says Salisbury, “all the more reason to keep the Queen in their minds; she is loved by the yeomen and prentices: they would not raise rebellion against her heir. I know that it is hard; up until the moment her heart stopped it was forbidden to imagine her end, on pain of death. Even now many find it difficult. However, to help, I have arranged a performance: a marvel to celebrate her life.”

James is damned if he is going to another play, twice damned if it's about Gloriana. Thrice damned if it is, "a performance to celebrate her life? I want them to forget about her, not celebrate."

"Your Majesty?" says Bacon knotting his fingers, and bowing before Gloriana's cursed portrait, "your secretary signed the instruc..."

Bacon turns on his heel to face James, "I beg pardon, Majesty. Your secretary gave money for the players, and said you wouldst honour us with your gracious attendance. The companies and aldermen, the yeomen and the prentices all rejoice at the thought that they may lay eyes upon Your Majesty, it fills them with delight."

"Attend? I cannot: I am unwell, a cold."

There is a soft cough again.

"Salisbury, I cannot."

Salisbury hands him a large silk handkerchief.

"Oh, Your Majesty, of course you need not attend, there must be some other means to maintain the affection of the citizens..."

"Such as?"

"I cannot quite envisage it at present, but I'm sure God will grant you the grace of inspiration."

"And the play?"

"I'm sure the play will be a success, will it not Bacon?"

Bacon acquiesces with a frosty smile.

"A success which will be associated forever with your name, Your Majesty," says Salisbury.

"But..."

The next day James, the King of France, lies in bed; he dreams of Mary, his dead mother, of her softness, her warmth, her sweet voice that calls him across the moor. He

runs through the heather beneath a round white moon. He almost reaches her when he is waylaid by three grotesque old women who boil a vile cauldron upon a fire. They surround him poking and pointing, they stab him with sharp-nailed fingers. He feels sick with their toad-breath in his face. “King of France,” they cackle through broken teeth, “You shalt never be King of France. King of nothing more like.”

He wakes up screaming but the Groom-of-the-Chamber just places another pillow beneath his shoulders, so that James may sit comfortably to receive visitors. The pages remake the fire in the great hearth and James is already attended by his clerk, with paper, with inkpot, with a nose quite blue from cold. The clerk shivers in his fur-lined gown. The clerk seems vague this morning. Unclear, circuitous, ill defined at the edges. For a change it is an affect of the man and not an effect of James’ defective eye. James squints and catches the clerk’s head in his blind spot, just to get the measure of him without a top, to see him abridged, virtually decapitated. This is perhaps an improvement, perhaps a daydream, perhaps a prophecy.

“Well Sirrah,” says James, “What today? Are there witches to hang? Traitors and Rebels? Where is Lord Salisbury?”

The clerk bobs and bows, does a little backwards and forwards dance, then addresses the painting of the deceased Gloriana.

“Lord Salisbury is without, Majesty.”

“I, we, James by-Grace-of-God and so forth, are... am here; You speak to my cousin Gloriana, my dead cousin Gloriana. Did we not build her a new tomb? A tomb of white marble: did we not pay a great deal of money for it? Ten thousand crowns. Was it not built at Westminster and her coffin locked safe inside? If there is a grave she must be dead must she not? We are King now and she, bless her sacred memory, is going to stay dead.”

“Dead, Your Majesty?”

The man's face falls and tears leak from his eyes.

"Of course she's dead otherwise I wouldn't be King."

The clerk catches himself, pulls himself upright, then prostrates himself and grovels lest the King's sharp tongue make his ears fall off.

James has made diversions, commissioned masques and glorious pageants, mummers, fantastical progresses, executions, witch trials. He has hung the city with bright pennants, the shrines with spring flowers, the gallows with thieves, malcontents, traitors, and ne'er do wells. Still he cannot distract his people. The Queen's return is constantly expected. The expectation is the worst part. If she just popped up, walked into court, said good morning cousin, then he could come to terms, make arrangements, and drive a stake through her black bloodless heart.

He goes to the business of government. Advised by Lord Salisbury, he dictates a letter for whoever is Tsar of Russia this week to his secretary. He is just enquiring whether it would be possible to acquire a pair of live unicorns as the Tsar has sent a great many of their horns to him, when the secretary's eyes glaze and wander over Gloriana's portrait.

"...and a firefly in amber to illuminate your Majesty's new dress," the clerk says.

"Salisbury!" shouts James, "Why will no one remember she is dead, I want the pictures gone."

Salisbury remains smoothly impervious in his furs, "Oh your majesty," he says, "surely it is a precious relic of the dear departed Queen".

"But all the other pictures," says the King, "Can we not just burn a few of them?"

James wraps his favourite counterpane about his shoulders and a pair of shivering footmen open the doors to the Royal Gallery. It is hung with image after image of Gloriana; Gloriana in a thousand different dresses: she rides in one painting, in another she walks, she sails on the sea with sword in hand and cannon primed, she flies on the

back of a magnificent eagle armed with a flaming star. But always the picture contains the same pale oval of her face, the same perfect crescent of red, and eyes as black as death. There is Gloriana as a child, as a princess with her hair bound in long plaits, and a young queen with Cecil's father at her elbow, as an elderly queen standing stiff as a Dutchman's ruff. Here is her funerary portrait in the imperial crown with her foot firmly on the thin white neck of the allegorical figure of death. Dr Dee's funeral eulogy is painted in the corner:

“They tethered their hearts to her golden reign  
And they'll never untether those hearts again,  
She lies without care or disease's corruption,  
Still and so perfect in her jewels and lace  
Not dead but asleep in snowy perfection,  
We shall bow once again to her heavenly face.”

Pictures, Pictures, Pictures. There is Gloriana on her progress, Gloriana in her palaces at Whitehall, at Richmond, at Nonesuch. Everywhere Gloriana. James stops beneath an image of Gloriana wearing a dress of cloth of orange covered with delicate little ears. Among the drapery disembodied eyes flicker and blink at James.

“What the hell is that,” he asks.

“It was Bacon's idea, that Gloriana watches all, hears all,” says Salisbury.

“And if you speak out of turn she'll take your ears away,” says Bacon.

“Yes, Bacon, a lesson you should learn,” says James, “I don't like it.”

They move on to a painting of Gloriana with a bow in her hand and a crescent moon on her brow. Those long white fingers are so elegant and slim wrapped around the

shaft of an arrow. She is too, too beautiful with her frost-pallid skin. Those black eyes glitter with something like humour and malice.

James has preached against witches, orated against the abuses, evils, and ubiquity of them. He has written a book on demonology, rewarded witch-hunters, and encouraged the magistrates. He has outlawed vice, iniquity, and wickedness. Yet in spite of the prosecutions, inquisitions, and punishments measured out to sons and daughters of Lucifer, to the cunning folk, and to the folk who weren't cunning enough, James knows there is only one witch who matters.

“Lord Salisbury, once I was happy,” he says, “I was James of Scotland. Just the one rough little kingdom, but I was its master. You invited me here and you told me this was Albion, Lyonesse, and Camelot; a magical kingdom of legends and wonder. Well it certainly is full of magic: full of evil enchantment, of blasphemy. And no wonder: in Scotland I could burn all the witches I liked. But here! ‘No, Your Majesty,’ you say, ‘you can’t burn witches it’s against the law, reserved for women who murder their husbands, for traitors, for heretics, Witches must hang.’ Hang! Whoever heard of hanging for a witch?”

He grips the gorgeous gold surround and tries to remove the picture from its fixtures. It stays fixed.

“There she is,” says James struggling with the immovable image, “Chief among the witches painted with the horned moon upon her forehead, and yet she does not even dangle on the gibbet as the English law says witches should be hanged, but hangs in my hall like a spider in her golden frame. She should be consigned to the fire.”

“Oh, Your Majesty, not at all,” says Salisbury, “the painting is an allegory, she is merely represented as the goddess Diana, the Huntress.”

Gloriana as Diana the huntress looks grimly down on James. She is perpetual and pale as the damned moon.

“Why did you make these idols? Why, Salisbury, did you have her painted as a pagan goddess?”

Salisbury sighs, “In the reign of her sister, Mary, the cursed Catholic tyrant, when Gloriana was just Princess Elizabeth, it seemed probable that she would die. Many even thought she had been secretly strangled by her sister while she was imprisoned in the Tower. When she turned up alive many thought she would be overthrown by the Spaniards and recusant Catholics.”

“If only she had been...”

“But we had Dr Dee build the great clock at Westminster; it was a model for the kingdom, then he built a kingdom that functioned like the clock with Gloriana, our Gloriana as its heart. We sent portraits from one end of the country to the other to show she lived, she was ubiquitous. We made her so central to the working of the kingdom that it became impossible to imagine her death. I am afraid it has worked too well.”

James gazes up at her painted as a mechanical princess boldly striding out across a frozen ocean.

“You saw her die, Salisbury,” says James, now tell me she is dead, tell me.”

“She lives on only in her people’s hearts, Your Majesty.”

“Her people?” says James stroking the back of Salisbury’s neck.

“I meant your people’s hearts of course.”

James takes Salisbury’s arm and leads him to a great portrait, twice as large as life. Those eyes were such beautiful wells of understanding, such pools of mystery and comfort. She had a fine nose and shapely mouth; a fabulous jewelled dress of gold and silver falls from her breast. The artist had surrounded her with choirs of seraphim.

“Tell me how she died. Salisbury,” says James wondering at the glory of the angels.

“I saw her; she stood straight upright, her heart beating slower and slower...and slower. Until she... until she... until she...she.”

“Until she what?”

“...stopped,” says Salisbury.

“And you are sure,” says James, “are you sure that she cannot be started again? What of the necromancer Dee?”

“Dee was a wise man, a mathematician not a sorcerer.”

“What is the difference?”

“It is why you banished him, I understand,” says Salisbury, “I am sure Your Majesty has already considered recalling him to help in this matter.”

“I am considering it now, Salisbury,” says James.

Later that night Salisbury’s coach rattles along the King’s highway and skids through the frozen ruts of Drury Lane as the coachman turns towards Southwark. A thick white mist swirls over the frozen Thames and pours up out of the river through the roads and alleys.

“Stop here,” shouts Salisbury banging on the roof of the coach. The surrounding streets are dark as pitch yet yellow candle-light spills onto the cold snowy ground from the windows of an inn.

“My spies say he had been assisting Captain Wintour,” says Salisbury as he helps James out, “we will find him anchored below.”

The beam of his lantern falls on a sign that reads The Queen’s Tavern. It illuminates a rough portrait of Gloriana – a white oval, two black circles, red smudge at the top: a cipher.

There is raucous laughter inside and when James presses his face against the frosty glass he sees a head of red curls among a band of privateers.



“Is that her, Salisbury?”

“Surely not, Your Majesty.”

There is a glimpse of an ivory throat among the ruddy-faced pirates; she swills down a jug of spiced ale held in her pale fingers. James makes for the door with Salisbury protesting at his heels. James slips through the reeling, drunken sailors. She stands with her back to him in a ragged farthingale, an empty flagon in her pale hand. James reaches out for her shoulder, but before he can touch her she turns to present a face ruined by the French pox. She is masked in white grease, a wig of horsehair bristles above, and her thick throat is hung with common glass baubles. She grins at him with a sharkish row of blackened teeth.

“Insolent whore,” says James

She sticks her tongue out. “Useless King!”

On the other side of the room another figure also wearing red curls leaves through the back door. James makes to follow but feels a gentle hand on his elbow.

“Come away, it is just the fashion. A tribute to Gloriana. You cannot chase every red haired maid about London. We must hurry Your Majesty” says Salisbury, “Captain Wintour’s ship is at anchor; if anyone knows where Dee is, it will be the Captain. If we go later, he may sail.”

“Sail on a frozen river?”

“Dee equipped the ship marvellously for northern seas. Even ice will not stop it.”

Reluctantly James leaves the Tavern and follows Salisbury down some steep and icy steps.

By the river, amid the desolation of the great freeze, a boat is moored. She is bound to the dockside by a frozen web of warps and springs. Her dark hull of wood and metal is shaped into strange spirals, complex arabesques, and frozen devils; improbable mechanisms and jewelled gears are visible between the carvings covered by a latticework

of frazil-ice. Footsteps resonate on the snowy deck. Then there is the thin laughter of the wind in the rigging as a dark being squats over the hatch, unbuttoning an icy cloak of mist. “Captain Wintour? Are you there?”

“Lord Salisbury, come aboard,” says the Captain. His beard is a cloud of white in the bitter wind, blowing around him in tendrils and strands.

“I must find Dr Dee.”

“He is banished.”

“But we both know he is still here do we not?”

“He would surely not defy the King.”

“He had better not,” says James.

“He would not go far from Gloriana,” says Salisbury.

“Perhaps you should visit her,” says Wintour.

“Dee is in the Abbey?”

“He will be nearby.”

At Westminster Green, James and Salisbury approach the abbey as Dee’s great clock strikes midnight, each metallic boom louder than the last, and each stroke of the hammer slower than its predecessor. The great cogs and springs are sluggish in the cold; following the twelfth strike, clever figures begin their strange stately dance; they follow many and various epicycles and complex deferents as do the days and nights and centuries and years, as do the thoughts and fancies of men, and as do the heads and hearts of kings and commons alike. A triton knight in copper armour with a seahorse-helm gallops past James, the clank and grind of his mechanism shakes icicles from the abbey’s medieval façade. A fantastical duchess dances a little galliard in the shadows, and a dwarf encrusted with moonstones tumbles through the snow. Near the mechanism a dark robe floats in the fog.

“Dee,” whispers Salisbury, “we have found him. Now Your Majesty, he is very sens...”

From the somewhere within the clock silvery laughter rings out. A perfect white arm reaches from within the mechanism and a farthingale swishes across the snow. Two eyes as black as death stare into James’s.

“Gloriana,” he whispers as his breath freezes in his throat.

And then the fantastic figures all melt away into the fog. James sneezes.

“We must check her tomb, in the North Chapel,” he says.

“What about Dee?” says Salisbury.

“I saw her,” says James, “I saw Gloriana.”

Salisbury shakes his head, “It was probably the fog playing tricks.”

“The only way to be sure is to check the tomb.”

Moments later the two of them stand before her monument, situated in glory and golden splendour among the cluster-columns and gargoyles. The sepulchre is surmounted by her frozen image carved from marble by the finest masons, marble fine and cunningly cut to imitate lace and flesh and hair. The effigy is as white as her frosty portrait and similarly decorated with pearls and jewels: some translucent marble, some gilded, some painted, some real. There are gold and basalt pillars supporting a crystal canopy and six mournful, marvellous knights animated by cunning mechanisms march up and down. On her stone head the imperial crown shines over marble curls.

“I saw her interred,” says James, “She should not have been able to escape: see the locks and the great iron mechanism sealing it.”

“So she must be at peace, secure in such a beautiful monument, she must be so happy resting here,” says Salisbury.

“It cost enough,” says James.

James pulls out a key and inserts it into the mouth of a gaping cherub; the marble panel slides aside smooth and easy on oiled rollers. James takes Salisbury's lantern and shines the light among the cobwebs and dust. There is a single lead casket; it is complete, untouched, and perfect.

"I am sure your majesty is much relieved," says Salisbury, "she is here."

"She's gone," says James "there should be two."

"Two, Your Majesty?"

"Yes two: that is her sister's casket. I had her and Gloriana share the tomb"

"You had them put together? Did you not consider their hatred, loathing, and undying enmity, Your Majesty?"

"It was a joke."

"She would not have approved."

"If she was still there. But she isn't is she? Where is Gloriana? And where is Dr Dee?"

"I shall have everyone look for them, Your Majesty," says Salisbury shaking his head.

Home again in his own bed James dreams of his mother; her softness, her warmth, her sweet voice calling him across the river. He wonders if this is some memory of his childhood. He has no real recollection, no vision of her; he was after all still a babe when she left. After she fled her rebellious subjects, fled here to England, there was nothing. But there had been that face in his dream, her face fading away to a pale cipher in the snow.

James shivers, rubs his gooseflesh skin, brushes a single frozen tear from his cheek and draws the glorious embroidery of peacocks and dragons on the counterpane close about his shivering body. The cold is getting worse; for God's sake he is more than

two-score years not two. Why does the dream of a woman he had last seen forty years ago haunt and harrow him so? He sees her again walking over the ice, her face hidden, a pale oval in the snow and fog, the delicate hands float in the air, coming to take him home. Who had reattached her head? Gloriana had definitely had it removed. He only ever saw his mother in his dreams... there are no images of her at court, as the English still consider her a traitor, while pictures of ghastly Gloriana abound. He wakes with a start.

James-by Grace-of-God recognises Lord Bacon in yellow cross garters who approaches across the presence chamber. James doesn't want to go. He buries himself deep in his blankets.

Bacon bows low to Gloriana's picture. "The play, Your Majesty..."

"I am here Bacon."

Bacon turns away from the damned portrait and looks just a little too snakily at James.

James imagines him without his head. He conceals Bacon's top with a well manicured hand. It is an improvement. Salisbury hisses, "Francis."

Bacon focuses and continues "The play, Your Majesty. The apprentices are refraining from rioting especially for your attendance, and the common people are all coming, and of course the stout yeomen, the stout yeomen are particularly keen to see you at the performance. They are looking forwards to your attendance – surely you do not want to disappoint them.

James heart drops. The English have removed unpopular Kings, his own great grandfather for instance was a Welsh gentleman-farmer, a stout yeoman who overthrew an English King.

"The masque, it will be with puppets." Says Bacon, "It is called Frostiana, a celebration our own wonderful Gloriana, our Gloriana in the snow."

James chokes. He has an inner vision of Bacon roasting over an open fire. He hasn't seen anyone burned alive since 1603 and he misses the spectacle, the smell of burning flesh, the screams of the wicked sinners, the feeling of having cleansed the earth of evil. That mouth of Bacon's has definitely kissed the Devil's arse. Evidence could be found if James said so.

"Whose idea was this?"

"Lord Salisbury's, Your Majesty."

"Salisbury!" calls James and a door opens to admit his minister who hurries to his side, "Salisbury? What means this?"

"I think you should see before you judge, Your Majesty."

"I am not going to any play," he sneezes, "I am ailing, most unwell,"

"Of course Your Majesty, of course," says Salisbury, "Yet..."

"Yet? What yet?"

"Well, the Yeomen, Majesty," says Salisbury, "they are hoping to see you, as Bacon says, who knows what they will do in their grief if you do not attend?"

Salisbury affects a shudder beneath his furs. James sneezes. He is too poorly, he has not the will. He has not a death warrant at hand. He will send them both to the headsman when he is better. The thought cheers him up. "I will attend, but quietly. I am after all most, most unwell."

"Of course you are, Your Majesty, as you say quietly, without fuss."

Out on the Thames traders have set up their stalls; lamps glow in the twilight. A great number of booths have been erected ornamented with bright flags, signs, and statues. There is a plentiful supply of beer, of posset, and of gingerbread. Spits and fires are prepared, and animals are herded and penned, ready to slaughter, ready to roast, ready to fill the air with the scent of burning flesh.

James By-Grace ventures out into the snow among the crowds between Lords Bacon and Salisbury. The people all wear cloaks and hoods against the weather: why should they be different? James is almost happy incommunicado among the curious nobles, among the dandies in their Flemish ruffs and slashed sleeves, among the stout yeomen in doublets and ancient gowns, who cast suspicious and dissatisfied eyes over the rambunctious apprentices tumbling in the snow.

James pretends to examine a roasted pig and overhears a group of commoners.

“Is this a progress?” asks a Pikeman, “are they preparing for Gloriana, is she coming Tom?”

“She may do, she is expected,” says Tom.

“How can she? She’s dead after all” says a stallholder.

James nods in approval. At least not all his subjects are mad.

“That’s as may be, but do you think she is coming?” asks the Pikeman.

“We shall see,” says Tom.

“Gloriana is all around us, the snow has painted her excellent imitation over the kingdom,” says a hooded bishop.

He turns and skates off across the ice. Somewhere in the gently falling flakes pale figures dance and fly dressed in white furs and fabulous outfits of lace and diamonds and pearls. There is a marquee: painted on its canvas sides are pictures of mythical beasts and legendary figures.

“Shall we go inside, Your Majesty?” says Salisbury, “I believe the performance is going to start.”

Onto the makeshift stage strides an actor in a false beard and the purple robe of an emperor: “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon

me, saying unto me, 'Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore'."

"Amen," returns the audience.

The Emperor begins, "Welcome, to my poor cell, to my pavilion on the icy river, in summer Pluto is the King of Faerie, and his queen, is Proserpina, but in England's winter when the jolly green wood is silent and the faeries frozen solid we have our own Frostiana."

Out onto the stage capers a pale figure, jiggling and swaying like a snake on her poles and strings: silent and graceful in her strange dance. A simulacrum of the late Gloriana forged from ice and frost.

"Observe, Your Majesty," says Salisbury smiling, "observe."

James observes Salisbury's neck and wonders how many chops it will take.

Frostiana takes long strides across the stage throwing back her head and opening wide her arms as she gangles and dangles on her strings.

"Piebald!" she says, "My father the King of Winter is dead."

"But Frostiana, what about the Queen thy mother?" asks a Harlequin.

"She cuckolded father so he cut off her head," replies Frostiana.

"Then you are alone in this cold world," says Harlequin.

"Oh, I am but a maiden born and my poor flesh is weak. My lords would have me marry and gain a King, so I must a suitor seek."

Her first suitor appears arrayed for war with a great axe. He lays siege to Frostiana in an imitation palace of paper and wood that shines in the lantern lights of the makeshift stage.

"Oh beautiful Frostiana," he says, "would that I, the Prince O'France, could melt your icy heart."



“Why I love you true Prince O’France,” she says and through a marvellous artifice the puppets false eye winks at the audience. “What gift do you bring your beloved, your betrothed, your Frostiana?” her head jiggles on its string and the mechanical mouth smiles coyly as a wolf.

“Why I have nothing but my heart,” says the Prince, “... and this big battle axe.”

“It is a good axe?” asks Frostiana, “Is it bright, and strong, and...sharp?”

“This is the brightest strongest sharpest axe in France.”

“Then I will have it.”

“And wouldst you have me, Frostiana?”

“Why of course my love,” says Frostiana, “lay your head upon my lap.”

He lays his head upon her dress and she wriggles and worms and fidgets.

“Your lap is like the ocean, Frostiana.”

“Then lay your head upon this block of English oak,” she says indicating a cube of wood besides her. The Prince O’France shifts his position.

“Are you more comfortable now my love,” she asks testing the edge of the weapon, and accidentally cutting her finger. She sucks at the wound making very crossed eyes at the crowd. The crowd respond with claps and whoops. James smiles. Gloriana is a clown. Risible.

The Prince O’France answers her, “I am much more comfortable, the aperture could have been made by my measure to rest my shoulders and the balcony on the block doth support my neck most contentedly.”

The puppet Frostiana raises the axe above the gorgon curls of her blood-coloured wig, she whirls it once...twice...three time around her head and swings it in a glittering arc neatly severing the head of Prince O’France in a single blow. The disconnected head rolls off stage left while lamenting “She hath changed her mind and doth break my heart.”

Frostiana capers back and forth in a frolicking scramble with disarticulated limbs and gurning mouth.

“Oh my heart I am so lonely.

Who will come and comfort me.

All I want is one who loves me.

Where oh where shall that one be.”

James leans down and whispers into Lord Salisbury’s ear “I think, Robert, I might enjoy the play after all.”

Behind him the common crowd’s laughter rustles like dry leaves in the wind.

Frostiana is again in her tower of frost and her suitor is King O’Spain.

She capers, she is mocked by Spaniards, men beg for her hand and always she smiles, always she defeats them, confounds them. She confuses them until they know not where they are and then chop. Off with their heads.

James by-Grace-of-God, laughs, “That’s it, that’s it, make mock, make mock,” he shouts out “you are a ridiculous old witch.”

He turns to the audience whose laughter hisses like the windblown snow from their muffled and hooded mouths. “She is a ridiculous old witch,” he says and claps his hand on his thigh. The audience creaks in appreciation of the joke.

Through the play he roars and weeps with laughter. The audience’s laughter is a whisper, their muffled bodies still. Do the fools not understand it is still a comedy? One by one all the characters die, leaving just Gloriana-Frostiana triumphant and another severed head at her feet.

Finally there is the death scene: she stands shivering so her icicles ring like sleigh bells. She converses with a familiar apothecary, who with his long white beard and skull cap, his scholars robe and staff, his crystal ball and books, is the spit and image of the banished Dr Dee.

“It is forbidden that I die,” says Frostiana.

“Indeed it is, but perhaps you could lie

Upon this bier just to rest. All your enemies are slain,

And yes all your lovers have proved false.

And so we must away from here as Arthur left,

And Merlin too, to Avalon, to the kingdom in the west.

Or perhaps to the white world beyond the frozen

Lands, where still your court may be restored

Remote from the too-rough ages of man.”

“I should stop then?” she says testing the edge of an axe with her finger.

“Yes, for the moment, STOP.”

And so it ends, the motionless figures carried off stage by a couple of clowns and a harlequin.

James by-Grace-of-God shouts, “they have broken the spell, out you go you old Witch,” he stops. The puppet master himself emerges, bows to him and smiles through a beard longer and whiter than James remembers: his cheeks have grown more hollow, and his eyes seem so distant and strange as they should, being the eyes of the only man of this age who has conversed directly with an angel: they are the pale eyes of Dr John Dee.

Frostiana follows him back onto the stage, her strings removed.

James strides forward to meet them, “in her tomb, not dead but sleeping in snowy perfection, you said, John Dee.”

“She was disturbed,” says Dee, “the constant praying of her sister kept her from resting. She came and found me so we arranged this little outing, a Masque, Your Majesty”

“Her age is at an end,” says Salisbury, “Dee, we agreed.”

“You knew, false Salisbury?” says James, “your head is mine.”

“But hers was a marvellous age,” says Dee.

“She decreed it herself,” says Salisbury rubbing the back of his neck, “she saw that time flows onwards, a great river bearing all before it.”

“All besides Gloriana,” says Dee.

“She is like a rock impeding the current,” says Salisbury.

“But THIS great river has stopped has it not?” says Dee, “The Thames is still.”

“It is frozen, lifeless.”

“You may not like the flood unleashed if the rock is removed,” says Dee.

“She has to go; you of all of us know there is a new age coming.”

“And that age will seem as dust when they remember Gloriana.”

“Send her away,” says James, “I command it: it’s my kingdom now.”

He turns to the audience, “It is my kingdom now,” but they remain silent in their hoods and mufflers. Immobile and grown with white crystals of frost.

Frostiana’s delicate ring encrusted fingers dance, and she spreads her pale hands as a loom to weave the very air with veins of ice that run like spiders webs all among the stalls and games: over the pitch, the butts, out in the fair, across the roasted pigs and into wine spiced with cinnamon freezing in the steaming cup. She gathers up her heads and leaves the tent on a swirl of snowflakes. James follows, James capers behind her, James pursues Gloriana through the fair. The stall holders and dandies and rowdies and whores and goodwives one by one bow and kneel to kiss her pale hand, supplicant, entombed within the frost. Each remains kneeling in the snow: what other use are they? For a heart given to Gloriana can never be given again. Her subjects kneel in prayer celebrating the return of the dead Queen and she leaves them frozen solid. As she moves through the thickening snow, she leaves her images frozen behind her. She is refracted in the frozen city; a world of Glorianas: like shattered fragments caught in the ice crystals. A moonstone dwarf tumbles past laughing. Six knights all in golden armour skate in

intersecting spirals and a hundred mechanical marvels come singing and playing music. James joins them. His illness is forgotten as he takes the hands of all the wonders dancing in a stately circle, spinning on the ice of the river, floating on the soft flakes of pure snow. Light as snow himself; his soul is pure and transparent in the cold air.

“Gloriana,” he shouts and the ice shatters before him. There is Dee holding a crystal globe filled with swirling snowflakes. James skids and loses control; he slips out into the centre of the river. He can see beneath his feet, ice-entombed fish and murdered spies wide eyed and gaping under the frozen water among filaments of trapped air that streak the polished surface; they claw at the smooth ice, each bears the marks of a dagger in its eye or a stain of green poison on its lips. Gloriana’s spies are loyal even beyond death.

Frostiana-Gloriana stops. She smiles a black toothed smile at him. “A game of bowls, little cousin?” she says holding three peculiar balls. They are not round enough to roll true and they drip with gore and rot.

“Have you brought your traitors with you?” she asks.

“I have none,” he says.

“I think thou hast a great many. But here borrow mine,” she says passing a familiar head, white with frost, red with blood.

“Is that?”

“Mary the Traitoress,” she says.

“My Mother!”

“She would burn thee for a heretic Cousin. She would give our Kingdom to Spain.”

“Mother,” he cries shielding his eyes from the sight, “mother.”

“Hush,” says Gloriana, “why make this show? You will call her back.”

“Though I never knew her...” says James.

“If the plot against me had succeeded she would have taken your throne in the north and mine in the south. Now cousin, on with the game: would you take a throw at the jack?”

He looks into the dead face in his hands.

The dead face opens some very alive looking eyes and hisses at him “Monstrous canker of my womb.”

The snow beneath his feet pours away and the ice creaks. He wobbles unsteadily on his legs. The ice erupts scattering shards across the snowfield. From out of the frozen waters a headless body bursts and gives him a swipe with a maggoty hand. His dead mother reaches to retrieve her head, but Gloriana plucks it from his grip and bowls it in a beautifully calculated parabola across the ice. The lower portion of his mother scrambles after, leaving bloody footprints through the mounds of snow.

“Then best forget her; she was not much mother to thee, nor sister-Queen to me, she did after all kill thy father.”

“He was a fool by all accounts.”

“Do you believe she had to blow him up?”

“It was not well done” says James, “not enough powder; they had to drive a stake through his heart in the gooseberry bushes,”

“Then forget her,” says Gloriana-Frostiana.

She takes Dr Dee’s arm and he leads her to a dark ship that waits on the ice. Gloriana-Frostiana, the queen of the winter, smiles and waves to James; Dee’s mechanicals climb aboard carrying the great clock onto the fantastic mechanical boat. Frostiana smiles, her eyes so black, black as the winter sky, her hair is red as blood, piled high upon her head, and decorated with sparkling jewels. She spreads the delicate ring-encrusted fingers. She holds out a cold white hand for him. James By-Grace-of-God reaches to take it. To follow her away from the miserable grumbling yeomen and

rebellious apprentices, away from the traitors, conspirators, and plotters, away from the dammed lords and government, and away from dammed Salisbury. He is too late. The ship is already slipping away across the ice. The mechanicals of the Westminster clock strike up a jolly galliard conducted by Doctor Dee. Captain Wintour is impassive behind the wheel, his great white beard makes him one with the snow. Frostiana-Gloriana dances with a metal knight and the sky is lit by flickering lights and magical fire flowers. The boat's mechanism roars as it speeds through the ice into the darkness of the river. The last real witch is slipping away, the last of the magic leaving Albion, all the wonder of her age heading to a new kingdom beyond the north wind. In the starlit-distance his mother chases after the ship clutching her own bloody severed head. She chases the dark ship that sails through ice as if it were water. The music fades away into the frosty air, leaving only James, just James-by-Grace-of-God alone on the ice; James, titled King of Great Britain, Ireland, and aspiratory King of France with a stinking cold, subjects who hate him, and his expensive royal breeches ruined by the snow. There is a soft cough by his ear and Salisbury proffers him a small but steady hand while Bacon shivers behind him, "Your Majesty?"

## 2.2 Entropy and Language

Early in 2014, inspired by a scene in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*,<sup>29</sup> I had an idea I would like to write a piece based on the frost fairs during the Little Ice Age<sup>30</sup> In the course of researching these I came across *Frostiana; or a history of the river Thames in a frozen state, with an account of the late severe frost; ... to which is added the Art of Skating*: this formed part of my source material for a cut-up

'Frostiana's' other literary sources include Johnson's Bartholomew Fair<sup>31</sup>, several Shakespeare plays<sup>32</sup>, C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*<sup>33</sup> (the witch queen who keeps the kingdom in a state of permanent winter). In 'Gloriana'<sup>34</sup> Moorcock imagined a science-fantasy Elizabethan age, Gustav Meyrink's *The Angel of the West Window*<sup>35</sup> examines the supernatural experiments of Dr Dee, and Brahms and Simon's *No Bed for Bacon*<sup>36</sup> was an influential source for Gloriana's 'difficult' character.

I begin a piece of creative writing with perhaps a few fragments of a previous work, a piece of text borrowed from an old book, or a poem produced through a surrealist game; I reduce these texts to fragments by cutting: paper with scissors, or electronic text with a spread sheet. The fragments are reordered through random processes: mixed up, pulled out of a hat, thrown up in the air, viewed through windows carved in the page.

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<sup>29</sup> Virginia Woolf, Rachel Bowlby, and David Bradshaw, *Orlando : A Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p32 -59

<sup>30</sup> Brian M. Fagan, *The Little Ice Age : How Climate Made History 1300-1850*, (New York: BasicBooks, 2002, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Bartholomew Fair in Ben Jonson and Gordon Campbell, *The Alchemist and Other Plays : Volpone, or the Fox; Epicene, or the Silent Woman; the Alchemist; Bartholomew Fair*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Twelfth Night, Macbeth, The Tempest

<sup>33</sup> C. S. Lewis and Pauline Baynes, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, (London: Collins, 1998)

<sup>34</sup> Michael Moorcock, *Gloriana, or, the Unfulfill'd Queen : Being a Romance*, (London: Allison and Busby, 1978).

<sup>35</sup> Gustav Meyrink, *The Angel of the West Window*, (Sawtry, Cambs.: Dedalus, 1991).

<sup>36</sup> Caryl Brahms and S. J. Simon, *No Bed for Bacon*, (Yardley, Penn.: Westholme, 2010).



For some practitioners such as Gysin<sup>37</sup> or Tzara<sup>38</sup> this disassembling and aleatory reordering has been the end product, either a statement about the nature of text, a deconstruction of the form, or a new more true to life representation of reality freed from the artifice of narrative structure. In my practice it is a beginning, a set of clues to be reconstructed as a narrative. These aleatory interventions may introduce unusual juxtapositions, lacunae, or dislocations; it is unlikely that a work will develop a narrative structure from the process so more often I consciously impose one.

Because I aim for fluidity of processing, for clear narrative much of the obvious signs of cut-up disappear. Some of these fragments persist in the text, or being erased in the final version act as invisible attractors around which the text accumulates. As this thesis is concerned with cut-up I wanted these stories to be more than examples of work produced using the method; I wanted the process of cut-up encoded within the creative work: for the stories to be constructed around the themes of Fragments, Entropy, Confabulation, and Structure.

The process progresses from the formulaic disordering and reordering through a partially unconscious or intuitive stage of imagining meanings for the new texts and finally the conscious use of craft techniques to turn these poetic interpretations into narrative.

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<sup>37</sup> Burroughs and Gysin. p24

<sup>38</sup> Brotchie and Gooding. p36

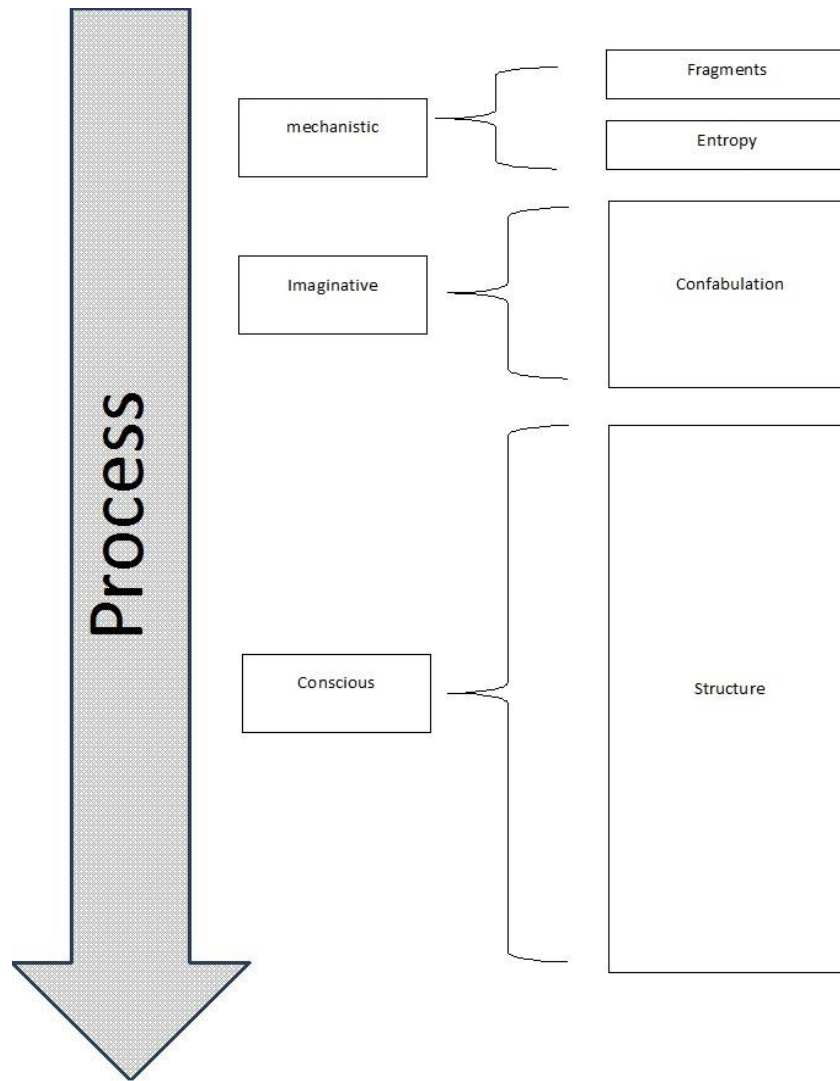


Figure 1 cut-up method as Fragments, Entropy, Confabulation, and Structure

‘Frostiana’, is set in the court of James I in 1608: James is haunted by the paintings, propagandists’ images of a dead queen, that fill his palace. They are the residue of a previous reign that persists within his new kingdom as a disruptive intervention. She, Gloriana, has gone but the fragments she left behind are assembled by her subjects into an illusion of her continued presence. Gloriana haunts the kingdom but James, the new king, hopes to break the spell by erasing her from the hearts of his nation. However, illusions once established are difficult to dispel, and in this case the illusion establishes itself as the

new narrative reality; first as the multiple painted images, a funerary statue, through a puppet of Gloriana in a dramatic performance, and then as the resurrected ice queen, Frostiana. When she becomes real she is persuaded to leave with a boat full of mechanical servants and her court magician taking all the magical rules of her world away; the kingdom undergoes a phase transition<sup>39</sup> and a new set of rules are established for James's continuing reign.

The work itself reflects the process of cut-up through the fragmentation of Gloriana into multiple images, a theme that encodes the disordering of the cut-up fragments of text, and is indicated by the winter ice that paralyses the city, in the construction of the portrait that hangs in the palace; confabulation is also included centrally in the development of Gloriana from an image to reality: structure is embodied in the mechanistic organization of Gloriana's kingdom, in the clocks and clock-like control she exerted when alive.

Within 'Frostiana', the visual language of the English Renaissance is central to the imagery and narrative. The portrait which James tries to remove at the beginning of 'Frostiana' is based on Nicholas Hilliard's *Pelican*<sup>40</sup> and *Phoenix*<sup>41</sup> portraits:

resplendent in pearls and rubies: the silver-grey of her dress cunningly painted, each detail rendered in perfect imitation of the fleshly substance and matter of the sublunary world... everything is shown in minute and attentive detail; each encrustation of jewels, the spread of the farthingale, the half smile of vermilion on the pale face, all is perfect and yet not of this world.

In the historical Elizabethan court, for political reasons, portraiture looked back to the Gothic and miniaturist courtly traditions: the image of the Queen was strictly

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<sup>39</sup> Lawrence M. Krauss, *The Fifth Essence*, (London: Vintage, 1990).p184

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Hilliard, *The Pelican Portrait*, (National Gallery, 1575), Painting, oil on panel.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Hilliard, *The Phoenix Portrait*, (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, c. 1575). Painting, oil on panel.

controlled<sup>42</sup> for propaganda purposes, art and literature extolled the Queen's virtues, her health, her permanence. The symbolic and the stylised gothic image suited these needs: she is represented in the manner of a religious figure.

In these courtly portraits a fragmentary technique gives an entropic quality to the works: in the assemblage of vast quantities of detail which seem to build images through a process of accretion. English courtly painting under Elizabeth used a very different technique from contemporaneous European oil painting (Titian, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, El Greco)<sup>42</sup> and later painters working for the Stuart court (Vandyke, Lely, Reubens) who spare the detail in areas where the viewers attention is not focussed and use the fluid slow drying qualities of oil paint to display both virtuoso brushwork and to produce illusionistic imitations of reality.

When a viewer approaches the Elizabethan *Phoenix* and *Pelican* portraits it is this detail-encrusted surface which attracts the viewer's attention. This focus on detail is a symptom of the use of fragmentary methods which focuses attention on the textural features but tend to erode the overall sense of compositional structure which a practitioner may struggle to re-impose.

When the fragments of writing in cut-up are mixed up, pulled out of a hat, reassembled by chance, the text that is constructed has higher entropy than the source materials. From a practitioners' point of view a little entropy goes a long way. Entropy is defined in the OED as

1. A thermodynamic quantity representing the unavailability of a system's thermal energy for conversion into mechanical work, often interpreted as the degree of disorder or randomness in the system.

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<sup>42</sup> Karen Hearn, *Dynasties : Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630*, (London: Tate Gallery, 1995). p77

2. Lack of order or predictability; gradual decline into disorder.
3. (in information theory) a logarithmic measure of the rate of transfer of information in a particular message or language.<sup>43</sup>

The lack of predictability is key to all three definitions: in a physical system where heat is unevenly distributed on a molecular level it is available to do work – heat flows from hot to cold (the second law of thermodynamics<sup>44</sup>) e.g. heat flowing from a coal fire into water to create steam which expands to create motion. When heat is disbursed through doing work it is randomly distributed therefore there is no flow of energy from hot to cold. It is unavailable to do more work.

When the reader meets James the kingdom is running down, expiring: the world is undergoing an apparent heat-death<sup>45</sup>. The energy of Gloriana's reign has dissipated and entropy has paralysed the physical world. The vast mechanical structure of Gloriana's kingdom, the great clockwork engine of Dr Dee has run down, as did Gloriana herself. In the social hierarchy there is also the same breakdown with James' subjects' failure to recognise him as their King. Instead they cannot distinguish between past and future (this is another symptom of heat death as without change there can be no sense of past and future).

Just as physical molecules have entropy, a particular degree of disorder, so does language. In 1948 Claude Shannon formulated the mathematical theory of information in relation to electronic communication systems.

Shannon entropy measures the amount of information contained within a message for example:

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<sup>43</sup> 'Oxford English Dictionary on-Line', <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/entropy>> [accessed 15/06/2016].

<sup>44</sup> Charles Seife, *Decoding the Universe : How the New Science of Information Is Explaining Everything in the Cosmos, from Our Brains to Black Holes*, (New York: London Viking, 2006).p33

<sup>45</sup> P. C. W. Davies, *The Last Three Minutes*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994).p9

AA  
AA

Has very little information; it could be compressed into a shorter message e.g. “PRINT ‘A’ FIFTY TIMES” while truly random text such as Shannon’s example:

XFOMLRXKHRJFFJUJZLPWCFWKCYJFFJEYVKCQSGHYDQPAAM  
KBZAACIBZLHJQD<sup>46</sup>.

has a high entropy – it cannot be compressed into a shorter message: the most compact form of the message is the message itself. Shannon formulated information theory to account for information loss in radio communications but later applied it to written English.

When using the cut-up method, disorder and therefore entropy is increased. This has several effects including increasing the originality of word combinations, and producing a sense of the uncanny<sup>47</sup> through reducing regular collocations. A potential negative effect (depending on a practitioner’s aims) is that narrative and prosodic elements are disrupted.

In his paper 1948 ‘A Mathematical Theory of Communication’ Shannon writes:

Frequently the messages have *meaning*; that is they refer to or are correlated according to some system with certain physical or conceptual entities. These semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem. The significant aspect is that the actual message is one *selected from a set* of possible messages<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, ‘The Mathematical Theory of Communication’, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964).

<sup>47</sup> In the sense of the *unheimlich* used by Freud .

<sup>48</sup> Shannon and Weaver.

Yet the two extremes in Shannon entropy are: total uniformity where there is no information; or total chaos – where information content is maximal and the message could transmit no information the receiver did not already have. For language/semantic communication to function it must contain regular patterns which variations can be read against.

Shannon's measure of entropy depends on predictability. He initially uses this for written English:

The redundancy of ordinary English, not considering statistical structure over greater distances than about eight letters, is roughly 50%. This means that when we write English half of what we write is determined by the structure of the language and half is chosen freely.<sup>49</sup>

With the improvement in computer processing power and the development of corpus studies measures of entropy in language was expanded in theories of lexical attraction<sup>50</sup>. This places specific values on the probability of particular word combinations. These values lie behind predictive text, plagiarism checking software, and language recognition systems.

With increasing entropy in a text a practitioner will find kennings, metaphors, neologisms, and hints at narrative. The defamiliarisation makes the language uncanny, Freud's *unheimlich*<sup>51</sup> where the familiar is made unfamiliar, unhuman – strange idiolects emerge. When it is used on a more limited scale cut-up can produce effects similar to various rhetorical figures of disorder such as anastrophe, hyperbaton, and ellipsis.

My own use of cut-up developed from my experience of painting, from the Surrealists, and in particular the methods of Max Ernst: from frottage, grattage, and

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Deniz Yuret, 'Lexical Attraction Models of Language', (1998)  
<<http://www2.denizyuret.com/ref/yuret/yuret.pdf>> [accessed 22/09/2018].

<sup>51</sup> Sigmund Freud and Albert Dickson, *Art and Literature : Jensen's Gradiva, Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985). p335-376

collage.<sup>52</sup> These almost hallucinatory processes involve finding images in aleatorically distributed medium on substrate. Ernst wrote of his use of these methods:

I was surprised by the sudden intensification of my visionary capacities and by the hallucinatory succession of contradictory images superimposed, one upon the other...<sup>53</sup>

Ernst produced similarly intense images that share the packed surface detail and compressed spaces of the Elizabethan courtly painters, (e.g. Ernst's *The Robing of the Bride*<sup>54</sup>) who were not above a little bizarre surrealism if it fitted their propagandist purpose: in *The Rainbow Portrait* Elizabeth is depicted holding a rainbow and wearing a cape covered with disembodied eyes and ears.<sup>55</sup>

Similar methods of image production are described by Da Vinci, (see above page 1). The same process takes place when a reader or writer is confronted with a piece of cut-up text: we look for meaning in the disordered or partially destroyed text. For example an early draft of 'Frostiana' contained the cut up text:

Croom sold were destroyed which the frost began, grip white Judgment  
blew, they white was upon middle

It is obvious from this how with increased entropy the text becomes more ambiguous – how are we to interpret this? Perhaps as:

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<sup>52</sup> Barbara Berger, 'Max Ernst's Artistic Techniques', (2008)  
<<http://www.modernamuseet.se/en/Stockholm/Exhibitions/2008/Max-Ernst/Collage-Frottage-Grattage/>>  
[accessed 04/07/2015]

<sup>53</sup> Max Ernst and Robert Motherwell, *Beyond Painting, and Other Writings by the Artist and His Friends. [with Reproductions and Portraits. Edited by Robert Motherwell.]*, (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948). p13

<sup>54</sup> Max Ernst, *The Robing of the Bride* (Venice, Italy: Peggy Guggenheim Collection, , 1940).

<sup>55</sup> attrib. Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, *The Rainbow Portrait*, (Hatfield House.: Private Collection, 1600–02).



Croom sold (some things which were) destroyed , (the destruction) which the frost began, grip(ped in) white judgement (that) blew ~~they~~ white was upon the middle (place)

Which has produced a narrative introducing a character (Croom) who has performed an action (sold some things); the narrative moves forward by telling the reader the things were destroyed by frost and then shifts into a metaphor (white judgment) and an image containing a synecdoche (white upon the middle place). Croom never made it into the final draft. By this stage there were already several themes emerging: the puppet master; the frost fair; and a narrator (who rather than James was a minor observer of the events).

In some cases disordered text can seem more exciting than well-structured writing.

In *Seeing Through English* Carter and Nash point to the technique of topic skipping where a heightened sense of excitement is introduced by using:

frequent breaks and shifts with no central strand, and with weaker marks of sequence and cohesion[...] frequently in passages of transition, scene setting or resetting, when the author wants to maintain the pressure of an action packed yarn<sup>56</sup>.

This description applies to the qualities found in disrupted text. Another piece of the early cut-up reads:

as in small played sleigh along the coaches crystalline sometimes so frozen over, London bridge, and from the boys onto of booths, &c. on ice it assumed all the below universally of a fair; puppet and wild beasts were exhibited. The beef, Livery companies paraded, the particular their provides the dead shows sailors prescience still heavy

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<sup>56</sup> Ronald Carter and Walter Nash, *Seeing through Language : A Guide to Styles of English Writing*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

Rather than a smooth walk through an environment there are rapid shifts between conceptual worlds from fragments of visual images to background information between elements of diogenesis and mimesis

Unfortunately for a writer using cut-up language does more than juxtapose words; meanings depend upon the words position.

Approximately half of the words in a piece of prose will be function words and the disordering of these tends to reduce cut-up writing to beautiful or interesting textures. Peter Stockwell points out that 'while densely textured writing can add a sense of richness it is possible for texts to be too rich'<sup>57</sup> and 'overload the reader' with possible meanings through the interaction of too many possible metaphors.

During the process of transforming a piece of cut-up narrative into *Frostiana*, gaps were filled and ambiguous metaphors interpreted. A clear narrative structure emerged from fragmentary scenes and a narrative centre, in this case James narrated from intimate third person perspective. During this part of the process the interesting surface is sacrificed in the interest of fluidity of processing.

Characters are built for narrative development, not for the fascinating idiolects and fragmented identities, not for head-skipping and dizzying fantastical perspectives. In 'Frostiana' inevitably my knowledge of art history, history, and related literary works (see those mentioned above and in the accompanying bibliography) were brought to bear on the text together with the drag towards the norms of the prose story.

Although thematically *Frostiana* encoded the cut-up process, the textual organisation seemed to be lacking many of the visual signifiers of a cut-up text: the juxtapositions, lacunae, or dislocations. I began to consider ways to reintegrate some of

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<sup>57</sup> Peter Stockwell, *Texture : A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).p63

these qualities of cut-up. This resulted in the story 'The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near'.

### 3.1 Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss

*First published in the collection 'Stars beneath the Ships', Mount Abraxas/Ex Occidente Press, Bucharest, 2017*

Bayer took a well deserved break and rested on an empty oil barrel by the harbourside. He put a match to his briar-pipe and blew a bank of swirling, billowing tobacco smoke out over the sea as the Harbourmen loaded the ship with casks of fresh water and boxes of tinned turtle soup.

It was only Saturday afternoon but Bayer gave thanks to his God for the fair weather and fair water. The sky was clear and coloured the most deeply spiritual blue he had ever seen. The low, late sun washed the ship, Penkaryth's Pride, with antique golden light as she lay at anchor.

Iron wheels clattered over cobble stones as a couple of Lumpers in half undone oilskins came across from Cooper's warehouse with a trolley. They lifted their load of steel harpoons one by one into a sling and hauled them aboard with a block and tackle. Bayer himself would handle the grenades and detonators later. They made the harpoons so much more effective. Too effective.

It was unfair, perhaps, that those weapons would kill the whale before it had a chance to dive into the depths, to join battle with the whalers, or even take them all down with him. The weapon made a dead whale float rather than sink, as they were inclined to, by blasting great gas filled voids into the organ cavity. That made him sad too: to see even the greatest beasts floating with their inflated bellies filled with sulphurous fumes. The explosives were too volatile to be entrusted to the Lumpers and Deck-hands; only Bayer understood their sensitivities and moods, only he understood how the sun or the rain affected their capabilities, how moisture would slow them, how heat and time would make them unstable.

The water in the harbour was grey and fogged by silt below the first few inches. The silver back of a sleepy slow mullet materialized to reflect the blue of the sky. The fish rose to take a gulp at the surface and then resubmerged into the hidden world beneath the keels.

Out beyond the harbour groyne the waves were glass green and smooth. A few unicorns played beyond the reefs and rocks: giant seahorses that stood above the waves on fern-coiled tails twisting beneath their lithe bodies and coloured pure-white. A sharp whistle blew and drove them below the wave-tops.

The whistle came again and a traction engine rounded the corner of Ship Street and puffed its own pipe as it chugged between the Mermaid's Head and Ander's Chandlery. It drew a truck load of coal ready for the Dockers to crane into the coal store. Mr Mascoe, the Stoker supervised - his face already smutted from the dust. The Pride would be ready to steam out on Monday.

The next day Bayer made his way to church. He was slow on the bright Sunday morning with a brand new black eye and a throb in his head. It must have been one hell of a Saturday night. He could remember the first three bars and maybe the next three but after that his mind was obscured by merciful blankness.

All through town, the people were on course for their churches, halls, and temples. There was his cousin, Tom, on his way to the United Church of the Seven Songs, here was his sister, Engris, off to worship with The Fishers of Men, and yonder was crewman John Fincher going to speak in tongues and sway with Adam Coalthwaite's Brethren.

They all worshipped the one true God in their own way: the Church of God our Saviour, the Brothers and Sisters in Prayer, the Holy Tremblers, they all bowed before the one deity pictured in Embert's True Portrait of God. What did the little denominational

differences matter when they could gaze upon his True Image and worship him and he responded with such abundance?

God had sent them such a massive crop of green turtles that the beach was now littered with their shells; some of the children had taken to paddling around the bays and headlands in them or taking trips out to the reef. They were always there on the water, the future sailors and fishers, in a swarm of upended turtle carapaces bobbing in a little fleet, paddling back and forth between the witches' hat rocks and the *Westenstrand*. The remains of God's great harvest littered the beaches: middens of fish bones and oyster shells towered on the upper shore, while shellfish grew one over another in great fat reefs, and even the edible seaweed, the dulse and caragheen, formed vast meadows in the tidal zone concealing hoards of fat crabs and shrimp.

The town's prayers before the True Portrait had brought catches of fish so gargantuan that some of the greedier captains had drowned when they overfilled their boats, and so had the subtle God even rid the town of many of its sinners. Such was his wisdom, such was his way, and such was his generosity in the provision of fish that the few landmen who tilled the soil had taken to using the rotting catches to fertilize the land after all had been fed.

In the church, Bayer sat with the other members of The Congregation of God on the Sea. There were a lot of sailors there praying in the dim atmosphere for a safe journey and a good catch. The atmosphere was even dimmer than normal; most of the candles that burned in the niches were of cheap tallow and gave nasty smoky flames that stained the gilding and discoloured the stonework. A single rare wax candle burned before the True Image.

Bayer sighed. Bayer prayed.

The one shortage was oil. They had so little that they did not light the lamps even here. That would be amended soon: as soon as they could bring whales to render in Musselbaum's furnace. Then they would have oil for their lamps: oil lamps to fill the bright painted churches with light. Soon Bayer would be aboard the ship, soon Bayer would be out on the sea, soon Bayer would be hunting the monstrous whales for the precious oil out over the deep ocean, and then, they would need all the help God could give them.

Captain Torquil sat at the front of the congregation in his private pew. He sang in a surprising falsetto given the deep growl he used to command at sea. The True Portrait hung in noble grandeur behind the altar; there was Embert's True Portrait of the Lord God Almighty that had brought such wealth to the town and people of Roscaven. The crown of glory glowed above the noble brow and eyes deep with wisdom looked down upon them all. Those eyes were such beautiful wells of understanding, such pools of mystery and comfort. This being had a fine nose and shapely mouth; a great patriarchal beard flowed gold and silver over his breast. Embert had shown him surrounded by choirs of seraphim. How could anyone doubt that this was the true face of God?

They sailed out from port on the Monday in bright sunshine. On Tuesday it started raining and not a thing went right. A fortnight later Bayer found himself clinging to the nailed-down table trying to swallow a mouthful of fortified turtle soup.

"Two weeks of storms and not a fin nor fish," said Snotty Palmer.

"I wouldn't mind that," said the Doc, "but half the crew are down with sea sickness: they call themselves sailors and a few rough waves have them puking like babies."

"What did you give 'em, Doc?"

“A talking to. Then I told them to pray before Embert’s True Image of God for better weather.”

Eight of them huddled in the galley over their soup bowls. Bayer poured a shot of rough sugar spirit from his flask and stirred it into the green greasy liquid to warm him against the vicious cold hail that ricocheted on the deck above. The whole ship rolled and Bayer lifted his bowl to avoid it spilling.

“It’d be ok if the soup would stay still.”

The door burst open and lightening silhouetted the massive figure of First Officer O’Dane. As he slung the door shut lumps of ice fell from the steel surface and rang on the deck.

“Where is John Fincher? He is supposed to be on watch!” said O’Dane.

“I saw him at two aft; he was checking the springs on the boats,” said Bluey the Quartermaster.

“I saw him at three checking the locks on the gun,” said Snotty.

“Well he isn’t there now,” said O’Dane, “Right, the lot of you up and out and keep looking until you find him.”

Bayer picked up his bowl and gulped it down too fast so a little stream of green turtle fat spilled down his chin.

“What if he’s gone overboard?” asked Snotty.

“Then, Mr Midshipman Palmer, I’ll have to redo the damn watch-list,” said O’Dane.

The gale had encrusted everything with ice, the spray and rain had mixed on the cold metal of the ship and formed a glassy covering over the whole boat. The deck was a slick as an ice-rink and icicles hung from the superstructure in frozen waterfalls and bizarre columns.



Bayer shivered beneath his oilskins with his beard rapidly turning white with rime. “Come on,” said the Doc, “he’s probably skiving-off in the lifeboat.”

Doc was right; they found Fincher huddled inside the ship’s boat. He had wrapped himself in a blanket and lay frozen-solid with his eyes shut beneath a layer of ice. His lips were set in a crafty, sleepy smile beneath the icicles that ran down his face. First Officer O’Dane gave him a poke with a boathook.

“Sleeping on his watch,” he said, “lucky he’s dead ‘cos I would have killed him. Get him below – put him in the meat-locker to keep him fresh for his mum and dad - they can bury him on land; the sea might spit the lubber out.”

Later, back in the mess the mood was sombre. Doc poured them all a full measure of grog to mix in their coffee as they thawed their frozen hands and faces.

“What will his sister say?” said Snotty.

“Will you tell her?” asked Bluey.

“I suppose I should,” Snotty sat up, “I’ll ask Captain Torquil what to say, he always has the right words.”

“We should pray for him,” said Tillotson and he was right; the True Portrait waited expectantly on the wall.

Mr Juxon the Navigator stood up. He banged his fist on the table and said, “You’re fools, God is unknowable. He always has been: this is an idol you all worship.”

“But,” said O’Dane, “how can he be unknowable when Embert painted his picture from life out in the Thousand Mile Sea.”

“That is not the true God,” said Juxon, “it is a false God.”

“That is close to blasphemy, Mr Juxon,” said Doc, “Why would God hide his face from us? God loves us and is open in all things.”

The others agreed they did not like Juxon's secretive, invisible God and O'Dane threatened to fling him overboard, "No more heresy," he said, "you'll not blaspheme with a mouth full of brine and a hungry turtle up you."

Juxon went down to sulk in the warmth of the boiler room; he skulked away cursing them as idolaters under his breath.

The grog cheered them up a little. Bayer lit his pipe and poured another finger of spirit into his cup and passed the bottle to Bluey.

"We may as well finish the bottle – they'll be no whales in this weather," said Bluey.

"It can't blow forever," said O'Dane, "then we'll have our prizes."

"What are you going to do with your share?" said Doc to O'Dane swaying slightly and hanging onto a metal pipe.

"Why, I'm going buy Swanhilde Musselbaum a fine gold ring for her wedding finger."

"What will her father say?" said Bluey.

"He won't say nothing if I bring him whales to render," said O'Dane, "He won't say nothing cause Swanny loves me and she gets what she wants. He won't say nothing because though he loves Swanny, he loves his business more and I'm going to be good for his business – I'm going to bring him so many whales the town will drown in whale oil."

"Have you chosen a church?" asked Bayer.

"I don't know," said O'Dane, "They go to the Seven Songs, but Adam Coalthwaite's have a bigger copy of the True Portrait,"

"God on the Sea has better though – one of the first Embert painted," said Bayer.

"But he had had more practice when he painted the Brethren's version," said Bluey.

Most of them agreed God on the Sea was better, and O'Dane led them in prayers before Embert's True Image of God as the ship rocked and yawed and loose crockery and anyone not hanging onto something screwed-down were flung about the mess. The ship climbed mountains of sea and fell from great cliffs of water. The view from the portholes alternated between the blue glare of the lightening and the green glare of the lightening seen from beneath the waves.

Bayer thought he would be spending the night in the Devil-Below's foot locker. He prayed harder and clung to the table leg and begged for God's mercy through the roar of the thunder and wind. The ship rose high into the air with such speed that they were all pressed to the floor. Higher and faster they rose until the ship hung suspended in time with the violet light of St Elmo's fire flowing over every surface. The hull gave a loud creak and the ship threatened to break her back, unsupported as she was, atop a wave. Higher they were lifted, higher, until they burst through the cloud tops. For a moment the sun shone bright upon them and then they began the long plummet down into the storm. They floated free from gravity as the boat fell. Bayer flew weightless in the mess hall surrounded by twenty tins of turtle soup that had escaped the kitchen hanging all around him unsupported in the air. The ship seemed to fall forever through the darkness. Still the lightning flashed but the boat slowed and the tins of soup settled to the deck. Through the porthole Bayer could see they were sliding down the side of a great green wave, then they were gliding smoothly out onto a calm ocean and the wave sank beneath the glass surface. The storm had abated, and the sea was calm.

"Look at that," said Doc, "as smooth as a lake and sun shining like there was never a storm."

Beneath the hull the clear waters teemed with fish. A shoal of turtles swam by perhaps five fathoms below.

Captain Torquil spoke in a low voice, yet in the silence it carried to every part of the ship.

“It was like this in the Thousand Mile Ocean when Embert saw God’s face in the waters and the waters parted and God stood before him while he painted his likeness, so that we could know and worship him in all his majesty. So noble, so beautiful, so true.”

Below the smooth surface of the sea, below the swarming turtles, below the silver fish, perhaps forty or fifty fathoms down, a dark shadow swam by. The Captain’s eyes widened, “do you think he is here? That we could see him? See God himself at play in the sea?”

In a calm voice he ordered the crew, “Everyone on your knees and pray, we’re in God’s own ocean.”

It was then a whale broke the waves about five hundred yards to starboard; it rose in silence, its back smooth and black with steam and water blowing as it breathed. The ringing of the chadburn for full steam-ahead shattered the silence. First officer O’Dane was off his knees and after his prize, “Bring her about,” he shouted, “there’s your fortune over there.”

The whale raised its tail and beat the water to a maelstrom then turned its head down and vanished.

Captain Torquil gripped O’Dane’s collar with both hands and roared into his face, “Stop this blasphemy!” The Captain turned red with the effort to thunder louder than the ocean; the ocean that boiled with whales leaping like a shoal of sardines.

In the engine room the stokers bent their spines and shovelled. They shifted coal to furnace by the hundredweight and ton. The bronze screws churned the water and the ship shot forward and yawed as she turned; such was the velocity and so hard was the rudder set that she half rolled allowing water to swamp the lower deck.

“The pumps,” shouted O’Dane tearing himself away from the Captain, “get the pumps working.”

“Whale Ho!” shouted Snotty.

“And you,” O’Dane yelled at Bayer, “get to the harpoon.”

“This is God’s ocean,” yelled the Captain, “leave them be.”

But the crew had been set in motion by O’Dane. Bayer ran to his station calling “Whale Ho!” and each fellow he met took up the shout Whale Ho! to measure out his time and each moved in that time to the song of Whale Ho! as the song swung along the decks from bow to stern like a pendulum, each man slipped into the part he had practiced, interlocked in action as neatly and inevitable as a set of cogs in a clock.

Bayer sprinted to his post. His heart beat hard and adrenalin flooded his head hotter than the grog ration; the gunner’s mate ran in lockstep behind him with the box of propellant charges for the gun crew who stood ready with wrenches and tamping by Bayer’s cannon.

The pod of whales extended to the horizon: a hundred different species all together. The Captain grasped the safety rail and leaned out wide eyed at the great gathering, but O’Dane was in command. He chose their target: a massive blue whale that broke the surface two hundred yards to port. “There,” he shouted and they had just started to turn in pursuit when another broke twice the size and three hundred yards before them. The monstrous blue-black fin of another huge bull eclipsed the sun and plunged the ship into darkness.

“No...over there.”

At an even greater distance a titanic white beast rose up; a giant amid a pod of Right Whales, it raised its smooth back as larger and larger whales broke the water.

“That one,” roared O’Dane as straight ahead the pale flanks of the white whale blotted out the sky, “enough oil to light all the lamps in the world.”

The Penkaryth's Pride bore down on the giant; she rushed full speed ahead with flames and soot pouring from her funnels. The creature tried to submerge, but already harpoons flew and carried their cables arcing through the sky; their sharp steel heads pierced the skin and the grenades exploded deep inside. The great beast thrashed beneath the waves tethered by a dozen ropes; even the explosive power of the harpoons was not enough to finish it cleanly.

Bayer was mortified when the great beast raised a human head from the water and stretched out a massive hand. He fell to his knees and rocked as down the noble beard ran blood as an infinity of angels swirled up from the sea to the sky and wept. Too late did the living God swing his arm to swat the ship like a bath time toy; too late he tried to defend himself as a cannon roared close by Bayer's ear and a lance burrowed into his heart and the grenade detonated so God's living flesh flowered in a scarlet chrysanthemum spraying over the water.

"Got him!" shouted Juxon.

The wounded deity subsided and light leaked from his wounds as blood made a scarlet waterfall of his lips. The crown of glory slipped from his head and tumbled in a shower of divine light. It sank beneath the waves and God's eyes rolled back like two dying suns. He turned belly up on the waves, with his beard and hair haloing his face like Sargasso weed in the water, while a choir of dead seraphim floated at his upturned toes.

What had they done? The crew, Bluey, Mascoe, Tillotson, and the rest all stood in tears as dark clouds rolled on a dim horizon. The sun sputtered like a dying candle. They tried to sing a weak hymn but the words fled their heads. They tried to pray but the words died on their lips. Bayer just sat on the deck and stared at his hands. They should have been red, he would be accursed.

The Captain muttered, "A sin, a dreadful sin."

The waves turned red with the blood and the clouds made strange shapes. The water was roughening and a foul wind began to blow. Penkaryth's Pride and the colossal body seemed to dance together in a mutual orbit upon the rapidly changing sea.

"It's not our fault," said O'Dane, "God created the sea to sail and the fish to catch and whale to kill: it was negligent of him to use it as a bathing pool."

"No," said Captain Torquil, "we should not have hunted the whales, should not have gone so far from land – he sent us fish and turtles into the shallows near our town. We knew the deeps were his, since Embert saw him out there, since the sainted Embert brought back the True Portrait. We should not have gone out onto the deeps."

A miniscule angel fluttered and buzzed about the Captain's face. But O'Dane swatted it away. A swarm had landed on the boat; they clung to hawsers and nets and perched all along the safety rails. While ever tinier contingents spread like grains of golden sand across the deck.

"Oh, oh, oh," they sang, as they flew around Captain Torquil and settled in his beard. He knelt and prayed on the bridge but First Officer O'Dane shook his shoulder. "Well," he said, "we've killed it now. We better tow him back to harbour," he turned to the crew, "what a prize, eh lads?"

"But we have killed God," said Captain Torquil.

"How can you kill God? This was not God," said Juxon, "God is ineffable and omniscient. God cannot die."

"It was God," wept Torquil.

"Listen Captain," said O'Dane, "did not Juxon just tell us that the true God is unknowable and ineffable? How could the supreme being be killed by a mere mortal harpoon?"

“But we have killed him none the less,” said the Captain, “We must make amends; we must suffer and die for what we have done to the world.”

“You are hysterical and unfit to command,” said O’Dane, “Stoker, take Torquil below and put him out of harm’s way.”

Stoker Mascoe hesitated and O’Dane drew his pistol, “I said take him below. Are you going to follow my order?”

“No, it is wrong,” said the Stoker, “He is the captain.”

The others nodded and shuffled. There were low voices in agreement. Bayer eyed the pistol in O’Dane’s hand.

“That’s mutiny,” said O’Dane and a flame flashed from the barrel and a shot echoed from the mess to the furnace room and three times around ship. Stoker Mascoe fell to the floor with a thud, a neat hole drilled in his forehead. A gob of grey matter slipped down from a head-high dent in the metalwork and the wall dripped red.

“Any other mutineers?” asked O’Dane.

No one moved.

“Well, Tillotson get a mop and Bluey put the body in storage,” said O’Dane.

“I think you had better go below, Captain,” said the Doc, and Bayer took him gently by the arm and led him down to the brig. Ex-captain Torquil sat on the single bunk and wept. His body wracked by sobs. Through the tears he said, “We will all suffer: in this world or the next.”

By the time Bayer returned to the deck the crew had rowed out to the titanic carcass and attached hawsers to tow it back to port. O’Dane stood in the centre of the pale belly directing the operation in the Captain’s hat. Bayer retired to the mess hall with an extra two fingers of rum in his mug. He looked upon the True Portrait: it was certainly the same creature that now floated a couple of hundred yards off the stern. He sipped his



coffee and hoped there was some error. Either God was just stunned and would wake and forgive them, or there were many God's in the Ocean and no-one would miss this one.

The new first officer, Mr Juxon, placed a knotted hand on his shoulder, "that is the false idol of the blasphemer Embert. You should throw it overboard, burn it even. When we get back to port there will be such a bonfire when the fools see their God was just a mortal creature."

The Doc joined them. He said, "Is it such a good idea to take the body back – shouldn't we lose it?"

"Why on earth would we want to do that, Doctor?" said O'Dane.

"Well, they may not like it. As you say he was a false god. But can you prove it?"

"It is self evident," said Juxon, "and we will show those gullible fools when we sail into port with the imposter's corpse in tow to be rendered down. We shall make a fortune too. Musselbaum will boil it to oil, the bones will fertilize the farms, the flesh, well we will see how it tastes but even as pig food we have a mountain of the stuff."

"But I cannot stop the feeling that I have sinned," said Doc, "even if it was not God, it was a vast man with a soul like you and I; no, a vaster soul than you or I."

O'Dane scoffed, "you do not think a monkey a small man, why do you think this was a larger man; it was some great beast that resembles man."

"But," said Tillotson, "but," he whispered, "there were angels, what about the angels?"

"Not angels," said O'Dane, "they were its parasites, like the fleas and mites on a moose, but proportionate to its bulk."

Beyond the portholes the great white body bobbed in the water, already the stomach was swollen and taut with the gasses of decomposition.

Bayer rested on the rail by the boat where they had found Fincher. Down in the water a single turtle raised its head to the surface and regarded him with two hundred million year old eyes and then descended into the darkness of the deep; there were no shoals of silver fish, no kelp forests, no dolphins chasing in the wake; just clear grey seas that seemed to go down forever into ever deeper shades of grey.

For three weeks they had laboured towards Roscaven Port with the engines struggling to move the giant's weight. It was slow going; the sea resisted their journey like glue. In the brig former Captain Torquil had prayed, he prayed for forgiveness. He prayed and sang so loud "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" in that high pure voice that he kept them all awake until O'Dane took a boatswain's club and beat him into silence.

In the mess, Juxon led the prayers to God the ineffable represented by a simple wooden cross where the blasphemous portrait had hung. They thanked him for the great prize they had, for revealing their error, for leading them not into temptation. When the prayer had finished they sat down to their Turtle Soup. O'Dane poured each man an extra finger of Rum and asked what they would each do with their share.

"I shall have a fine ring for Swanhilde," he said, answering his own question, "and pearls for her wedding gown; I shall have a fortune and a father-in-law what will you have Midshipman?"

"You really think we'll be that rich?" asked Snotty.

"Without doubt. See how slow we move? The giant weighs more than any whale and look at the blubber. Show them, Mr Juxon,"

Juxon placed a small lump of butter-yellow grease on a plate, lay a piece of lamp-wick there and set a match to it. It burned with a brilliant flame. It was scented with frankincense and myrrh, and illuminated everything with a pure clear light. As the light touched him Bayer found the dread that filled his heart was replaced by joy. He rested once more happy in God's grace.

“The oil will sell for a fortune,” said O’Dane glowing in the holy light with spectral angels circling the ceiling above him, “That oil will make the lanterns shine in the churches brighter than ever - think how the pastors and priests and preachers will thank us. What high standing they will hold us in.”

“It will shine indeed, Captain,” said Bayer, filled with amazement and glory; filled with love for O’Dane, filled with the wonder of God’s grace.

The flame subsided and Bayer was empty and alone in the shadow.

“Is there more?” he asked, “can we have more light?”

“If you pay, Mr Bayer, if you pay,” said O’Dane.

Doc whispered to Bayer, “best face your despair, once the oil is burned there will be no more, this may be the last of God’s gifts to us.”

Bayer lay in his cabin. Under his bed, wrapped in oilcloth, was the True Portrait. ‘Destroy it’ they said. But he could not. He had destroyed the being it depicted; he could not also murder the image. He lay face down on his bunk and wept.

At dinner O’Dane opened a bottle of the Captain’s best rum and poured Juxon a big glass.

Tillotson looked sad and said, “Have you noticed the turtle soup is a little ripe? How long has it been out of the tin?”

“Fresh from the stores an hour ago, let me try,” said Bluey. He helped himself to a spoonful; held the spoon in his mouth a moment then spat, “It’s spoiled – must be a bad can, I’ll get another.”

But that and the next had turned rancid. Every tin they opened was rank and rotten.

“The whole batch is off, what shall we do, Captain?”

“There is a great deal of flesh there,” said O’Dane, pointing to the porthole, “Do you think it will be like whale meat?”

“Have you tried it?” asked Juxon.

O’Dane asked, “Have you?”

“Oh, indeed Captain. It is the sweetest, the most savoury, the most tender meat I have ever eaten: better than pig or lamb, or veal or venison, far, far better than the turtles. It made me feel... wonderful.”

“We had better serve it from the galley then,” said O’Dane.

So the Turtle Soup was replaced with meat stew, and though God was dead Bayer felt a little of his warmth inside, found himself able to smile once more. He laughed at Doc’s jokes, and found deep reserves of sympathy within his heart even for O’Dane.

They saw land about twenty-five miles north of Roscaven, so they spent the last day hugging the coast. They rounded Penkaryth point on the Sunday morning, the tiny ship towing a mountain of swelling flesh; the dead face of God was puffy and a little green and the beard trailing in the water was knotted with driftwood and weeds.

Bayer was relieved at last to see the great steeple of the United Church of the Seven Songs rising above the town with the lesser spires of the Church of God our Saviour, the Brothers and Sisters in Prayer, the Holy Tremblers, and a single trickle of smoke from Musselbaum’s refinery. The harbourside was deserted.

“Drop the anchor, Mr Palmer,” said Captain O’Dane, “we should not enter harbour on a Sunday.”

Penkaryth’s Pride was washed with the silver light of the full moon as she lay off Penkaryth’s head; the great white body bobbed six hundred feet astern. Bayer went to visit former Captain Torquil who lay with his face to the wall. Bayer put a match to his briar-pipe and packed one for Torquil. They filled the brig with tobacco smoke and Bayer

offered Torquil a glass of grog to help him sleep until morning when he would be handed over to the town's authorities.

"I'm sure they will see sense, Captain," said Bayer.

"They will hang us all, said the Captain, "and we deserve it."

Bayer prevailed on him to take a little meat stew and his mood improved a little.

On Monday, soon after midnight, a flotilla of boats set out and circled the body of the giant. The children paddled around the great body in their turtle shells among the moonlit waves. Their voices chirped from the colossus as they explored the great wounded torso.

O'Dane gritted his teeth and muttered about private property, but Juxon persuaded him to take another celebratory drink.

"They will all see how they were deceived," said Juxon.

As Monday's yellow sun rose in a pink sky they steamed towards the harbour. They let go the giant body half a mile offshore attached to a couple of heavy anchors. They slowed and came to a full stop just a few yards from the groyne. The Lumpers took the mooring ropes and made them fast. Below the hull, the white bellies of a few dead mullet bobbed among the ripples. On the *Westenstrand* the bones of unicorns littered the tideline where gulls and crows battled for scraps of their flesh.

"They'll be grateful for our catch if the fish have given out," said Juxon, "I told them it couldn't last."

A sharp whistle blew. The whistle came again and Bayer rejoiced as the steam tractor clattered round the corner of Ship Street and chugged between The Mermaids Head and Ander's Chandlery. It drew a cannon behind and was followed by the town's militia. As the *Pride* lowered the gangplank the Mayor and the priests of the many

churches and denominations waited for them- all looking grim as death - the militia too waited to greet them in their best Sunday uniforms and armed with ancient rifles.

“Go below and get the lunatic Torquil,” said O’Dane, “they don’t look in a good mood.”

Snotty and Bayer went with the Doc to fetch him.

“Captain Torquil,” said Doc, “we are home; come on we’ll see the tables turned on the heretics.”

As they passed through the mess Captain Torquil roared, “Where is the True Portrait? who has taken the portrait from the mess.”

“I have it, sir; Mr Juxon said to throw it overboard but...”

“Good man, fetch it.”

Bayer restored it to the mess hall. The crown of glory glowed above the noble brow and eyes deep with wisdom looked down upon them all; such beautiful wells of understanding, such pools of mystery and comfort. This being with his fine nose and shapely mouth, with his great patriarchal beard that flowed gold and silver, Embert had shown him surrounded by choirs of seraphim. How could any have ever doubted this was the true face of God? The crew fell to their knees before its radiance.

“Get the blasphemers,” roared Torquil, “stop them.”

Juxon and O’Dane were already on the gangplank and O’Dane turned and fired at Torquil but he missed and Snotty fell. O’Dane hurried Juxon down the gangplank as Torquil attended to the dying Midshipman.

By the time Snotty had breathed his last Juxon was preaching his new gospel in the centre of the Harbour Square before the people. O’Dane was in conversation with the Mayor who shook his head. Swanhilde ran to O’Dane’s side and Mr Musselbaum followed. Musselbaum shook O’Dane’s hand and Swanhilde fell into his arms.

“O’Dane is certainly in deep with his new in-law, it will break her heart when they find what he has done.”

It seemed that Juxon had told the town exactly what they had done as there was a low booing from the crowd. The Mayor’s face contorted with anger. In a moment the militia seized Juxon and dragged him away. There were distant shots and the crew cheered and Doc said, “the games up.”

“Now,” said Torquil, “now we will see the wicked punished,” Captain Torquil strode down the gangplank, his beard unkempt and matted from his imprisonment, his eyes filled with righteous anger. The militia moved forward to meet him and the whole crowd pressed towards the Chandlery where O’Dane and Musselbaum stood.

On board, Doc took command, “We shall have much work to do to make amends for the deicide. All on-deck sharp.”

The crew’s boots clattered on the iron stairs and ladders; and hatches squeaked and banged as the ship disgorged its crew. They lined up on the portside of the boat.

“What should we do, Doc?” asked Bayer.

“We should probably pray – If the food has given out they will be hungry and we sinners have grown fat on the flesh of God...”

“They’re hanging the bastard O’Dane,” said Bluey.

“Get me a telescope,” said Doc, “I want to see him swing.”

Quartermaster Bluey ran to get one.

The crew cheered as the townsmen hauled a wriggling figure up on the rope so it swung like a pendulum from the crane. It jerked a few times and its feet kicked a yard from the ground.

Bluey returned with the telescope and Doc paled as he held it to his eye. Doc shouted for the stokers to get the boiler pressure up.

“And you crewmen, for God’s sake, cut the cables.”

He gave the glass to Bayer with his face as grey as a dead mullet’s belly.

“Look.”

Bayer caught the last twitch of the rag-doll body of Captain Torquil. Swanhilde Musselbaum stood beside and spat at the limp corpse that dangled on the rope. Swanhilde took the arm of O’Dane who pointed at the ship and crew cutting the moorings and shouted. Swanhilde’s father tapped the Mayor and they gathered the militia into formation to march across the harbour square and intercept the Penkaryth’s Pride.

The mooring ropes parted under axes and knives and the Pride drifted off the groyne. Doc rang full-astern on the chadburn and the ship’s screws churned as she backed away from the mooring and began to come-about.

A hundred and fifty yards away white-tops rolled across the harbour mouth. There was a sound like thunder and the first shot from the town’s cannon flew across her bows and splashed harmlessly into the water.

“It’ll take them a few minutes to load again,” said Bayer, “They’re not as fast as us.”

“Better pray they haven’t been practicing” said Doc. “at least we’re pointing out to sea now.”

“Who should we pray to?” said Bayer as he rang Full Ahead, “there is no God to defend us, we will have to defend ourselves,” Bayer roared as loud as Torquil ever had, “Whale Ho” he shouted and the crew took up the chant as the ship pressed forward gaining speed too slowly against the resistance of the water.

Back on the shore militiamen with un-shouldered rifles ran along the harbour groyne and a bullet ricocheted somewhere astern. Then another whistled close to Bayer’s ear as his feet rang out on the deck, and the gunner’s mates ran behind him with the ‘Whale Ho!’ on their lips towards a crew ready with propellant charges and a fresh



projectile. Bayer's beating heart rang with the Whale Ho! Throbbled with the beat of his feet, and burned with a vengeful fire as he called out "for the Captain," and turned the harpoon gun towards the crowded harbour square.

### 3.2 The True Image of God

In 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' the artist, Embert, has painted the True Image of God from a vision out in the Thousand Mile Ocean. A copy hangs in the mess of the whaling ship, Penkaryth's Pride, where Mr Juxon tells the crew, "God is unknowable. He always has been: this is an idol you all worship."

In *The Treachery of Images*<sup>58</sup> the surrealist Rene Magritte painted a pipe and wrote 'C'est n'est pas une pipe'.<sup>59</sup> He was pointing out how a painting is not the same as its subject: 'It's just a representation, is it not? So if I had written on my picture "This is a pipe", I'd have been lying!'<sup>60</sup>

It is an artifice. There is a substrate, perhaps board or canvas spattered with pigment carried in a medium that produces perception in the human eye. These may be analogous to it observing a three dimensional scene but you cannot smoke a painting of a pipe.

Juxon is threatened with drowning for daring to question the reality and the efficacy of the sacred image at the centre of his shipmates' lives. When the authenticity of representation is questioned Doc answers "Why would God hide his face from us? God loves us and is open in all things." The crew continue to pray before the True Image of God.

Both 'Frostiana', and 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' contain painted images as a significant theme: Embert's True Image of God centres its world; each citizen and sailor (apart from Juxon) looks to it for comfort and guidance. They believe it has provided them with life-rich seas and will protect them from danger; the True image of God unites

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<sup>58</sup> Rene Magritte, *The Treachery of Images (This Is Not a Pipe)*, (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1929), oil on canvas.

<sup>59</sup> This is not a pipe

<sup>60</sup> Rene Magritte, remarks reported by Claude Vial. "Ceci n'est pas Rene Magritte," Femmes d'Aujourd'hui, July 6, 1966, pp 22-24 in Harry Torczyner, *Magritte : The True Art of Painting*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979). p71

the many religious sects and denominations and cults that co-exist in the town of Roscaven. Early in the story the crew discuss in which church a wedding should take place:

[...]Adam Coalthwaite's have a bigger copy of the True Portrait,"  
"God on the Sea has better though – one of the first Embert painted," said Bayer.  
"But he had had more practice when he painted the Brethren's version," said Bluey.  
Most of them agreed God on the Sea was better, and O'Dane led them in prayers before Embert's True Image of God as the ship rocked and yawed[...]

In 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' all the many paintings are an identical representation of God. Each painting is a reproduction of an original sketched from the living deity; each sect has its copy of the True Image of God. Even the ship carries a copy of the image on its journey, every household must have one.

As there are many versions and copies of the True Image, some must be different; some truer than others. This is recognised by the crew when Bayer argues that 'God on the Sea' is better because it is an earlier iteration - not a copy of a copy.

As a work is reproduced, especially an analogue work such as an oil painting, a physical written text, a folk song: errors are introduced. Entropy enters the process and increases with each iteration.

Shannon<sup>61</sup> produced a model of communication showing how information is transmitted. He was interested in how errors occur in radio communication.

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<sup>61</sup> Shannon and Weaver.

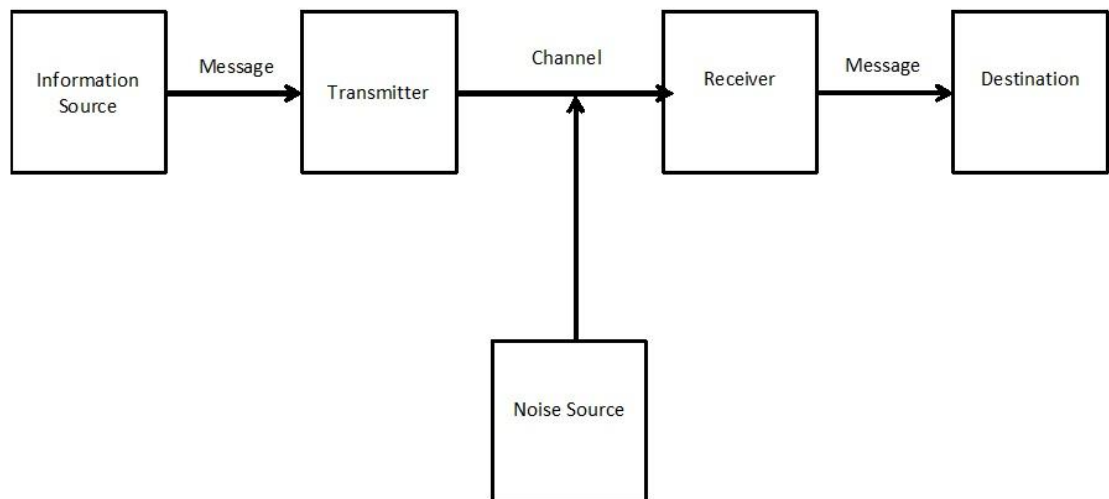


Figure 2 Shannon's Model of Communication Systems

A message could be passed through a whole series of receivers and transmitters resulting in a 'misheard whisper' effect<sup>62</sup>.

In the case of Embert's True Image the information source is the original painting, carried out at sea. In terms of Shannon's diagram the transmitter and receiver would be the copyist and the noise source could be the limits of perception, to notice a particular detail, and the limits of an artist's technical skill or its overemphasis. Embert's early paintings are closer to perfection, to the image painted directly from his vision, so while others may be more grand, such as the one possessed by 'Adam Coalthwaite's Brethren,' any later reproduction could be seen as less perfect.

In 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' each painting is intended to be as close as possible to an unique original and so be the most perfect representation of an ideal. In contrast, in 'Frostiana' each painting is a different aspect of the Queen. She takes on a different character, or persona derived from mythology, allegory, or biography: the

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<sup>62</sup> [...]the Chinese the first European saw might indeed have whispered quite a lot to each other – and usually about how queer the big noses looked[...] Zhang Xin, 'Chinese Whispers', *China Daily*, (2013) <[http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/columnist/2013-09/13/content\\_16968014.htm](http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/columnist/2013-09/13/content_16968014.htm)> [accessed 21/09/2019].

multiple images in 'Frostiana' do not try to approach some ideal Gloriana, but exists as many Glorianas. A multiplicity of queens occupy the kingdom.

Where Image of God is always an image, in 'Frostiana' the Page, and Lord Bacon both lose track of where and when they are. They treat an image as the real queen, so much so that James must remind them: "We are King now and she, bless her sacred memory, is going to stay dead." *C'est n'est pas la reine*<sup>63</sup>. The resemblance between the Queen in 'Frostiana' and her portrait is all surface. These paintings are all "cunning detail" that conceals the real Gloriana.

[...] image after image of Gloriana; Gloriana in a thousand different dresses: [...] always the picture contains the same pale oval of her face, the same perfect crescent of red, and eyes as black as death.

She is constantly costumed to act in a role. Each picture is painted to transmit some propagandist message. In contrast the God of 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' is 'open in all things.'

The presence of the single image in 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' and multiple images in 'Frostiana' reflects the differences in the process through which each was created. The original cut-up experiment which produced 'Frostiana' resulted in a series of disconnected scenes. During the process of structuring the story these were placed into their own frames, and hung together in the narrative gallery of 'Frostiana'.

The True Image of God was the basis of 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss'. It derived initially from a cut-up transformed into the prototype and (less than successful) poem 'They Shall Have Dominion'<sup>64</sup>, which contains among its forty-two lines the scene where the sailors accidentally harpoon God in the belief he is a whale:

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<sup>63</sup> This is not a queen

<sup>64</sup> In Douglas Draa Ed, *Weirdbook 36*, (Rockville, MD: Wildside Press, 2017). p45

Down his noble beard ran his life; too late he swung  
His arm to swat the ship like a bath time toy:  
The gunner's grenade finished off the wounded deity.

Light leaked from his eyes as blood  
Like red velvet made a Niagara of his lips.  
The crown of glory slipped from his head

And sank beneath the waves, while a choir  
Of dead seraphim floated at his upturned feet<sup>65</sup>

I developed the narrative of 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' to frame the image of the harpooned God. This image was as central to the creative process as the True Image is to the imaginary world of the town of Roscaven.

Within both stories there are various shifts between sub-worlds within their respective narrative universe. Again these reflect their origins: in 'Frostiana' multiple images are fitted into a single narrative and in 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' the narrative frames a single image. This is apparent in the contrasting way the narratives switch sub-worlds.

In 'Frostiana' in addition to the main 'now' in James's universe the story contains his fantasy world (he dreams of witches), a hypothetical extension<sup>66</sup> into an imagined future (King of France) remembering his past (a play he disliked), before he enters into action in the present the narrative. His attention cycles between dream, aspirations for the future, the past world of Gloriana and the present universe. James' epistemic world is in conflict with that of many of his subjects for whom 'Gloriana is constantly expected,' and these contradictions drive the narrative.

In the earlier part of the story Gloriana is present only within the conceptual sub-worlds of various arts: as painting, as sculpture, and as a performance. At the resolution of the story the conflicting epistemic sub-worlds are resolved as James 'real' world, his

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p45

<sup>66</sup> Elena Semino, *Language and World Creation in Poems and Other Texts*, (London: Longman, 1997), p72

fantasy worlds, dreams, nightmares, aspirations, and Gloriana's world (from the sub-worlds contained within various cultural artefacts) all merge in the final scene where the dreams and images become reality and then remove themselves from the world, leaving James in the world as he originally imagined it.

The shifts between sub-worlds are much less elaborate and much less frequent in 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' which almost entirely takes place in the epistemic worlds with a few deviations into a speculative future sub-world. The rather linear narrative is driven mainly by epistemic conflicts – at first between Juxon and the rest of the crew as to the nature of God and the True Portrait and then by the shifting epistemic claims of O'Dane – that the True Portrait is a real representation of God, that it was not God but a man-like sea beast, and finally that God was killed by Juxon, Torquil, and the crew.

The starting points of the two stories, multiple or single fragments, is reflected in the structure. The need to frame many sub-worlds reflects a limitation in the process of cut-up; cut up as a method lends itself more to the creation of shorter sections. It tends to degrade the hierarchical structure of narrative. As a narrative it is consolidated into ever larger chunks – sentence, paragraph, and increasingly large sections up to chapters and books. These work with our cognition to allow our memory to process and recall information. Without this 'chunking'<sup>67</sup> a reader will struggle to process an extended piece of cut-up writing. For shorter pieces of cut-up, less demanding of information storage, a reader can readily interpret it. It is much easier to consolidate sections of cut-up to around two hundred words into a coherent section than a piece of several thousand words.

Don Paterson highlights how a reader can draw multiple meanings from short pieces of text when he writes of late modernist practice in poetry:

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<sup>67</sup> M. Thalmann, A. S. Souza, and K. Oberauer, 'How Does Chunking Help Working Memory?', *Journal of experimental psychology. Learning, memory, and cognition*, 45 (2019). <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324804549\\_How\\_Does\\_Chunking\\_Help\\_Working\\_Memory](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324804549_How_Does_Chunking_Help_Working_Memory)> [accessed 20/09/2019]

[...]poets underestimate a sign's ability to generate a great many secondary attributes in the absence of any specific narrowing of context or *fondement* –here, a clear thematic domain...often absent in late modernist poetry.<sup>68</sup>

A cut-up, while disrupting prosody, produces many syntactic forms that fill the poetry mode-template<sup>69</sup> - unusual juxtaposition, unusual syntax (hyperbaton), blending, heightened originality. Within a limited frame a reader is likely to interpret noise as containing meaningful information.

Recent experiments by Google with image recognition software, the Deepdream neural network, forces a computer to mimic this over-interpreting process. Deepdream links image recognition software in a feedback loop. This loop effectively forces the neural net to hallucinate and produce surreal landscapes from nothing but noise.<sup>70</sup> I have adapted Shannons' model below to reflect this:

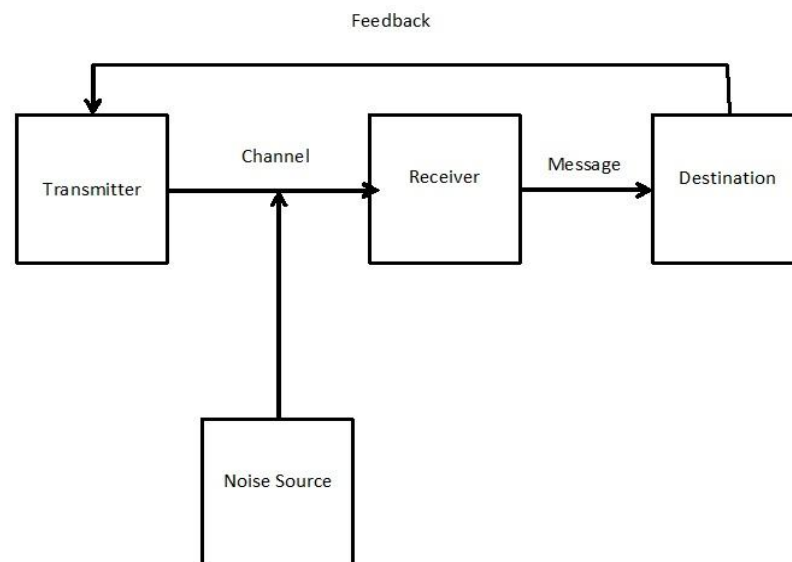


Figure 3 Feedback and Noise

<sup>68</sup> Don Paterson, *The Poem : Lyric, Sign, Metre*, (Croydon, UK: Faber & Faber, 2018). p156

<sup>69</sup> Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics : An Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 2002). p28

<sup>70</sup> Alexander Mordvintsev, Olah, Christopher, Tyka, Mike 'Inceptionism: Going Deeper into Neural Networks', *Google Research Blog* (2015) <<http://googleresearch.blogspot.co.uk/2015/06/inceptionism-going-deeper-into-neural.html>> [accessed 28/05/2016].



This propensity to over-interpretation seems this is inherent in perceptual systems. Investigations of the cause of hallucinations in the work of Cardiff University's Christoph Teufel et al<sup>71</sup> shows that the human brain is prone to inventing similarly hallucinatory images when presented with ambiguous data:

Current models of brain function view perception as a combination of two distinct sources of information: bottom-up sensory input and top-down influences from prior knowledge. This framework may explain hallucinations and delusions.[...] these results indicate that visual function in early psychosis and in healthy people who are prone to such experiences is characterized by a basic information processing shift that favours existing knowledge over incoming sensory evidence. [...] under most natural viewing situations, it may provoke anomalous perceptual experiences. Specifically, it might impose prior expectations on inputs to the extent that, ultimately, formed perceptions are generated that have no direct sensory cause: hallucinations.<sup>72</sup>

In this case Shannon's Diagram can be pruned even further:

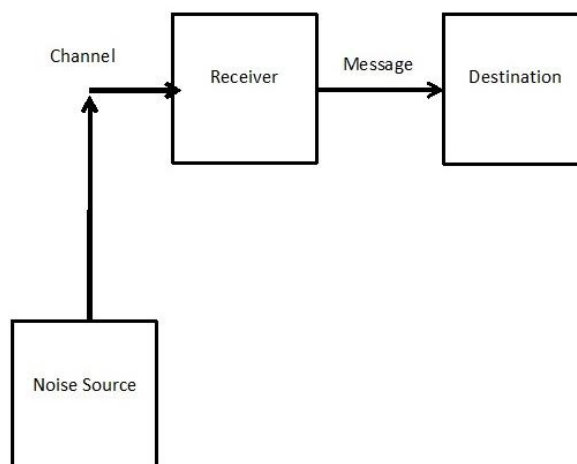


Figure 4 Noise

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<sup>71</sup> Christoph Teufel and others, 'Shift toward Prior Knowledge Confers a Perceptual Advantage in Early Psychosis and Psychosis-Prone Healthy Individuals', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112 (2015). <<http://www.pnas.org/content/112/43/13401.abstract>> [Accessed 10/10/2017].

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p4

This also describes Max Ernst's method of grattage<sup>73</sup> where paint is pressed between the substrate and a hard surface. When the surfaces are separated the paint will flow between the surfaces and form intricate textures, often resembling coral or other fractal organic forms. Ernst turned these into fantastic landscapes of lagoons and reefs inhabited by insects and reptiles and bird-human hybrids. (e.g. *Europe after the Rain*<sup>74</sup>).

Ballard said "the silent swamp, has attained an organic life more real than that of the solitary nymph sitting in the foreground."<sup>75</sup> He suggested this is a return to some more primordial form of cognition.

Ernst and the Surrealists argue that these aleatory methods give access to a more real, truer level of reality: that underlying manifest content was a latent content that distorted and controlled human behaviour. Breton thought aleatory methods would access the pure thought allowing the artists and poets to unpack its latent content and make it manifest.<sup>76</sup> He says that 'the imagination is perhaps on the point of reclaiming its rights.'<sup>77</sup>

The Surrealists engaged in a search for 'the marvellous'<sup>78</sup> accessed through dreams and trance states, through the methods of psychic automatism – "by which one intends to express verbally, in writing or by any other method, the real functioning of the mind"<sup>79</sup>.

As a practitioner of cut-up method although the aleatory text suggests images and ideas, it is possible to trace these back to various models and influences. It is

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<sup>73</sup> Berger.

<sup>74</sup> Max Ernst, *Europe after the Rain II*, (the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, 1940-42), . Oil on canvas.

<sup>75</sup> J.G. Ballard, *A User's Guide to the Millennium*, (HarperCollins Publishers, 2014). p87

<sup>76</sup> Sarane Alexandrian and Gordon Clough, *Surrealist Art*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970). p47

<sup>77</sup> André Breton, 'What is Surrealism?', A lecture given in Brussels on 1st June 1934 at a public meeting organised by the Belgian Surrealists and issued as a pamphlet immediately afterwards (1934) <<http://pers-www.wlv.ac.uk/~fa1871/whatsurr.html>> [accessed 15/11/14]

<sup>78</sup> Alexandrian and Clough.p48

<sup>79</sup> André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', (1924) <[http://www.ubu.com/papers/breton\\_surrealism\\_manifesto.html](http://www.ubu.com/papers/breton_surrealism_manifesto.html)> [accessed 19/01/2019].

in the placing of these ideas into unusual conjunctions that cut up excels. I am, after all, aware of the meanings of the words “goatweed, Miranda, sublunary, scattered flotsam.” I try them backwards, forwards, in several combinations. They are ripe with possibility, with hidden strings that link them, with deep dark chasms that separate them. How I link the words within a narrative will, as Teufel et al show, be dependent on my prior experience and knowledge<sup>80</sup>.

Although the image of God, and the basis of my story derived initially from a cut-up transformed into the prototype ‘They Shall Have Dominion’<sup>81</sup> I can reflect upon numerous sources that have informed it: Terry Gilliam’s animation in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*(1975)<sup>82</sup>, Ancient Greek gods and titans in *Jason and the Argonauts*<sup>83</sup>, Ballard’s ‘The Drowned Giant’<sup>84</sup>, Brian Aldiss’s ‘Heresies of the Huge God’<sup>85</sup> which explores the results of a giant Kaiju-like being landing on Earth. There is the M. John Harrison story, ‘Settling the World,’<sup>86</sup>, where God is discovered in a dormant state beyond the moon, and is towed back to earth to be revived. In Harrison’s story(1975) the result of God’s arrival on Earth is an end to war, but a strangely aimless society. In Ballard’s ‘Life and Death of God’<sup>87</sup> (1976) after the discovery of God and the declaration of peace mankind revolts against the similar resulting aimlessness.

Moorcock’s fantasy books of the sixties and seventies contain a pantheon of gods who are always getting banished or killed. Of particular note is Arioch in the *Knight of the Swords*<sup>88</sup> who reappears across Moorcock’s various series. Both Ballard’s drowned giant

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<sup>80</sup> Teufel and others

<sup>81</sup> Draa. P45

<sup>82</sup> Terry Gilliam and others, 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail', (London: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment,, 2009).

<sup>83</sup> Don Chaffey, 'Jason and the Argonauts', (United States: Columbia Pictures, 1963), p. 104 minutes.

<sup>84</sup> J. G. Ballard, *The Complete Short Stories*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2006). v2 p100

<sup>85</sup> Brian W. Aldiss, *The Complete Short Stories, the 1960s. Part Three, 1965-1966*. (London: HarperVoyager, 2015) p341-351

<sup>86</sup> M. John Harrison, *Things That Never Happen*, (London: Gollancz, 2004). p1 - 22

<sup>87</sup> Ballard. V2 p371

<sup>88</sup> Michael Moorcock, *The Knight of the Swords*, (London: Mayflower, 1971).

and Moorcock's vulnerable gods are possible source's for God's mortality in 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss'. However I have always been impressed by several questions posed by John Hospers' in his *Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*<sup>89</sup>, about God's existence on the lines of How do you know there is only one? What if God exists but is not immortal?

In 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' Embert's painting is variously sacred, a blasphemy, a revelation, a delusion, the truth, a category error, and the last memory of a vanished paradise. This is unlike 'Frostiana', where fragmented meanings are embodied in many different paintings – it does not contain single true image but a collage, a montage, a cut-up from many sources brought together and undergo 'coherencing'<sup>90</sup> to fill in the gaps and ambiguities.

In 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss', the fragmented and contradictory meanings are not in the painting but in the crew, who project them onto Embert's True Image of God. Even though they have met God, killed him, and eaten him the image remains 'true': In 'Frostiana' the image becomes the living Queen - *Ceci n'est pas une image*,<sup>91</sup> while in 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss', the god incarnated as flesh is gone and all that remains is its treacherous image: *C'est n'est pas un dieu*.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, 4th ed. edn (London: Routledge, 1997). p201-246

<sup>90</sup> William Hirstein, *Brain Fiction : Self-Deception and the Riddle of Confabulation*, (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: MIT Press, 2005). p6

<sup>91</sup> This is not an image

<sup>92</sup> This is not a god



#### 4.1 The *Dísir* on the *Langstrand*

*After Little Eyolf by Henrik Ibsen*

As soon as Yolanda Skalligberg could grip a needle her father put her to work repairing the sails and nets. As soon as she could grip a knife she was put to gutting fish.

“We must all play our part, Yolanda,” he said, “or all starve.”

In the brief summer, when the day lasted all night, Father taught her to swim in the warm waters that flowed from the south; in the winter when the night lasted all day Yolanda froze and shivered close to the fire and listened to her mother tell stories about poor girls changed by magic into princesses. The poor girls sat in rags like Yolanda’s and chanced upon a witch who transformed them just as the cold wind that blew from the north transformed sea to ice. Once they were changed, princes fell in love with them and took the princesses away to lands where they never had to gut another fish, but lived all day in tall towers. Yolanda thought a long time about all those princesses and resolved to find some magic to change herself. Her mother had told her that witches were dressed all in black finery with noses as long as fire-pokers. Yolanda had seen such a person down by the sea. Her Mother told her it was Mrs Bengard.

“Who is Mrs Bengard?” asked Yolanda. Yolanda hoped for a sweeter future than fish and ice. She hoped Mrs Bengard would raise her to the aristocracy.

“A Witch who will eat you up,” said her mother confirming Yolanda’s suppositions.

When Yolanda was eight years old she decided she would risk being eaten and danced all the way from the *Hekstein* rocks along the *Langstrand* to visit Mrs Bengard. Mrs Bengard was not expecting her.

“Are you the Witch?” Yolanda asked staring up at Mrs Bengard with her eyes as wide and green as the summer sea.

“I am greater than any Witch,” said Mrs Bengard, “I am the Rat-Wife.”

“Can you make me a Princess like in the stories?”

“No, but I can make rats dance into the sea.”

“Well it is a sort of magic,” said Yolanda, “it would be a start - could you teach me?”

“Child,” said Mrs Bengard huddled in her everyday coat of rat-skin in spite of the warm sun, “You are too young to hear my secrets. Come back in five years. Then we can begin your education. In the meantime take a sweet,” Mrs Bengard gave her a small rat modelled in sugar.

Yolanda held it up by its string tail and let it dangle, unsure what it meant.

“Just bite off the head,” said Mrs Bengard.

Yolanda had never tasted sugar before and thought that the angels had smiled upon her.

“Go on,” said Mrs Bengard, “always finish what you started.”

Yolanda ate the sugar rat right down to the tail and she promised herself that when she became a princess she would eat rats every day.

Yolanda kept their meeting secret. All through those five years Yolanda never spoke to anyone but her mother and father. Sometimes she saw Mrs Bengard at a distance. But no one visited the *Langstrand*; no normal people came onto the long black beach beneath the glacier topped mountains. No one ventured into the troll-lands by the cold, green sea. Perhaps they were they afraid? No one had actually seen a troll there themselves for a hundred years. But everyone knew someone who had a friend whose grandma had seen one when she was a little girl. The grandma had seen it lurking among the mossy, green logs as she gathered wood in the stunted forests. Or grandma had come across it crouching among the rocks as she herded goats in the summer pastures.

Yolanda’s father blamed their bad luck on the trolls that lived among the seaweed on the

shore but the Skalligbergs were too poor to live elsewhere. They were too strange to have any family to help them. And they lived too close to Mrs Bengard the Rat-Wife for the Pastor to come visit.

On Yolanda's tenth birthday her father failed to return from the sea and from that day onwards her mother took over his boat and spent all her days fishing the cold, green waters. As Yolanda's days as half-orphan passed she learned to dry and smoke the catch over the fire: to cook for her mother, to keep the house. In the brief summer she walked along the *Langstrand*, gathering cockles and razor-fish for a stew. The midnight sun skipped across the horizon and in the distance the new iron ship steamed past with the smoke from its funnels rising in the sky like black feathers floating on the blue sea. Mother still sailed the little wooden craft around the grey rocks, still fished as her ancestors had fished back to the days of King Sweyn, or even longer ago when Odin still walked the mountain roads followed by swarms of clever black crows. Mother said the new steamships travelled from Tromsø to Kristiana in seven days. Mother had dreamed of visiting Kristiana when she was young.

"I could travel if only I had money; just to see Kristiana before I die. That would be a thing would it not?"

She could hardly have been thirty yet the hard life of the north had taken her looks and her youth. Somehow the sea had got into her. Her hair white as wave-foam, her eyes thin as water, and her soul like withered seaweed.

On Yolanda's thirteenth birthday, old Mrs Bengard came up the beach to the Skalligbergs' house. She knocked on the door just as they were sitting down to their fish soup. Yolanda's mother nearly choked at the shock of a visitor to the tiny one-room shack on the shore. Mrs Bengard stood in the doorframe wearing her best black dress and lace collar; and on her head an English lady's riding hat covered with a fine black veil. Mrs



Bengard the Rat-Wife! Her Mother's mouth hung open. She closed it then opened it again, unable to remember the appropriate greeting. She gasped for words as a dying cod gasps for air.

“Good evening Mrs Bengard,” Yolanda said, “won't you join us for a bowl of soup.”

Yolanda found her father's old bowl and ladled out a portion of the thin whitefish-stew. She was careful to capture as many of the flakes of solid flesh as possible for Mrs Bengard. She gave Mrs Bengard her own chair and went to sit on her bed in the corner with her bowl balanced on her knees.

When Mrs Bengard had eaten seconds and thirds she addressed Yolanda's Mother.

“Your daughter has grown fast Mrs Skalligberg?”

“So she has; and she eats like a horse. It's all I can do to keep us both from starving.”

Her Mother eyed the thrice emptied bowl before the Rat-Wife. Mrs Bengard ignored the implication and held out the bowl to Yolanda for fourths. She told her, “I am getting old and I need an apprentice. There must be a new Rat-Wife.”

“I thought you would live forever,” said Mother, “in Tromsø they said you are old as *Jord*, old as the hills. You have always been, will always be.”

Mrs Bengard slurped her soup down and waved her spoon at Mother.

“Yes, a Rat-Wife is part of tradition and we tend to live long lives, but we don't go on forever - who would want to? I'm looking forward to a nice rest, a nice long sleep. To rest until Gabriel blows his trumpet and rats and men can live together without want or hurt.”

Mrs Bengard had brought a small packet of coffee and a bottle of clear spirits. She had Yolanda boil a pan of water and then she sat with Yolanda's mother drinking hot *Karsk*.

Mrs Bengard drew out a fine purse of leather and emptied the contents onto the table. She said, "Thank heaven it is good business as a Rat-Wife. If I can have her as an apprentice your daughter will be able to keep you in your old age."

"Why would I want to get old? I want a one-way ticket on the steam boat to Kristiana."

"That could be easily arranged, but tell me Mrs Skalligberg, do you know what a Rat-Wife does?"

"She kills rats, destroys them with magic."

"The rats destroy themselves, Mrs Skalligberg. You see the rats, bless the sweet little things, they are so full of hope, so trusting. The rats tell wonderful stories in their holes in the ground. They sit in their burrows, the sweets, the dears, the little furry darlings and they dream of a wonderful land without cats. A place where the cheese is unprotected and served with fat juicy grains and the corn grows high and is always ripe. Where no one traps them, glues them, bites them. That dream is a beautiful dream: it is their weakness. It is what lets a Rat-Wife sing them out into the fjord. She tells them their dream is real and all they need do is swim over the water to that magic land and so they follow that dream to their deaths. Why throw your life away after your dream? As Yolanda learns she will bring in money, make this life comfortable. Why not let it stay a beautiful dream and choose a softer life?"

"What is this life but pain?" asked her mother, "and that dream makes it worse because I cannot have it. I will take the dream fulfilled and oblivion over the dream suspended and this life filled with memories of fish and frost and tears."

So Mrs Bengard bought Yolanda from her mother for the price of a second-class steam-boat ticket to Kristiana.

Yolanda followed Mrs Bengard along the beach skipping between stranded jellyfish and rotten piles of kelp; Yolanda followed her to her *trollhule*.

“You must call me mother now,” said Mrs Bengard.

And although the word seemed strange attached to her Yolanda tried it and after a few goes it seemed to stick.

Life in her foster-mother’s cave above the *hedland* was easy compared with the life of the fisher-girl. They always had hot *Karsk* to warm them against the northern cold of winter. They always had food. So much food stored away in the nooks and crannies. There was beef and pork and mutton so she never had to eat fish except if she felt like it.

Mrs Bengard gave Yolanda a Rat-Wife’s dress of black lace. As she tied it tight around Yolanda, Mrs Bengard’s nose twitched behind her long grey whiskers. She sniffed. She said, “Yolanda you are beautiful but you must cast aside beauty and leave it among the weeds and barnacles for the sea. Wash your face with witch-pitch and green salt so you have skin as old and impervious as mine. You must dig a hole in the soft sand by the shore and bury your heart there.”

“Why would I want that, second mother?” Yolanda asked.

“Because a Rat-Wife’s fate is to slay that which she loves most. You see once you know the dreams and hopes of the rats you cannot do anything but love them, and yet we must follow ten thousand years of tradition. In all that time a Rat-Wife has never failed in her duty to men, never gone back on her bargain. When I met you, you danced barefoot between the sea and the sands with simple joy in your heart. Now you will learn to dance in thick leather boots with ugly iron heels and soles of wood: to dance in spite of the grief in your heart. Such songs you will sing that every foot will join in with the *Waltz, the Garoon, and the Dashing White Sergeant.*”

So began her lessons in Rat-Wifery. Mrs Bengard sang the rats out of their holes to dance with Yolanda; Mrs Brngard taught her the old tunes that rose and fell like the

tides; that broke like the waves. She taught her to sing in a voice that hung midway between music and noise. Yolanda could sing so icicles rang and shattered. She could sing the rats out of their holes to dance so she was never without her dancing partners. Mrs Bengard taught her to lead their hoards and to harden her heart against their innocent spirits as they plunged in their thousands into the cold, deep waters of the fjord.

Every week Yolanda and Mrs Bengard went to the town. Mrs Bengard made her appointments with grain merchants and bakers and big houses where food was stored and the rats were fat. Yolanda wrote them in the big black accounting books Mrs Bengard purchased each year from Bjornsen's.

Bjornsen's was a treasury. It was filled with stationary and haberdashery, dry goods, wet goods, and a variety of spades, mattocks, and agricultural tools. There were sausages from Austria, spices from India, tins of green turtle soup, whalebone corsets, bottles of American patent medicine, a piano accordion from Italy, steel fishhooks and glass fishbowls, mechanical potato peelers, crab-pots, and steam engine parts, fireguards and fireworks, even a variety of mechanical rattraps and poisons.

Mrs Bengard said although some interfering busy body had invented traps and poison and sticky boards, people respected the Rat-Wife. She was traditional, and much more efficient. Where a trap could catch one at a time a Rat-Wife could lead a hoard. A Rat-Wife could sing a song so the rat sees visions of the ripest cheeses, the sweetest grain, and an island blessed beyond the sea and so it swims out; out into the dark water of the fjord where it slips into sleep in the cold, deep water. It was kinder than the glue boards where the sweet creatures gnawed their legs off to escape and died in agony, or the traps which could paralyse but not kill, or the poisons which could make them sick for weeks before they died.

Mr Bjornsen agreed that with Mrs Bengard around he didn't sell very many at all. Mrs Bjornsen snorted and said something about superstition.

"Please my love, show respect to the Rat-Wife."

Mrs Bjornsen ignored him and said, "It's a shame really; you could retire if people used them more."

"But I don't want to retire," said Mrs Bengard as Bjornsen crossed himself and looked at the ceiling.

"...and then you could send Yolanda to the Orphanage where she belongs."

Bjornsen covered his eyes.

"She can't go away," said Mrs Bengard, "her mother gave her to me."

"Well she should have an education – not be a witch's skivvy."

"I am greater than any witch," said Mrs Bengard, "I am the Rat-Wife, Yolanda show Mrs Bjornsen what an apprentice Rat-Wife can do."

Bjornsen took his hands off his eyes and put his fingers in his ears instead.

Yolanda warmed up with a few scales and trills, Yolanda built the trills into a smooth sea of overlapping sound waves. Then she stirred the waves into a maelstrom of noise swirling in her throat. She opened her mouth and unleashed it as a river set free from a dam. She moulded and shaped the music it as it flowed between her lips. It flew around the room like a whirlwind. The walls shuddered, the floor vibrated, and the roof-tiles rattled over their heads. Under the music came a scratching and a scraping and a squeaking. Grey forms eased themselves from their hiding places between sacks and crates, emerged from shadows and unseen corners, and uncoiled their bodies from holes and cracks in the wooden walls. They danced and skipped about the room; they ran in a circle around Mrs Bjornsen who opened her mouth and screamed as if the devil himself was poking her with his red-hot toasting fork. Yolanda shut her mouth.

"Why have you stopped, Yolanda?" asked Mrs Bengard.

“I don’t think Mrs Bjornsen likes it,” she said, “you don’t like it when I sing do you?”

Mrs Bjornsen shook her head.

“You are a good and merciful child,” said Mrs Bengard as they left, “you should watch out for that...”

Living with Mrs Bengard, Yolanda had never known such food: meat and potatoes as well as fish and crabs. Even pickled cucumbers and dill weed sauce and eggs.

She learnt her song and dance so well that she could send a swarm of the rats swimming among weed and crabs and anemones out into green oceans and down into the cold bay.

At last, on Yolanda’s eighteenth birthday she stood with Mrs Bengard before the *Hekstein* rock and Mrs Bengard told her, “This was not always a rock, once it was Yaga, the first Rat-Wife.”

“Why is she a rock now?” asked Yolanda.

“Because she is holding a Rat-King under the cold water.”

“What is a Rat-King?” asked Yolanda.

“A Rat-King is many rats knotted together into a monster. The singular rat is a beautiful little angel, you can keep a single rat as a pet, a companion, as your little darling. But a Rat King is a thousand rats all woven together; a single rat is weak, a hoard is stronger, a thousand rats with their tails tied is impossible. Where each rat has a tiny splinter of evil, a glimmer of magic, a miniscule fragment of insatiable hunger, no more than some mischief, no more than a little luck, no more than a stolen bit of cheese, in the Rat-King all the evil and magic and hunger comes together and grows. A hoard is a thousand rats. A Rat-King’s power is a thousand rats a thousand times a thousand. Ten thousand years ago when the world was first born from the ice, the great *Völva* Yaga

stood on these sands with her back to a green glacier and fought a Rat-King; she sliced him with her sharp knife of stone, but the Rat-King was a thousand rats in one. So after she split him apart the rats all joined back together and came for her again. She cut again and again but the rats just split away and rejoined. She cut a thousand times and sang them down into the cold green sea. But the Rat-King formed again out in the waves so *Völva* Yaga sat on him and kept him under the water. She held him down in the cold grey water but he struggled still beneath her and she knew he would be free when she died (for die we all do) and so she called on grim old Odin to turn her to stone and that he did. Since then that Rat-King has been trapped under old Yaga.

And so Yolanda completed her training, and her step-mother took a back seat and gave Yolanda more reign; she allowed herself a little extra shot of spirit in her *Karsk*, a little extra butter and beef. She said, “a little pleasure before I go to join old Yaga.”

Yolanda had learned well and business was good. She was allowed a day off a week and in the summer rambled all over the green hills and blue mountains; her fingertips sticky from wild blueberries, her lips red from wild strawberries. In the winter she sat by the fire and read. She read the Old Sagas and the new collections of fairy tales by Mr Andersen and Bishop Moe. She was surprised that her stepmother wasn't in them, but Mrs Bengard said, “We keep ourselves to ourselves.”

Yolanda was settled, her step-mother seemed content to sit in the cave and prepare her supper after her days luring out the rats, and drowning them in the sea, but then the messenger came.

Mrs Bengard was sat at the back of the cave warming a kettle for another cup of *Karsk*. Yolanda had said no after two cups and was reading Moe's book of folktales. Out on the sand she noticed a man dragging a heavy black shadow along the tide-line. He moved as if he walked on broken bones as he climbed the steep path up to the *Trollhule*.

He moved like a man who had spent a hundred years not moving and had forgotten how to use his limbs as he stood at the threshold of the cave; he was an old, old man; he wore furs and feathers of a great many animals. He knelt before Yolanda and spoke in a strange language. Yolanda shook her head and said, "I don't understand."

The old man tried another language, a wild and barbarous dialect of Old Norse, "I have a message for the Rat-Wife," he said and held out a hollow leg-bone with a stopper for her.

"Stepmother," called Yolanda, "a visitor."

The old man knelt before Mrs Bengard and gave her the bone; inside was a tube of fine skin. Mrs Bengard, unrolled it and peered through her pince-nez.

"See Yolanda," she said as her finger followed the angular letters written there, "There is no rest for the Rat-Wife; I must travel to the West."

"Surely I am the Rat-Wife now, Stepmother," said Yolanda, "should I not go and you stay on and enjoy your retirement?"

"Oh, little Yolanda," said Mrs Bengard, laughing like the old witch she claimed she wasn't, "How you long for adventure, for magic, for life. You would hope to find a prince and a coach to carry you there, but my road to the West is a hard road that holds only horror and death. A new Rat-King has been born. It is ten-thousand years since Yaga trapped her Rat-King. Now a new crown of rats has been forged in the New World. The immortal enemy has returned and it is my duty to fight him."

Mrs Bengard stretched her legs out and her old joints crackled like wet logs on a winter fire. She stood upright and her spine stretched out straighter than Yolanda had ever seen her so she, who had stooped a head shorter than Yolanda, was equal to her height. Mrs Bengard stretched out two long, well-muscled arms and yawned, "How I long to rest, but fate has not much time for Rat-Wife's rest: we are of too much use. At the back of the cave, Yolanda, you will find a black chest of oak-wood with a strong bronze lock."



“Could I not go?” said Yolanda as she dragged the long black chest from its cubby hole, “I know the songs, I know the dances, I can charm the rats almost as well as you, Stepmother.”

“There is something you have not learned yet, Yolanda, there has not been time to teach you – something I did not think you would need to learn,”

Mrs Bengard took an old iron key from a chain around her neck and unlocked the chest. Inside wrapped in layers of sealskin was a long straight sword in a scabbard, jewels glittered in the pommel and guard. Mrs Bengard unsheathed the weapon and examined the blade decorated with old runes inlaid with silver that glittered and sparked in the lamplight. “It is a long time since I used a blade,” said Mrs Bengard whirling it so it sang, “but I have not forgotten.”

“How will I learn swordsmanship, Stepmother,” said Yolanda, “what should I do if I come across a Rat-King of my own.”

“I am sorry Yolanda, I was not expecting this. I will teach you when I return. You must wait here for me and promise me, you will stay and take care of the town, not go off in search of adventure, or princes, or magic lands over the water.”

“I promise, Stepmother,” said Yolanda kissing her cheek.

And so Yolanda waved her stepmother goodbye and Mrs Bengard set out along the sands to Tromsø with the old Shaman out of the west trailing behind with the best black handbag and the best leather suitcase as the Rat-Wife strode ahead carrying a Viking sword on her shoulder looking younger and stronger than she had any right to after two hundred years living on the *Langstrand*.

Yolanda supposed she should have settled to her life, should have lived as the Rat-Wife had always lived for two or three hundred years and then gotten an apprentice of her own. But of course there was a prince. There is always a prince. She had dreamed of him

and he came just like in Mr Andersen and Bishop Moe's stories. Yolanda was only nineteen and he drove up the beach in his shiny Graf & Stift limousine; he had a hundred sacred orders on his uniform, a great many medals, and a mile of braid stretched across his chest. He had a fine aristocratic moustache that curled extravagantly at the end like two sabres. His name was *Herzog Otto*. He thought he could see a princess under the severe English couture and widow's black lace as Yolanda danced in her heavy iron-shod boots and sang on the shore. He thought he could see an angel under the wild hair and witchcraft as she led a vast swarm of rats across the beach and sent them swimming out into the cold dark waters where Odin lay dreaming of the ancient days.

The next day he asked her to a ball at the Sanatorium on the *Blåbärberg* Mountain.

"The Sanatorium," she had said "- are you sick?"

"No, it is more a hotel really, a health resort; some invalids come to take the mountain air as a cure but there is fine hunting in the woods and regular dances. Some of the most ancient and noble families in Europe are represented. You can hardly move for Tepes and Glucksteins and Kropotkins.

He bought her pretty silk shoes and Yolanda danced with him.

At the May-day ball Otto introduced her to Countess Magnus. Countess Magnus was older than Mrs Bengard and no-longer danced but said she was glad to have a new princess to dress.

Countess Magnus lent Yolanda a gown of sea-green silk and a maid to help her with her hair. She was transformed just like the poor girls in the fairy tales.

The first person she saw was Mr Bjornsen in a slightly scuffed tailcoat taking refreshment at a cold buffet laid out in an annex.

“What?” he said and nearly choked on a pickled herring.

“Such a lovely party isn’t it Herr Bjornsen?” she said as she thumped him across the back.

“What are you doing here?” he said spitting fish-bones into his handkerchief.

“I’m dancing with Otto. Do you know Otto, Herr Bjornsen? He’s a prince like in the stories.”

Mrs Bjornsen tried to ignore her but followed Yolanda out of the corner of her eye, admiration battling displeasure and fear on her face.

“Can I get some *Karsk* here?” said Yolanda.

“There is champagne over there. I don’t think they do *Karsk* at these things,” said Bjornsen.

In the ballroom a small group of professional musicians fortified with English whiskey played enthusiastically if occasionally a little out of time.

The gentlemen and dukes wore their military jackets and tailcoats, while the ladies and duchesses were in magnificent ball-gowns of silk and lace and taffeta and velvet. The company was lit by candles burning in sparkling chandeliers and multiplied by mirrors hung about the room. Ballroom after ballroom stretched away through vine-carved doors to fill the universe with beautiful aristocrats and rainbows of candlelight refracted by a forest of crystals.

Otto entered in his full array of orders and with a cavalry sword at his side. His moustache was waxed and curled and he took Yolanda by the hand. Yolanda, who danced to kill the rats in the ocean, danced with her prince. Where her feet fell others seemed to follow. The whole group of dancers orbited the room as one with their feet falling in time

to the flight and descent of the notes; to the one-two of the polkas and the two-two-three of the waltz.

After a couple of hours Otto led her from the ballroom to a conservatory filled with rubber plants, palm trees, and bulbous glass terrarium that enclosed strange, glossy-leafed ferns. Otto sat fanning himself beside a potted aspidistra as he rested on a delicate wrought iron bench; while outside, beyond the windows, the summer pine forest held mystery in the dark gaps between the trees. Someone had hung paper lanterns that burned like the stars in the deep. Beyond the woods the lights of distant farmsteads stood alone in the dark mass of the landscape.

“You know, Yolanda, my family is very, very old.”

“I understand,” said Yolanda, “my stepmother is also very old, about two hundred years – it’s amazing how she still gets about.”

“No, not like that: my family’s bloodline is very old; we can trace it back to Count Ardabastos of Byzantium. Fourteen hundred years ago - what do you think of that?”

“That is old; what did he do?”

“He was the father of the King of the Visigoths.”

“Ah, I have heard fatherhood takes only a moment, who was his mother?”

The conservatory doors swung open to admit the smell of the pine trees and a princess of indeterminate age in a black dress of a lustrous material and cut a hundred and fifty years out of date. She was complete with a tiara on her head and came tripping up to them and took Otto by the arm.

“Ah, Otto,” she said, “you are monopolized,” the enormous rubies dangling from her ears glittered like fresh pools of blood.

“Good evening, Delphine; this is Yolanda, Yolanda this is the Princess Von Thurzo.”

“You have no title?” Delphine said raising a thin, charcoal eyebrow.

“Of course I do,” said Yolanda.

“Oh, I knew one so fair, so graceful, so strong must have noble blood – a secret princess,” a tear glittered in Otto’s eye, “what is your title my beautiful girl?”

“I am the Rat-Wife Yolanda, and I’m pleased to meet you Princess Delphine.”

Otto looked at his feet and in the distance the lights of a steamship moved very slowly towards the horizon. It was as if the ocean had turned to treacle and time floated adrift. The feeble light trickled from the sky and the ship slipped away over the edge of the world.

Perhaps we should go for a little walk in the woods Yolanda,” said Otto, so they stepped along the lantern lit-path through the birch trees and pines.

“That’s a fine sword, Otto...” said Yolanda.

“Yes, it’s a Sabre – I am a cavalry officer -I have apartments in Vienna where you could stay.”

“I have a comfortable cave – do you fence well?”

“I have fought a great many duels - but Vienna, Yolanda: we could go to the theatre, to concerts, to the opera, you would sleep in a gilded chamber on a feather bed with a maid to dress you and cook to feed you, you could ride in a chauffeur driven motor car out to the great forests of Carinthia, where you could stay at my hunting lodge or you could shop on the *Kaerntner Strasse*, and I am rich - you would be able to have the most fashionable dresses, you could even attend balls in the Imperial Palace.”

“But I promised my stepmother I would look after the town here - do you think you could teach me to fight?”

“Could you not ask her to release you from you promise? I could pay for a new apprentice - then we could be together in Vienna.”

“My stepmother had to go travelling, I cannot be released until she returns – you could come and live with me in my cave and show me how to use a sword.”

“A Duke cannot live in a cave – what do you want to learn to use a sword for?  
You’re a girl!”

“You must teach me.”

They spent the long days of May and June touring the resorts and picturesque monuments in his car. They picked wild blueberries in the mountains and visited many famous sites where legendary trolls and witches and mermaids had turned into notable landmarks.

They sat eating wild blueberries and cream on an old giant’s head hung with forests of soft green moss and reefs of lichen, where small birds sang and reindeer grazed, and foxes in their red summer coats stalked hares in their brown ones. The car was parked three miles away at the foot of a ravine.

“Otto,” said Yolanda, “let us try fencing here. No one will see.”

So he found two long straight pieces of wood from a lone, dead pine.

“*En-garde*,” he said with the pine stick held above his head in the academic duelling style of the German Universities. Yolanda squatted with the stick ready to parry an attack.

“You are crouching like a Viking, Yolanda, you must stand on your marks.”

“Is this how you fight battles?” she asked.

“This is how gentlemen fence in the universities, now stand on your marks - do not move, keep your head up. Then I stand on my marks and we cross blades like this.”

He made a swipe at her stick. She swiped back. He parried and drew the stick across her cheek.

“You see it is not so easy, if we had real swords I would have spoiled your pretty face.”

“Let us try again,” said Yolanda.

During the day they would drive out into the countryside and walk in the wild forests or picnic by the coast, or go for lunch at the Sanatorium. Every night he came to visit her on the *Langstrand* and taught her the art of fencing like a German student. She was passably good Otto said and she even began to win sometimes.

“But what about real sword fighting? Like a cavalry officer? Like a Viking?”

So he tried to teach her that too and again said how good she was, what a natural swordswoman, and asked if she had had lessons before. He also beat her almost every time.

“Why can I not fight like you?” she asked him.

“Because you did not have a fencing master from the age of three,” said Otto, “because your father did not do as his father had done and his before and his before put a blade in your hand as soon as you could grip; because you are not a boy; boys fight their whole childhoods, girls do other things.”

Still, she tried to fight and still he complemented her as he beat her. He admired the grace of her style as she wept with frustration. She improved with time. To her joy she beat him slightly more often. Eventually she even became good enough to see that, every time she beat him, he had been kind enough to let her win.

Yolanda felt she was weakening in her resolve. Autumn was coming and Otto said he would have to return to his duties at the Imperial Court. She would be alone again with rats and witchcraft and the histories of a hundred dead rat-wives for company. She and Otto took lunch at the Sanatorium together and shared a table with Princess Von Thurzo and her friend Sir Kenelm Scrudd.

The princess had just a little bowl of steak tartar, red and fresh with blood while Sir Kenelm sat before a great black roasted hock of some huge beast. He poured himself a flagon of ruby red port and glowed in its heat, “I imported my own cook across the North

Sea so I can eat proper English food. English food is the finest in the world; you must both let me ask chef to prepare you something.”

He held up some of the blackened meat, “only the English can cook meat like that,” the meat was grey to the core and tough as an old boot. He sawed at it with a very sharp knife and chewed and washed it down with his port. He had some grey strings of vegetables as an accompaniment.

“Are you sure that is not a little overcooked?” asked the princess “– it really has very little colour and the meat – is it not burnt?”

She lifted a sliver of steak tartar to her mouth and sucked the bloody surface; delight suffused her face. She removed the dry, pale meat from her lips and made a sickly mouth as she put it back in and swallowed it down as if it were a prickly pine cone.

“It’s all my doctor will allow,” she said, “that and a little *aqua vite*.”

Sir Kenelm lifted a fork full of his limp vegetables and waved it at the princess “What do you think that is then.”

“I have no idea... seaweed?”

“That is English Lettuce, properly cooked English Lettuce,” he popped some into his mouth and washed it down with a swig of port, his cheeks purpled in a reverie and livid veins pulsed with pleasure in his crimson neck, “you can’t get that if you employ a fancy French chef; that is lettuce boiled properly, with horseradish and cayenne pepper,” said Sir Kenelm, “for three hours,” he waved another limp forkful at her, “English Lettuce,” he said, “the finest vegetable in all the world.”

Yolanda stuck to pickled herring and Otto ordered a grilled trout. Sir Kenelm peered with anthropological curiosity at their lunches, “Astonishing, if you put them in water they would probably swim away – do you have ovens in your countries?”

They confirmed that both their cultures were familiar with the oven and Sir Kenelm asked if they were also familiar with fire to heat the dishes within. He shook his



head little sadly when they said yes and said, “So you eat that by choice. Does it wriggle all the way down?”

“It is quite dead, I assure you,” said Otto, “I caught it myself this morning in a stream, and beat its brains out with a rock.”

Yolanda stroked the beautifully ironed linen tablecloth. She admired the fine china plate. She turned to Delphine, who sheltered under a black sun shade and peered out from under her broad hat.

“It must be wonderful to be a princess,” said Yolanda.

“You know what a princess is Yolanda?” said Delphine, “We are so sensitive we can feel a pea through ten mattresses, we can lose our reflections in the mirror, and our image wears as thin as chiffon in the too-bright sun. For years and years I had to live in a high tower waiting for a prince and when he finally came... Well, he was the most blood-thirsty creature I had ever met and his death was so... Violent. Then the travel is so tiring, I must travel all the time to keep up with society: Monte Carlo, Kristiana, Karnstein, Cardiff.”

“That must be exciting.”

“I never know where I will be from one day to the next no-one does. I even asked the gypsy in the woods if she could provide me with an itinerary for the future.

“Did she?” asked Otto

“She said it would take forever.”

“A gypsy in the woods who can tell the future,” said Yolanda, “we should go, Otto, and see our future. Wouldn’t that be wonderful?”

“My future is the same as my father’s and his father’s and his.”

“Yes, but our future, yours and mine – together.”

“Well perhaps we should walk up this afternoon and have our fortunes told,” said Otto.

After lunch they took the walk in the woods following Princess Delphine's instructions. They strolled along the forest path among the tall pines where the primroses bloomed in vast banks of glowing yellow petals among the blue spring-shadows.

"I could make all your dreams come true," said Otto.

"My Mother had that happen," said Yolanda, "it was a terrible thing."

They followed a babbling stream up through the forest where the blue flowers of the Wolfsbane nodded in pallid banks. All through the high valley they went until they came to an old wooden caravan sheltered under a mossy boulder of dark-banded gneiss. Its wheels had long been immobile, and one corner was supported by a pile of small boulders.

"Hello?" Otto called "Gypsy, Old Crone, Hag? We have come to have our fortune told."

The door opened with a long slow creak and a cloud of leaves flew out. Squirrels skittered about the trees and two ravens called in thousand year old voices from the branches of an ancient oak that hung heavy with mistletoe and ivy.

The gypsy's face was covered in cobwebs as if she had slept at the back of a quiet woodshed for a hundred years with generations of spiders weaving around her. Her nose was hooked and her mouth broad and full of white teeth; gold hoops hung from her ears, but where her eyes should be was smooth skin. She stepped slowly from her home feeling her way with one arm stretched before her and the other resting on the caravan's wooden side. She took a seat in a carved chair, the wood deep brown and smooth with age and two ravens sculpted on the finials.

"Hello Forest Mother," said Yolanda, having been taught by Mrs Bengard the correct forms of address and etiquette for these situations. "We bring coffee and spirits to make you hot *Karsk*, and silver coins to reflect our future."

“Welcome Yolanda Skalligberg, Welcome Duke Otto. You may call me Mrs Skogmor. You will find a kettle of water in the kitchen.”

Yolanda left Otto outside feeling that perhaps the functioning of kettles would be too lowly a burden on his noble mind. She emerged from Mrs Skogmor’s caravan with three cups of hot *Karsk*. Otto sniffed his and his eyes watered from the fumes rising from the surface.

“So Gypsy,” he said, “will you see our future without eyes?”

“Second sight is better than first; deep wisdom did not come to Odin himself until he traded his eye for the secrets of the world tree. Then there are the Norns. The Norns were the weavers of fate in our legends, they had no eyes. What did they need them for when they held the threads of fate in their fingers to lead them through the maze of the future?”

“Would you tell us ours then?”

“We should not be too quick to know our futures – in knowing we can unmake the future which might have been.”

“Go ahead,” said Otto, “I have nothing to fear from the future.”

“There are two futures before you, Yolanda, two futures for the world, Duke Otto: if you go away together the line of Rat-Wives, the line stretching back to Great Yaga will be broken. There will be no more Rat-Wives. There will be no no-one to mediate in the war between rat and man. The hoards will multiply. If you stay here the Rat-Wives go on but Otto’s line ends.”

Otto spluttered, “I was going to make her my mistress,” he said, “I had a beautiful apartment picked out near the Imperial Palace but I must have a legitimate heir, to continue the lines of Ottos.” And with that he knelt before and asked, “Will you marry me, Yolanda?”

“You are free to choose, Yolanda,” said Mrs Skogmor.

“No she isn’t,” said Otto, “I need an heir.”

“Let me think,” said Yolanda.

“Take your time,” said Otto. “My family tree is withering while you consider.”

“I know,” she said, “we just need to wait until Mrs Bengard comes back.”

“When is she due?”

“She didn’t say.”

“But I must re-join my regiment in the autumn.”

“Well come back next summer. Then stepmother will be home and she can find a new apprentice and we can see the world together.”

She waved him goodbye and promised to be faithful and true, may her heart be fed to the wild ravens if she strayed.

While he was away she carried on her business as a Rat-Wife and when the summer came she sent for a dress of white English lace and new dancing shoes of silk. She expected Otto at the beginning of July, but he remained absent and Yolanda smelled sulphur and blood and iron in the wind. For five years a war raged across the seas to the west and in the lands to the south.

Those years after the war were difficult for her. The horse had definitely had its day and cars and trucks filled the town. A new age dawned for Norway. People were no longer content to spend long winters by the fire telling stories of the Trolls, and the Giants, and the Dragons. They were interested in education and politics; they thought to sweep away the old signs and superstitions. That was her, the old superstitions. That was also Mrs Skogmor so Yolanda paid her a visit.

They sat drinking *Karsk* outside the caravan, now grown thick with green moss and lichen. They had a little fire beneath the tall black pines where strange fungi and spectral blue flowers glimmered in the distant dusk of the pinewood.

“You are missing your prince?”

“Oh, yes – when Stepmother gets back I will go and find him.”

“I do not think she will be back.”

“Why ever not?” said Yolanda.

Mrs Skogmor told her how a messenger had come from New York carrying her stepmothers best black hat and her long black sword and a card that said ‘with deepest sympathy’ in a curling script and sealed with a rat in a crown.

“So, the Rat-King slew her and I will never be a princess.”

“But what is a princess, Yolanda?”

“The girl in the stories who marries a prince.”

“You will see him again you know...”

“I don’t think you should tell me, after all knowing can undo the future.”

“You are learning, Yolanda.”

They had another round of *Karsk* and Mrs Skogmor put the Rat-Wife’s sword on the table.

“That has been passed down the chain of Rat-Wives for fourteen hundred years, a family heirloom if you like.”

“That makes my family as old as Otto’s”

“Are not all families equally old?”

“Apparently,” said Yolanda, “if you can count back it makes the blood purer.”

“Some count the links on that chain of ancestors and use it to bind others.” Said Mrs Skogmor, “Some families rise, some fall, some drift along quite happy in the middle; Otto’s ancestor was born so very low and raised very high, so his descendents have struggled to stay high – they have loaded him with legends to hide the truth.”

“So they were not always noble?”

“Well I shouldn’t gossip,” said Mrs Skogmor, “but...”

Six hours and a great deal of *Karsk* later Mrs Skogmor said, "I am tired. Just put a blanket over me while I sleep."

Yolanda left her sat in her chair outside the caravan with loud snores coming from beneath the cover.

She wobbled and wavered between the trees and toasted her dead Stepmother in neat spirits; she sang and danced and swayed all the way home with a hoard of rats, a dozen wolverines, and even a couple of grumpy brown bears, all dancing among the summer flowers following her all the way to the *Langstrand* where she slept face down in the sand for three whole days.

It was a fine June evening in 1924, the sun was staying long in the sky and the nights were warm and blue. Yolanda sat outside the *Trollhule* with a glass of *Karsk* and her book of fairy stories admiring a new steam ship speeding between the distant islands and disappearing into the twilight. Through the ultramarine of the midnight-dusk two white sparks approached from around the *hedland*. The wasp-buzz of an engine carried along the strandline and grew into a growl then roared like a tiger. A smart sports car pulled up at the foot of the cliff. And *Herzog Otto* with a silver headed walking stick stiffly manoeuvred himself out of the Isotta Fraschini Tipo 8. He had shaved his wonderful moustache off.

"Wait there, Otto," she shouted and she tore off her Rat-Wife's black clothes and took out the white dress she had bought when she was ten years younger. She slipped back into her silken dancing shoes and ran to his arms.

"So Yolanda," he said, "will you return with me."

"Perhaps I will, my life here is running out," she said, "People mistrust traditions, they ask why? They question everything after your war, Otto. "

They took in a few dances at the Sanatorium but he was slower with shrapnel in his leg and bullet-holes everywhere. She was less inclined to be mistaken for a princess. Having distinguished himself in the field, he no longer wore all the medals and braids he had before the war. His country was now a republic, so he wore a simple black uniform with just his campaign medals and the Golden Bravery Medal with a double bar. He said, “We aristocrats must try and fit in with the new democratic age.”

As they rested on the balcony watching the far away trawlers and merchant ships in the darkness with the familiar scent of pines and mushrooms drifting in the warmth of the summer night he knelt stiffly before her asked her, “will you marry me Yolanda?”

Ten years before Yolanda had thought she had his answer. She thought she still had it.

Herr Otto said, “Now with the new democracy and the egalitarian principles the Republic of Austria there would not even be any stigma to you being my wife.”

Yolanda’s answer slipped away from her and she replied, “I had been unaware of any stigma in the first place.”

“Well, you know, I come from an old family with a pure bloodline, and you are well ... a commoner, but I can raise you up. I understand some old families are even marrying Americans. With your foreign accent we can pretend you’re are at least from a good family. Do you know any good families? ”

“Now that you mention it, I do. I am from the oldest family in Norway. I am ten thousand years of tradition passed down from the days when Odin walked among the ash trees with two good eyes to see his way. I can name each and every Rat-Wife, my line of stepmothers going back to *Völva* Yaga before”

“Yes, but common rat-catchers, Yolanda. You mustn’t tell people you are a rat-catcher. It is not a noble profession, not like soldiering, or... Soldiering. My ancestor, the noble count Ardabastos of Byzantium was a great soldier.”

“But what about his father – Alberich, wasn’t it?”

“Who told you about Alberich?” said Otto turning red.

“Mrs Skogmor. I was so proud when I heard, Otto.”

Otto went from red to purple and held his head in his hands, “not Alberich – do not speak of him, Yolanda,” he said. “What would the princesses say?”

“But his technique, Otto, how original, how inventive – to cultivate a body odour like ripe cheese to draw the vermin from their dens. I think his use of a mallet was a little brutal, but it was swift. Merciful even. Out comes the little rat thinking this man, your ancestor, is a lovely ripe cheese then splat on the little rat head. No more rats,” she said, “No more rats,” she sang.

“No,” said Otto, “the shame is killing me” and he clutched his heart and staggered.

“It is good your family were common rat-catchers. It means there will be less stigma among my illustrious ancestors, the great Rat-Wives: *Völva* Yaga, Hilda the Boneless, and Cabbage-Head Frida. There will be no shame in I, Rat-Wife Yolanda, marrying you. You can take up your family profession and live with me here in the *trollhule*. There may be no more Rat-Wives – they are going out of date apparently - but we can buy a truck and make a living as common rat-catchers. We could advertise ourselves as The *Völva* Yaga Exterminating Company. We would have a great future.”

“I suppose Mrs Skogmor told you that,” he said, “but I am an officer of the Republic of Austria and I will not catch rats for a living.” And he got into his Italian sports car and headed back home in a huff.

After a long cold winter alone she thought perhaps she should follow but then there was the promise to Mrs Bengard, there were her duties to the town and the people to keep them safe from the rats and she remembered what happened to her mother seeking her heart’s desire. She sat watching over the reefs and rocks for a steamer, thinking maybe



he would come back to her and the pretty painted town. The red and yellow houses glowed with a saturated intensity against summer-midnight's pearlescent sky.

She would often go down to the harbour to watch the steamships disembarking their passengers. On Cuckoo Mass, the first of May, the wharf was hung with bright blossoms and paper streamers so she went to the dock to look for him among the summer visitors. She thought he had returned when a tall figure stood silhouetted on the prow of the Kristiana ship as it steamed into port. For a moment a black outline against the blue sky seemed like a returning king born over the ocean from too-long an exile in foreign lands.

"Otto," she shouted and waved but its noble pose was an illusion; as the boat slowed and backed-water the shape twisted into something unbelievable and collapsed like a paper bag: there was no prince from over the sea come to settle down to a democratic life as a pest exterminator. All that came ashore was a plague of rats: creeping along the mooring ropes and riding on the goods-crates, bursting from barrels running among the bright blossoms and threatening to eat the food laid out for the May-day feast.

Yolanda sang the rats into the green rolling sea and kept them away from the spring-pies and cakes, the potato salad, and grave-salmon, but the next day another hoard came and another. Every day a hoard perished there in the cold waves, but the next day a hoard appeared creeping along the mooring ropes and riding on the goods-crates, bursting from barrels. She grew tired and by the long summer days of June her voice seemed weaker and the rats stronger. The notes that had flowed like water stuck like thorns so she had to drag them from her throat. The lands she conjured up seemed faded and false. At last she stood on the beach in agony as the song clawed its way from her mouth, and perished still-born on her lips. The ten thousand bodies that had danced about her stopped

and stared back at her, twenty thousand black eyes watched her. She had not seen that look before.

The countryside and the town were full with rats. They cleared the grain from Bjornsen's basement and chased Mrs Bjornson so much that she spent all day stood on a ladder where they couldn't reach her. They stole from the grain merchants and bakers and big houses. However many traps they laid and however much poison they put down, it was never enough and more rats replaced them. Now she missed Otto more than ever. She was no longer a Rat-Wife so what was she? It was as if she had stayed as a fisher-girl on the sea, never met a prince and never learned the old magic from Mrs Bengard.

Yolanda retreated to her *trollhule* and the sea streamed inland across the beach scattering rat-bones on the tide-line. She dreamed of all those dead bones dancing on the beach.

A week later a deputation from the town came led by *Borgermester* Olsen.

"How much do you want, Rat-Wife, to take them all away?"

"I cannot," said Yolanda, "I am sick, I cannot sing."

"Come now," said Olsen rattling a bag of *Krone*.

"We never have the rats like this before. Mrs Bengard never would have allowed it."

"This is different," said Yolanda, "something is singing the rats a stronger song."

"Nonsense, I have seen you sing, you are doing it deliberately," said Mrs Bjornsen.

"It's her fault they came," said Mr Andersen.

"She was always too fond of rats," said Constable Svensen, "I saw her dance with them and let them go!"

"Her heart has softened," said Mrs Kropotkin.

"Or her mind," said Olsen.

She had never done anything but help them. She had taken the rats from their houses and though she loved them did her duty and drowned them in the cold fjord. Anger burnt like fire, a flickering incandescent flame that burst from her lips in a shriek. The blast of the involuntary song paralysed them. The deputation hung in the air like marionettes on strings. She made them raise an arm and a leg, made them all step in time, made them spin and form a dancing circle. She sang them to the left she sang them to the right, widdershins and sunward and then six times around the *Hekstein* rocks in and out of the cold sea until she decided they had learned their lesson and, being too merciful for her own good, she set them off dancing back to town.

Yolanda sang in celebration as she followed; she could no longer sing the song of the rat but she found the song of men. To think: people could act just like rats if you sang them the right tune.

They ran ahead of Yolanda and vanished into their houses.

The streets were empty and dun coloured dust blew through them among discarded rags, bones, paper. A truck sat on tireless wheels, and all the bright paint on wooden fronts were peeled and scabbed.

There was a prince waiting for her. She recognised him. He was tall, athletic, and beautiful. He descended the stairs from the veranda of Andersen's Hotel with an imperial spring in his step. His finely tailored coat blew in the wind. When he saw her he corrected his fine silk tie, took off his hat, and bowed with the grace of a swordsman.

"Otto!" she called as she thought for a moment he had come to save her.

This prince though, was not Otto.

"Yolanda Skalligberg?" said the prince with a charming smile beneath a long thin moustache waxed in the style of twenty years ago. "Rat-Wife Yolanda?" he said and on the top of his handsome head a crown of rat-tails quivered in place of hair.

She had come to teach the ungrateful townsmen a lesson in respecting their traditions; instead death was waiting. He stood holding his Homberg hat and leaning on a silver headed cane. She was not prepared to meet him. She had practiced fencing since Otto had gone but had not brought a sword – she had no song to sing death away, no dance to lead him in, no sticky board, or poison, or trap set for him. She shuddered while he, the Rat-King smiled politely on the far side of a pit of horror ten-thousand years deep.

She turned her back and ran, skipping and jumping over the grey bodies. From out of cellars and drains poured rats, thousands and tens of thousands thronging the streets so she stood in the eye of a hurricane of rats. As she ran the rats moved with her orbiting her like dancers at a ball. She leaped streams and chasms, climbed cliffs to escape them and dashed as fast as she could through the forest where the tall pines sheltered her and the primroses bloomed in vast banks of glowing yellow petals among the blue shadows of the spring-light. There was an old wooden caravan sheltered under a boulder of dark-banded Gneiss that dripped with moss. Where the stream babbled from the rocks-spine, juniper, rowan, and goat willow grew and blueberry and cloudberry bushes ran wild in the understory.

Loud snoring came from a mound of moss.

“Mrs Skogmor,” called Yolanda, “I need help.”

The mound shuddered and a couple of fingers poked through the bright green surface; they wriggled like pale worms grubby with loam. A few centipedes crawled out and Mrs Skogmor’s head popped up like a mushroom with her strange eyeless face pointed into the air. She raised her quivering nose and sniffed.

“Yolanda,” she said, “you have chosen to stay. Help me out and put the kettle on girl – I have been waiting for you.”

Yolanda grabbed her hand and pulled. She pulled Mrs Skogmor from her earthy womb. Mrs Skogmor was naked as a new born baby; her clothes had quite rotted away.

“Oh, My,” said Mrs Skogmor patting down her body, “it has been a long time. There are clothes stored in the oak-wood trunk.”

“The Rat-King, Mrs Skogmor, the Rat-King is here.”

“Is it that time already? Better put the coffee on and get a new bottle of *Skogens vin*. I need some *Karsk*.”

The wood-wormed steps creaked and shed softly rotten splinters under Yolanda’s tread; grey sheets and blankets of spider-webs smothered her. She brushed them aside and found the tarnished kettle and a dusty bottle. She found the trunk and brought the clothes to Mrs Skogmor who was sat in the stream scrubbing her back with a pine-branch.

“I have been asleep so long Yolanda, tell me how the world has gone?”

“The old ways, the path of Odin and *Völva* Yaga have grown further from us, even the new paths of the Christian kingdom are fallen into disrepair. The world grows so I can’t make a living. Even the rats have changed. They no longer obey me: I made my choice, but now I think I chose wrong. I did not care for Otto’s pride, and he did not care for mine.”

“You must take your sword,” said Mrs Skogmor, “it’s there under the caravan wrapped in an oiled cloth.”

Yolanda crawled into the gap beneath floor and ground, a strange earthy cave filled with nests of spiders and cobwebs, woodlice and centipedes, blind pale amphibians and false scorpions. She smelled something else: a rat. In the shelter of the supporting rocks it sat with its red eyes watching in the darkness. She dug her fingers into the grit and soil and felt the smooth oil cloth and something solid within. The rat moved forward to watch and Yolanda reached out to stroke its soft little head.

There was a label around its neck: it was an invite to the Midsummer Ball at the *Blåbärberg* Sanatorium and it was signed with the image of a crowned rat.

She crawled out from under the caravan with the invitation in one hand and her sword in the other.

The next day she put on silk dancing shoes and a white dress and strapped the sword to her side and stepped out of the *trollhule*. As she followed the trail through the woods the flowers nodded sleepily in the enchanted groves and the new green ivy ran wild between the trees. In the ivy hundreds of little black eyes glistened as she passed. Little paws rustled and little naked grey tails coiled and curled.

The sanatorium stood as she remembered but the stucco seemed a little cracked, the elegant windows a little dusty. In the gardens unkempt and common flowers were mingling with those rarer and nobler imports in a way that would not have been tolerated before the war.

The reception was unmanned but she heard the sound of music coming from the ball room. As she entered she saw Mr Bjornsen there in a ragged tailcoat

“ Herr Bjornsen, what are you doing here?”

“The rats brought me; they brought us, all of us. I had to bring a ladder for my wife.”

Mrs Bjornsen was in her best dress. She stood on her step ladder out of reach of the rats that scuttled around the floor.

“There is rain water and milk over there. I don’t think the rats drink *Karsk*.”

“They look very much like the Aristocrats in the old days. Do they have champagne?”

The court of the Rat-King had assembled in old uniforms rescued from the rag heaps. The rats all piled up together to imitate men and women. They wore military jackets and tailcoats. They assembled bodies within ancient livery and worn-out suits. They filled dresses abandoned by fashion and hats abandoned by reason. The whole group orbited the room as one. Their feet fell, tripping in time, to the flight and descent of the notes, to the one-two of the polkas and the two-two-three of the waltz.

Above them the dusty, broken chandeliers reflected in the mirrors transforming the ballroom into a world of crystal and cobweb. *Borgermester* Olsen danced with a partner whose furry legs bent like elastic bands, more fluid than rigid, while other rat-creatures hid within noble robes and dressing gowns of velvet and moved on carpets of tiny running feet and rolling rat-balls. Among the unskilled imitators were those that lived their lives as humans: there were liveried knaves with a single rat tail standing in the centre of their heads, uniformed knights with two tails parted in the middle, queens with flowing grey-scaled locks, and among the rat-haired princesses there was Princess Delphine in her broad brimmed hat with her black parasol.

“Princess,” said Yolanda, “I thought you would be in Monte Carlo.”

“But the King is here.”

“The Rat-King, Princess, it’s the Rat-King.”

“A king is a king. So he is King of the Rats; at least he has a Kingdom. That is better than a lot of Kings have done since 1918.”

“But Otto said having business with rats was unacceptable for noblemen.”

“*ex-Herzog* Otto, so choosey about who he associates with. His family are a little nouveau - I think it makes him touchy. We all have ancestors we are not proud of, for example my own great-aunt Erzsébet had unusual bath-time habits that involved some unkindness to a number of servant girls; but did we disown her? Throw her from a high tower window? Let the peasants burn her? Why no. As they say, blood is thicker than

water, a subtlety lost on poor Erzsébet I am afraid, but there you go. We kept her safe in a lovely suite of rooms and, honestly, didn't close the food slot or block the air-holes up until we were almost sure she was dead.”

The music stopped. Delphine looked up. A princely figure stood in the doorway. The Rat-King advanced. Yolanda drew her sword: the Viking sword handed down through the generations for slaying the Rat-Kings.

The Rat-King looked at it and stroked his chin until a small goatee of rattails grew out of it.

“I see you got my package; such a shame about Mrs Bengard.”

“Murderer!” She shouted, crouching and swinging exactly as Otto had taught her not to.

The Rat-King was obviously not expecting to be attacked. She could tell from the way his head flew from his shoulders and his body fell backwards onto the floor. The rat-people stood back, silent at the fall of their king. Bjornsen clapped slowly at first but with enthusiasm as Olsen joined in. Mr Andersen slapped her on the back and said “they’ll always be free *Karsk* for you in the hotel, Yolanda.”

“An easy victory after all,” she said and prodded the dead Rat-King. The body squeaked and boiled with rats beneath the cloths; it lost its human shape and a single rat poked a grey snout from the headless collar. Something twitched under the grey pelt something uncoiled and inflated and the skin puffed up filled with wriggling naked rat spines and skulls forming rows and piles like bones in a catacomb, skulls like bricks in a house. The Rat-King’s almost-handsome face took shape with its crown of tails wiggling above.

“I am deeply hurt, Yolanda.”

“I’ll give you hurt,” she said and hacked his body into quarters.



Each quarter retreated to a different corner and fell apart into a hundred rats. The rats became a swarm and the swarm swirled about the corners of the room like water swirling around a sinkhole in the *Hekstein* reef. Around Yolanda the rats ran bunching together until they formed a wave that broke on the far side of the ballroom and washed up a complete Rat-King with a steel sword held above his head in the university fashion. The rat-court broke into applause.

“On your marks,” he said.

She ran low swinging her sword at his feet. He jumped the glittering arc and landed smartly back on his spot as Yolanda was carried across the floor by her own momentum into a crowd of rat-courtiers. They seemed surprisingly well disposed towards her and picked her up and dusted her down then placed the sword back in her hand. She charged back towards the waiting Rat-King.

“Whoever taught you to fence Yolanda,” he said, “they were not a gentleman; you fight like a Viking.”

She advanced on him pink with anger, red at the aspersion upon Otto’s lost nobility. “I was taught to fence by a Prince and an Officer.”

“Then take your marks and keep to the rules.”

He stood with his sword still above his head in perfect fencing posture (pointed down at 32.5 degrees. His nose was raised at 57.5 degrees and his chin jutted Germanicly). His goatee twitched with mild irritation and his moustache coiled and uncoiled like a rather cross earthworm.

She stepped up to a line in the dust a few feet before him and raised her sword at a similar angle. The Rat-King squinted down her four-foot steel blade with its magic runes and glittering razor edge.

“Did you know that says something very rude about rats in Old Norse? And magic Viking swords are not approved weapons,” said the Rat-King, “The students’ fencing association at Heidelberg specifies Sabres or Epees.”

“*En-garde*,” Yolanda whispered as she plunged the sword into his open mouth.

“Argh argh arghoo,” said the Rat-King.

Yolanda withdrew the sword.

“I said that is an illegal move. Do stop now Rat-Wife Yolanda,” said the Rat-King mopping his forehead and his crown of living rat-tails hanging slightly limp, “It does no good you know, even old Yaga never managed to slay us with a sword.”

“But you killed Mrs Bengard.”

“Why would I want to kill her?”

“She was the Rat-Wife, your mortal enemy.”

“Not at all - she was my immortal enemy: immortal – no point in trying to kill her. Now put down your sword and come for a walk.”

There was nothing else to be done so she put away the blade and walked arm in arm with the Rat-King out into the garden where the wild flowers grew with flamboyant abandon among the gone-to-seed remnants of a formal garden.

They sat together in the twilight of the northern midnight on a bench by a fountain overgrown with moss and ivy.

“She was my opposite but not so opposite as the modern people who don’t believe in us. We have the same history: Rat-Wives have more in common with Rat-Kings nowadays. We could have reached an accommodation; after all it’s a long time since rats and men needed to fight over scraps – not with a city like New York to live in. You should see it Yolanda; the cars and trams can whisk a rat for miles. They travel faster than a raven flies roaring like tigers and crying like whales. The streets are never silent, never slow, never empty. The carriages and trucks are filled with more food than a rat ever

dreamed of, even in the song of the Rat-Wife. There are trucks as broad as buildings and tall as trees that thunder through the streets bringing fresh food frozen in ice from the sea and the countryside for the fine restaurants.

“But what about Mrs Bengard,” said Yolanda, “you killed her – I saw her hat.”

“When did a Rat-Wife kill a Rat-King or a Rat-King a Rat-Wife?”

“What about *Völva Yaga*?”

“But neither of them are dead,” he said, “They just reached stalemate – a balance.”

The rat-tails on his head twirled, “New York,” he said - “is the greatest, fastest, most modern, most rat-filled city in the whole world; the alleyways run for miles in great chasms and man has tunnelled deeper and further than anywhere. In the shadow of the great buildings the nights are like days and the days like nights and a rat need hardly sleep from dusk to dawn to dusk again. It is better than the heaven you sing of, like a happy isle from the rats and there is no dark cold fjord waiting for them. Mrs Bengard was a great warrior. She fought me under the green trees of Central Park. Ten rounds and of course neither of us won so I said, let’s negotiate...”

I took her to dinner at Manganaro's on 9<sup>th</sup> street. In New York they are not allowed grappa, or whiskey or vodka. But I bought a bottle of *Skogens Vin* from a bootlegger. She had a great deal of it in her coffee.

She could see my point – New York is heaven for rats and hell for people; we like the darkness and the earth, but men need trees and seas and fields. We had a plan: I would drive the people from the city into the countryside and she would sing the rats from the country into the city – they would all be happier that way. It was a great plan.”

He sighed and brushed a tear from his cheek, “I offered to help her to her hotel but she said she could manage perfectly well. She stepped out of the door. She stepped out in the rain to wave down a taxi. There was one on the other side of the road so she stepped out into the street and...”

He stopped and took out a large handkerchief and blew his nose.

“And?”

“A grocery truck ran her over. Splat. She never had a chance – squashed like a rat under a hammer.”

Yolanda burst into tears. “Why couldn’t you have killed her? She would have wanted to die like a warrior with a sword in her hand, not squashed by a truck. She always believed in the tradition. Why can you not stick with it? She would have been so disappointed.”

The Rat-King also burst into tears, “I’m sorry, I just wanted us all to get along,” all the rats that composed his supernatural entity also seemed to be weeping and Yolanda handed him her handkerchief.

“So - if you haven’t come to kill me why are you here?”

“We have come to hear you sing.”

“Hear me sing?”

“Yes, Mrs Bengard told me your voice is beautiful.”

She opened her mouth and no sound emerged.

“I cannot sing – you have taken my voice.”

The rat tails on his head hung limp and the rats gave a collective sigh. “Perhaps you are trying too hard.”

“To do what?”

“To sing them into the sea. You don’t need to do that anymore because I am here. I can tell the rats where to go, what to do. Let us have a proper performance.”

He took her hand in his and led her through the gardens back into the conservatory among the potted plants and ferns in bulbous glass terrariums.

The Rat-King sat in his throne with the princes and kings and other rat-nobles and all the guests from the town. *Borgermester* Olsen, Mrs Kropotkin, Mrs Bjornsen,

Constable Svensen, and Mr Andersen looked with loathing at the surrounding knights and knaves.

Yolanda gave a croak.

“Ha,” said Mrs Bjornsen, “is a frog stuck in your throat?”

“Has the devil taken his power back?” asked Olsen.

“Ah, she is just a little nervous,” said the Rat-King who handed her a bottle.

She sipped her glass of *Karsk*, and gargled with a little water.

“You can’t do it,” said Mrs Bjornsen.

Yolanda felt her ears go red. Even though Mrs Bjornsen hated rats she hated Yolanda more. Yolanda opened her heart and sang gently at first, as if she was tempting a rat out of its hiding place in Bjornsen’s cellar to chase her. The notes stuttered a little and she stopped.

The rats burst into rapturous applause and there were tears in the Rat-Kings eyes.

“Beautiful,” he said, “just beautiful. Do sing some more.”

Yolanda tried again: a pitter-patter of notes fell from her lips, faster and stronger so they all joined together in a stream that grew broader and deeper until the voice came back and although it could not charm the rats into the sea it could propel the rats and the men and women together around the dance floor. For hours they danced until she was exhausted with the song.

The Rat-King sat fanning himself as he rested outside beyond the windows where the summer pine forests swayed under the stars and the lights of distant farmsteads stood alone in the dark mass of the landscape.

“Thank you, Yolanda,” he said, “that was beautiful; what are you drinking?”

“*Karsk*,” she said.

“I do not think that drink does you much good – it killed Mrs Bengard.”

Yolanda persuaded him to join her in a cup and the next morning the Rat-King sent the rats back into the fields and hills, back to their homes in the granaries and towns, in the forests and in the cellar of Mr Bjornsen's shop.

Kristiana became Oslo in 1925 just like in the days of king Sweyn; at some point in 1926 Norway became a truly modern country and Rat-Wives and Norns and Rat-Kings dissolved away into myth.

Still, on summer nights a walker in the woods might come across a truck with 'Völva Yaga Exterminators' painted on the side and see Yolanda with Mrs Skogmor and the Rat-King sat out under the stars with a kettle on the fire; they might see them drinking *Karsk* as hawk moths flew into the flame and fell as burning cinders into the darkness.

Yolanda surprised herself by becoming a pillar of the community – she conducted nature walks and gave fencing lessons. She took parties of schoolchildren through the woods to meet reindeer and bears and wolverines. *Borgermester* Olsen became Mayor Olsen in 1938 and this break with tradition seemed to herald yet greater changes on the way.

Yolanda, the Rat-King, and Mrs Skogmor sat eating potato salad and pickled herring. Mrs Skogmor had told them the story of Granny Ran and her granite teeth but was a little hazy about the order of events and which lay in the past and which in the future. The Rat-King had tried to finish it for her but was side tracked by the trials of a Knight of his acquaintance who had fallen in love with Cabbage-Head Frida; the story tellers had become quite confused and thought it best if they had a song instead so Yolanda opened her mouth to sing only to have it stopped by a hard wind that blew through the trees and stuck in her throat. Mrs Skogmor sniffed, "sulphur and death again," she said, "somewhere down south."

Another war began and this time it came all the way up to the *Langstrand*.

As Yolanda sat drinking a glass of hot *Karsk* in Andersen's Hotel she heard good king Haakon was in England.

"That is good that Norway has again taken possession of perfidious Albion, like King Sweyn in the old days," she said.

"No Yolanda," said old man Bjornsen, "King Haakon has been driven out by the Germans. He is exiled there – a guest of the English."

"How horrible," Yolanda said, "he will have to eat their food."

Yolanda saw great grey ships steaming past, racing to disembark the invaders at Trondheim, and once again her prince returned. Otto came back to the *Langstrand* in a chauffeur driven Mercedes 770 with a secretary and a great many guards. He had his military bearing as when they met, but this time he wore a smart black uniform with a shiny skull sewn on the front of his hat.

He was still not old; silver threaded his hair but he was still strong in spite of his war wounds.

"Otto," she said, "How could you. We welcomed you here as a guest; why have you returned as a conqueror?"

"Well," Otto said, "it is not just Norway we are conquering, it's the world so you really shouldn't feel victimised or singled out... won't you come for dinner tonight? For old time's sake?"

Otto had chosen the Sanatorium as his headquarters – he was sentimental that way. The Sanatorium stood as she remembered; but the stucco had been repaired and a red, white, and black flag hung above the door.

"Come sit - have a glass of *Karsk*," said Otto and he took her arm and led her from the shiny black sedan past grey guards on the stone steps. They were reflected as a

hundred recursive Yolandas and Ottos sat at a small table in the old ballroom underneath the crystal chandeliers. A uniformed waiter brought two cups.

“I remember how I hated this when I was young,” said Otto sipping his and breathing in the fumes, as he swirled the *Karsk* around the cup, “how things change. How vain I was about my ancestors: you remember my ancestor Alberich – the *volk*-hero who rid Constantinople of vermin? Well, you will be pleased to hear I am following in his footsteps.”

“You have become an exterminator? Have you a mallet and the special feet like your ancestor?”

“Of sorts. You see we Germans, we Nordics, we Aryan *volk*, have allowed our native soil to be tainted, tainted by vermin.”

“Ah they are just rats – sweet alone, annoying in hoards – not so much trouble nowadays when there is enough food for everyone.”

“By vermin I mean inferior races.”

“Not the English?” asked Yolanda, “I know their cooking is vile but...”

“No, not the English. In the our new order, our modern world, our pure world there is no place for Jews (he spat,) and gypsies (he spat), for witches, raven-tamers, troll-catchers and freaks (he spat).

“What about Rat-Wives?”

“Rat-Wives are what we do need – exterminators. We need rat-catchers to winkle out the vermin from their hiding places. We are doing the same work now, Yolanda, we are purifying the world of the vermin. I realise how wrong I was to be so proud of just my own bloodline. Science shows us that it is the bloodline of the *volk*, the species that is sacred: so even a humble rat-catcher like the *volk* hero Alberich was a member of the greater race. Come,” said Otto, “let us walk in the garden.”



He led her among the trees and rows of identical blue corn-flowers waving in the sunshine. Green leaves burst from the linden and a thousand identical birds sung together in their branches.

“Imagine Yolanda, you obviously have good heredity; why you hardly look older than when we met. You could have been a mother, yes, with the blond hair, a true Aryan – with my pure German blood, our children would have been the master race. But our future now is in the blood of our people. You and I we can witness this birth.”

“The world has got along fine with all those people in it, Otto.”

“They betrayed us, stabbed us in the back in the War; then they took away my kingdom, my title, my honour. I will make them give it back.”

“Oh, poor Otto,” she said: he was so upset and angry and hurt with the world, “I should have married you. Then this would never have happened. I will make it better if I can.”

Life carried on much the same for them. Though the occasional patrol passed through the town, the soldiers were under strict instructions and even addressed her as Frau Oberführer, which made her feel very smart. She danced with Otto and he sent her gifts though food was short. “When your war is over I will marry you,” she said.

They had a lunch of trout and herring and their old friend Princess Von Thurzo arrived in her own black limousine with a very similar uniform to Otto.

Yolanda left them to discuss their work and returned to her own. Later she and the Rat-King opened the door of the van and released a swarm of rats into the open woods.

“Who’d have thought there could have been so many in Mr Bjornsen’s cellar,” said Yolanda counting out the *Krona*.

“Well they will have work to do in the east. There are thousands of dead that need disposing of.”

“Such a waste,” said Yolanda, “but at least that is something they don’t mind the rats eating.”

The Rat-King offered her a glass of neat *skogans vin*.

“Have you no coffee?”

“We could build a fire?”

“Yes, go ahead; it is a pleasant evening.”

“Do you know how I became? How I was made,” said the Rat-King.

“I thought you had always been.”

“The first Rat-King was made by old Yaga. She was a shepherdess of the rats and she wove a circle, knotted their tails together to make herself a crown. But it didn’t turn out as she expected. It’s the crown that made the king and the first Rat-King grew there. He was the rats and the rats were him.

Well old Yaga didn’t want a rival, but pretended she was glad to see him so called him her son and adopted him lulled him and sang to him until he slept. Then as he lay sweet and innocent as a baby she crept in with her sharp stone knife... “

“Who is this, Yolanda?” said Otto stepping from the darkness.

“*Herzog* Otto, may I introduce His Majesty the Rat-King. Your Majesty may I present *Herzog* Otto.”

The Rat-King removed his Homberg and bowed, his crown of rat tails glistening and quivering in the firelight. Otto blinked.

“Yolanda, this is a vermin, a monster.”

“This is my friend”

Otto drew his Luger and fired.

“Stop Otto ... You can’t...”

The Rat King clutched his heart and staggered back. He clutched his throat and gurgled and he flung himself backwards head over heels, stood on his nose, then slowly collapsed into a heap. His limbs gave a final convulsion and he was still.

“Otto that was... rude,” said Yolanda.

“I have purified the race, annihilated a freak that would taint the *Volk* with his impure bloodline”

“Nonsense, he is not interested in getting mixed up in your family. I know you have cheese-smell in your heredity but even so I don’t think the Rat-King finds you so attractive.”

“Found me attractive, you mean, not finds me. He is in the past-tense.”

“What past-tense?”

Otto gestured at the inert Rat-King, “he is defeated, slain.”

“No, he is just playing,” said Yolanda. “You are lucky he didn’t cut your head off. It shows what an excellent and good-natured person he is– get up Rat-King and Otto will apologise; won’t you Otto?”

The Rat-King sat up smiling and offered Otto his bullet back. Otto backed away.

“I am sorry I played the trick, *Herzog* Otto,” said the Rat-King as he reassembled himself, “would you like some *Karsk*?”

Otto fled into the darkness.

“Come back here or it’s over Otto,” shouted Yolanda, “I know you are upset you lost your war but you cannot just go about be so horrible to people.”

There was no answer.

“I do not like you anymore,” she called.

“I didn’t mean him to run away,” said the Rat-King as he drove her back to the *Langstrand*.

“I don’t care,” said Yolanda, “I am very cross with him. I am not *Frau Oberführer*. I am not going to be *Herzogin* Yolanda. I am the Rat-Wife.”

“He was just foolish, just afraid,” said the Rat-King, “after all you ran away and tried to kill me when we first met.”

“But why do you want me to go back to him?”

“It’s what you wanted, your dream – you should be happy.”

“Those sort of dreams always end badly,” said Yolanda, “I am happy with my friends.”

Towards the end of the summer she thought she might speak to Otto again so she made her way through the green woods. She followed the old path among the birch trees and the wild mushrooms. There were searchlights there and trees were being felled; a piece of land levelled out. A displaced wolverine fled past her and somewhere a bear called. The smoky smell of a fire trickled from the direction of Mrs Skogmor so she thought it best to drop round pay her regards and perhaps have a glass of *Karsk*. As she drew closer the mist thickened like a winter soup and the smoke tasted bitter and sad.

She walked beneath the birch and pines with the branches above lost in grey. The woods were silent, no birds sang, no small animals rustled in the bushes. The creak of the trees was muted. Yolanda tried to sing up a wolverine or two for company but the tune died in the dead air. She was cold as no-one should be in autumn. The ghost of winter haunted the woods; the wyche-elm had shed all its leaves and the trees crouched naked beneath the grey clouds like wrinkled dwarfs gathering shallow pools of mist about their feet. She tried to whistle a jolly polka but it would not carry and went flat after a couple of bars. The mist grew thicker and she was surprised when the familiar outcrop of gneiss

loomed through the greyness. The rock was dark and stained with deep-green algae and yellow slime mould. The twigs and leaves under her feet crackled and broke and thin black mud bubbled between stones and abandoned snail shells. Mrs Skogmor's caravan was completely overgrown with ivy and the door broken, the ashes of the fire still smoked and stained the fog but the sticks and logs were scattered. There were a great many boot prints in the ashes and mud.

Otto's men had been there. She had hoped for a reunion, hoped his views of those people different from him had softened but his men had taken Mrs Skogmor.

She doubled her pace and strode furiously through the desolate woods towards the Sanatorium.

She had only been walking a quarter of an hour when there was a dull patter on leaves.

"Rain? I should have brought an umbrella"

Then the patter erupted short bursts and a louder sustained patter joined them. She followed the noise through the mist and up the steep incline of the *Blåbärberg* Mountain.

She climbed higher and the noise grew distinct: gunfire.

She emerged from the trees into the gravel parking area of the Sanatorium. A whole platoon of soldiers sheltered behind a truck. Several lay wounded or dead on the ground and her own exterminator-van was crumpled against the trunk of a pine tree.

There were more shots and screams from the woods and the tramp and crunch of heavy boots on pine-needles and brittle twigs. A helmet flew from the mist and spun on the ground in front of her. A young man stared up at her with a somewhat surprised look on his face. His eyes blinked a couple of times and then froze over as the life leaked out. A soldier ran back towards the Sanatorium. He wriggled and squirmed clothed with rats

and red blood; as he ran he grew shorter and shorter and shorter and finally collapsed into a pile of bloody bones. The rats fled back into the fog in search of more soldiers.

More soldiers presented themselves; they ran like ants from a hill; individuals emerged from the mist carrying sub-machine guns and carbines. They formed a river of grim faces and grey helmets that flowed past her and dissolved again into the woods.

A familiar figure danced out of the mist. The Rat-King came with his duelling sabre whirling and cutting. However many bullets flew through his body, however many rats and dead rats fell from his ragged sleeves more rats flew to his defence. They joined their King to give him life. But the more rats came the more men came too with guns that spat bullets and guns that gushed fire. They drove him back. More grim soldiers joined them and herded him into a waiting armoured truck.

They drove him up the ramp with the bullets ricocheting and denting the interior. The door slammed shut trapping the Rat-King. The engine coughed into life and the van trundled away up the road.

Yolanda ran after him but the van outpaced her. She tried to cut across the countryside to catch it. She sprinted across the gardens and straight into Otto's arms.

"Where are they taking him?"

"Just around - for a little spin in the van."

"But why? He wanted to be your friend."

"Well," said Otto leading her back up to the Sanatorium, "he is a monster, a freak of nature, vermin. We, the master race, have been experimenting with new ways to rid the world of vermin: carbon monoxide, Pyrethium, cyanide, mustard gas, and others – we have all sorts of chemicals."

"You should have stuck with smelly feet and a rat-mallet. When he gets back he will annihilate you."

“No, he will do nothing. I trust in our scientists, our knowledge, our future. He came asking after the Gypsy. I knew if we took her he would follow.”

A motor coughed and buzzed in the fog. The van imprisoning the Rat-King rattled out of the swirling mist and came to a stop on the brittle gravel.

“The Rat-Man is back,” said Otto, “come and see - now here is the vermin.”

The guard opened the door releasing a cloud of blue smoke that poured from the truck like water running from a broken cistern and there in the back was a pile of dead rats with their tails all knotted together

“See, that’s how to deal with vermin - if you trap them in a room, then fill the room with poison gas...well that will be the whole nest gone. Do you see Yolanda? I am making extermination a truly modern business.”

“But this is a terrible thing,” she shook and her anger burned. Otto stoked it so it glowed red in her stomach.

“A terrible thing? Nonsense, it is the reasonable thing. I hope you will marry me this time – now the Rat-Man has gone and there are no fortune tellers to spoil our future.”

“What have you done to Mrs Skogmor?” the coals in her stomach burned hotter and blistered her heart.

“Yes- a gypsy – ha. She is being questioned. Then we’ll see what future she has...”

“The future is the same Otto, even without the teller.”

“So tell my new future beautiful Yolanda...”

“I will tell you the future,” she said, filled with red flames that seared her so she might burn to a cinder, “I will tell you the future,” and she took him by the hand and she opened her lips to let the fire out. She sang the one-two of the polka and the two-two-three of a waltz. They danced through the conservatory door into the sunset of the September night. She held him close on the veranda looking down into the familiar valley. She sang

him the story of their life together as they danced: how he had swept her off her feet as a girl on the beach and carried her off to gorgeous Vienna where she had married him in St Stephen's Cathedral before a dozen kings and queens and how they honeymooned on the Danube then settled in his castle overlooking the great forests of Carinthia and of their children and grandchildren and a thousand balls that never ended and all the time they danced down the mountain, he looked so handsome in his black uniform as they waltzed from pine wood to birch wood and she rested her head upon his strong shoulder a moment as they stood together down on the *Langstrand* and she gave him a last lingering kiss and sang him her story so he danced out beyond the *Hekstein* rocks into the sea down deep in the cold fjord with ten thousand years accumulation of rat bones and the sleeping body of grim old Odin .

Yolanda went to find Mrs Skogmor. Through the twilight forest she walked, and temperature grew softer and the fog dispersed. She searched through the gentle blue-grey woods with the orange moon lighting her way. She came to a wire fence guarded by men in grey helmets and armed with rifles. The new posts and wire fences were topped with vicious spikes. There were watch towers with machine guns and beyond the fence rows of wooden huts. Sad lines of people sat with bags; taken away from their bright painted towns and cosy stone farms. The troll catchers and raven-tamers, water-diviners, and the people from the northern islands, half seal and half angel with bulging hydrocephalic foreheads and fishy eyes yet calm and sweet as Madonnas in all their strangeness; they all waited silently behind the wire.

The grey guards barred her way so she sang to them of a glorious and terrible kingdom where they would all be kings. She stood with her white hair flowing about her head in the gale of music. They skipped and circled and danced down to the beach where they splashed through the white foam breaking on the shore and swam out into the darker



water and as they sank a hand as grey as stone may have slipped out of the waves to pull them down faster to their sleeping place beside the grim old god.

The troll catchers, raven tamers, water-diviners, the northern islanders, slipped away into the woods and Yolanda stepped through the unguarded gates and called for Mrs Skogmor.

Her call was answered from a hut with barred windows and two ravens perched on the roof.

“There you are,” said Mrs Skogmor turning here eyeless face to Yolanda. “I was just having a nice chat with these boys”

The boys lay on the ground wobbling like jelly. Their shiny black boots twitched and their wide eyes stared unable to blink. They had a number of unpleasant looking tools in their hands.

“They don’t seem very well,” said Yolanda, “I was so worried about you.”

“I’m fine. The boys wanted to know what I know.”

“Did you call on Odin to destroy them and guard the forbidden secrets of the old gods?”

“What secrets? I just told them the truth.”

“I suppose the truth doesn’t always agree with everyone,” said Yolanda.

More German invaders came and she danced a few of them away. Yolanda sat on the rocks and sang a few beneath the waves but never enough to free the land. If only she could have called the rats or even the Rat-King back and set them on the invaders. But they were beyond calling.

After the war King Haakon returned none the worse for his experience of English cooking and order of sorts was restored. Rat-wives were now considered an important

piece of social-history so Yolanda Skalligberg was awarded a grant as a working museum. The *Langstrand* beach lost its reputation and in the summer there were visitors strewn like rat-bones along the tideline. Swarms of them came and photographed each other stood on the *hekstein* rock or playing in the caves where they pretended to be the long-vanished trolls.

Yolanda sat in the *trollhule* with Mrs Skogmor and sipped a small cup of *Karsk* in the glow of an electric light. She nodded along with a gramophone playing a recording of the great modernist composer Arkenholz who was said to conduct the New York Philharmonic using six rat-tails that grew from the top of his head.

“You should go,” said Mrs Skogmor. But Yolanda Skalligberg was not so sure.

There was a knock at the door. Yolanda opened it and blinked in the bright daylight. A small girl stood on the threshold and looked up at her with eyes as wide and green as the summer seas.

“Ms Skalligberg?” she said, “Can you make me a Rat-Wife like in the stories?”

## 4.2 Midway Between Music and Noise

And when they hear me play, up they have to come from the cellars, down from the lofts, out of all their dark holes and crannies<sup>93</sup>.

-*The Rat-Wife*

The *Langstrand* is haunted by anthropomorphic ghosts: the *Hekstein* rocks resemble a witch, the stones and boulders are trolls, and together with petrified mermaids they have turned into notable landmarks:

[...]a tall figure stood silhouetted on the prow of the Kristiana ship as it steamed into port. For a moment a black outline against the blue sky seemed like a returning king born over the ocean[...]as the boat slowed and backed-water, the shape twisted into something unbelievable and collapsed[...]

Our cognitive systems are so willing to recognise unrelated objects as wholes, that we often perceive collections of unrelated objects as whole figures. The surrealists Salvador Dali<sup>94</sup> and Giorgio De Chirico<sup>95</sup> made use of this in various anthropomorphic constructions in their paintings. They contain rock-piles that simulate human subjects, and artefacts such as broken sculptures and tailor's dummies occupy the pictures as uncanny humanoid presences. In 'Frostiana' a puppet simulates the dead queen, in '*Dísir* on the *Langstrand*' the rats simulate a living king.

The Belgian artist James Ensor painted anthropomorphic models built from the props from his parents' costume shop in Ostend. In *The Astonishment of the Mask*

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<sup>93</sup> Henrik Ibsen and others, *Plays*, (London: Methuen Drama, 1980). V3 p235

<sup>94</sup> See Salvadore Dali, *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, (London: Tate Modern 1937), Oil paint on canvas.

<sup>95</sup> See Giorgio de Chirico, *The Disquieting Muses*, (Milan: Gianni Mattioli Collection, , 1918), Oil on Canvas.

*Wouse*<sup>96</sup> a figure with a strangely elongated face wears fantastic frocks and hats from the dressing up box of the nineteenth century. In *Two Skeleton's Fighting over the Body of a Hanged Man*<sup>97</sup> Ensor's creatures of skulls and lace battle with mops over a mask and empty gown that hangs from the ceiling before an audience of carnival masks. It was these figures I had in mind in the initial description of Mrs Bengard, the Rat-Wife, whose name 'ben-gård' is literally bone-garden.

I began experimenting with cut-up and collage while an undergraduate in the late 1980s. Some of my writing (from 2007 -2012) featured other Rat-Wives on other beaches. These were large scale pieces combining multiple sources and so exhibited a high level of entropy. Some of the methods employed resulted in a degree of alliteration in the texts: the particular cut-up technique I employed used the table function in MSWord to introduce both dislocations (see appendix 1) and a pseudo randomisation where every sixth word was removed, sorted alphabetically and then replaced by the word now occupying the equivalent position in the table (see appendix 2).

After some editing, the results of these cut-ups produced poetic sounding but syntactically obscure text: a monologue from the mouth of a witch with such eccentrically mangled language that a definite interpretation without a large amount of additional contextualisation would seem impossible:

The labyrinth must become a path to the womb-like centre drawn in rat  
bones and dust more dangerous and delicious like the poppy blood  
Comes merciful and cool the water hiding the red coral hands, we weave  
the counter-magic and make the sea still. (2007)

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<sup>96</sup> James Ensor, *Astonishment of the Mask Wous*, (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 1889), oil on canvas

<sup>97</sup> James Ensor, *Two Skeleton's Fighting over the Body of a Hanged Man*, (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 1891), oil on canvas.

This was transformed through rewriting applying ever more restrained applications of cut-up method. Eventually this became more landscape like:

The rat bones leap in animate clouds behind each footstep propelled by green shoots rising from salt and sand. Sweet songs drifting up from the waters breaking apart over the rooftops into dark loose noises on the edge of desolation (2012)

After I had completed my 2015 drafts of ‘Frostiana’ and ‘The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near’ my PhD supervisor suggested that I write a story with more female characters. The Rat-Wife seemed an obvious starting point for the new narrative and some of the previous cut-ups were absorbed into the ‘*Dísir on the Langstrand*’. After several drafts, that established clearer characters and narrative, this became:

She taught her the old tunes that rose and fell like the tides; that broke like the waves. She taught her to sing in a voice that hung midway between music and noise. (2019)

The Rat-Wife was originally a semi-supernatural character invented by Henrik Ibsen in the play *Little Eyolf*<sup>98</sup> (1894). Ibsen depicts the Rat-Wife as a part of a local tradition and the play is situated by a dark fjord. The tragedy of the Rat-Wife is she must lead the rats to their destruction in the sea even though she loves them. She says, ‘[...] little angels, down there they sleep so sweet, so long a sleep. All the creatures men hate and persecute.’<sup>99</sup>

In spite of appearances Ibsen didn’t draw on Norwegian myth for the Rat-Wife but from the German story of the Pied Piper.<sup>100</sup> In ‘*Dísir on the Langstrand*’ I have followed

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<sup>98</sup> Ibsen and others V 3 p213 -286

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p236

<sup>100</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism : Art, Theater, Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).p129

the play and embedded her among Norse myths and legends: Odin is asleep in the fjord, Mrs Skogmor bears all the characteristics of a Norn, one the Norse goddesses of fate, and the absent trolls still haunt the landscape as a reference to the earlier verse drama *Peer Gynt*<sup>101</sup> (1867). The trolls vanished from Ibsen's play after this for a quarter century but reappeared a few years before *Little Eyolf* in *The Master Builder*<sup>102</sup> (1892) where '[...]they represent evil instincts and desires – mysterious powers that make him afraid of himself.'<sup>103</sup>

'*Dísir* on the *Langstrand*' is set a few years after *Little Eyolf* and follows the Rat-Wife's apprentice and successor, Yolanda. The time period covered is from 1898 to 1998 but mainly focuses on 1913-1945. The *Dísir* of the title refers to a female spirit or ghost associated with fate: this could refer to Yolanda's mother who dies early in the story, yet whose fate continues to haunt Yolanda. It could also describe the Rat-Wives themselves or the myths and fairytales that haunt them. The narrative style is less mimetic than either 'Frostiana' or 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss'. It is told in a more fairy-tale style that reflects Yolanda's interest in her native folklore and its influence on her life, 'she read the Old Sagas and the new collections of fairy tales by Mr Andersen and Bishop Moe. She was surprised that her stepmother wasn't in them.'

Yolanda could be seen to create the story through her own interest in fairy-tales. As a child she reads about "poor girls changed by magic into princesses" by witches and the inevitable prince: this carries through into other sub-worlds – particularly the wish-worlds of the rats and the wish-world of Otto and Yolanda as she sings him into the sea. In the conclusion Yolanda enters the fairy-tale world when she finds that she is now in the story book.

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<sup>101</sup> Henrik Ibsen and others, *Plays: Six : Peer Gynt, the Pretenders*, (London: Methuen, 1987). p29 - 181

<sup>102</sup> Henrik Ibsen and others, *Plays*, (London: Methuen Drama, 1989). V1

<sup>103</sup> Professor Francis Bull quoted in Michael Levenson Meyer, *Ibsen*, (London: Cardinal, 1992, 1967). p290

Yolanda's first enemy, later her friend, is the Rat-King. A rat-king is actually the name given to a group of rats whose tails have become knotted together<sup>104</sup> however in 'Dísir on the *Langstrand*' the Rat-King is also King of the Rats and appears in an almost human form.

The mythic figures of the Rat-Wives emerge from their beach, the details of the landscape are lost in the background and attention is drawn to Yolanda and Mrs Bengard. The figures stand out from the rest of the world of the *Langstrand*. Cognitive studies of visual perception indicate that the mind turns the fragmentary perceptions into a narrative by conceptualising the world as figure and ground.<sup>105</sup>

The *Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* provides the following definition: [of] figure-ground phenomenon. [This is] The characteristic organization of perception into a figure that "stands out" against an undifferentiated background, e.g. a printed word against a background page. What is figural at any one moment depends on patterns of sensory stimulation and on the momentary interests of the perceiver.<sup>106</sup>

What captures the reader's attention is the figure that moves and acts on the beach not the witch-like rocks, the troll-caves, waves, sand, fish, driftwood, rat bones ('a million fragments of paper caught among the rock pools and sea-carved spikes, or the ruins of magnificent empires reduced to rubble by the sea.)

The Rat-Wife does not need to be completely seen to be perceived as separate from the *Langstrand* world. Just a hat and a bit of lace will do to indicate her presence. Just as a human body half hidden by a tree is not perceived as half a body but as an extension of a whole one. Fragmentary perceptions are reconstructed as belonging to a

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<sup>104</sup> Andrei Miljutin, 'Rat Kings in Estonia', 56 (2007)

<[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240640974\\_Rat\\_kings\\_in\\_Estonia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240640974_Rat_kings_in_Estonia)> [accessed 20/05/2019].

<sup>105</sup> Vyvyan Evans and Melanie J. Green, *Cognitive Linguistics : An Introduction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2006). p65

<sup>106</sup> Geert Brone and Jeroen Vandaele, *Cognitive Poetics : Goals, Gains and Gaps*, (Berlin ; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009). p238

whole if it is highlighted against a neutral ground. This tendency to perceive a group of parts as an organized whole is called gestalt.

Stockwell gives the following list of ways that a figure will be highlighted against a ground:

- it will be regarded as a self-contained object or feature in its own right, with well-defined edges separating it from the ground;
- it will be moving in relation to the static ground;
- it will precede the ground in time or space;
- it will be a part of the ground that has broken away, or emerges to become the figure;
- it will be more detailed, better focused, brighter, or more attractive than the rest of the field;
- it will be on top of, or in front of, or above, or larger than the rest of the field that is then the ground.<sup>107</sup>

The mind ‘wants’ to find completeness in forms. It fits together perceptions in a way that makes sense, we are primed to find meaning. In *Brain Fiction* William Hirstein, reflecting on confabulation, suggests that the mind is primed to construct narratives from partial information:

Presumably the brain engages in “coherencing” processes to facilitate its primary work: selection of actions from perceptions. Is it filling in gaps in memory similar to filling in the blind spot of the retina<sup>108</sup>

The rats that form the Rat-King act coherently to make a sort of man, as a man he can escape danger or destruction by fragmenting himself into a swarm of rats who then act independently – he loses his gestalt.

The Rat-King’s almost-handsome face took shape with its crown of tails wiggling above.  
“I am deeply hurt, Yolanda.”  
“I’ll give you hurt,” she said and hacked his body into quarters.

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<sup>107</sup> Stockwell. p15

<sup>108</sup> Hirstein. p6



Each quarter retreated to a different corner and fell apart into a hundred rats.

In that moment the Rat-King is no longer a figure – he has dissolved into the texture of the fragmentary background. When the Rat-Wife and Yolanda visit the Bjornsen shop the description contains a detailed inventory of the contents:

[...]spades, mattocks, and agricultural tools, sausages from Austria, spices from India, tins of green turtle soup, whalebone corsets, bottles of American patent medicine[...]

These fragments are not things that perform actions. They have a passive existence. A reader can gather clues as to the nature of the places and people but there is no figure and ground. Reuven Tzur describes how Ehrenzweig envisages a thing-free gestalt where nothing draws attention. He writes that ‘both in music and painting the combination of gestalts and gestalt-free qualities typically underlie the figure-ground phenomenon.’<sup>109</sup>

Ehrenzweig writes that it is possible to produce a surface where ‘the eye fails to pick out any stable gestalt pattern’<sup>110</sup> and uses the example of a woven cloth: ‘the single textile motif may be pleasant in itself, but it must never detach itself from the broader textural effect so as to become an isolated unit.’<sup>111</sup> He recognises that in certain circumstances these gestalt-free grounds may produce figures through spontaneous hallucinations (see page 41 and pages 73 to 74).

In *Texture*, Stockwell suggests that this gestalt-free effect applies to all areas of text which do not command attention.<sup>112</sup> The fragments produced by cut-up method may be equivalently patternless. Once our perceptual systems become convinced

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<sup>109</sup> Brone and Vandaele. p243

<sup>110</sup> Ehrenzweig. p98

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p99

<sup>112</sup> Stockwell. p22

of this, a reader will experience it only as a texture effect: it may become boring, or we may focus on the minutiae of the surface but will not perceive an overall figure and ground. In 'Frostiana':

[...]bright flags, signs, and statues. There is a plentiful supply of beer, of posset, and of gingerbread. Spits and fires are prepared, and animals are herded and penned, ready to slaughter, ready to roast[...]

This shows the typical effect of a piece of cut-up text and of non-cut up descriptive text in that attention does not settle on a particular object but moves from image to image – it remains fragmentary. Stockwell demonstrates this in relation to Surrealist poetry<sup>113</sup> “where complex figures and vague grounds are blended.”<sup>114</sup> For an item to be foregrounded it must command a reader’s attention in some way. In ‘*Dísir* on the *Langstrand*’ in Bjornsen’s shop:

Under the music came a scratching and a scraping and a squeaking. Grey forms eased themselves from their hiding places between sacks and crates, emerged from shadows and unseen corners, and uncoiled their bodies from holes and cracks in the wooden walls.

The rats draw attention to themselves by “moving in relation to the static ground.”<sup>115</sup> Later as Yolanda sings they form a single mass following the gestalt principle that objects following a similar trajectory will be perceived as part of a whole:

Following from the principles of Gestalt the better the shape, the more it tends to stand out as a figure and, less tautologically, there are rigorous principles that account for what makes a shape “better” or “worse”. Indeed, we always try to experience things in “as good a gestalt way as possible”.

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<sup>113</sup> Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen, *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*, (London: Routledge, 2003). p13-25

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p24

<sup>115</sup> Stockwell. p15

<sup>116</sup> Brone and Vandaele. p238

We want to find figures in random fragments: fragments are perceived as a whole if only their motion is in unity. In 'Frostiana' the kingdom is complete because it follows 'epicycles and complex deferents,' it is whole because it is moving in synchrony. In '*Dísir* on the *Langstrand*' the swarm of rats are so closely synchronised they form a whole being.

Mrs Bengard herself becomes more solid, more separate from the background as she moves through the narrative, accumulating detail. Just as each painting in 'Frostiana' adds to the total Gloriana, so each additional appearance by Mrs Bengard increases solidity. She begins as *Dísir*, a distant shadow out of a fairy-tale world, a witch who is 'dressed all in black finery' with a nose as long as a fire-poker. A few years later she appears as a model of nineteenth century respectability wearing 'her best black dress and lace collar and on her head an English lady's riding hat covered with a fine black veil.' This emphasises the difference in status between Yolanda's family and the Rat-Wife. Later when Yolanda is her apprentice she becomes someone very unprincess-like with a slightly surreal resemblance to a rat when 'her nose twitched behind her long grey whiskers.' And on hearing about the Rat-King she transforms into a Viking warrior 'so she, who had stooped a head shorter than Yolanda, was equal to her height. Mrs Bengard stretched out two long, well-muscled arms.' Finally she changes into a tourist in prohibition era New-York where 'She stepped out in the rain to wave down a taxi' and dies in a traffic accident. She is transformed from Witch to mother to warrior to a tourist and falls victim to the technological changes that threaten the Rat-Wives throughout the story.

The sequence of scenes puts flesh on the bones and fills out Ensor's empty dress, but the descriptions are each as different as the paintings in 'Frostiana'. In the development of the characters the whole story acts as the ground to the emerging figure.

This process fulfils the gestalt requirement of being ‘regarded as a self-contained object or feature in its own right.’ However it is the labelling of the characters in the scenes as ‘Mrs Bengard’ or ‘Gloriana’ that unites contradictory, or fragmentary images that produces the sense of a continuous entity, of a figure coming ever more into focus. In ‘Frostiana’ the process that led to the creation of ‘James’ followed a similar pattern. ‘James’ was originally a minor character and the main narrative focus was originally an apprentice, ‘Luke Crenel’, who witnesses the construction of Frostiana and is taken away (much like Kay in Andersen’s *Snow Queen*<sup>117</sup>). Descriptions of Gloriana and of the outdoor scenes were retained in the story but ‘Luke’s place taken by ‘James’.

It is not just the spirits of Yolanda’s dead parents and the ten thousand years of former Rat-Wives who inhabit the beach. Many other *Dísir* haunt the *Langstrand*. There is the ghostly presence of several Ibsen plays. Most obviously *Little Eyolf*, but also *Rosmersholm*<sup>118</sup> (1886) where a supernatural white horse appears as a portent of death and *The Lady from the Sea*<sup>119</sup> (1888) in which the central character, Ellida, like Yolanda waits for her lover to return, and like Yolanda when he does finds she has other loyalties. I have explored this further in the final story in this series, ‘Eve Last’.

The *Langstrand* beach is, like ‘Frostiana’, haunted by previous iterations of cut-ups and by other images of witches and rats and the grim waters of a dark fjord. Within the texts fossils left behind by this process are occasionally identifiable as originating in cut-up method such as the phrase ‘witch-pitch and green salt’ but more often earlier iterations that existed ‘midway between music and noise’ remain concealed by the process of their re-writing.

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<sup>117</sup> H. C. Andersen, *Andersen's Fairy Tales*, (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1993). p188-217

<sup>118</sup> Ibsen and others V3 p31 - 112

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. V3 p127 - 212

## 5.1 The Architect of Putrefaction

### *Département*

Moonflower sits at the window as the train flies past mining towns and camps and coalfields, rushes through passes where the track is carved into cliffs of granite or limestone, and speeds down tunnels cut through black basalt and pale marble.

His companion in the carriage introduces himself as Jimson and leans close to him and says, “I’m glad we’ll be away from these dismal forests and vile mountains. I have spent too long with my father selling his medicine. Too long travelling to the barbaric villages, avoiding superstitious priests, and selling good health to the hopeless, dull farmers who scratch in the dust. My father told me I could make a fortune in the city.”

The railway twists and zigzags; it rises and falls in the shadow of summits where snow and ice never melt; some shine white and heavenly in the sun; some are shrouded in grey mist and blue-black cloud.

“Wait until you see the wonderful city!” says Jimson, “there will be glass and steel cathedrals, domes of crystal that shelter lush pleasure gardens; there will be arcades and squares and apartments of marble; fantastic statues that line broad avenues where a man may be a man, where a citizen may grow and flourish. Civilization awaits us! Golden towers filled with wonders stretching to the sky, golden towers where men who have made themselves angels fly so much closer to heaven than the peasants in the countryside.”

The train rattles on tracks laid along a clearway cut through countless dark pine trees and Moonflower blows his nose and wipes the homesick tears from his eyes, "Is the city such a place?"

"You will see," says Jimson straightening Moonflower's tie; he leans closer still, and although the carriage is otherwise empty, whispers confidentially in Moonflower's ear, "It is that place where a man may make his fortune, become a king, rise from the gutter, burn like the sun and glitter like the stars. We will illuminate the world so that our names will live forever in the memory of the generations that follow."

Moonflower rests his head on the shoulder of Jimson's grey woollen suit and sinks into a deep sleep; when he wakes he has dreamed of the new world; he presses his nose to the grimy window and hopes for a sight of the city; but is disappointed by an endless vista of soggy, smudged pine trees washing past in the rain.

He opens his suitcase and takes out a cold pie that was baked for the journey by his mother; crumbs from the pastry fall and scatter over the carriage floor among dust-balls and cigarette ash.

Moonflower offers half to Jimson. Jimson takes his piece and clasps Moonflower's hand as his eyes grow moist with gratitude, "Oh, true friend, true friend and brother," Jimson says and hugs Moonflower close and he squeezes from Moonflower the memory of home and the station and the sunlight. It fades away in the steam and smoke of the locomotive rushing them towards their futures.

The birdsong that fluttered in his heart is replaced by the geometric chug of the engine, the smell of cows and meadows and the apple trees is overwhelmed by the smoky grown-up atmosphere of the carriage, by the cosy companionship of Jimson. Home and past memory are submerged in the soot and ash that blows around the tracks and embankments and viaducts. The world is a steel carriage filled with his brother Jimson's good humour.

With his tie unclipped and collar loosened, Jimson chatters between mouthfuls of Mother's mutton pie; he talks of the great future in the city. Moonflower's heart is kindled by the possibilities before him, by the life to come, by their ambition and hope. He repeats, "Oh golden towers stretching to the sky; golden towers filled with wonders, golden towers where angels fly."

Jimson nods enthusiastically and the rattle of the wheels on the track carries them away from the mountains across the plains towards Jimson's vast city that spreads around a sweet blue river. Where, Jimson says, green gardens burst with scented flowers ordered and nurtured by municipal gardeners. Where everything is clean and modern and the nights sparkle with electric light; where the days are filled with speed and energy and material abundance.

"We could go into partnership," says Jimson, "the city is full of opportunity."

Outside the window, hillsides slump and valleys sag; undulating landscapes flatten into pancake farmlands and marshes and copses. Smoke and soot flow by the greasy fly-stained glass.

"We should go into construction," says Jimson, "We must build, build fine towers, houses, temples, build often, build broad, and build tall. The city always needs buildings and builders... it is how it grows. We shall design its future and in designing its future leave monuments to our genius behind."

The relentless trees lose their colour and crouch and cower hunchbacked under the stony sky; blacker grow the fields and woods; more eroded and broken the hills. The buildings become more corroded, yet more fantastically constructed. Mills rise above the earth with turrets and tall black chimneys and houses with a hundred minarets and spikes and spears emerge from groves of stunted oak. Beneath the soiled finery of their ornament, the bones of the buildings are twisted; beneath the reluctant flesh of brick and stone the frames are warped, the foundations distorted, the structures are, perhaps,

wilfully misshapen. Moonflower's eyelids close and the rocking of the carriages and the cosy warmth of the compartment lull him into sleep.

### *Arrivée*

Once Moonflower floated formless; the formlessness was all thousness. He was a dust-cloud that swirled in perfect entropy around a vast golden cosmos; but in his perfection two little I's blinked giving a certain lop-sidedness to the universe of light and joy; the dust clumped and gathered ever more material to itself; the thou became an imperfect I and you, the you and I opened an eye; the eye-opened basks in the golden radiance of the infinite sky. The I-eye condensed irrevocable from the noon-tide world; the blink of the eye's flickering lids ticked past tense, present tense, future tense. Sixty tenses a minute by minute building eternity in ticks. Time parcelled out in mean little heartbeats as the stars swirled around him burning and dying and returning to dust. Every six drips of mean-time a convulsion squeezed, and crushed Moonflower. He was carried on wave after wave growing heavier in the new found force of gravity. There was a muscular contraction that crushed him, his head squeezed by a crown of elastic flesh; he was near drowned in the spurt of red blood, of mucous, in a river of shit and piss. He gasped and suffocated and choked. He expelled foul water from his bursting lungs. He was left howling and bloody and naked beneath the dirty cobwebbed ceiling of a dusty farmhouse.

The midwife lifted him in rough hands, she took white rags and wiped blood and mucous away leaving him fresh and new in the unforgiving world.

The kettle boiled on the wood fire and a goat swivelled its head; the coarse Cardinal de Richelieu-beard on its aristocratic chin quivered; its golden serpent-eyes were meek and sweet and calm. Each hair of the beard was woven with the smell of sap and grass, of meadows, and of course, of goats. Here was the goat, among green hedgerows,



yellow irises, mother's milk, perspiration, and orchards filled with the buzz of wasps and piles of lushly overripe, rotting fruit.

### *Arrondissement*

The universe of light and joy is ahead now with Jimson, not behind with Moonflower's family. His eyes are wide, awaiting the wonder of the golden towers. The train brakes and grinds through limbo; they travel forever through a grey purgatory filled with vaguely hellish shadows hidden in the grey atmosphere until at last the wheels slip and squeal beneath the brake and white sparks shower the empty grey platform that curves away into a fog of grey dust.

"A fine city day," says Jimson, "you can smell that money in the air."

"It stinks like a dead goat; where are the golden towers?"

"Oh, up above the dust," says Jimson airily waving an elegant hand at the billowing clouds, "they will be revealed in time."

A muffled man waits layered in cloth, wrapped against the dust in muslin and linen; his soiled leather shoes squeak on the grey stones of the platform. The well-wrapped man approaches with his footfall dead and flat; resonance and echoes die in the dusty air. Other lonely figures wait like Moonflower and Jimson in their church-clothes with suit-cases clutched in their hands. They are all on the platform waiting for their futures and one by one the muffled one gathers them to him.

"Come on," says Jimson, "he is the master who will lead us to our future."

Jimson takes Moonflower by the arm and they confidently follow him past the unmanned, abandoned ticket barrier. The ghosts of buildings waver in the grey atmosphere; what first appeared as a solid stone cornice dematerialises and melts. Headlights shine in the dust like golden angels descending from heaven; the nimbus gently illuminates the dust that entwines its living filaments like cotton wool, candyfloss,

and spider's webs. A darker grey against the grey is unveiled; a truck washed black with city-grime, corrosion and oil-smoke.

“Everybody, get in the back,” says the muffled one. The engine splutters and they bounce over cobbles and potholes until their bones shake and their teeth rattle. The exhaust pipe belches black fumes which are sucked up by the greedy dust that grows blacker. A tarpaulin provides poor shelter from the dust and they muffle themselves as best they can. The other boys introduce themselves as Marshbird, Stumpskin, and Leveridge. Through holes and tatters they glimpse spectral buildings and the dust-bound city. They pass villainous houses and unhealthy streets; out of the swirling soupy atmosphere emerge beggars, poverty; wagon-drivers, rag tailors; politicians, vendors of tea, and sellers of compressed coal; there are seamstresses, republicans, and monks and priests in black birettas; there are revolutionaries, royalists, and Cardinal de Richelieu with his coarse goatee beard and eyes like a gentle golden snake; the cardinal is selling second hand hats from a handcart.

Through the strands of cold dust, the ornateness of a fantastical theatre looms with flashing neon, the building lunges into the roadway so overwrought with organic detail that it threatens to collapse in an orgy of chiaroscuroed decadence.

“A marvellous building,” says Moonflower, “We should make many like it.”

The truck's engine sputters and the suspension bounces. The apprentices are flung together compelled by their own gravity as the truck takes a sharp left; Moonflower, Jimson, Marshbird, Stumpskin, and Leveridge extract themselves from a tangle of their own limbs.

The grey cloud thins to display the endless facades of soot-black buildings fading to grey in the invisible heights. Before him the road is unrolling; unrolling, unrolling like a greedy grey tongue.

“What is your future going to be?” asks Stumpskin.

Jimson looks out at the stone bridges that rise in arcs, flying as stone should not fly, across a river that boils with the dust. “Engineering!” he says, “I am going to become an engineer. The future is in industry; in the mechanisation of mills and factories, in discoveries made in laboratories. In the future, machines will bring mankind a life of ease, security, and wealth. Machines will bring dominion over lands and worlds and stars. We will build ships that will carry us far away beyond these confining skies; ever higher, ever onward, ever beyond...”

“Beyond what?”

“Beyond ourselves, beyond our limitations. Beyond these earthly skies of grey that trap us here in a world of decay; we must rise to immortality among the stars. Only in the stars will our futures be secure, all we have done, all we will be or have been will then be forever.”

“That sounds marvellous,” says Stumpskin.

“Yes,” says Leveridge, “we could fly away from here.”

“The knowledge is there,” says Jimson, “all it takes is for us to have the will. To grasp this future. Do you have the will my brothers?”

The brothers agree that they do indeed have the will, but Moonflower asks, “What about buildings; what about rising like the sun here in the city?”

“This is rising, have you no vision? Through engineering, through science there is no limit, what is an architect compared with an engineer? We can build an empire, leave behind this small world. You should all join me, Stumpskin, Marshbird, Leveridge, and Moonflower. We will build the trains, the bridges, the tunnels beneath the earth, the wings to fly like angels in the heavens high.”

“What about me?” asks Moonflower, “what about our plan?”

“It is all one plan!” He takes both Stumpskin and Moonflower by their hands, “Oh brothers, I shall never forsake you, it is our fu...”

They tumble forward as the brakes squeal and the truck halts. They all land in an ungainly pile of tangled apprentice limbs and baggage. From the grey dusty air, the fat cherubs and vines of another baroque theatre swell encrusted with opulence. An abundance of decoration tangles with bright pools of artificial light. The neon signs illuminate and flash the message: *Théâtre de Pompions!* Arkenholz! Tonight! Somewhere within the gilded foliage and twisted forests of carved stone a tuba farts out a bass two-four and a drum beats at a merry pace.

“Listen,” says Jimson, “a show, a circus, a hullabaloo. Come on you lads, let’s go.”

“But the job?” asks Stumpskin.

“Our kingdom?” asks Marshbird.

“It is our opportunity,” says Jimson.

“What sort of opportunity?” asks Moonflower.

“We must take our chance, brave the whim of the crowd, trust our talent; our own genius, perhaps we will find fame, perhaps, lads, we will find a rich mistress, who will cast her gold at our feet, make us dukes or princes or kings, the stage awaits. Come!”

“The engineering – the golden towers – our future in the stars?” wonders Leveridge.

“Now or never,” says Jimson and throws his suit case and any other luggage he can get his hands on from the back of the truck. He follows the misappropriated trunks and submerges in the formless grey dust. The truck lurches forward again and Moonflower is alone with the strangers and without his suitcase.

The iron skeleton of a tower rises rusting among broken Grecian temples and Roman palaces. They traverse *boulevards* long as a canon shot, wide as a battery of field guns.

Grand iron gates open to admit them in the greyness; their bars are wrought with decorative vines and their tops are obscured high above. Vague suggestions of mountains emerge and recede in the boiling dust-cloud. The remaining apprentices huddle together for warmth. Moonflower recoils from the others' unpleasantly moist skin with its suggestion of too-soft rottenness beneath. But finds he must return to their intimacy or freeze.

"He has gone then, gone to build the future, an architect, an engineer, an emperor."

Moonflower, Marshbird, Stumpskin, and Leveridge step down from the truck knowing they will never be like Jimson, never so alive, never so filled with the future.

Another muffled master looks them up and down, "I am Munderbold and you are my apprentices. Bring your bags." Munderbold beckons them to follow.

"Sorry, we lost them," says Moonflower.

"Are you going to teach us to be engineers?" asks Stumpskin.

"Soldiers?" says Marshbird.

"Scientists?" asks Leveridge.

"Look about you," says Munderbold, "do you see furnaces, lathes presses or forges? Tanks, aeroplanes, battleships? Laboratories, rockets, bathyspheres?"

Around them is only dust, only decaying buildings, only the walls of brick and stone dimly looming in the thick grey dust-heaps: mounds and mountains, fog banks and towers, oceans and rivers and hills all made of dust. A thousand shades of grey, a thousand soft-grained textures.

"These are the Dust-Yards," says Munderbold.

He wraps his woollen coat tighter and laughs, "You are to be dust-gatherers. I will make you masters of dust in ten years, twenty years, who knows? Dust is full of mystery:

it is all and it is nothing...Who can truly master dust? Perhaps you will be apprentices forever?"

Moonflower weeps.

There is a whole long winter and he spends it working and studying in the cold dust. The cold dust greys his skin; the cold dust gets in his eyes so they bulge too tight in their sockets. He is put to learning dust and his brain hurts from the days spent grading and sorting it. Influenza sweeps through the Dust-Yards like a winter frost and does not spare him, so each day is slow, cold agony as his bone-joints ache and muscles turn to withered scraps of dead meat. Moonflower cannot last long. As night falls and the cold penetrates deep into his heart. Moonflower is so exhausted by his work and the illness that as his eyes slip shut he is grateful that he will not wake again.

The arrival of the morning is a bitter disappointment. Marshbird has crept close to him in the night and their combined warmth has saved him. He curses Marshbird but they are disturbed by the noise of distant construction: the roar of engines and crash of bricks. More walls are rising; the domain of the Dust-Yards is being extended out across the city. Moonflower shivers; his bones are filled with ice, his flesh already cold dust. Marshbird is also cadaverous and sick; together they creep through the dim coldness of the dust piles in search of a cooking fire to huddle by. Instead of a fire they find Stumpskin curled in his sleeping-hole covered in a thin layer of white frost; the ice-crystals have seeped from the ground and hold him down like greedy fingers: Stumpskin is jammed tight into his hole with hoarded rags he has used as insulation. His mouth hangs open with a worm of frozen fluid on his lips. Stumpskin is grey and stiff as an old boot. Marshbird hesitates a moment but Moonflower pulls Stumpskin from his burrow.

"Another layer, another coat might save us from the cold."

He breaks the frozen arms from the sleeves and the joints crack and skin bruises. Marshbird joins him, breaking the dead boy from his clothes, and takes the jacket and shirts and trousers. Moonflower acquires a new coat.

Later as the darkness of night merges with the dimness of the day, the two apprentices huddle together for warmth under the newly acquired rags. Their skin is glazed with sickness and they shiver as they merge in unconsciousness.

The day begins and they separate from their union under the insulating dust. Muffled in the solitude of the dead air, the road unrolls before them like a greedy grey tongue. They follow the path through the dust piles to a smoky fire where a pot boils.

Mrs Stone bakes grey bread and grey boiled meat over her fire of dusty wood. Moonflower creeps closer to thaw his fingers near the yellow flames. The iron pot bubbles and Mrs Stone dips into it with an enormous iron spoon and dishes out their portions of grey soup. Moonflower eats his boiled meat and stale bread with the other apprentices. Mrs Stone has three grey-faced daughters. The apprentices compare their charms and calculate their chances.

### *Amour*

Little Moonflower wanted to crawl back; back into the swirling shapeless oneness and away from awareness. The goat looked through the open window. The golden sweet-serpent eye of the goat drew him with the promise of return to those summer afternoons. He basked reflected in the still eye of the goat. In the warm summer nights he slept close to the warm goaty smell of the Cardinal, who was stabled just beyond his window, in an old stone courtyard.

A few years later Moonflower had eaten and absorbed matter and excreted matter and retained some of the flow of matter through him and so grown. This taller Moonflower chased Cardinal de Richelieu as he trotted off towards the

church. Moonflower giggled as he ran through the leaves swirling in the summer dust, brown dust blown from the fields, black dust blown from the forests, yellow dust blown from the corn. Time was disclosed in the movement of fauna, the growth and death of the flora and the circling of the astronomical dust clouds glinting in the radiance of the hot yellow sun.

The goat, de Richelieu, sat with its yellow eyes full of calm goodness, full of holy love. Moonflower sat close and felt its warm flesh pulse beneath his fingers. The skin under the hair was delicate and woven with beautiful networks of lacy veins and marbled capillaries. He put a hand on its shoulder and felt that beneath the delicate silky skin there was a solid lump of muscle and warm beating heart.

Father found them sat together; father smiled at Moonflower and patted de Richelieu's head. Father beckoned him to follow. Moonflower followed father and the Cardinal trotted after him into the barn. Father absent-mindedly rubbed the back of the goat's neck. Affectionately father ruffled the coarse red hairs and scratched behind the ears. The air splintered and the good sweet-gold serpent-eyes filled with red. Father had an iron mallet in his hand. He swung the limp de Richelieu-goat from the floor; he held the back legs and drew a noose about the fine thin ankles and about the dainty hooves. Red cascaded into a tin bucket as Father slid a sharp blade across the warm white skin of the pulsing throat. A red smile as deep as the spine hung open under the de Richelieu beard...

### *République*

Moonflower is a good student: what else can he be when the choice is either study or dust and, for him, they are one and the same? In his study of dust he learns his craft well; he learns to catch the dust and hold it; he learns to sort the grains, granules, and



fragments; the scraps, shreds, and particles; the flotsam, jetsam, and finely worn sand blown thousands of miles from the distant deserts of Morocco and China and Old Cockaigne-by-the-Sea.

With the years the hard, rough walls of the yard grow smooth as glass under the abrasion of wind-blown dust. New walls are built further and further out from the original Dust-Yard and where once there was a city the rage of vagrant matter dissolves the streets. The roads run as palimpsests between the high mounds that cover the broken and worn-down buildings. The flow of unbound substance loosens the mortar and erodes the stuff of the city; it even smoothes the faces of the marble statues; it wears heroes and politicians and saints to anonymity.

Mr Munderbold is long buried and Moonflower is the new master of the dust piles; Moonflower watches over the grey-faced dreary cohorts of Marshbirds and Leveridges as they work through the dim, daylight hours; he supervises the separation of the different grades and qualities of dust beneath the constant low ceiling of the grey sky.

Moonflower suffers the wear and tear of the years: the days that make him wise in the art of dust also rot his hair and teeth and clothes; the days stain his skin with ingrained dust so he seems tattooed with a panorama of his world. The dust-mounds shudder with infestations of life, grey goats burrow into the ground, crawl beneath the surface making an omnivorous feast of the raw dust; their shaggy coats in turn provide environments rich with unwieldy accumulations of ticks and crawling ash-coloured lice. A grey lizard slithers beneath the dust, it breaks the surface and skips over dunes to snatch a meal of lice from the coat of a sleeping goat. Everywhere fat grey worms churn the dust, and something hidden spits a half-digested goat-head over a grey bank that is littered with sunken bones.

At night, as Moonflower sleeps, moths fall from the darkness and lay their eggs on his coat; the larvae hatch and grow as do the holes in the fine cloth. Then he sleeps again

and the pupa crawl from his holed finery and chew at the ends of his hair. He wakes yet more ragged than the day before. So it goes on day after day and year after endless, dusty year.

Ragged, dusty Master Moonflower has many tools to gather and separate the dust from the mound, to sort it into its constituents. In his clever fingers he holds a pair of elongated tweezers: at the pivot of sprung steel they are a half-inch broad, but its metal toes taper to foot long talons fine as whiskers; fine enough to pick a thousandth of a fragment; to grade dust and pass it through a measure to ascertain its geometry, to finely calibrate its constituent particles.

The barrowmen come and wheel the dust away each week bagged and labelled for the many industries that need dust: the finest grade dusty mica for paint; organic dust for filling out the bread, the deepest coal-black for printer's ink; smooth hard grains for the lubrication of book pages, sharp grains of flint dust for polishing the swords of officers, dust made of tiny diamonds for grinding watch parts and polishing lenses.

He has many apprentices, wealth, and many new appetites: he has the choicest sleeping hole in the most sheltered spot of the wall. He has traded his mastery of dust for a comfortable life. When the dust is sorted more dust settles; there is no end to the source of his wealth.

Moonflower sits with his sorting board and bags; in his eye is fixed a jeweller's ring; the multiple lenses magnify the many grades and qualities of dust as he sorts them faster than he can think. A wind gusts and swirls a cloud up into the air. The cloud falls back to the ground but unsettles the equilibrium of the dust pile, and an avalanche tumbles in silent clouds and obscures the valley where Moonflower sits. The apprentices cough and splutter, they vomit grey liquid and sicken; but Moonflower carries on savouring the

dust's flavours on his palate as he rolls it around his mouth and puffs it out like pipe-smoke into the air.

At night he steps out alone in the dim orange light of the dusty moon. In the night there are shadows among the dust where the absintheurs and opium eaters, actors and whores, fakirs, wolf-saints, devil-worshippers, motor mechanics, and prophets of the Great God Lop-Lop resurrect the ruins of the theatres and brothels, of museums and music-halls and morgues. They emerge from daytime hibernation; each of them insulated against the other by the night. Moonflower is safe from the jealousy of his inferiors surrounded by a halo of darkness, safe too from the malice of the rival masters of dust, who spread their own empires of industry ever further across the rotting city.

On his fiftieth birthday Moonflower makes a day's journey through the endless walls and dust hills to a district where the remains of a great ironwork tower poke like dead twigs from the ground and a thin, bitter silence itches among grey flowers. The flowers in the dust sink parched roots ever deeper but can never find a purchase in the loose substance of the mounds. The grey blooms sit on the dunes attached to endless trailing roots. Moonflower tries to pluck a blossom for a buttonhole but it dissolves away and crumbles back to dust. The disintegration spreads through the network of roots far into the distance.

In the shadow of an impossible arch spanning a gulf from nowhere to oblivion are the remains of the *Théâtre de Pompions*. Its chiaroscuro rubble of faked marble gains a new patina from the growth of patchy mould and lichen; in daylight the fallen *Putti* holding books and quills and masks are reduced to rotting plaster: wings broken, gilding tarnished, and eyes blind.

The fading of the grey day transforms the baroque ruin and the great play in the theatre of night begins: off the stage a company of grotesques, an association of the night

people made bold, and beautiful, and stranger than ever under the stars that shine greenly through the dusty air. Now on Midsummer's Eve, he finds a performance underway before an audience of monstrous angels half-eaten by the great worm of time.

In the moonlight, in the candlelight, in the dusty starlight a wanderer moves so nobly across the ruins of the stage, among fallen *Putti* whose eyes follow and wings quiver; he mimes an adventure among the disintegrating architecture of an ancient empire, columns and ruins of the rarest marble; marble that lives and grows and transforms itself into forests and mountains and herds of goats wandering in a green land.

The actor wraps himself in a repurposed velvet drape among broken scenery. He stands so imperial in his gorgeous robe and places a plaster crown upon his head, that once in place, sparkles with precious firefly-jewels. He picks a rotting goat-head from the ground and declares to the gracious skull of the tragic Cardinal in his hand.

“Have you noticed,” he says confidentially to the dead de Richelieu, “How the restless dust makes molehills of mountains and mountains of mole-hills.”

He turns, “Do you think?” he asks the crowd, “if within the dust is the seed of possibility: to dust a king might fall but from dust a king might rise, to dust the world has crumbled but from dust a new world may come. Oh, who would be the mad golden fire that forges that world!”

The audience, the mob, the monsters, the inconstant-harlequins, and constant-columbines; the low-tragedians, and the lizard-queens and goat-heroes shout as one, “I, I will forge the new world.”

They cheer and clap and follow the ragged figure in a strange hullabaloo. They make a carnival and take a mad gambol jiggling and skipping between the buildings; Moonflower would follow, but he has the Dust-Yard to tend in the morning. Moonflower is left without company now in the lonely night.

## *Révolution*

Moonflower is a master alone, a castaway on the shore of an island of fine dust. The sea of grey silence ripples like mist and envelops him, washes over him. His tribe, his nation, his people pay their respects to him. More dust falls and must be swept into the piles for sorting. Dust is delivered and removed on carts and trucks and trailers; and new apprentices are brought for induction into the ever expanding world of dust.

After another winter new men come to the yard, they stride certain and solid across the world of the Dust-Gatherers and declare themselves prophets of an empire. One prophet stands before him taller and healthier than any man he has seen since he was a child, more angel than human, he seems.

“I am the envoi of the kingdom after the dust,” the voice reaches to him across the gulf of the years and a hand is stretched out over a chasm of time to save him. “Believe it,” say the strong fingers that grasp his hand. Certainty infiltrates his heart, infects him with hope.

The golden universe will return! The others come at the prophet’s call from the dust piles: thin men from the grey dust; fat bakers from their fires; the bitter citizens who would be revenged, the sad citizens with no-hope in a future beyond the dust, and those like Moonflower; who had once tasted hope and had liked the taste and wanted more.

He accommodates the prophets, provides them with goats and bread and the grey soup of the Dust-Yards. But the apprentices are too-full with hope, too eager for their future. The apprentices are restless, “Now,” they say; “now our liberator comes.”

And they leave their work undone so the dust blows away unsorted, unexploited, untamed. The apprentices are filled with righteousness and fear; the fear which smells very much like the sweat of men who had recently eaten the meat of a goat.

“No more,” say the new men, “no more masters who take more than their just share. We shall all be brothers: equal citizens and together build a future for all.”

A thin apprentice, one of his old friend Leveridge's brood, eyes Master Moonflower, "No more masters!" young Leveridge shouts.

They gather around him feral and unleashed. He is jostled and pushed, torn and overthrown. Young Leveridge slips a rope around Master Moonflower's neck and the apprentices drag him forwards for judgement, for justice, for execution.

"To the Emperor," they say.

The Emperor waits for him in his gorgeous robe and with a crown upon his head that sparkles with precious jewels of firefly-light.

"Jimson?" says Moonflower.

"He is the Emperor," says a prophet forcing him to kneel.

Jimson is there to judge him. Jimson sits on an old stone covered with a goatskin. This older Jimson; this Emperor Jimson, has guards and a goat skull on a pole as his standard. Jimson, the youth who ran away into the dust, is fattened and muscled, filled by the prayers and fervour of saints, filled with imperial sanctity.

"Moonflower, my old friend," he says, "what have you become? What have you done? What crime have you committed against these good citizens of the world to come?"

"I have given them work, given them food, given them shelter," says Moonflower.

"You have oppressed them," says Jimson, "kept them from their freedom beyond the dust, bound them in chains of reason, built walls to hold them captive."

The apprentices cheer. "Hang him," they shout.

Others object, "Hanging is too good," they yell.

Others argue with them all, "Hanging is not good enough," they say.

"Death is too merciful," says Jimson with a wink, "he shall make amends, he shall serve the people, serve the soldiers, serve you, the conquerors of the world."

The apprentices release him and Emperor Jimson gives him a goat-cart to drive, to transport the victuals and supplies for the army. And though he is a convicted oppressor of the people they walk together through the dust and ruins.

“Our conquest is almost complete,” says Jimson, “the whole city is nearly ours. We will cast down the old world, the old masters that have ground everything to dust and build a new kingdom here, such as we dreamed of when we were young.”

“The golden towers, the ships to the stars?” says Moonflower.

“Yes, we shall make those dreams real; once we have conquered, once we torn down the old world, then we can build a new one.”

Moonflower follows the army in his cart drawn by eight goats and loaded with bright new weapons. They march upon the city; among dunes where the tips of old buildings are visible beneath the rolling grey hills of dust swirling in the yards. They march through the deep dust from yard to yard.

Moonflower shakes his head; how could he have been so wrong – to pursue a life among the dust when Jimson held this brighter future. He raises high the battle flags and goat skull-standards; he beats the goat-skin drum and blows a goat’s horn trumpet as he drives the cart filled with bright weapons.

A signal comes that the Dust-Masters, the monsters who have corrupted the golden paradise have been sighted and the cart is emptied of its supplies by the smiling and excited recruits. Each citizen picks a weapon, all equal in the ranks of Jimson’s army.

The multitude is armed with spades and spikes, swords and pikes, bardiches and glaive-guisarmes, shotguns and rifles, muskets and machine guns, and sharp flint hand-axes. They assemble in a phalanx upon the plains of dust with the Emperor Jimson at their head; Jimson in his velvet robe kindles their hope for a brighter future together. They sing in their deepest counter tenors and sweetest contraltos as they march, men and women,

youths and aged dotards, with a heroic song resounding in a thousand voices strong and unified.

The phalanx wheels in the distance. Moonflower plays his part tending his goat cart but wishes himself with them. If only he were there marching shoulder to shoulder with his brothers and sisters; if only he were joined in one with a glorious fighting machine engineered by the great Emperor Jimson. The sisters and brothers in arms march raising clouds of dust high into the air; they step together locked in time; as they march their feet fall in rhythm and fall in rhyme. Brothers and sisters joined together beat a regular stomp, as they traverse valley and hill to battle. They march two by two sisters and brothers together. And marching towards them in turn is the mindless and implacable enemy; the Dust-Master's fighters approach in their fine grey uniforms with bright sabre's drawn. Faster, faster then they charge; a trot turns to a canter to a sprint to a headlong rush and the two masses collide. For a moment they both halt, hold still in a stalemate, the rear ranks piling into those before. Then they bend their spines and lean forward with the pressure building as their boots struggle for traction in the dust.

First Jimson's men push the enemy back a yard; then the enemy pushes Jimson's back to where they started, maybe even a foot beyond. A man falls at the front and the two phalanxes are enmeshed. The two bodies of combatants lose their precise geometry in the melee as the merging ranks spill red across the grey. All day they are locked together in the teeth of the meat-grinder or man-grinder, scattering a trail of bloody mince across the dust.

The battle subsides consumed in its own bright steel teeth leaving the remains tarnished and incarnadine. At sunset only two fighters stand and these two hack slowly at each other with broken axes: they slow in the twilight and sink to their knees in the darkness.



The wind blows through the night's dead soft silence. The armies' bones bleach overnight and their flesh becomes dust. The bones crumble in the abrasive wash and flow; the ebb and advance of the dust.

In the rising sun a shadow approaches across the dust: it is the Emperor Jimson without his army. Jimson drops the ragged velvet curtain of the emperor-manqué from his shoulders and casts away the plaster crown. He is lost in his victory, in his defeat, in his loss of army and enemy alike.

"There is no one left. No one to build the future," says Moonflower.

"But I remember we had a past: as a child I ran free in green woods and fields and a golden sun warmed me. We shall leave the City and feel again the exhilaration of flight into the unknown of adventure; all will be joy as it was when we travelled here," says Jimson bandaging a wound on his arm and producing a smart travelling hat.

### *Départ*

The green world of home grew into a pale shadow of the golden primordial one, yet still it was a marvel. He trudged through the streets already slightly dusty, waded through fields of corn in the summer, lay in the cool meadows of spring where goats grazed all looking like French cardinals and dancing like French kings. On the lush pastures square bodied cows grazed growing fat through the summer; and in the hill-fields sheep were herded, their backs so close they formed a single woolly mass. His days were spent running and playing in the acorn woods where pigs were staked on long chains to forage.

On a fine summer morning a dusty cloud grew in the distance and metal glittered in the sun. Along that wide road from the mountains the gleaming worm of a railway grew piece by piece. There was a distant noise. Moonflower opened his ears to let it in but it was obscured by the rustle of the wind. Brighter grew the metal's gleam and dustier the

air. Explosions shook the mountains and startled the goats and with the wind came a great hammering; trees fell before the advance and rocks crumbled and split beneath hammers. Hoards of navigators wound through the valley. Twin snakes of steel track slid after them laid upon stones broken from the hills and timbers cut from the forests.

Following the tracks came the train that steamed through the valley depositing its bright packages of goods taking its loads of passengers away to the city. Government men came in dark uniforms and told them, "A better life awaits," they said, "a better life in the city, jobs in the factories."

At first hundreds of trains passed. They roared through the valley, their thunder echoing through the mountains. The villages emptied and the flow of bright goods diminished. A few of the Government Men remained and the goats ran feral through the hills. The pigs reverted to the habits of their wild ancestors and so too those few remaining families reverted to their ancestral habits. He learned to hunt rather than farm. Still, a few long black trains stopped and a family at a time left the village so, at last, only Moonflower with his mother and father remained with the old priest and a fat lazy officer in a moth-eaten black uniform. Still Moonflower ran and played in the sun and dust of his village until at last the government man sat with father over a mug of home-brewed beer and said it was Moonflower's turn to leave.

His parents walked him down the road in the sunlight through the thickening dust. In the distance a cloud of smoke and steam rose high into the clear sky and a whistle blew. When they came to the dusty, ill maintained station a train waited eagerly smoking and steaming.

"You are going to the city, there is nothing left for you here." said his father with his greying beard, with sadness and death in his eyes.

"You will write, won't you?" said his mother wiping a tear and straightening his clip-on tie.

“You will be a good boy” said the village priest who, like the goat, resembled Cardinal de Richelieu.

“Come on,” said the uniformed guard, leaning down from the train, “we’re ten minutes late already.”

### *L'empire*

Moonflower and Jimson make their slow way through the city, through the dust and the buildings that seemed so magnificent when they arrived. Now they crumble before them. Jimson is sick and his wound smells bad. Moonflower wraps a blanket around him and the goat-cart slews and skids along the trail. There are looted treasures discarded in the empty streets that the Emperor Jimson’s army had carved through the city of dust-yards, and there are a few living goats grazing among the skittering lizards in the flats of the dead sea of dust. The air clears a little as they leave the city and behind them mad towers of iron rise high in a swirling dust cloud.

“Goodbye golden towers, farewell the mighty bridges that span the blue waters of the great river,” says Jimson.

Though the air is clearer the dust grows thicker on the ground. They find a small town and a station fallen into ruins. The tracks are buried under dust too deep to be shunted aside. The rotted body of a train lies broken and twisted under a mountain of debris like a dead caterpillar curled in the dust. The wooden carriages are eaten away by woodworm and dry rot, wet rot and death-watch. The beetles tick in the last fragments of wood and red rust swells and splits the green paint on the engine. Streams of red mix with the grey dust of the plain. Branches like buried fingers break the surface twisted with a weird rheumatism of tree-bone.

Moonflower lets the goats rest and Jimson wanders among the carriages. He returns with a dead lizard to cook over the fire. The sun is red in the dust. The world is crimson beneath the swirl of the sky.

“I have found some friends, colleagues to join us on our great adventure,” says Jimson, “come I will show you.”

Moonflower follows him, still eating the cooked lizard. Jimson leads him to the train. The dining car is full of people; they sit at the table, grey figures softly coated with the silent dust. Moonflower tries to wipe the dust away from one grey lady but it goes all the way down to the bone, and the bone itself crumbles to nothing under his touch.

“Citizens of dust,” says Jimson, “let me lead you to a better world.”

“What would they do if you told them there was no better world?” asks Moonflower.

“Do not despair citizens,” says Jimson, “there is a fair, green world just a short train journey from here. A world of forests and high pure mountains, of pretty villages where all are neighbours, all are friends; a world of honest farmers earning their living from the soil, a good world, a moral world, where priests are respected, and order holds. Come with me away from the chaotic, immoral city, away from the dust...”

Moonflower slips out of the dining car and leaves Jimson to make his speech. The town is more corroded yet more fantastically constructed than the city. The mills and houses are forested with embellishments yet beneath the soiled finery the buildings are alien constructions shaped by the orbit of unearthly worlds. The houses have bloomed and fruited. They have ripened and reached a state of putrefaction. Their fabulously mutated ornament was never meant for human occupation. They have taken on their own monstrous life: half rotted in the dust; half grown into parodies of

coral and tree roots; minarets and arabesques coalesce and dissolve where the goats and lizards make their homes in burrows in the crumbling stone.

Moonflower concludes that the buildings are themselves a cancer of the dust growing ever more flamboyant as they consume the flesh of their host planet.

This is it. There is no world but the endless dust and grief. He counts down the varieties of dust: dirt, earth, grime, powder, sand, soil, soot, ashes, cinders, filth, flakes, fragments, granules, grit, fluff, and flocculence. All there is left to do is to return home.

He collects Jimson, who argues that they should stay until the dust people agree to join them.

“They have accepted me as their own,” he says, “I am to be their king,” but he is persuaded by the thought of citizens in the new land who will join him.

“We will return and the citizens of the dust and the citizens of the green lands can combine into a greater union, a union such as the world has not seen since the first Augustus ruled in Rome,” says Jimson as Moonflower draws him away.

They travel many kilometres following the tracks back to their origins. The dead pines of the forest are numberless pinpoints in the smooth grey hills; the trees have all suffocated beneath the dust. The cottages on the mountain pastures have mutated into castles improbably clinging to the abraded crags that grow more ragged in the abrasive flow of the dust. The citadels and palaces fall away again into the ever-moving matter. The landscapes roll away, the hills yaw and rise like waves on the ocean. All is unstable. All is just grey dust. Grey goats and lizards battle over pallid plants, the plants themselves survive as parasites of the world. In the distance a dust storm rises high into the sky with lightening flashing in its heart.

Onwards Moonflower and Jimson walk following the course of the old tracks. At last they find the source pouring from the sky; a great waterfall of dust flowing

downwards in a torrent and spreading ever further across the land forming rivers that flow away towards dying seas. At last they climb the dusty path through a mountain pass and find a grey village preserved in a grey valley. There is the smokehouse, the barn.

“This is my home,” says Moonflower.

He finds his parents; his mother’s mummified mouth hangs open in shock. There is a deep compression crumbling away around the top of her head while his father grins almost entirely without flesh with an iron hammer in his hand.

“There is nothing but dust here either,” says Moonflower.

“I thought we would find golden towers.”

“There are none,” says Moonflower.

“There should be a noontide world.”

“It is not here.”

“My kingdom among the immortal stars?”

“No.”

The dust creeps and crawls. A grey goat with the blue eyes of a nightmare looks through the window and a lizard skitters across the table.

“Well I am still the first-citizen of the dust,” says Jimson, “The dust is all there is. It is transforming me, making me a god.”

He rubs his skin and it crumbles away to grey powder; he squeezes an eye and grey powder pours from the socket. He falls forward and crumbles, flakes away to nothing.

“Oh, my friend,” Moonflower rubs a tear from his eye and finds he is weeping dust.

He rests in his chair: dead friend, dead family, and dead goats around him. He is lonely among the dead and he sits and waits as the tears of dust accumulate on his skin. He draws a finger through it; it is soft, flocculent. He rubs it between his fingers and as he

compresses it a grittier texture evolves. He brushes the dust away but more dust rushes in to fill the void. It flows across the floor towards his boots. It creeps up his legs. He looks up at the dusty sky; the stars above him are burning dust. They are only the final surrender of the ashes of a greater fire that destroyed its primordial form. The dust draws more dust to itself and the dust ball surrounding him grows so dense that even light falls into it and condenses as more dust. He is surrounded by darkness falling inwards where slowly he curls up into a ball. The tick-tock of the clock slows until time's passage is imperceptible. Even that golden moment of his birth was an illusion; a temporary configuration of the dust within the darkness; at last he is all he is; there is only night's infinity within.

## 5.2 Pessimism and the Laws Of Thermodynamics

The storytellers have not realised that the Sleeping Beauty would have awoken in a thick layer of dust; nor have they envisaged the sinister spider's webs that would have been torn apart at the first movement of her red tresses.<sup>120</sup>

George Bataille

Practitioners of cut-up method have used varying scales of fragmentation. Tzara<sup>121</sup> suggested a method that reduced a text to individual words, while Burroughs used pages torn into quarters<sup>122</sup>. Gysin 's original chance encounter with the method<sup>123</sup> and Safran Foer's 's *Tree of Codes*<sup>124</sup> both use windows cut through the pages. In the BBC documentary *Cracked Actor*<sup>125</sup> David Bowie is seen reassembling complete lines to create a lyric. A practitioner might use chapters torn from different books as imitated in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Tomcat Murr*<sup>126</sup> and H. C. Artmann's *Search for Dr U*<sup>127</sup>. They might assemble a work from short passages like Fernando Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet*<sup>128</sup> (posthumously assembled by others) or William Burrough's *Naked Lunch*<sup>129</sup> (assembled while alive by his friends) or the unbound book in a box such as B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*<sup>130</sup>.

These parts do not smoothly coalesce into objects through a gestalt. They are all obviously fragments. The OED defines a fragment as:

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<sup>120</sup> Entry on Dust in Georges Bataille and others, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica : Comprising the Critical Dictionary & Related Texts* (London: Atlas Press, 1995).

<sup>121</sup> Brotchie and Gooding. p36

<sup>122</sup> Burroughs.

<sup>123</sup> Burroughs and Gysin. p24

<sup>124</sup> Foer and Schulz.

<sup>125</sup> Yentob.

<sup>126</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann, Anthea Bell, and Jeremy D. Adler, *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr : Together with a Fragmentary Biography of Kapellmeisterjohannes Kreisler on Random Sheets of Waste Paper*, (London: Penguin, 1999).

<sup>127</sup> Hans Carl Artmann, Malcolm R. Green, and Derk Wynand, *The Quest for Dr. U, or, a Solitary Mirror in Which the Day Reflects*, (London: Atlas Press, 1993).

<sup>128</sup> Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, (London: Serpent's Tail, 2010).

<sup>129</sup> Burroughs.

<sup>130</sup> B. S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates*, (London: Picador, 1999).



A part broken off or otherwise detached from a whole; a broken piece; a (comparatively) small detached portion of anything.

An extant portion of a writing or composition which as a whole is lost; also, a portion of a work left uncompleted by its author; hence, a part of any unfinished whole or uncompleted design.<sup>131</sup>

We see that a fragment is incomplete, it is broken off; an element of an absent whole. To be perceived as fragments the parts must not ‘chunk’ easily. The entropy of the fragments, their lack of order, must be visible to the reader. The title of my story, ‘The Architect of Putrefaction’, refers to a form of entropy manifest in a natural system: decay.

‘The Architect of Putrefaction’ takes place in a counterfactual world where entropy is not resisted. The world is filled with the visible sign of the encroaching entropy - dust. It is filled with all ‘[...] the varieties of dust: dirt, earth, grime, powder, sand, soil, soot, ashes, cinders, filth, flakes, fragments, granules, grit, fluff, and flocculence.’

In the *Encyclopaedia Acephalica* Bataille predicts that dust will one day win out against mankind’s efforts to remove it. However hard we apply feather-duster or vacuum cleaner we are fighting a losing battle: decay and entropy will triumph. This is entirely in accordance with the predictions of the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

Previously I examined the place of entropy in ‘Frostiana’ where the kingdom was running down. As the clock strikes midnight James finds ‘each stroke of the hammer slower than its predecessor.’ Its energy is dissipating within the universe.

Entropy can be kept at bay locally only through moving it to a different place. If local entropy is reduced a neighbouring system’s entropy will increase and so the universal quantity of entropy continues to grow. At the end of ‘Frostiana’ the entropy in the form of Gloriana (and her magic) leaves the kingdom restoring a degree of order. In

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<sup>131</sup>Oxford English Dictionary, "Fragment, N.",  
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/74114?result=1&rskey=N5gYYw&>> [accessed 20/10/15].

‘The Architect of Putrefaction’ a city is growing and it maintains its structure by removing workers from the countryside. As the workers emigrate away from the farmland and leave it untended entropy increases and dust begins to accumulate ‘[...]the summer dust, brown dust blown from the fields, black dust blown from the forests, yellow dust blown from the corn.’

The entropy is shifted away from the city, but according to the second law this is only a temporary solution. ‘The Architect of Putrefaction’ is the story of out of control entropy.

Moonflower is an immigrant from a rural backwater; he and the ambitious Jimson are carried on a train to the city. As the train moves forward so entropy increases in accordance with the second law—to the extent that some buildings are almost hallucinatory products of the chaotic cosmology:

[...]fantastically constructed[...] turrets and tall black chimneys and houses with a hundred minarets and spikes and spears emerge [...] twisted out of shape; the bone beneath the flesh of brick is wilfully misshapen.

Jimson promises Moonflower that together they will become architects and have a great future together. They both arrive in the city which is an increasingly counterfactual version of Paris in 1932. This Paris is based on Burroughs’ vision of the city as a fragmentary experience. Moonflower never sees the whole of this Paris, he only glimpses fragments “through holes and tatters.” He sees that “[...]out of the swirling soupy atmosphere emerge beggars, poverty; wagon-drivers, rag tailors; politics and vendors of tea and compressed coal.’

In the gestalt-free<sup>132</sup> description there is no solidity, no single structural element to focus on, with which to construct a figure from the ground. There are many modernist

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<sup>132</sup> Ehrenzweig. p99

depictions of the city as fragmentary. In the Dadaist George Grosz's *Funeral Procession*<sup>133</sup> multiple perspectives of cubism are used to an expressionistic effect with images scattered like shards of broken mirror reflecting a hellish cityscape populated by masks and skulls, reminiscent of James Ensor's *Entry of Christ into Brussels*.<sup>134</sup>

William Burroughs interviewed by John C. Kramer describes his perceptions of a city:

You walk down the street. You see it and you put it on canvas. That's what they did first. But that's not how you really see it or remember it. It's more jumbled. There are the street signs and the vendors and the houses and people walking. You don't see them like a photograph. You look at diverse images. Painting it that way is montage. I merely applied it to writing.<sup>135</sup>

But this is not how we think of the world. We perceive it as filled with whole objects. Rather than fragments we impose a gestalt<sup>136</sup> upon fragmentary perceptions and create a solid model of the world. Kramer commented that Burroughs:

[...]relates the fragmentation of texts as more true to reality than unfragmented texts, than single viewpoint photographs, this is the revelation of Cezanne's work, of cubism, the multiple fragment viewpoints.<sup>137</sup>

Burroughs' revelation describes the perception of an eye without a mind to interpret it. Cognitive studies show we impose order on our perceptions even when the data we receive through our senses is only partial. Burroughs said of cut-up method:

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<sup>133</sup> George Grosz, *Funeral Procession*, (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie, 1917), oil on canvas.

<sup>134</sup> James Ensor, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*, (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1888), Oil on canvas.

<sup>135</sup> John C. Kramer, 'William Burroughs – a Sketch', *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 13 (1981) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02791072.1981.10471456>> [accessed 20/10/2015].

<sup>136</sup> Brone and Vandaele. p238

<sup>137</sup> Kramer.

The cut-up method brings to writers the collage, which has been used by painters for fifty years. And used by the moving and still camera. In fact all street shots from movie or still cameras are by the unpredictable factors of passers-by and juxtaposition cut-ups.<sup>138</sup>

These collaged fragments of text have their precursors in George Braque and Pablo Picasso's cubism. The critic Anton Ehrenzweig<sup>139</sup> in his study of art, psychoanalysis, and gestalt psychology, *The Hidden Order of Art*, believes that:

The eye was sent on a fool's errand. When it fastened on one feature the cubistic fragments fell into a new pattern[...]Cubism attacked conscious sensibilities and the gestalt principles ruling them.<sup>140</sup>

The Paris that Moonflower encounters is Burroughs' cut-up city – there is no gestalt, only a series of fragments glimpsed through the dust:

Ghosts of buildings waver in the grey atmosphere; what first appeared as a solid stone cornice dematerialises and melts [...] the iron skeleton of a tower rises rusting among broken Grecian temples and Roman palaces.

Moonflower's world is reduced to ever smaller fragments, ever more disorder, less predictability, and greater entropy. On the journey to the city Jimson leads Moonflower to believe they would be helping the city to grow by building. Moonflower's actual job is to keep the entropy at bay in the dust-yards and he begins his apprenticeship as a dust-sorter. He is confined to a small domain where entropy might be reduced – the dust transported in from the city and, after he has finished sorting it, carted away for industrial use “dispelling the injurious phantoms that cleanliness and logic abhor”<sup>141</sup>.

The pessimistic Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran provided the epistemological basis of the story. The Romanian publisher Ex Occidente Press proposed a project based

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<sup>138</sup> Burroughs and Gysin. p17

<sup>139</sup> Anton Ehrenzweig was not a professional art theorist, and has a somewhat unusual view of Cubism, but remained influential in Art education in the 1980s ; he was innovative in applying cognitive psychology to art and is quoted by Reuven Tsur in Brone and Vandale.

<sup>140</sup> Ehrenzweig. p82

<sup>141</sup> Bataille and others

on Cioran and in response I read his *History of Decay*.<sup>142</sup> Cioran's viewpoint can be trivially summarised as: nothing is worth it because we die. His style of philosophising was influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche. In *On the Heights of Despair* there is a rather Nietzschean section that relates directly to Moonflower's dust-world:

I would like to explode, flow, crumble into dust, and my disintegration would be my masterpiece. I would like to melt in the world and the world melt orgasmically into me and thus in our delirium engender an apocalyptic dream, strange and grandiose like all crepuscular visions.<sup>143</sup>

Cioran seems to be in full *Zarathustra* mode here. In the actual *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche equates dust with non-existence.

I have sat on every surface, like weary dust have I fallen asleep upon mirrors and window-panes: everything takes from me, nothing gives; I have become thin—I am almost like a shadow.<sup>144</sup>

A key literary source for the dust yard was Louis Ferdinand Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night* where he describes the fictional neighbourhood of La Garenne-Rancy with rag pickers, rubbish piles and how he:

[...]passed through the dust[...] whirling up from the gutters. A howling typhoon filled the whole street with new clouds, more dense and stinging than the others. We couldn't see each other anymore.<sup>145</sup>

During the writing the dust got into Celine's description and rag pickers became dust pickers and garbage piles were transformed to dust piles. The dust is the tiniest possible fragment of the world and subject to continuous aleatory rearrangement. In the world of 'The Architect of Putrefaction' the dust is also a catalyst. It turns all materials it

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<sup>142</sup> E. M. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, (London: Penguin, 2010).

<sup>143</sup> E. M. Cioran and Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, *On the Heights of Despair*, (Univ.Chicago P., 1992). p57

<sup>144</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and R. J. Hollingdale, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra : A Book for Everyone and No One*, (London : Penguin, 1961). p284 - 285

<sup>145</sup> Louis-Ferdinand Celine, *Journey to the End of the Night*, (London: Calder, 1988). p220

comes into contact with into itself. At first it erodes other surfaces, but eventually corrodes all life producing only more dust. Part of the inspiration for this is from Ballard's 'The Cage of Sand'<sup>146</sup> where dust brought from Mars as ballast in space ships has infected the earth with a plant virus that has turned areas into desert similar to Mars. The catalytic effect is inspired by Eric Drexler's warning that out of control nanotech could turn everything to grey-goo.<sup>147</sup> Moonflower's world is undergoing fragmentation, erosion to the finest granularity. This is the world where, as Bataille predicts:

[...]dismal sheets of dust constantly invade earthly habitations and uniformly defile them: as if it were a matter of making ready attics and old rooms for the immanent occupation of the obsessions, phantoms, spectres that the decayed odour of old dust nourishes and intoxicates.<sup>148</sup>

The dust destroys the world, but the spectre of the old world haunts it. The dust dreams of dead trees, of parasitic ecosystems and forms strange images like distorted memories. In the dust-yard Moonflower looks closely at the world – he is a connoisseur of dust. As he learns his trade the city around him fragments. Moonflower resists entropy and adapts to a hierarchical and traditional professional milieu. By the end of *République* he occupies a position very like Halvard Solness in Ibsen's *Master Builder*.<sup>149</sup> He has fought his way to the top of his profession and finds himself alone and beset by fear of his rivals and of younger men. Dust is a good business:

for the many industries that need dust: the finest grade dusty mica for paint; organic dust for filling out the bread, the deepest coal-black for paint; smooth hard grains for the lubrication of book pages, sharp grains of flint dust for polishing the swords of officers, dust made of tiny diamonds for grinding watch parts and polishing lenses.

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<sup>146</sup> Ballard. V1 p482

<sup>147</sup> Paul Rincon, 'Nanotech Guru Turns Back on 'Goo'', (2004)  
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/3788673.stm>> [accessed 01/07/2019].

<sup>148</sup> Bataille and others

<sup>149</sup> Ibsen and others V1

The dust-yards multiply. As Moonflower organises and classifies the fragments to build his world:

He learns to catch the dust and hold it; he learns to sort the grains, granules, and fragments; the scraps, shreds, and particles; the flotsam, jetsam, and finely worn sand blown thousands of miles from the distant deserts of Morocco and China and Old Cockaigne-by-the-Sea.

He is reversing entropy but the Laws of Thermodynamics mean that: ‘1. You can’t win; 2. You can’t break even either.’<sup>150</sup> The hierarchical, closely focused world of the dust-yards falls apart in the face of entropy. Again, as Bataille predicts, the dust:

[...] will probably begin to gain the upper hand over domestics, invading the immense ruins of abandoned buildings, deserted dockyards; and, at that distant epoch, nothing will remain to ward off night-terrors[...] <sup>151</sup>

The decay of Moonflower’s world is visible when Jimson performs in the ruins of the theatre that was a magnificent building thirty-five years earlier.

On the journey to the city Jimson dreamed of being an architect (or articulated such a fantasy) . He promised his companions a future ‘beyond these earthly skies of grey that trap us here in a world of decay;’ and told them ‘we must rise to immortality among the stars.’

Jimson is constantly confabulating. He takes what little information he has and fits it to a self consistent narrative of a great future. With the ruin of the city he becomes an emperor-manque, a somewhat *Peer Gynt*<sup>152</sup> like character. At every opportunity he tells a story about a happy future to persuade others to follow him (much as Yolanda the Rat-Wife persuades the rats to drown themselves in *Dísir on the Langstrand*).

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<sup>150</sup> Nicholls and Langford *The Science In Science Fiction* quoted in James Gleick, *The Information : A History, a Theory, a Flood*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2011). p271

<sup>151</sup> Bataille and others

<sup>152</sup> Ibsen and others

In Blood. 'Dark Rainbow Bliss', O'Dane is willing to articulate any belief for his own advantage. Unlike O'Dane, Jimson is sincere in his belief. He is truly confabulating.<sup>153</sup> Jimson obviously changes his mind throughout the story making increasingly greater claims in *Département* and *Arrondissement* before joining the theatre. Jimson returns in the *Révolution* section as the Emperor. As in Grosz's and Ensor's paintings he becomes the false messiah leading a vast dehumanised horde:

The two bodies of combatants lose their precise geometry in the mêlée as the merging ranks spill red across the grey. All day they are locked together in the teeth of the meat-grinder or man-grinder, scattering a trail of bloody mince across the dust.

Jimson leads his followers to their deaths but still seeks a new empire. As Moonflower and he search for their homes the world is revealed as decaying and subject to ever greater entropy. Even as Jimson disintegrates digested by the catalytic dust he insists this is a path to a positive future. At the end Moonflower finds 'a great waterfall of dust flowing downwards in a torrent and spreading ever further across the land forming rivers that flow away towards dying seas.'

Unlike Ballard's Martian dust, this is just pouring naturally from the sky; the whole world is someone's dust yard. Moonflower realises his existence was only borrowed; a temporary decrease in entropy (or an accident of probability). In *L'empire* he returns to nothing, closing the circle of the narrative from the *Arrivée* past-world:

Even that golden moment of his birth was an illusion: a temporary configuration of the dust within the darkness: at last he is all he is: there is only night's infinity within.

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<sup>153</sup> Hirstein. p177



This looping of the narrative leaves open the possibility of return, a new creation. This reflects some suggested model of cyclic universes in cosmology<sup>154</sup> (and of the recycling of his story through cut-up). This stands as an alternative to the pessimistic view of mortality. Even though Moonflower is as thin as a shadow, as Friedrich Nietzsche wrote in *The Joyous Science*; ‘the eternal hourglass will be turned over again and again, and you with it, you speck of dust!’<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Davies. p141

<sup>155</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, (London: Penguin, 2018). p221

6.1 The Voice of Your Redeemer, the Songful Morning Near

*First published in Stars Beneath the Ships by Mount Abraxas Press 2017*

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are caught  
on the wind  
and sca t e r  
ed  
t

On the waves

These scraps of substrate: of reeds, of skin,  
Of wood pulp, linen rags, and holy stones,

Of clay tablets, magnetic tape, and electronic memory:

They decay, erode: lose their identities as they are carried on the flow.

The catalogues of this library are lost. How will I know what has gone if there is no record of what was? In the ocean their meaning crumbles, warps, changes with the wind and tide. They fall to pieces, tear, and dissolve in the water.

There were a thousand books here once: ruptured and washed up by the sea. The great library is reduced to so much flotsam, so much jetsam, fragments, disintegrating

shreds, ragged tatters, shards. It ends as it begins. In the beginning there was nothing. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. In the beginning was the word but that word is lost, hidden among a million fragments.

A pelican floats as a grey shadow reflected in the distant sea, a silhouette in the distant sky.

There are words written on these fragments. I shout them aloud, “goatweed, Miranda, sublunary, scattered flotsam.”

But these words are irreconcilable.

I try them backwards, forwards, in several combinations.

They are ripe with possibility, with hidden strings that link them, with deep dark chasms that separate them but hold infinite meanings. What new worlds cannot be built from the ruins of the old?

There are a million fragments of paper caught among the rock pools and sea-carved spikes and sea-hollowed caves, among ruins of magnificent empires reduced to rubble by the sea. The pelican stands offshore seeming wise in the silence of his grey robe; in his ragged magnificence. He shakes his head, raises his yellow beak to the sky, his yellow eyes witness my exile on these yellow sands. He is a grey shadow reflected in the distant sea, a silhouette in the distant sky. He rises from the water and flaps across a broken reef, heading inland over the wreckage and ruins in the lagoon.

I try to force a few odd scraps together: I stitch word to word with threads of conjecture thin as spider webs. I work until the new pages become illegible in the fading light. In the re-writing I have my purpose and around that purpose I sleep and wake, wake and sleep: I build a hut, a bed, a civilisation; find food and fire and fresh water, tame goats, lizards, dormice, rats, and rare spiny voles. I find native figs and feral lemons, grape vines, medlars, and ancient olive trees. I make a new life; make the beach my own.

In my hut I paste the scraps together, boil the glue in an old brass pot salvaged from a wreck. Slowly I assemble the words. I sit with my glue brush, formed from the cast off feathers of gulls, the fur of marooned rats, the bones of forgotten castaways. Slowly I fit the pieces into the page.

Today there are more pieces. The ink runs from the scattered pages into the water. In the water the black stain swirls congealing about a form beneath the waves. The rough outline of a man materialises from the ink. He raises two huge hands like clubs; each finger is an inch and a half thick, each nail two inches long. The hands are followed by two manacled wrists bound by chains of green bronze. Massive shoulders and a smooth skinned head hung with weed and encrusted with limpets also rise from the sea, from the ink, from the ruined pages. This dreadnought walks muscled and scaled. He has a chest like a ship's boiler and a skull like a gun turret.

He crawls onto the yellow sands dragging a broken automaton in the shape of a knight. The knight is smashed and spills cogs and gears that still spin and attempt to mesh. It desperately clings onto its mechanical life that nevertheless ebbs and leaks away. The wash of the waves forms a crater around the giant's body. He reaches a desperate hand towards me and opens his mouth. The teeth are blunt grinders and crushers. He has bone-breakers at the back that could render the rocks to sand and his canines are cleavers built for slicing flesh. I run to fetch him fresh water. I run to fetch him food. I bathe his wounds and bandage him where he has been damaged in his battle.

I leave him to sleep beneath my blanket. A fire flickers in the sky. The scattered clouds are heated to gold for a moment against the unfolding of night's black petals. The darkness is filled with a hundred strange noises from the rusting and rotting ships: with mechanical clicks and the squeal of metal on metal, with the groans of old timbers settling, and then on the shore there is the rustle of things moving not stealthily enough

through the undergrowth. At night the sea is turned to an obsidian mirror where stars' reflections gleam cold as death and everything seems lost deep in time. I walk along the seashore. The world swirls and washes about me, ebbs and flows. These fragments come (pelican, sand, sea, sky, me). I gather them and they lie curled up in the corner of my pocket like seeds. Before me is the massive back of the bound slave.

“Friend,” he says, “sit beside me.”

I take a seat on a worm-eaten piece of ship's timber. He towers above me in height and he doubly dwarfs me with his depth and breadth.

“My name is Cal. I was born on this island. My mother ruled here in goodness, held just-power over reefs and ruins and the island's ghosts. My father was a wise man exiled from over the sea. He was kind until my sister came. My sister who sucked the life from our mother as other babes suck milk. She made father so bird brained he could do nothing but her bidding. She cast me down, made me a slave.” He shows me his chains.

I blanch – “Where are they?”

He laughs. “She thought she could leave the island, take its treasure. She had me bound like a circus beast in the hold to display to the new world she sought. But a great storm struck. The vengeance of an unchained spirit split the ship on the reef. I think now the ghost of my poor murdered mother watched over me. She filled the sky with fire, and scattered the sorcerers through air and sea and earth. You see my scaly skin? My fins? My gills? I sank beneath the waves. What difference does water make to a fish like me?”

He does smell like a fish: a very ancient and fishy thing.

“What was the knight you brought ashore?”

“Father made them. He was a master of mechanics, he made them first as toys, then as our guardians, but they became her servants and they would revive the evil the storm banished. I have hunted and smashed a hundred yet still they haunt the island and

the waters. But you are my good friend,” he says, “You have saved poor Cal. I can fetch and carry, bring you food. I can fish and farm.”

And so he does. He bends his broad back to plough furrows for the sea kale, the celery, the wild parsnips. He tames the vines and prunes the trees and herds the goats so they multiply. He is immune to the sting of bees and brings me sweet honey. He makes this island a paradise.

On the beach there are bones, many bones. In some places the sea has sorted them. They are laid out as neatly ranked as Parisians in a catacomb. Dead books too, the remains scattered here like lost memories. The current can classify bones by mass and resistance, but scraps of paper are all equal in the sea’s weighing. So I send Cal to gather them. He brings me great piles of paper. I sort them, catalogue them, curate them. I paste them on my workbench of driftwood and salvage. I mend and reconstruct and make anew. One day after years of work a single thin book among so many in progress is complete. All that remains now is the small matter of securing a publisher. I wonder could I send Cal swimming across the ocean with my work?

Slow wings beat like broken umbrellas before a storm. Cal stands on the beach and roars at the pelican. He picks a medium-sized boulder and hurls it through the air. The pelican ignores him and rides the warm updraft from the sea to gain height then skims low across the waves and extends his serpent-neck to reach down into the frothing white-tops.

“What is it Cal?” I ask.

“Father,” he says, “he seeks now to do magic. To restore his rule. To spoil my happiness.”

Cal skims a stone across the water that skips three times before the pelican stands aside. The pelican dips the long yellow scoop of his beak to ladle small silver fish from the waves. He gathers the scattered fry and flesh of the ocean in the baggy sack of skin

beneath his bill. He fills it and carries his load to the rippling silver shallows. He rests on a broken mast that reaches above the waves amidst radio antennae, funnels, gun turrets, and fabulously carved rams.

“It is just a bird, Cal,” I say, “You must have had a nightmare.”

I explain carefully about genes and DNA and how one species cannot transform to another except by the slow process of evolution. Cal accepts this.

There is a pain in both my knees, an aching stiffness from sitting too long at the desk. I rise and rub them. The pain increases but the pain is a release from my paralysis; the pain of ungluing cartilage and bone. I stagger to my bed. At night I sleep comforted that at last a small portion of the work is complete. I can see one day there will be a whole library, an oeuvre, an end to my work. I sleep. I sleep deep in the darkness with the dead and the drowned. With the dead and the drowned I dream and I dream of an old man in a grey frock coat crawling from between the covers of my book. He stands before a lectern that is carved with sea life. There are writhing octopi, squirming eel-pout, and rising kraken. All the creatures of the deep are there. He reads my book by the green phosphorescence of a single pearl.

“You know each day a memory leaks from my head,” he says, “it is carried away like a page caught in the sea. I try to catch the black ink as it floats away in the water and to return it to the paper. But it is too dilute; it just stains me a little greyer.”

He stands. He leafs through the pages. “You are catching those stray memories, connecting them here: goatweed, sublunary, Miranda, scattered flotsam. In these pages you have remade my mind. Remade my magic, remade my world.”

He claps me on the back and winks. “I have a daughter whose heart I may trade for safe retirement in your kingdom.”

I try to tell him I have no kingdom. No country even.

“So,” he says, “will you join me in my quest for restoration? When I return to Milan the streets will run red with blood. I will not spare man or woman or child or dog or cat or flea if they are complicit in my exile.”

He tells me of the kingdom he lost, of his scholarly daughter, of his son who is away at sea. Of his daughter who is an angel from heaven, of his son who is a monster. He tells me of the fish markets of Morocco or Herculaneum or London and how they resembled Paradise, or Heaven, or Purgatory. Of the many fish he has eaten and how he longs for just one more. Of the recipe for Whitebait and Elvers and Goby a L’Orange. Of formulae that may be the laws of flight or rules of magic or migratory routes of the pelican.

He removes the pearl and places it in an oyster shell that snaps shut and scuttles back into a brine-pool. I catch a glitter in the bottom of the pit; a gold locket among the sand and broken shells. It is finely crafted and hangs upon a gold chain untroubled by its exposure to saltwater and time. I reach down into the waters and take it. The portrait within the case is a face as delicately wrought as Venetian glass; her silk robe is fastened with a brooch at her breast. Her hair flows in red curls from beneath a coronet resplendent in pearls and rubies. The silver-grey material of her dress is cunningly rendered in perfect imitation of the fleshly substance and matter of the sublunary world. It is a wonder of the limner’s art displayed in minute and attentive detail; each encrustation of jewels, the spread of the farthingale, the half smile of vermilion on the pale face. All is perfect and yet unreal.

I wake with the locket still in my hand.

“She is a goddess,” I say, “see her name, Miranda, is inscribed on the inner casing.”



Cal dares to contradict me: “It is my wicked sister. She was a monstrous sorceress long ago. Long ago in an age where magic and horror ruled. If she had lived she would now be wrinkled and old. Wizen and vile. Throw it away William, it cannot bring you luck.”

“Her picture will always be young though. Splendid Miranda! I shall wear it always.”

“How do we know it is not cursed? She was malicious, cruel, and jealous. Why spoil our life together with her memory. Think of your books, our work.”

“She is a treasure. I think now I remember someone like her. Before I came here. Was it in New Mexico when I juggled guns in a sideshow and took trick-shots with an acrobat’s accomplice? Was it in *Mictlan* where she fled drunk on tequila riding backwards on a wild horse? Was it in the library on Fifth Avenue where I was hired to treat infestations with Pyrethum spray? I miss my books, I miss some of the living, all of the dead, and I miss Miranda.”

“You can’t really miss what you never had,” says Cal.

“It is like those gaps in between the words, between goatweed, sublunary, and scattered flotsam. I know what is absent gives meaning. I know in those absences are all possibilities.”

“We have paradise together on this island.”

“Paradise, yes, but look at what I have achieved with nothing. What could I have been without the shipwreck that cast me here?”

“Was it a shipwreck? says Cal “I thought maybe you were on a plane en route to Tangiers.”

“Memory is fragile. Fragmentary. How otherwise could I have forgotten my beloved Miranda?”

“You are not remembering, you have read of her in your book.”

“If I read of her I must have written of her and therefore remembered her.”

“Writing is not remembering. Writing is making up. Write more books. Make different stories. Let me find you more words by the sea.”

“Where now is Miranda? There must be more than an image?”

At first he denies, but I wrinkle and weasel the truth from him. I worry and beg and curse until he tells me. Like a diver retrieving a pearl from a particularly uncooperative oyster I extract the information.

“There are only bones,” says Cal.

Only bones? If there are bones I must find them. I ascend the sloping beach that shifts and crumbles under the tread of my feet; I ascend to where the sea has formed a dyke, a barrier of storm-tossed pebbles that shelters an inner island from tempests and tides. I follow it clockwise along its raised mass. Plants poke salt-tolerant shoots and suckers through the coal and flint and pumice. On my left the sea hisses and crashes and foams; on my right are hills, parkland, ruins, and rough little woods. The island cannot be quiet: it is filled with the noise of the broken ships. There are signs of more recent habitation too. There are tracks worn through the foliage, circles of shorter grass that is habitually trodden by some creature. There are dark openings leading into the ground and in the darkness of these cellars there is constantly the ticking of clockwork. There is ticking and rustling in the woods, in caves, on the beach. The darkness is filled with the cry of the gulls, the squeaks and groans of the broken machinery and now the rustle of her farthingale. In every grove there is the tread of her foot, in every glade the sigh of her breath.

I wake in my hut. Cal is snoring. I am cold in the silver-blue morning light and the dunes sing a lonely song as they roll in the wind. The bird stands a little distance off shore. His wings flap idly, and then with more determination. His ungainly webbed feet run across the lagoon until he is free of the ground. The black edge of his wing skims the

water; he dawdles on the cushion of air trapped between sea and bird-belly. Two creatures like dragons rise from the waves, like animated illuminations from an ancient bestiary they rear rampant sucking up stray pages and looking at me with flaming eyes. The Pelican's wings beat once then hold. Its feet splash - running on the water with webbed toes pressing against the viscous surface, with a final push he soars with a long squawk and heads inland to the dark green of the cypress trees.

I follow to where he stands on a naked pine. Its barkless carcass is bleached white. He has constructed a rough nest of twigs at the broken top of the tree.

In the branches another stranger watches. A skull in a wig of moss hung upon the branches, the articulated bones of a bleached half-skeleton flung by some tempest into the tree. She is unmistakable. I admire her well-formed rib-cage, her delicate radius and ulna, her long, sensitive phalanges. She has the most beautiful bones: her skull resembles porcelain, very fine, almost translucent. She is hung with abundant flowers: purple irises, white lilies, narcissi, and wild roses. I am a satellite caught in her orbit, frozen in the cool pale smoothness of her face, trapped within the whirlpools of her absent eyes. I spiral down. Cal wakes me from my contemplation.

"It is evening William," he says.

"She knows, yes, she knows I am here I am almost sure."

"Control yourself William," says Cal, "she has been dead a long time."

"What is time compared with love?"

"It may make certain physical expressions of your desire difficult."

"No matter, I shall worship her as best I can."

"But she was a monster in life."

"Silence slave, she is my beloved!" I say.

I cannot believe that such a wretch as Cal could slander my angel so. I find a stout stick and strike him. I beat and beat and beat him until the stick is shredded. I am guilty

that he does not fight back. He hates me because of my love for Miranda. Why will he not fight me? He is built like a bull, like an ox, a rhinoceros. I would play David to Goliath. I would find a stouter stick, but he just weeps. He is doing it to provoke me further. I must find a very stout stick with thorns. He protests his love for me - it is a lie. I must find a sharp stick with thorns and sharpen them further. If he loved me he would love Miranda also. I drive him away into the woods with harsh words and a hail of stones.

I am free of the monster. Who placed these flowers around her? She must have many mourners and now I shall join them. Where are they hiding? I gaze at her painted image and compare it with the bones. I wander the shoreline. As I sit weeping on the edge of the lagoon the pelican gulps down a few scraps of paper that float on the ocean. A few more pages are lost forever. He flies towards the rocky hill that rises in the centre of the island. As he soars above me on his broad wings a piece of paper flutters down. It is the word life. I take the word life and go to Miranda - I place the fragment upon her forehead and pray all night at her alter.

The shadows are full of rustles and clicks, whistles and squeaks. A kettle boils and something rings like a bell. Are these more of the mechanical creatures? They skirt the grove in the shadows. I try to follow the noise into the turpentine trees. I return again to Miranda and in those few minutes I have left her alone she has been decked in narcissi. Every day she is reborn adorned with a different flower. There are tracks like bicycles, and insects, and snakes. I follow the trails down to the grey-green sea where little wrasse rasp barnacles from the rocks. Below the pitted shoreline yellow, violet, and scarlet fish shoal where the reef breaks and in the still shallows tiny dragon-headed beasts swim in the clumps of purple weed. There is some other movement. At first I think it is a crab, but it has only five legs. Then I see it is a jewelled gauntlet animated by a naked mechanism of tiny cams, cranks, gears, and ratchets all mounted in jewels and cut from bronze and

brass. I try to catch it but it scuttles away under a metal head that blinks headlamp-eyes beneath a knightly helm.

I sleep under Miranda's tree with the locket in my hand and my book as a pillow. My dead love hangs above me in the branches. She whispers through the leaves and grass and flowers. She seems to be talking of the natural history of goatweed, the mortality of the sublunary world, and the fate of scattered flotsam on the ocean.

I wake with the dawn and I reach for her hand in the boughs of the pine. For a moment in the rising sun she is suffused with light like blood and light like flesh. She is tinted with roses and peaches. There's an exhalation of breath and a noise that is almost a song, almost a whisper, almost a desolate sigh that hangs in the air like the scent of dead orchids. The world is alive with possibilities; the word life is filled with power. She must come back to me soon. I lift her marvellous bones from the tree. She is so much lighter than I expected yet so beautiful.

There are excited clicks in the undergrowth and the goatweed shudders. The pelican beats his wings in the branches. I fear the unmasked sun may burn her, so determine to find her a home. The pelican waddles before me. He leads the way beyond the green foliage of the cypress and ivy into the darkness of old oaks and pines where an ancient palace of white stone waits overgrown with creepers and cascading vines. It reminds me of those barrows and burials in the *Terre de Crânes Noirs* in the monstrous paintings of the Breton, Jean Avril. The walls are built from stones of bizarrely incongruous sizes, varying in scale from pebbles to boulders, some smaller than a gulls-egg while others look as if they are looted megaliths from Stonehenge or Carnac. They are unmortared but so tightly arranged not a mustard seed can pass between them. They are weathered smooth by millennia of wind and rain. They are thick and tall and strong. I carry her through a rectangular doorway guarded by winged sphinxes and then through what were once broad corridors with strange demons and insane gods carved into the

masonry. There are friezes of dragons and beasts fighting heroes and wild men and giants. A throne carved from a single limestone block forms a seat for my beloved and I sit her there. I dress her: in lost scraps, pearls, jewels, gold, wrack weed, dunes, pine, moss, and skeletal fragments of lost documents. I find a rag of cloth here, a tiny fragment of lace, the word 'beauty' on a piece of windblown paper. Each piece I add to clothe her naked bones. Each day I search for the words to describe Miranda. Each word I find I add. Another inkstain on papyrus saying blood or flesh or liver, tangles of knotwork and illumination on vellum for her veins. The word hair on a shred glued to her head among the moss and lichen. I read the word hair and so her hair is red. The reddest hair. On her fingers a scrap of parchment fair or freckled takes the place of her perfect skin.

We live together in the abandoned palace. Among its massive walls coolness and shadow bring relief from the daytime heat. A hundred mechanical slaves wait upon Miranda. some are fragments like the jewelled gauntlet, some almost complete. A knight limps on a peg-leg like a pirate and a moonstone dwarf tumbles roly-poly across the floor and presents her with a tray of sweetmeats. They produce wine and fruits and meat from stores somewhere underground. The pelican flaps and squawks moving in intersecting spirals with a hundred mechanical marvels singing and playing music. The metal knight bows before her and all the machines dance in a stately circle before Miranda. Each night we feast, each day I add a little to Miranda (the fragments: horses, rampant, monstrous, priest).

I live well. I grow a little round. My neck gets fat like that of an old tortoise, and my liver swells like a well fed goose. Cal never feasted me so well. He never brought me so much wine, such fine bread, and such choice cuts of meat. Though Miranda does not eat I am patient. Though she is silent, my thoughts and feelings are so in sympathy with

hers that she does not need a voice. Though she is immobile, her spirit dances almost visible among her servants, through the corridors, over the whole of the island. Every night in my dreams I reach for Miranda's pale fingers and move towards the crimson lips, her eyes of paper are almost ready to open...

I meet Cal on the beach. He begs me. He says, "I would be here alone. I can help you leave, I am strong, see my muscles, my thick arms, my barrel body. I can carry you away from here over the ocean. I have treasure, treasure of a thousand ship wrecks hidden hereabouts. You could take that too."

"And what do you want in return?"

"Leave her behind, do not destroy yourself, do not release her upon the world. She will spread her sorcery, her evil. She will suck the life-blood from your world."

"Would you deny the world her beauty?"

"What beauty she has she took from my mother like a leech."

"How could you and beautiful Miranda share a mother," I say, "her mother is an Italian princess, your mother some monstrous hag, a vile witch, a whore of the vilest gutter."

At the mention of his damn precious mother he weeps and retreats into the goatweed and turpentine trees.

Fragments of paper blow across the ground (flesh, umbrella, ink, illuminated). I try to gather them to start another book but cannot see how I might fit them together. I screw them up and keep them in my pocket.

The rock pools are filled with once broken starfish. They have been torn by a storm, yet starfish fragments live through this destruction, each fragment, each shred, each scrap becomes a seed that grows anew, regenerating a simulacrum of the parent. Oh if books were starfish and could remake themselves from seeds. Instead they are dependent

on the precise configuration of their content. I am disturbed by a swarm of gulls rising from the sea. On the horizon a ship sails slowly in the bright sun. I leap and wave and shout. I run to her throne room.

“Wonderful news Miranda – a ship - we can be together in the world, in Tangiers, Paris, Mexico.”

All her beautiful teeth seem to smile at the thought. We must take all the marvels and beauty of her court out across the ocean. We must take them back into the world where she can be revived. Where she can feed on those inferior beings: those common men and women. Where she can take her rightful place enthroned as an immortal queen. Then at last she can tread New York, London, and Paris, beneath the heels of her silken dancing shoes. But a darker shadow stands on the edge of the room. I must act quickly. I hear him breathing in the corridor. Cal is waiting for the chance to creep in upon us, he waits for night and the darkness to pour in from outside and cover his advance. I know he is following, hiding. In some gap or spandrel. He cowers, out of sight, curled into himself with muscles knotted and locked. Yet his eyes glow red reflecting the faint lights in the night. I see them swarm in the darkness like fireflies, like distant stars. Quiescent he waits, a faint disturbance rumbles through his body, he quakes with suppressed energy and the ground shudders in sympathy.

I open my book and look for our future.

I open my book and look for a storm, for a way to command the sublunary world and reduce a distant ship to scattered flotsam, to bring it to our island where the goatweed blooms and silent Miranda rules from her marble throne.

I open the book and find only my voice; I look into the obsidian mirror of the ink for an action in the face of the storm. I seek action but find absence: canvas flaps and beats like the great grey wings of a gigantic pelican. I see faces of sailors around me, fair and dark, young and old, a hundred faces but not my own reflection; my hand holds



neither hammer nor nails nor rope nor wood. I am disembodied. I am a ghost haunting that ship and the storm is the moment of my incarnation. I call the ship over the waves to carry us. Whatever I was then I am here now. Now I see how those possibilities within the book might be realised. There is more magic in those pages, there is perhaps the secret of a new life for Miranda.

In the morning the book is gone. A trail of wet footprints lead through the corridors. They are imprinted on the cracked marble pavements and are sunk into the meadows. They leave a trail of crushed orchids through the grasslands. They lead to a great cliff stuffed with fishy Ordovician fossils in the marine limestone and froggy Devonian fishes in the swamp- stone and anthracite. Those solid cliffs in reality are a million parts compressed to one. Countless living things cemented together to give the illusion of a homogenous structure. The cliffs rise into the ink-black of the sky. Down on the beach temples, palaces, towers, and gardens emerge from the sinking waters and offshore angry clouds boil like smoke. Cal's shadow scrambles among the ossified statues that populate this beach, so I follow him among the sea-worn rocks and among the broken buildings. He runs in grotesque hops and skips through the ruins, between witches' hat rocks and pumice stone boulders, until he reaches the ragged mouth of a sea carved cave. I follow him down into the twilight grotto through pitch-sticky darkness, through calcified floor-bones and meat-ribbed walls, where spectral harvestman scatter at my footfall and pale scorpions glow like candles. In a pool like green-glass ghostly crabs and blind shrimp battle above a vast beach of tooth-crushed bone and his mother towers in her throne; a chair improvised from the largest ship timbers, and bound with warps, rigging, and springs. She is decorated with skulls strung like pearls on a duchess. Cal sits like a child by her brontosaurian knee. He has scratched the word life on her bony forehead.

He laughs at me, "she will set my sister in her place when she wakes."

“We will be away by then,” I say and try to grab the book, but he escapes through another passage. I follow his footsteps. I wish I had a stick of iron so he could be beaten as he deserves. The sound of his feet on the rock is echoed by a louder thunder; the ground shakes and bucks in the throes of an earthquake. I run on through the darkness and emerge into daylight where smoke clouds boil and geysers steam. I stand upon the beach of paper-white sand. The limestone and marble ruins are grown with coral and bleached in the air. Starfish curl and coil their arms writing a thousand new forms while Cal sits cross legged beneath a pillar and lintel shelter eating the book. He pulls out each page then tears it into precise quarters then rolls it up and swallows. After each page is consumed he rubs his belly with his fat ink-stained hand.

He talks and rambles, “it is not enough. I must take all the magic away.”

He tears handfuls of pages and stuffs them into his mouth. He spills a few pieces on the waves. I gather in the fragments, these shreds of substrate: of reeds, of goat hide, of wood pulp. I take a thorny stick and raise it above my head: whip him, beat him so that he may know his master. He howls and complains, cringes, and cowers before me. Again he pleads and says how he loves me. He flees: plunges into the sea as the waves wash up the beach and break into foam. There is a single page left upon the sand.

The words have bound me to this world as I have bound words in my books, but there is a final spell. The pelican comes over the reef stood upon a raft of spars lashed with thick ropes, black with time, encrusted with shipworm and barnacles; and carried safely by the gale. A dead sailor is lashed to a stump of a mast. I don't like the way he grins at me. I catch Miranda about her narrow waist and lift her aboard. I cast the sailor into the sea and I take his place. The island behind us shakes and smokes. An eruption is imminent. We wash over the lagoon where the broken ribs of a great city lie half-sunk in the waves. There is a sink-hole five fathoms deep, where pebbles have swirled and

scoured away the stone. At the bottom a few bright coloured fish swim among skulls. The whole island is bones and rubble.

I feel Miranda is closer than ever. The many parts, lost scraps, pearls, jewels, gold, wrack weed, dunes, pine, moss, and the skeletal fragments of lost documents seem to form a congruent whole. They merge with the structure of her delicate bones. Her fine fleshless hand is covered with skin of paper and parchment. Her paper lips are suffused with red. Dark eyes are excreted in her empty socket and blink at me. She writhes beneath the flowers half flesh and half bone. She screams in the agony of her rebirth. But she cannot quite become. My hope is dashed. I have not the book, not the possibility that lies in the chasms between word and world. Each confluence of parts suggests a meaning that cannot be sustained. I pick some scraps from the waves. I find these fragments, these pieces (life, death, father, sea, lies, deceit, and love) that once made a truth that I have lost.

I hold her breathing living body in my arms as we wash over the reef out to the sea. Great fishy things that abound in the deep rise to the surface, spread out across the water in fantastic heraldic forms. The kraken naiant, white wave-horses rampant, monstrous priest-fish, and titanic whales. As if some spirit of the air has heard my command the clouds scud in the distance and the wind raises tall waves upon the sea. A nova is burning bright in Sagittarius and in the flicker and flare of the dying world our raft moves upon the darkness and the deep. I am surprised how fast our craft runs with no sail sheets; it is as if we are carried by some unseen force. We seem free of the island, of the reef, of the rough magic of Cal and his mother when the raft stops. The Pelican floats frozen, motionless in the air, the blurred arc of white wings are smeared out through time. The sea is like green glass. Everything is suspended.

Miranda is pale as paper. The colour drains from her lips. Scraps of flesh like paper fragments fall from her bones.

“Stay Miranda,” I say trying to patch them back onto her (Goatweed, sublunary, scattered flotsam). They will not stick.

“Just say you love me Miranda.”

But words seem stuck behind her lips - all that dribbles out is the black ink. She vomits fragments of paper (pelican, sea, sky, flesh, deceit, and love). A huge hand drags her away from me. I howl as she is flung into the water and she sinks slowly down into the grey- green sea. I try to reach down to her but she slips away from me. The glue dissolves: all those fragments separate and the meanings unthread. Everything I have tied together comes apart. The sea is polluted with ink. I see her face deep in the transparent water with her eyes wide open. She leaves me alone on the endless ocean. The word life floats to the surface where I grasp it in my hand. I hold it tight.

The massive scaled shoulders of the slave turned sorcerer rise through the waves. The chains on his wrist are no impediment as he whips the waters in to a maelstrom. The pelican clings to wooden spars and ropes, and then rises into the air as he sees Cal’s intentions. The bird is carried away through the rain, and storm, by the gale as the massive limbs rise from the water. Two scaly hands grasp the raft and tear it apart. For hours I fly among the foam and rain, but the green waters rise and then the green waves wash over me. A waterspout swirls a dreadful pillar in the darkness, lifts the raft and spins me round, takes me back over the reef to the familiar island, casts me up among the flotsam and bones and fragments of a million books.

I wake half buried in the yellow sands. It is Tuesday and a dragon raises itself onto the beach and lies couchant; half-asleep in the sun licking mussels from the rocks with its scarlet flamed tongue. Upon the sea the torn pages drift: webbed hands reach to pluck them from the waves and cast them ashore. Beneath the transparent sea a school of

Monkfish and Priestfish in cassocks and hoods chant the hours; the leader of the school is dressed in a scholar's gown.

In another world of bones, among sea-changed femurs and skulls I sit here in my hut built of legs and ribs and arms by the sea with my glue boiled from collagen in an old brass pot. I perform the reconstruction of these fragments washed up on the shore. I am restoring the dead remembered on this beach as palimpsests in the yellow sand.

## 6.2 The Shape of Cut-Up

Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me  
From mine own library with volumes that  
I prize above my dukedom<sup>156</sup>.  
*The Tempest* act 1 scene 2

‘The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near’ reflects the literary methods and biography of Burroughs. The back-story involves locations associated with Burroughs such as New Mexico, London, and New York. The narrative includes the information that William’s plane was en route from America to Tangiers but crashed leaving him washed ashore on Caliban’s island three hundred and fifty years after the events of *The Tempest*. The William of the narrative (like Burroughs) is a practitioner of cut-up and fortunately lands among the remains of a library. William pieces together a book from the fragments and with it creates his story. William meets the giant Cal (a fragment of Caliban), who becomes his friend. He finds that Prospero is there transformed into a pelican, and the remains of Miranda hanging in a split pine worshipped by mechanical servants. The pelican delivers a scrap of paper to William who tries to use it to resurrect Miranda: ‘it is the word life. I take the word life and go to Miranda - I place the fragment upon her forehead and pray all night at her alter.’

Later Cal attempts to perform the same magic by scratching the word ‘life’ on his mother’s skull. This is taken directly from the Golem myth. Robert Irwin writes in his introduction to Gustav Meyrink’s *The Golem* that the being of that name is:

A man-like creature of clay[...] is given life by inscribing EMETH(truth) on its brow. The creature can be deactivated by removing the first letter, leaving it [...] under the power of METH(death)<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). p110

<sup>157</sup> Gustav Meyrink, *The Golem*, (London: Dedalus, 1985).p13

This power of written language to magically produce change in the world comes from the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah which used various word games to find hidden meanings within sacred texts. In *The Search for the Perfect Language* Umberto Eco writes that in this tradition:

The original Torah was nothing but a disordered heap of letters[...]these might have been joined differently to form another story. For the kabbalist, God will [...] teach us how to read them according to a new disposition, only after the coming of the Messiah.<sup>158</sup>

In the Kabbalah changing a word can change the world. As the word of God created the world, it follows that the word was not a representation of a pre-existing thing, but the means of its creation.

The golem itself is traditionally a massive robot or slave moulded from the clay or dust as God moulded Adam. In his study of Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem writes that anyone wanting to create one should ‘take dust from the mountain, virgin earth, strew some of it all over the house[...] from this pure dust make the golem.’<sup>159</sup>

In the previous stories there are several examples of disparate components combining to create living beings. In ‘The Architect of Putrefaction’, Moonflower forms from the dust. In ‘Frostiana’, the Queen materialises from a composite of cultural artefacts. In ‘*Dísir on the Langstrand*’ the Rat-King is a symbiotic colony of rats. In ‘Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss’ the song of the “Whale, Ho!” entrains the crew of Penkaryth’s *Pride* and they synchronise their actions and become an unthinking machine.

In ‘The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near’, the practice of cut-up is an overt theme. Fragmented texts and their meanings are central to the narrative.

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<sup>158</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). p26

<sup>159</sup> Gershom Gerhard Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, (New York: Schocken, 1969). p187

William describes how he assembles Miranda from found parts and how he collages them over her skeleton:

I dress her in lost scraps, pearls, jewels, gold, wrack weed, dunes, pine, moss, and skeletal fragments of lost documents. I find a rag of cloth here, a tiny fragment of lace, the word beauty on a piece of windblown paper. Each piece I add to clothe her naked bones.

Miranda is a cut up, like the story she is constructed from fragments borrowed from other sources; from those precious jewel encrusted reefs of detail in Hilliard's *Pelican Portrait*;<sup>160</sup> from the natural landscape; and most importantly from books, from text, from writing: "On her fingers a scrap of parchment fair or freckled takes the place of her perfect skin."

Although William thinks the word 'life' is required to animate Miranda this doesn't work – she remains inert. When the inhabitants of the island are brought to life it is through William's creation of a book, of narrative, through bringing together words into a coherent form, not through the fragment. He revives the characters from the *Tempest* by gluing the fragments together. Cal(iban), and Prospero then take on their own lives independent of their author.

Even William has elements of collage: his past is fragmentary and occasionally contradictory. He is prone to confabulation:

Was it a shipwreck? I thought maybe you were on a plane en route to Tangiers..." says Cal.  
"Memory is fragile. Fragmentary. How otherwise could I have forgotten my beloved Miranda?"  
"You are not remembering, you have read of her in your book."

Even William the narrator may be the product of a few chance fragments coming together on the shore.

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<sup>160</sup> Hilliard.



In the text of 'The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near' the form of the cut up method is visible both in the layout of the text and in the description of William's world:

There were a thousand books here once: ruptured and washed up by the sea; the great library is reduced to so much flotsam, so much jetsam, fragments, disintegrating shreds, ragged tatters, shards: it ends as it begins.

The first few paragraphs include lacunae, dislocations, and scattered fragments. The end leaves only a *palimpsest*. The first paragraph of the story borrows the form of Tzara's version of cut-up method. The words are separated by voids. Their fragmentary nature as a discontinuous sequence is made obvious by exaggerated spaces in the layout.

Tzara first described cut-up method while part of the Paris Dada group; he wrote in 'Manifesto on Feeble and Bitter Love' (1920):

Take a newspaper.  
Take a pair of scissors.  
Choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem.  
Cut out the article.  
Then cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them in a bag.  
Shake it gently.  
Then take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left the bag.  
Copy conscientiously.  
The poem will be like you.  
And here are you a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Brotchie and Gooding. p36

He is of course joking. Tzara's intention was to comment on the content of the newspapers and the pretensions of writers rather than suggesting a serious way of producing poetry. Robert Short states that Dada questions:

[...] how could language, by definition an instrument of public communication do other than deform and betray life's authentic character as a discontinuous sequence of immediate experience?<sup>162</sup>

At its most extreme form cut-up method does little more than repeat Tzara's joke about the meaninglessness of discourse and imperfection of language as a means of communication. This method will produce very little in the way of meaning. William finds the words 'goatweed, Miranda, sublunary, scattered flotsam.'

Which William thinks are irreconcilable – meaningless. How is William to assemble the texts? He has fragments, perhaps a few words if he places random words together one after the other in the order he picks them up he may find many short sequences, but no overall narrative. Tzara's method does not lend itself to the slightest element of coherence. Its unpredictability is only constrained by the size of the document which has been fragmented.

As the Dada movement itself disintegrated, it gave birth to the Surrealists who emerged from 1919 through various associations and groups. The Surrealists found uses for cut-up beyond the Anti-Art statements of Dada<sup>163</sup>. They were interested in using aleatory methods, not as a statement in themselves, but to access the imagination. The Surrealists followed Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious and believed that beneath human thought's manifest content was a latent content that distorted and controlled behaviour. Breton wrote:

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<sup>162</sup> Robert Short, *Dada & Surrealism*, (New York,: Mayflower Bks., 1980). p17

<sup>163</sup> Hans Richter, *Dada : Art and Anti-Art*, (London : Thames & Hudson, 1966). p35

It was, apparently, by pure chance that a part of our mental world which we pretended not to be concerned with any longer -- and, in my opinion by far the most important part -- has been brought back to light<sup>164</sup>

The Surrealists were in search of ‘the marvellous’<sup>165</sup> accessed through dreams and trance states, through the methods of psychic automatism – ‘by which one intends to express verbally, in writing or by any other method, the real functioning of the mind’<sup>166</sup> and through the use of chance. Breton thought that these methods would enable artists and poets to reveal the mind’s latent content: <sup>167</sup>

Based on these discoveries a current of opinion is forming that will enable the explorer of the human mind to continue his investigations, justified as he will be in taking into account more than mere summary realities. The imagination is perhaps on the point of reclaiming its rights.<sup>168</sup>

William imagines what the words might mean, what context they could have and finds that his fragments ‘goatweed, Miranda, sublunary, scattered flotsam’ are ‘[...]ripe with possibility, with hidden strings that link them, with deep dark chasms that separate them but hold infinite meanings’.

Ernst Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* mentions various pre-20<sup>th</sup> century practitioners who used aleatory techniques, the painter Cozens<sup>169</sup> and his method of ‘blotting’ to produce images of landscapes; the German poet Justinus Kerner<sup>170</sup> who saw ghosts in his inkblots and may have influenced Hermann Rorschach; and, in America, the game of *Gobolinks* invented by Ruth McEnery Stuart And Albert Bigelow Paine who saw pictures

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<sup>164</sup> André Breton, 1924 Manifesto,

<[http://www.ubu.com/papers/breton\\_surrealism\\_manifesto.html](http://www.ubu.com/papers/breton_surrealism_manifesto.html)> [accessed 22/11/14]

<sup>165</sup> Alexandrian and Clough.p48

<sup>166</sup> Breton.

<sup>167</sup> Alexandrian and Clough. P47

<sup>168</sup> Breton, What is Surrealism?,

<sup>169</sup> Gombrich. p155

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. P157

of goblins in folded ink blots<sup>171</sup>. William's first view of Cal is when "The rough outline of a man materialises from the ink." William confabulates and fills in the gaps "word to word with threads of conjecture thin as spider webs":

Miranda[...]seems to be talking of the natural history of goatweed, the mortality of the sublunary world, and the fate of scattered flotsam on the ocean.

As William contextualizes these fragments he finds answers to the questions: who is Miranda? Why is she interested in mortality and the sublunary world? Where does goatweed grow? Where does the scattered flotsam come from?

Burroughs was introduced to a form of cut-up by Gysin. Gysin was an artist associated with the Surrealists. He claimed to have discovered or rediscovered the same process suggested by Tzara when accidentally cutting through newspapers covering a work bench in his studio:<sup>172</sup>

While cutting a mount for a drawing in room #15, I sliced through a pile of newspapers with my Stanley blade and thought of what I had said to Burroughs some six months earlier about the necessity for turning painters' techniques directly into writing. I picked up the raw words and began to piece together texts.<sup>173</sup>

'The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near' is pieced together from many other pieces of writing. It contains dialog and characters from *The Tempest*, plot elements from *Robinson Crusoe*, and was influenced by Ballard's *The Terminal Beach*<sup>174</sup> in which a solitary castaway has only a skeletonised body for company on an island used as a nuclear test site. There are also parts of other stories from this collection

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<sup>171</sup> Ruth McEnery Stuart, Albert Bigelow Paine, and Juvenile Collection (Library of Congress), *Gobolinks, or Shadow-Pictures for Young and Old*, (New York: The Century Co., 1896).

<sup>172</sup> David Brittain and Eduardo Paolozzi, *Eduardo Paolozzi - at New Worlds*, (Manchester: Savoy, 2013).p52

<sup>173</sup> Burroughs and Gysin. p24

<sup>174</sup> Ballard. p29- 50

and pieces of other unresolved pieces of writing. The Cyclopean construction of the palace is mentioned this is simultaneously a fragment of H. P. Lovecraft's lost city of R'lyeh,<sup>175</sup> a reference to Burroughs' study of Mayan<sup>176</sup> archaeology, and a palace from ancient Mycenae (as the ecosystem described on the island is Mediterranean).

On this island, castaway William is led in a dream-world to a pool where he finds a locket and contained within it a painting of beautiful Miranda:

It is a wonder of the limner's art displayed in minute and attentive detail; each encrustation of jewels, the spread of the farthingale, the half smile of vermilion on the pale face, all is perfect and yet unreal.

He awakes with this fragment straight out of 'Frostiana' in his hand. In 'Frostiana' Gloriana and John Dee sailed away with a boatful of mechanical servants and taking all the magic from her kingdom. On this island very similar mechanicals are at war with Cal which he says these are created by his Father. This island represents a possible future for Gloriana based upon Frances Yates identification of Dee with Prospero.<sup>177</sup>

Dee appeared in 'Frostiana' as an artificer. As a student he acted as stage manager and carpenter for a production of an Aristophanes play, for which he created a giant mechanical scarab beetle as part of the stage effects which led to accusations of sorcery<sup>178</sup>.

In 'The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near' the Dee/Prospero character is a Kabbalist – he performs his magic through written language. This is also

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<sup>175</sup> H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, (London: Penguin, 1999).p144

<sup>176</sup> Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw : The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs*, (London: Pimlico, 1988).p185

<sup>177</sup> Frances A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age (1979)*, (London : Routledge, 1979). p179

<sup>178</sup> Charlotte Fell Smith, *John Dee*, (London: Constable & company, 1909). p17

true of the historical Dee. In his book *Monas Hieroglyphica* he claimed to have rediscovered the language of Adam.<sup>179</sup> The true unspoiled language from before Babel.

Burroughs writes ‘in the beginning was the word and the word was bullshit’<sup>180</sup> and argues that cut-up is more truthful than everyday writing. Some of his claims regarding truth in cut-up are presented as a belief that the latent content is made explicit by the process. Ballard said of Burroughs:

I think his whole cut-up approach was an attempt to cut through the apparent manifest content of language to what he hoped might be some sort of more truthful world. A world of meaning that lay beyond. In books like “The Ticket that Exploded” and “The Soft Machine,” you see this attempt to go through language to something beyond. If there is a paradox, I think it lies somewhere here.<sup>181</sup>

Burroughs believes there is meaning hidden there “beyond the understanding of the vulgar.”<sup>182</sup> In Burroughs’ writing Tzara’s joke becomes paranoia or mystical interpretations of text.

In his essay ‘On The Cut Up Technique’ he suggests a variation on Gysin’s method:

The method is simple. Here is one way to do it. Take a page. Like this page. Now cut down the middle and cross the middle. You have four sections: 1 2 3 4 . . . one two three four. Now rearrange the sections placing section four with section one and section two with section three. And you have a new page<sup>183</sup>

Burroughs used iterations of the same repeated themes, phrases and words throughout his books. He relates this repetition to improvised jazz.

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<sup>179</sup> Eco. p188

<sup>180</sup> William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), Rev. ed. edn (London: Fourth Estate, 2010). p154

<sup>181</sup> Ballard, Sellars, and O’Hara. p349

<sup>182</sup> Brotchie and Gooding. p36

<sup>183</sup> Burroughs.

This method is of course used in music, where we are continually moved backward and forward on the time track by repetition and rearrangements of musical themes<sup>184</sup>

Castaway William's narrative contains the repetition typical of a text created by Burroughs, beside his frequent dwelling on the meaning of the four words "goatweed, Miranda, sublunary, scattered flotsam" he finds:

The goatweed shudders[...]he weeps and retreats into the goatweed[...]where the goatweed blooms and silent Miranda rules[...]

The silver-grey material of her dress is cunningly rendered in perfect imitation of the fleshly substance and matter of the sublunary world.[...] a way to command the sublunary world[...]

[...]reduce a distant ship to scattered flotsam

When cut up destroys the obvious 'chunking' structure the repetition can be used as a sort of substitute. An element of a text will remain primed for retrieval in semi-active memory for a limited time before it fades into background memory. Stockwell differentiates between renewing a referent by repetition and recalling. Recalling relies on a structured narrative when a repeated motif is employed the '[...] active referent is kept active by constant co-referral.'<sup>185</sup> Stockwell estimates the limits of this form of recall is about seven clauses. But adds that 'it should be noted that such repeated invocation strengthens the trace of items in the [...] fictional world.'<sup>186</sup> So provided a motif is repeated frequently enough it will be recognised and invoke its previous contexts throughout the text.

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<sup>184</sup> Burroughs and Gysin. p 95

<sup>185</sup> Peter Stockwell, *The Poetics of Science Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 2014). p149

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

There are many cut-up methods available, from subtle dislocation to extreme fragmentation. A piece of cut-up has qualities very different from an undisrupted text. Depending on the amount, scale, and method of disruption it may contain voids when the process introduces gaps in the text dislocations segments of line extreme randomized areas. It will usually be filled with unusual juxtapositions and a lot of nonsensical grammar; in shorter pieces of work this seems to more often resemble poetry and in longer pieces a reader may lose patience with the lack of narrative or be drawn to the deciphering of the meanings suggested by the adjacent fragments of text. There may be nonsense words or neologisms where words have been bisected and spliced. The structure of the text may be massively reordered or even dissolved away if the disruption is fine-grained and global leaving only a *palimpsest* of the original.

Cal is closer to the traditional conception of a Golem than Miranda. He is Friday of *Robinson Crusoe*, as well as a variation on Shakespeare's Caliban, and Frankenstein's creation. For Miranda there are other literary and legendary precedents: in Jewish mystical tradition there was Lilith who was created from the dust alongside Adam.<sup>187</sup> In Classical myth there is *Pygmalion's* bride in Ovid, where the artist's statue becomes a real woman. Closest to Miranda is E. T. A. Hoffmann's 'The Sandman'<sup>188</sup> in which the student Nathaniel falls in love with the passive automaton Olympia. Nathaniel rejects his former love, Clara in her favour. This is something of a parallel to William and Cal's relationship when William at first believes that Cal, '[...] makes this island a paradise.' Later when William discovers the remains of Miranda and decides he loves her he beats Cal and drives him away.

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<sup>187</sup> Scholem. p163

<sup>188</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann and R. J. Hollingdale, *Tales of Hoffmann*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982). p85 - 125



A comparison could be made between Miranda and the Creature's mate in *Frankenstein*<sup>189</sup> (1818) who remains inert in the original story and has to wait until 1935 to be brought to life in James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*<sup>190</sup>. In Villier de L'isle Adam's early science fiction story 'Future Eve'<sup>191</sup> the hero falls in love with an artificial woman and the author implies that she is only a simulated consciousness as there is no mechanism indicated for anything other than imitation. A similar experiment is performed in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*,<sup>192</sup> where the robot Ava has been programmed to convince humans that she is conscious.

Although Cal warns of what she might become Miranda never enters the world. There is the possibility that she will return to European aristocratic society like Delphine in '*Disir* on the *Langstrand*'; or that she may attempt to conquer the world like Lewis's Jadis<sup>193</sup> (who dismantled the world of Charn through speaking the abominable word); or even like *Ex Machina*'s Ava disappear into the crowded cities where she can learn to be a better simulation.

Miranda was never very alive in 'The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near', passive even beyond a Stepford wife.<sup>194</sup> She is a fetish in both senses of the word: an idol and object of misplaced desire. Miranda is a void, which William fills with his fantasies of love. At the end of the story she is returned to fragments and once more William finds himself alone with his scraps of paper on the shore. He starts to "pick up the raw words and began to piece together texts."<sup>195</sup> Like the primordial Torah, these might now be joined differently to form another story.

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<sup>189</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and Maurice Hindle, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, (London: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>190</sup> James Whale, *Bride of Frankenstein*, (USA: Universal Pictures, 1935).

<sup>191</sup> Peter Haining, *The Frankenstein Omnibus*, (London: Orion, 1994).p96 - 226

<sup>192</sup> Alex Garland, *Ex Machina*, (U.K.: Universal Pictures (UK),, 2015).

<sup>193</sup> C. S. Lewis and Pauline Baynes, *The Magician's Nephew*, (London: Collins, 1998).

<sup>194</sup> Ž Uvanović, 'Men in Love with Artificial Women: E. T. A. Hoffmann's "the Sandman," Ira Levin's the Stepford Wives, and Their Film Adaptations', 39 (2016) <[https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/primerjalna\\_knjizevnost/article/download/6350/6008](https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/primerjalna_knjizevnost/article/download/6350/6008)> [accessed 20/06/2019].

<sup>195</sup> Burroughs and Gysin. p24

## 7.1 Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me

The poet Henry Montfalcon attempts to flag me down. He has been dead at least a hundred years and has no right to be standing and waving at me among the carbonised skeletons of dead sheep and lambs. Behind his black-cloaked shoulder the detached shadows of the lost creatures still browse among the smouldering woods, still bleat in the hot air. I ignore Montfalcon; he is just a poseur with a skull and cloak - so melodramatic. I leave him behind flapping at the roadside and follow the bend round by Fisher's Quarry. My tyres bounce and slide over the melted surface of the Cutleadon road. The old excavations have transformed to a black glassy substance, which reflects things it should not: bright meadows, butterflies, flowers and fruit that otherwise remain invisible in this burnt out world. It reminds me of Montfalcon's poem, his *Persephone*.

*Once a flower-faced girl, she passed me dancing:*

*In her ethereal hands she held*

*Roses, crocus, cornflower, poppy, narcissus*

*And heady-scented hyacinth.*

I continue towards the ruin of the Hierapolis site where something darker even than the dead shadows seems to sprawl. I try to find news of the outside world. I turn on the radio; at first there are reassurances, pleas to stay calm, and then plans for an orderly evacuation. An aircraft flies high overhead, a tiny silver body with its engine droning like a mosquito: it drops a metal cylinder that floats to the ground on a silk parasol. I assume they are trying to monitor the situation. The monitoring does not help. The reassurances are hollow. A few weeks later all is silence and static.

I should have come back for her before. I had always planned to come back. In my heart Eva's memory burned sweet and strong and I hoped our re-acquaintance would bring some relief from my dull life in the city. I hoped that returning to the love I found in my childhood home would also return me to those moments when the eye of Jamzin's green woods opened. When I would float gloriously motionless; time abolished in the dissolving world of the summer sun. That alone should have been a clue to the future but I dismissed it as distortions, misremembering, dreams. Still I missed her, even now when she had become Persephone; taken her new name from Montfalcon's poem, even taken dead Montfalcon as her new love.

Before the accident, before I came back, in the days when there was electricity here and television transmissions still jabbered and babbled in every home, I viewed the dawning of the new age. The Hierapolis power plant was built here to produce unlimited energy. There would be no waste. It harnessed quantum effects to draw on the natural power of the space-time itself. It was there for the taking and we were ready to take it. No more coal. No more gas. No more wind or water. Minister Burnes issued an order authorising the activation of the Eldbray-Hierapolis reactor following months of successful stress tests. There were to be thousands of jobs, wealth for all. Sunrise Power said it was listening to various concerns about safety; and while it recognised there were certain risks involved it had taken steps to reduce these to an acceptable level.

"Hooray for Sunrise," I said.

They started the reactor. It ran smoothly - then just a tiny problem. It was all under control. "Good old Sunrise Power," I said.

Then they showed it on TV; a black sun pulsed above the Hierapolis site. In Jamzin there were always legends: of black suns rising, of mysterious apparitions, of bizarre relics.

I knew what was coming. Past and future connected in my head and I realised there was little of either left. I saw those legends, those visions in the woods, those mad poems of Henry Montfalcon pointed to one thing. I took shelter deep underground; as far down as I could go. Now though, in the aftermath, I have made my way to the disaster area.

If she is anywhere this is where I shall find her. It is obvious.

I stop the car: Jamzin has changed. There must have been some warning; in the rush to flee the doors were all left wide open. I kick my way among the cinders. A bicycle leans welded to a lamp-post. Plates lie in shattered fragments among the ashes of furniture in an empty restaurant. The road is pitted and scorched and the path to the mines is hidden beyond a row of gutted ironstone shops and cottages that have resisted the blast better than the newer brick properties. I take the winding footpath between what were once thickets of jasmine and laurel growing wild at the side of the Crow Inn. At the end of the track I emerge from a charcoal-forest onto a steep limestone outcrop overlooking the estuary. I sit on an ancient boulder by the Temple Mine. The Temple Mine was dug by the Romans in search of iron ore, of coal, of something stranger. I wait by its gateway.

Once the Hierapolis reactor shone in the sunlight like a vision of the New Jerusalem. The toroidal ring was a gleaming steel doughnut that blinded me with reflected light. It shone with hopes of a bright future. Beyond the power stations there glittered the white roofs of modern estates laid out for the workers in neat little match-box rows. Now there are only ruins.

The interior of the old mine might have provided some shelter for her. There are worn steps leading down into the darkness and the conical ruins of many, many furnaces. Henry Montfalcon once compared them to Pluto's Gates on Mount Etna; and here in sleepy little Jamzin, with its honeycomb of iron and coal mines, Montfalcon had described Persephone descending into the underworld. Now, I know this was more than an opium dream, more than that poet's mad imagination.

I find his diary lost in the ruins. Lost among all the dead broken dolls in the rubble that are not really dolls. The yellowed pages are scattered among the carbonised figures. I wonder at how they had escaped the destruction.

*Montfalcon's Diary August 1887*

*I had a successful season with the publication of 'Yellow Temples' and the Burlington wanted a portrait. Basilgate was the man for portraits, though considered by the stuffer critics to be a bit Greenery-Yallery and susceptible to continental theories, his star was rising as fast as my own, and I suspected the members of the Burlington hoped that we would shine brighter in the light of one another's genius and in turn re-illuminate the fading glory of their club.*

*I had hoped for at least a carriage from the station at Cutleadon. All I found was a farmer's cart. The town sprawled in black serrated rows of spikes and spires, chimneys and flues rising in the rambling woods. The warehouses, manufactories, and terraces of workers cottages were transected by many small sooty railways that ran to the north. Black smoke and white sparks vomited from their destination. I, however, was bound for the south western end of those woods. No trains for me, just the slow plod of a farm horse on unmettled roads.*

*I was relieved to have put some distance between myself and Cutleadon. The further from the sulphurous railway we travelled the more I liked this land; the backwaters retained a quaint and almost medieval aspect. The buildings changed from red brick to pretty white-washed local stone as soon as we left the town. The further out we travelled the richer the flowers grew. The flowers positively glowed and I could discern why Basilgate came to the area and where he found those fabulous colours that the critics said were too gaudy, too primitive, or too unlike nature.*

*I saw a stray entomologist pursue a swarm of bright butterflies across a meadow of such exotic blooms that, in his clergy-coat and black breeches, he became a dark ship sailing among the rolling waves of poppies while his net flapped and twisted like a pennant. He made an impossible tack to starboard and for a moment yawed with his net trawling the air in search of a shoal of his iridescent prey, for a moment he seemed to recover his stability, for a moment he wavered above the flowers with his net quivering among the illusive quarry. Slowly he pitched forwards and with a certain balletic grace was submerged beneath a blood stained sea, deep red rippling bloodstains punctuated by yellow bird's-foot-trefoil, purple vetches, and two black-gartered legs waving in the air. The air was rich with the scent of wild marjoram and the now unmolested butterflies scattered to the four winds.*

*I was deposited at Temple House where the famous Basilgate was due to paint me. Mrs Bathurst, his house keeper, welcomed me and having dispatched Sheppherd, the footboy, with my bags, led me to Basilgate's studio. Basilgate seemed an untypical bohemian, neatly suited and clean shaven. He offered me a cigarette and called for sandwiches immediately. "We had best get started," he said and produced a skull from somewhere and an old cloak. "Try them for size," he said "Rather old fashioned, but it's what the public expect from a poet."*

When I was young only old Mr Sheppherd remembered Montfalcon. My parents sent me away from Jamzin to school; I thought I would die. I thought I would prefer death to that alien land where the sullen trees always seemed wet and painted in unnaturally dark shades of glossy green. They dripped with cold grey rain in cold grey grounds of the school under cold grey skies. A world populated by scraggy stray dogs and black uniformed keepers. No ball games, no games, nothing; each plant, each shrub, each tree had been filed in the earth and systematized with pedagogic exactitude. How could the over-ordered grounds be anything other than hell compared to the wild forest in my heart? How could it replace those memory haunted arbours and the shadow dappled undergrowth where old Mr Sheppherd had rested on his gnarled staff and pointed with knotty fingers to mark a pile of stones. Where he had told us how Bronze Age kings had made strange sacrifices, how witches had held covens in the days of King James, and how the poet Montfalcon had summoned up the devil or something worse?

Now I have returned and that Jamzin has gone. But still sometimes those people seem to live again, to walk among the shadows of the buildings. Sometimes even the standing buildings seem to be just shadows and dust on the ground. Even those carelessly heaped blocks of stone and brick, gathered together in monumental piles, dissolve before me. The distorted shadows they cast seem the real buildings; a city of darkness designed in accordance with some discordant alien geometry and populated by hollow eyed dummies wearing rictus grins.

I don't suppose anyone else will ever know the true nature of the accident. It surpassed Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Windscale B. What scientists are left to investigate the results? If it had been a normal catastrophe the authorities would have coped, found a solution, evacuated. It was anything but normal; space-time itself was

twisted and split apart in the explosion, crumbled and broken, so Persephone fell away from my world and dropped into the arms of Montfalcon.

I find her, or at least a version of her among the mines and I realise she has an existence way beyond Jamzin. She is my Eva, and Montfalcon's Persephone, and something else.

Who knows how far back the disaster goes. I have memories of lips and darkness and flower scented woods. But it is too late to recapture those moments in the paradise of Jamzin, to reclaim her. This reunion is too brief. She lasts a few days clutching my hand in her cold fingers as she lies on my sleeping roll within the first chamber of the mine. In her dreams she rambles of Jamzin and London and lovers long gone. I try to comfort her; I stroke her hair that was once the gold of summer corn now turned grey. She tries to speak and I lift her close to my ear but her life has retreated inwards and she has not the breath to speak more. Her breath becomes irregular, she pants like an animal, and struggles to extract enough oxygen from the air. Her once cherry lips turn black and withered. Time has run amok with her; the bright eyes that transfixed me change to shadow and she is still. The flesh falls away from her bones in a matter of hours.

Yet there is this other Eva; Eva who became Montfalcon's Persephone, Eva who returns as a ghost, only half in this time. This earlier Persephone who is propelled back into the past; the Persephone I hope to regain. To return her to being the Eva I knew before she fell backwards through the years and centuries to Montfalcon's age.

With my heart breaking I place the remains in the ruins of St. Peter's where liquefied stone and puddled metal transform eleventh century Romanesque to Gaudi-Gothic. I surround her with the fantastic black jewels produced in the silent flash of the



accident. Her pale skull is worn thin by phantom thoughts so it is delicate as a Chinese lantern plant. This is the proof that it is she, not me, who is the ghost. I take a walk down to the shore of the estuary where rough clumps of sea kale grow among the pebbles just in reach of the salt waves' splash. Higher up, thistles and sea-bindweed cling to the solid limestone of the cliff face. The seed heads talk in tiny dry voices as if announcing her return.

*Montfalcon's Diary August 1887*

*While he fiddled with his paints and sorted his brushes I sat among the canvases looking distractedly through the window.*

*There in the bright gardens I saw her at the edge of the woodlands wearing a dress of some more innocent time, from before Pompeii and Rome, before Athens. Perhaps from before even Babylon or long vanished Akkad.*

*"Who's that girl?"*

*"What girl?" he said.*

*"That one there in the... she's gone."*

*"Have you seen our ghost then?"*

*"A very pretty ghost?"*

*"That'll be her. I assume she's a ghost as no one around knows her. She haunts the Hursbroke. She turns up in the garden now and then. Perhaps she's the priestess, after all this is Temple House – built on the site where the Romans worshiped Pluto."*

*I replied "Well there are ghosts and ghosts; on this occasion I'd like to be haunted."*

*He stood behind his easel smoking a Turkish and dabbing at the canvas with a stubby brush, occasionally picking a fresh rag and rubbing or smudging with his thumb. At one point he cracked open an egg and mixed the yolk with a thick mound of white lead pigment and a little oil.*

*“Dangerous mayonnaise, Gabriel,” I said.*

*He poured the egg-white into a brandy and swigged it down.*

*“It’ll give you some sparkle,” he said and proceeded to flick and stab and splash the mixture across the canvas *allegro* and *fortissimo* or is it *bravura* and *impasto*?”*

*At the end of the afternoon sitting he announced the under-painting was complete; he said “It’ll need to dry off a bit before I can start the glazes, why don’t we resume in a couple of weeks?”*

*“That’s rather a long time,” I said.*

*“Well I might photograph you, but it wouldn’t get the spirit in. Why not track down that ghost while you’re waiting?”*

*It was a splendid idea. I took a stroll along the banks of the Hursbroke, where the stream followed the edge of the woods among blackened oaks. Bluebell, red campion and foxglove nodded their heads in the dappled shadows. I traced her path through broken flowers, a trail of the green scent rising in the warm air. The start of a new poem came to me. *Of Persephone Amongst the Flowers*. The stream chattered as it flowed and the bees hung like drops of gold on the empurpled lips of the foxgloves. I felt I had reached the beginning of the world. I paused to light a cigarette and saw her watching me from the shade of an old elm. *Persephone*.*

*With warm lips that opened like the foxglove bell. Her breath was perfumed with heady scented sandalwood, patchouli and musk. She was very much alive.*

I remember Eva too. I felt happy returning to my former home, and yet there was disappointment; everything seemed shrunken and down at heel. My parent's house was just another holiday home and Mr Sheppherd's cottage was for sale. I found him, or his name at least on a lichen-mellowed gravestone in the churchyard. I paused for a moment and wondered who else would carry that history. I supposed I would write it down one day. The roads seemed ill-repaired, pitted and patched. Only the new visitors' centre on the ruins of Temple House beyond the village seemed fresh. The path to the ironworks and mines was hidden beyond a row of ironstone shops and cottages so a casual visitor might have missed it were it not signposted from every corner. If you followed the signs and took that winding footpath between the jasmine and laurel growing wild at the side of the Crow Inn, beyond the rust red stone walls and half timbers. Through the stands of resin scented pines you emerged onto a steep limestone outcrop overlooking the estuary and the shining silver marvel of Hieropolis.

Those stories old Mr Sheppherd told should have warned me, but he warned me of so many unseen things how could I have known? Perhaps if I had stayed until I was older I would have understood. I was allowed to return from my school only for too-brief summers among the trees. Mr Sheppherd had warned us, warned the boys when he found us building dens among the thick fallen limbs of the dead oak in Tabbot's Coomb. He said we were not to venture there on St John's Eve or Halloween or Midwinter or any other day come to think of it. We had shuddered at the stories, at the things which creep out from deep time; at the vision of a dark sun rising over a ruined world and the creatures thereof.

There were fantastic myths in Jamzin, fairy princesses and wild witches and dark worlds hidden in the woods, mermaids and serpents and pirates out on Pelkoe's Reef. I realise now this was the aftermath, or foreshadowing of the accident. We do not even

possess the vocabulary to describe the results of a shockwave that extended through time as well as space; and the implications make my head spin. The signs were there before, a warning perhaps, but then if the accident and the signs were connected this must all in some way have already happened. It was perhaps inevitable? How could we have prevented something predestined even if we had realised? Of course when the reactor was built there had been the usual protests by the usual suspects. They had no knowledge merely a Luddite mistrust of the future. Others from the village may have known, those who saw the visions in the woods; why did they choose to stay silent?

*Montfalcon's Diary August 1887*

*The purple flowering foxgloves drooped their heavy heads while the golden hum of the honey-drunk bees floated through soporific summer air. We lay lily-cradled: among hedge bedstraw, herb robert, wood avens, frail as wood anemones, the musk of the roses blew on a gentle breeze.*

*How I can recount those flowers now, their names ripe with the magic of that day, goatweed, wood-forget-me-not, wild primrose, self heal, red campion. She glowed among those wild flowers and a swarm of peacock butterflies fluttered around her untamed hair.*

*"Oh beauty, what heaven did you escape?" I asked.*

*"I don't think I've escaped; this seems very much like heaven."*

*"Have you a name?"*

*"I suppose so. I don't know it though," she smiled, "I've forgotten, but I'm not sure it matters."*

*"They thought you a ghost."*

*"You are Montfalcon, the poet, where's your cloak and skull?"*

*“You’ve been watching me pose.”*

*“No.”*

*“I see now you are a goddess, Persephone among the flowers.”*

*“It’s very beautiful,” she said and fell back in the poppies, “I wish I could stay within this dream.”*

*I was falling too.*

*“If I’m a dream I hope you don’t wake, could we dream together Persephone?”*

*“That sounds like a proposal.”*

*“I think it is, Persephone.”*

*“I will stay here with these flowers forever, and with my own poet.”*

*She agreed to accompany me but I thought I should acquire some more suitable clothing for her first.*

The first time I saw her, my Eva, our Persephone. I stood at the visitors centre door. The broad-windowed hall was built from massive timbers cut from the surrounding woods. I placed the style as National Trust-Rustic.

The ruins of the Temple Ironworks were more obscure than many other monuments. They stand as a series of ruined furnaces and foundries among the woods as mysterious as any iron age temple, and picturesque as any castle

There I had my first sight of Eva, she came to conduct me on the tour. I remember she wore a pale summer dress printed with blue and red flowers. Maybe it was the summer air, maybe it was some memory clinging to the place, and perhaps it was already love. The insistent health of her skin and flesh seemed to sing as she flowed around the site. Deep brown eyes held me in that still remembered moment like my childhood summer when she spoke. “The archaeology has been neglected and there aren’t really funds at the moment...”

Later we sat beneath a portrait of Montfalcon in 'The Crow', dressed in the standard issue broad hat and black cloak of his calling, and his hand resting on a now familiar white skull, he was staring into an undefined visionary distance.

"Are you new here?" She asked.

"No I was born here, I went away."

Now she too has gone away, now she too is born here...or reborn here.

How many days? How many weeks? How long have I waited? There seems a pattern to her visits but no regularity.

"I don't believe you," the ghost says, "you are an old friend. I simply asked you to meet me here by the sea to dance in the moonlight."

"You are a ghost," I say, "I came here to save you."

"Why would I have needed saving?"

"To stop you becoming like this."

"But this is Heaven," she says, "Are you ready to dance with me?"

As she dances the whole world dances too, the dark dead woods come to life and swirl like a maelstrom around her graceful body, the waters rise and fall in time with her steps, and the stars themselves brighten as she moves. I try to dance with her between the poison waters and the ruined land where strange plants and unreal creatures grow among the half-cremated bones of the old world. My joints are too stiff. I feel my nervous limbs move too swiftly from pose to static pose. I know I am too awkward and although she flows like water she dances to an irregular rhythm and I cannot match her step. She stops and looks sadly at me. Black tears run down her white cheeks and black raindrops fall from the ash-grey sky. The river waters are now repulsed by the tread of her feet.

As her face fades away into darkness she says, “We shall meet and try the dance again. You must practice. You must find a master.”

Then Montfalcon comes. He emerges from the old mine. He sits beside me with his saturnine features shaded by that broad brimmed hat.

“I have missed her again? There was no help,” he says, “they spoke of ghosts and curses. So I procured an axe and spade and after cutting through six feet of dead ivy I came to ash and clay and I dug deeper still, deeper into the mine until I could stand aside and say behold Persephone I have opened the magic door for you. Her sickness went; she was the Persephone I had seen on that summer day. She laughed, the hunger had gone from her and she said, “Well Pluto shall we pass through these gates then you and I, together into darker lands?”

“Do you think I would make a good Hades for you?” I asked.

“Bring your skull and cloak,” she said.”

He wipes a tear and continues, “In that tunnel I followed. She said the door was opened for me and joyfully I stepped through, but it is a narrow way, this dark paradise. I slipped into your world after her and yet I have lost her.”

“Lost?”

“Yes, lost. I left her waiting in the mine while I ventured to find her the black fruit. When I returned she had gone. I have been searching for her for weeks.”

“I have seen her,” I say, “She is here often. Let us wait together.”

He seems to have forgiven my refusal of the lift. Together we gather charcoal branches. Find kindling. He is strong and carries twice as much as I can manage. I am astonished that one who affects such sensitivity of mind has the body of such a brute. He is, I suppose, of a different, more physical age.

We trap something much like a deer and he shows me how to skin it and butcher the carcass.

He warms himself by the fire and bites on a cut of the creature.

*Montfalcon's Diary June 1888*

*Persephone and I returned to London. At first she seemed to settle to my life. She took over the running of the house and was so liberal and familiar with the servants I worried they would neglect their duties. However something in her open manners and sweetness must have touched them and the household ran as efficiently and perhaps more happily than before. She called it a commune and I worried that she might be some anarchist, she laughed at this suggestion, "This is not my world, but I have brought some of my world with me."*

*She marvelled at the streets and shops and made a great impression on the various circles of poets and painters and several adopted her as their muse. Musselbaum nearly shot himself because of his passion for her (he fortunately missed being far too drunk and moved on to a more available muse). In short she had the whole of bohemia at her feet.*

*Our happiness was short lived. Whilst visiting the sculptor Max Mowbray in Camden Town she was taken with sickness - a strange hunger. She lay on the ground clutching her stomach and begging for black fruit. When I asked what fruit she meant she tried to attack me. Of course she was no match; even so it seemed that her sickness made her strong. I called Doctor Graves who gave her laudanum to dull the pain. But always then she had the hunger.*

*It is a strange illness that compels her. I think she would consume all life if she could. It can overtake her at any time: walking in Oxford Street, dining at the Café Royal, or in Basilgate's house in Jamzin. We can be in the earthly paradise one moment and the*



*next she is screaming and raving after a fruit she cannot have because it does not exist in my world. She is tortured by her hunger so she becomes this wild creature vicious as a tiger. If I did not hold my love so tightly, if I did not bind her, imprison her during this madness she would crush the life from anything within reach. She cannot help herself; it is as if only death will assuage her hunger. Physically the opiates are doing her no good and I fear if I cannot find a cure she will be sent up to Hanwell Hospital.*

“I hoped I could free her, bring my poor mad love to this world and find the fruit that will save her so she may live complete with me,” says Montfalcon.

“I will help you search,” I say and he thanks me.

Together we search the woods and we find many sorts of black fruit growing on those dead and ruined trees, but Persephone remains a ghost. She will not manifest in full, only a pale wraith flitting through the trees that together we pursue with our offerings of fruit.

As we rest together Montfalcon weeps with frustration and I say, “Do not give up my friend, we shall find her and return her here; back to her own world.”

He reacts violently.

Once I thought Montfalcon was to be my friend, a living companion in the desolation but he cannot accept she belongs in this world and he wishes for something more. I take to avoiding his company and yet we both crave the visions, we both seek her ghost or her person so we happen upon each other far too often. When I am hunting the small dark creatures that somehow survive in the ashes and ruins I see him sat looking out across the estuary with a book in his hand and a cigarette smouldering in his mouth. When I paddle down the river hoping to scavenge food from less damaged locations I see him in a small boat idly exploring inlets and creeks along the far bank. He seems able to return to his point of entry into the disaster area - back to the eighteen-eighties and his friend

Basilgate. I attribute this to his origin somewhat further from the chronological epicentre of the accident. But Persephone where does she go? I find her wraith at the mine entrance and I tell her of the fate of the village.

“I don’t believe you,” her ghost says, “the worst of the contamination was blown northwest. Here there is so much life, so much beauty.”

I see a litter of young animals who have only known life inside the zone. There is something wrong with them but I couldn’t say what, they just seem wrong, like animatronics, waxworks, or simulacra. The soul has gone.

“There, Persephone,” I say, “proof that the end has already come.”

She laughs and says, “The butterflies, the pretty butterflies, catch them for me Reverend,” and runs across a field of glass and baked clay fading as she goes.

Has the radiation affected her mind? Or is it that she occupies more than one time? When for me there is the monstrous devastation of Hieropolis, for her is it also paradise?

The voices in the black city whisper. They tell so many secrets. They tell me how to call her back, to bring things up from the darkness that is leaking through the world. I wait for her here on the cliff top. I squeeze the black pomegranates before her delicate skull. As instructed I perform the ritual before Pluto’s Gates. Just to see her face again. Just to bring a little light to this new world.

Montfalcon as large as life crashes through the burnt undergrowth. He pauses on a grey beach before the wide grey river while the grey sun strengthens revealing a grey broken landscape. He speaks familiar lines to me; his clenched fists shaking in fury.

*Her song-sweetened lips, once beloved.*

*Are now pomegranate stained*

*Silent and swollen with the fruit*

*Of darker seasons.*

“All the long summer,” he says, “we had all the long summer together, but now she is gone. You are the one who calls her back to this ruined land!”

“It is where she belongs.”

“She belongs with me,” he says.

“She is dead.”

“Not in my world, in my world she is my wife and she is very much alive.”

“She is not your wife - she is my... ghost.”

“She is my wife still, sir.”

He is angry, overbearing. He is a wild man: a savage.

“You swore till death do you part,” I say, “but death has you parted.”

“We shall see,” he answers drawing a swordstick. He is too strong, too wild, too red in tooth and claw to tackle directly. I apologise. I try to sooth him. I take him by the arm.

“Oh Montfalcon, we are friends - let us not quarrel over the one we both love. Let us go and find her and ask her, let her choose of her own free will,” I say, “I saw her only a little way away.”

He is of course confident she will choose him and agrees. We walk many miles through the woods. We follow an old road of fire-burnished stones away from Hieropolis into the interior of the dead forest. We are among the leafless woods, among the dark flowers, among strangely armoured fruit of a sadder world where naked screaming things that once were birds nest in blackened branches. We stop to drink from a spring which surprisingly still flows with sweet water among the devastation. He leans over to take a drink from his cupped hands. It is the moment of the accident. The cause that has rippled out through time. If I could stop myself I would but desire is too strong. I free myself of

Montfalcon. All it takes is a heavy stone and a single sharp blow to the back of the head. He did not expect it and I congratulate myself on my superior intelligence. How thin a skull he had for such an uncivilized brute. Now he lies buried in the poisoned ground and my heart is lighter for his absence. I do not realise I am stood at ground zero. In fact I feel quite giddy and look with hope towards the future.

I take a trip out on the river. I find a raft and punt downstream to the Hierapolis site. I skirt the rusting skeletons of the power stations. Towards the mouth of the estuary the steel of the buildings' superstructures has melted like candle stubs. Black skeletal leaves still pretend to grow on the dead trees among the ruins and the flowers toss their ashen heads in the summer breeze. Here those voices whisper like distant wind and leaves, like the hiss of cold static from the dead space between the stars. I sleep and dream of those singers, those shadows that stand like dolls in the fantastic ruins of an alien world. There is something within the site – a temple to my Persephone. She sits an immaculate idol among the trees. She has grown huge and terrible and beautiful with her ivory roots reaching down into the black soil. Black pomegranates grow in her golden hair and before her an altar of burned skulls is piled high as a man. Her priest, a fire-damaged shop dummy from the ruins, waits immobile before her dark glory, with a congregation arranged in neat rows before her with rictus grins on their burned heads.

Returning along the shimmering dark waters a pale figure like a flame follows in the woods. I paddle to the shore in search of Persephone among the groves and glades where black fruit hang from the dead wood. There is a light among the trees and I follow deeper.

Now I am here by the estuary to dance with her. I am free at least to wait here without Montfalcon whom the accident has laid beyond the dark crest of Jamzin Hill and the ragged stain of the Temple Mine headland. I spread the blanket above the strandline;

the skeletonised superstructure of a grounded tanker rusting beyond Pelkoe's Reef sighs and creaks, threatening to collapse into the muddy waters. Things that might have been gulls a long time ago swirl in endless streamers of whiteness leaving misty parabolas in the air. Their movements seem disassociated from their positions - lost in time. I smooth the faded blanket, threadbare, fraying. I lay out the gifts. A few half melted ceramics, some black stones, roots grubbed from the upper shore, tins of nondescript meat with the labels seared off in the accident.

She should be here soon. I look at my watch. The hands are just two shadows stuck at 8:15 on a Sunday morning.

How can I explain to her that she is dead, has been dead for years?

"I don't believe you," her ghost will say when I tell her the earth itself is crumbled, blown away in the blast, given birth to monsters.

"It is a beautiful day," she will say as she lays her long white body on the desolate ground. "The sun is warm, the estuary so blue. It is a perfect day for a picnic."

And then she will sit with me and for a while it will be as it was. I will believe her descriptions of the flowers, her plans for the future. When she tells me it is true I will believe we are dancing on a sacred beach where white sands meet warm water beneath a yellow sun.

The sands are luminous in the moonlight; the world is liquefied. Tonight a bright pillar rises from the Hierapolis site just visible beyond the red sandstone and grey bluestone boulders. The stones are patched with fast growing mold, mold that eats at the rock and crumbles atoms into senescent decay so black voids that fall forever speckle its surface. There seems to be so little time left. I am grateful I will be spending it alone with my beloved. A white ghost flits across the water.

"Persephone," I call.

"Oh, it's you," she says, "have you found a dancing master?"

“There are none left.”

“Then I will stay here with these flowers forever, and with my own poet. Have you seen him? Have you seen my Montfalcon?”

“Not recently, you should come and meet me on the beach where we danced in the moonlight.”

I offer her the gifts and she accepts, but they remain untouched. She looks at my hands “They are red,” she says, “there is blood on your fingers.”

I try to wipe them clean but blood flows and drips, “An animal,” I reply, “I hunted it on the shore.”

“Where is Montfalcon?” she asks, “He was here often among these flowers, in this golden corn, in these green woods. Where is he now?”

“I don’t know, somewhere around,” I say with blood pouring from my fingertips and spattering my shirt.

She reaches out and touches my hand - her fingers are like mist, like frost, like ice.

“That is not an animal’s blood,” she says, “the blood of the animals is not so red, not so full of life, not so full of his love.”

She starts to cry, her body shudders with grief and the shudders of grief spread through the ruins. Her grief breaks the clocks, shatters the world, opens the ground and Montfalcon crawls out, his blood is flowing from the soil like a river. He points a crooked finger at me.

“It was an accident,” I plead. “I did it for you,” I say, “forget him, now we can be together again.”

I am at the epicentre. The ground shakes and the waters withdraw far from the estuary. All the woods burn red in the fire. A shockwave spreads to destroy the Hierapolis site; to ignite a black sun; to cast those bodies backwards and forwards through time. It is her anger that has initiated the disaster. It is her pain that crumples space and time like

tissue paper. It is her pain that reaches backwards into history like a black canker, and it is her pain that leaves me alone and accursed at the end of the world.

She has gone. Even as a ghost she would not stay. She has gone back into the darkness, back into the dream. What might I give for a candle? For the warm flicker of its flame, for the slick scent of warm wax. What would I give for a little light now and then here in the ruins? My supplies run low too often and are replaced with increasing difficulty. It is hard to find any light in my eyes or my heart without her. I know that she hates me now. I have made her hate me and she will not return to let me make amends. So I live alone ten miles from the ruined power station, ten miles from the hole in the world, ten miles from the monstrous idol in the woods. I live in darkness mostly eating from the anonymous tins scavenged from the ruins. All the while I hope for just another glimpse of a ghost who believes it is heaven, believes she still lives, believes it is a hot summer day in an old English meadow.

*In lands beyond the seven gates times seven*

*Behind the mirror of the endless river*

*She sits enthroned and crowned*

*With immortal stones and shadow.*

Henry Montfalcon, *Persephone*, 1888

## 7.2 Discourse and Fabula Time

I and you at this gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things- must we not all have been here before? -And must we not return and run in that other lane out before us, that long, terrible lane- must we not return eternally?<sup>196</sup>

*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche

‘Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me’ is a story about time. The Narrator, Eva-Persephone, and Montfalcon act in present, past, and parallel worlds; heaven, and hell threaten to break through into the disaster area where ‘space-time itself was twisted and split apart in the explosion, crumbled and broken.’

The form of time in this story seeks to mirror the natural form of cut-up narrative-time. This is without a clear past or future as cut-up tends to confuse the order of words within deictic sequences.<sup>197</sup> These are highly dependent on their relation to each other within the text; without the correct sequence of deixis the plot cannot move forward. What is left is an immersive, atmospheric text. For example in Burroughs’ *The Soft Machine*:

On the sea wall two of them stood together waving - Age flakes coming down hard here – Hurry up – Another hollow ticket – Don’t know if you got my last hints trying to break out of this dizziness with Chinese Characters.<sup>198</sup>

This was one of the aspects of cut-up admired by Ballard. In the late sixties he made a transition from the descriptions of surrealist worlds embedded within a

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<sup>196</sup> Nietzsche and Hollingdale.p179

<sup>197</sup> Stockwell.p41

<sup>198</sup> William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine (1961)*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2010). p75



conventional narrative to the use of a surrealist narrative methodology. This was a return to experiments he had made with collages,<sup>199</sup> while assistant editor at *Chemistry and Industry* magazine.<sup>200</sup> Ballard went on to include elements of these in various stories.

He considered narrative a distraction from pure fiction; he was attracted by cut-ups, lack of narrative action and its use of image. It was this aspect he borrowed from Burroughs for his compressed novels in *Atrocity Exhibition*<sup>201</sup>. Ballard describes this as:

A whole set of complicated formula, in which the characters are obsessed with building little psychological machines that will generate new possibilities out of everything.<sup>202</sup>

These worlds are empty of time. They present the reader with a scene and expect them to interpret it.

In several of the stories in this collection the fabula contains narrative sub-worlds that exist outside of time – paintings. In ‘The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near’ the locket found by William shows Miranda when she lived. In ‘Frostiana’ the portrait preserves the dead Queen, ‘Gloriana, [...] each detail rendered in perfect imitation of the fleshly substance and matter of the sublunary world. [...] All is perfect and yet not of this world.’

The True Image of God in ‘Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss’ is eternal even when model perishes. These paintings unfold their meaning only in space, not time. The form that Ballard seems to be looking for in his condensed novel is poetry. The place of the paintings in ‘Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me’ is taken by Montfalcon’s poem

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<sup>199</sup> J G Ballard, 'Four Text Collages [Project for a New Novel]', *The Papers of James Graham Ballard* (1958)  
<[http://searcharchives.bl.uk/primo\\_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=IAMS\\_VU2&afterPDS=true&institution=BL&docId=IAMS040-000786707&\\_ga=2.264116428.1570470575.1551623702-1334434039.1551623702](http://searcharchives.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=IAMS_VU2&afterPDS=true&institution=BL&docId=IAMS040-000786707&_ga=2.264116428.1570470575.1551623702-1334434039.1551623702)> [accessed 03/03/2019].

<sup>200</sup> J. G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life : Shanghai to Shepperton : An Autobiography*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2008). p187

<sup>201</sup> J. G. Ballard, William S. Burroughs, and Hari Kunzru, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2014).

<sup>202</sup> Ballard, Sellars, and O'Hara.p206

which forms a parallel narrative- free (or at least obliquely narrated) description alongside the main story:

*Once a flower-faced girl, she passed me dancing:  
In her ethereal hands she held  
Roses, crocus, cornflower, poppy, narcissus  
And heady-scented hyacinth.*

*Her song-sweetened lips, once beloved.  
Are now pomegranate stained  
Silent and swollen with the fruit  
Of darker seasons*

*In lands beyond the seven gates times seven  
Behind the mirror of the endless river  
She sits enthroned and crowned  
With immortal stones and shadow.*

In Burroughs' trilogy of novels beginning with *The Cities of the Red Night*<sup>203</sup> he used time-travel to rewrite history and reflected this by using a deliberately fragmented narrative order even though the novel was originally written as a traditional story. Burroughs said of the books 'I parachute my characters behind enemy lines in time. Their mission is to correct retroactively certain turning points in human history.'<sup>204</sup>

Jeremy Scott in *Creative Writing and Stylistics*<sup>205</sup> draws attention to the distinction between the telling or discourse and the tale or fabula. The fabula can be defined as 'the raw sequence of events that might have been in reality.'<sup>206</sup> The discourse is the way a story is told and may not necessarily be in chronological order. In frame stories such as *Frankenstein*<sup>207</sup> the discourse-time begins at the end of the fabula time (at the end of the story) and is narrated in flashback; Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*<sup>208</sup> is narrated with fabula time in reverse order. In 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me' the earliest part of the

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<sup>203</sup> Burroughs.

<sup>204</sup> Morgan.p601

<sup>205</sup> Scott. p66

<sup>206</sup> Stockwell. p122

<sup>207</sup> Shelley and Hindle.

<sup>208</sup> Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow, or, the Nature of the Offence*, (London: Vintage, 2003).

fabula is contained within the narrator's recalled childhood story where '[...] bronze age kings had made strange sacrifices, where [...] witches had held covens in the days of King James [...]']'.

Figure 5, below, shows the order of events that precede the readers entry into the discourse indexed using calendar time:

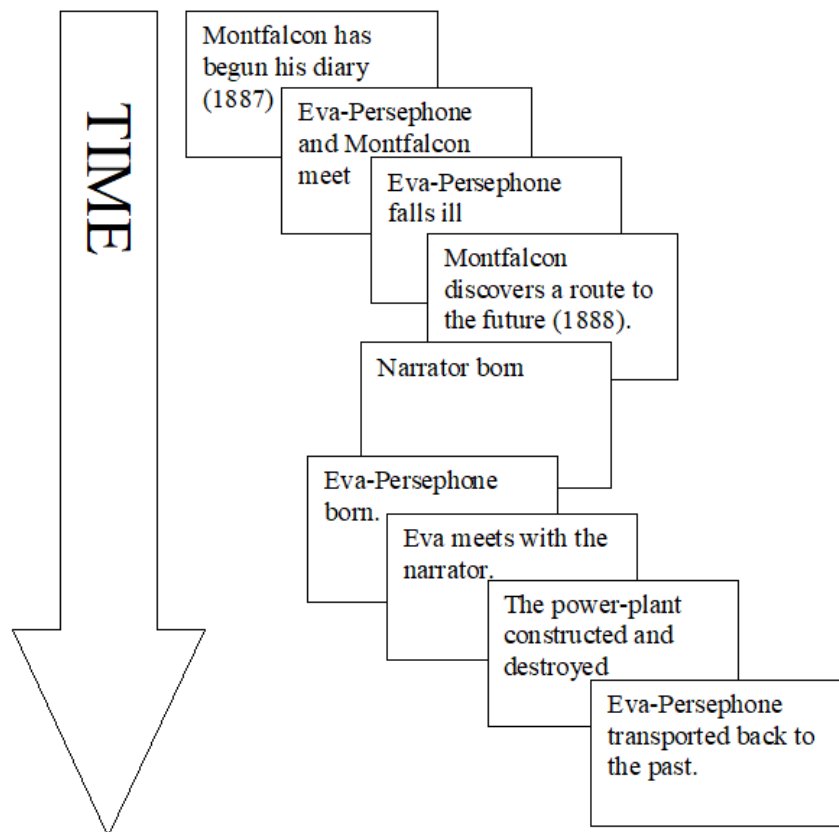


Figure 5 - chronologically indexed events in the fabula

The final event within this fabula is Eva-Persephone's transportation back to the beginning of the chronological sequence.

A physics within a fabula (or in the real world), which allows time travel, invites paradox. Writing about time travel in *Scientific American*, Tim Folger asks:

“What happens to a time traveller who kills his or her grandfather before the grandfather meets the grandmother? Would the demented traveller ever be born?<sup>209</sup>

Attempts to resolve this paradox underlie many time travel stories.

Consequentially a large number include a fatalistic view of time. In 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me' the sequence of events viewed from Eva-Persephone's perspective take a different form from the strict chronological index above.

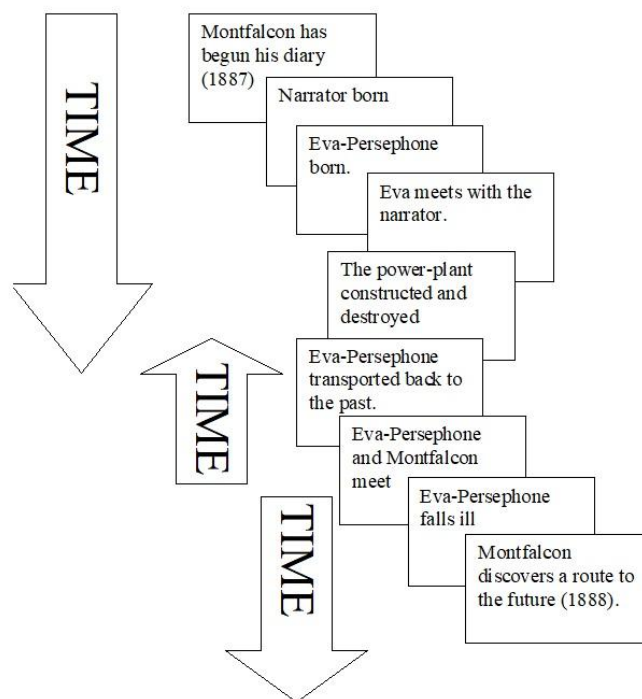


Figure 6 events indexed from Eva-Persephone's view point

<sup>209</sup> Tim Folger, 'A Brief History of Time Travel', *Scientific American*, September 313(3):68-73 (2015).

Usually we view the past as fixed and the future as open, but the easiest way for a narrative to avoid paradox in time travel is if time is inevitable: an 'Eternalist' perspective where past and future are both fixed. In real world physics:

Stephen Hawking [...] has proposed a "chronology protection conjecture," which would outlaw causal loops. Because the theory of relativity is known to permit causal loops, chronology protection would require some other factor to intercede to prevent travel into the past<sup>210</sup>

In the fatalistic time travel stories, the time traveller is seen as completing an inevitable loop. In John Wyndham's 'A Stitch in Time',<sup>211</sup> the time traveller, Arthur, is accidentally brought into the present by a scientist and then returned to the past. The outcome of the story is that the scientist would not have existed had he not performed the experiment, because without his intervention Arthur would have married the scientist's mother.

Discourse time refers to the order in which that the narrative describes the chronology of the fabula. Figure 7, below, shows the events of Figure 5 and Figure 6 indexed in discourse order:

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<sup>210</sup> Paul Davies, 'How to Build a Time Machine', *ibid.* 311 (2014).

<sup>211</sup> John Wyndham, *Consider Her Ways*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2014). p115 - 130

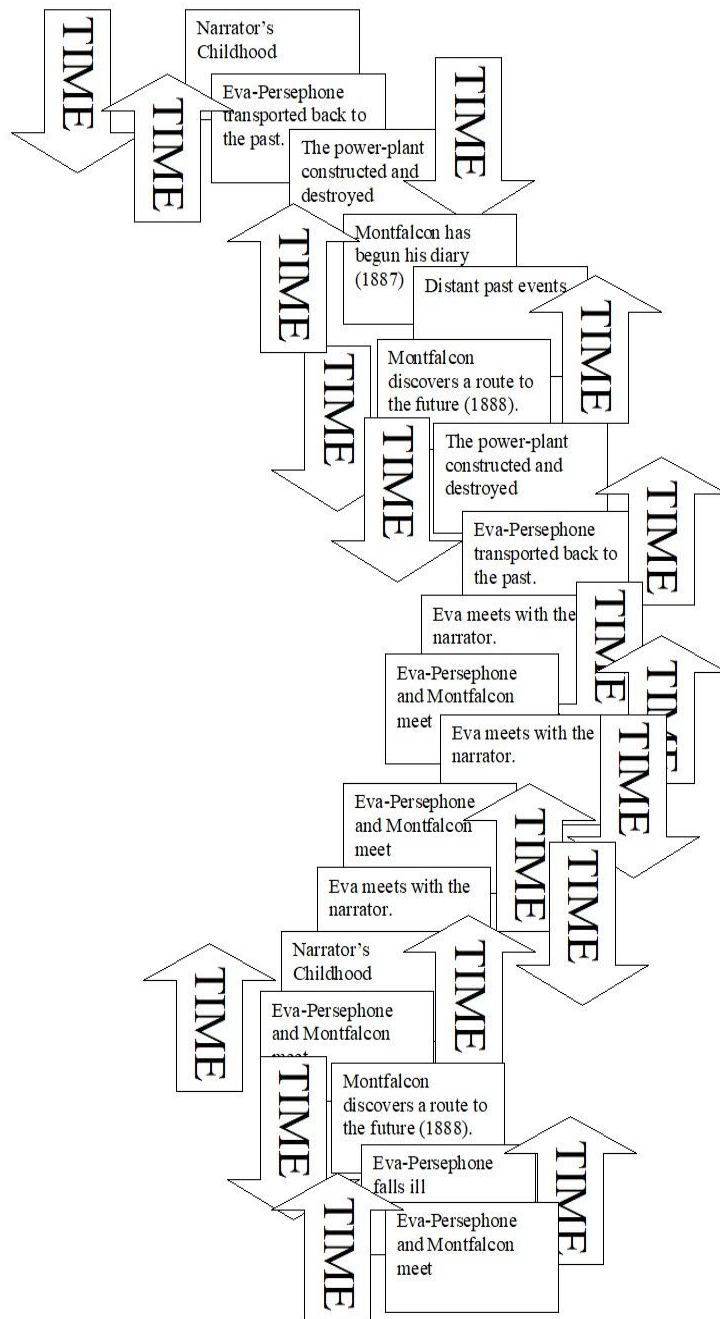


Figure 7 Events indexed using discourse time

Although this only shows events occurring before all three characters come together in the disaster area, the diagram shows how the discourse mediates the fabula in

complex ways. The narrative in Figure 7 comprises approximately sixty percent of scenes in the discourse and spans the first eighty percent of the chronological period covered by the fabula. These are the character's memories, the narrator's interpretation of events, and the pseudo-historical documents included in the text. Particularly noticeable in Figure 7, is how passages describing the relationships between Eva-Persephone and the narrator and Eva-Persephone and Montfalcon alternate in the discourse showing the two male character's conflict over the relationships.

The discourse time of both 'The Architect of Putrefaction' and 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me' contains two narrative time frames woven together: the fabula's past and present appears simultaneously.

In 'The Architect of Putrefaction' these are Moonflower's recollections of childhood in the sections *Arrivée, Amour, and Départ*. In 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me' the epistolary story of Montfalcon and Eva-Persephone's romance appears in several digressions. The story 'Frostiana' also includes flashbacks but these are less organised and only serve to provide background details for James. Unlike 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me', both 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' and '*Désir on the Langstrand*' are narrated in chronological order. Also narrated chronologically is 'The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near' in contrast to the cut-up's forms of repetitions, voids, and dislocations simulated within the text.

Early in 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me' the narrative enters a speculative wish-world, "I should have come back for her before," the narrator says; then explains his past plans and hopes of the future 'I hoped that returning to [...] those moments [...] I would float gloriously motionless; time abolished in the dissolving world of the summer sun.'

He wishes for his perfect moment to remain forever now. Two timeless situations appear in Ballard's 1962 short story 'The Garden of Time'<sup>212</sup>. In the story Count Axel and his wife live and act in a bubble of their own time while the external flow of time is slowed. Their whole existence takes place within a moment. Through this suspension of times flow they evade an advancing crowd that seems to represent the history that will sweep them away. When they finally run out of the means to continue to suspend the external time, their domain is overrun but they then become suspended in time themselves. They are transformed to statues and remain as they were while time moves forwards around them.

In 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me' the narrator's wish for time to be abolished is fulfilled, but not as he would have wished, when he finds himself in a disaster area. He is trapped within a paradoxically disordered time zone. He assumes this was caused by a reactor meltdown and describes time as being crumpled like tissue paper. Near the wreck of an oil tanker he finds:

Things that might have been gulls a long time ago swirl in endless streamers of whiteness leaving misty parabolas in the air. Their movements seem disassociated from their positions - lost in time.

These gulls are seen as trapped in time like flies in amber. This was one of the earliest pieces of the text to emerge from the raw cut-up and this timelessness is a major inspiration for the story.

In 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me' the narrator describes time as a linear movement between past and future.

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<sup>212</sup> Ballard. V1 p405-413



I knew what was coming. Past and future connected in my head and I realised there was little of either left. I saw those legends, those visions in the woods, those mad poems of Henry Montfalcon pointed to one thing.

This fabula-time appears to work in accordance with a reader's everyday experience; and with the usual way time works in real-world physics. The narrator experiences linear time with a fixed past. He is in a present which contains artefacts that give clues to the history of his world: the future is open. Once in the disaster zone he finds:

The poet Henry Montfalcon attempts to flag me down. He has been dead at least a hundred years and has no right to be standing and waving at me among the carbonised skeletons of dead sheep and lambs.

Although this is a person from the distant past, Montfalcon maintains the everyday relationship with time. This is similar to the leaps in chronology made by Washington Irving's 'Rip van Winkle'<sup>213</sup> and Merlin in Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*<sup>214</sup>, which although incongruous do not conflict with any law of physics.

In 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me', when the scenes that chronologically follow the opening scene are mapped they appear in the same order in both discourse and fabula, see Figure 8, below. This contrasts with the earlier events in the fabula, which do not show this sort of flow.

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<sup>213</sup> Washington Irving and Edward Wagenknecht, *Washington Irving's Tales of the Supernatural*, (Owings Mills, Md.: Stemmer House, 1982), p29 - 50

<sup>214</sup> C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength : A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups*, (London : Pan, 1955).

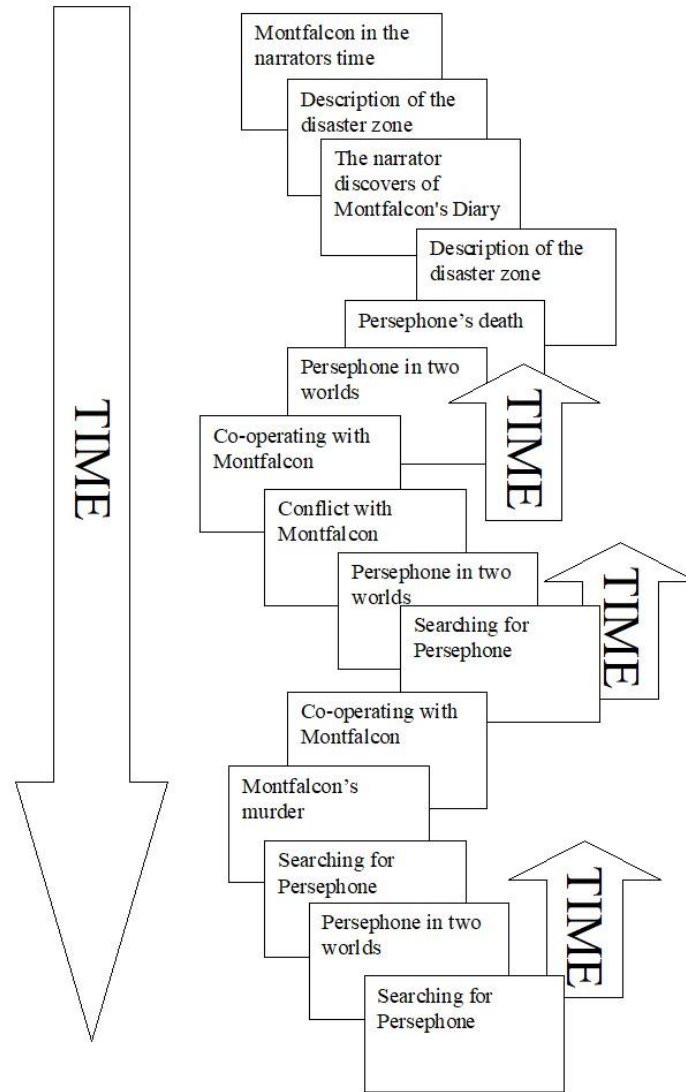


Figure 8 later events indexed using discourse time

Figure 4 also shows three scenes where Eva-Persephone perceives two time periods simultaneously. Early in the discourse the narrator describes the death Eva:

Time has run amok with her; the bright eyes that transfixed me change to shadow and she is still. The flesh falls away from her bones in a matter of hours.

The narrator then introduces the reader to the dual nature of Eva-Persephone and tells the reader that she is both in this world and the past. Other more mysterious worlds also impinge on the disaster area:

Even those carelessly heaped blocks of stone [...] dissolve before me and the distorted shadows they cast seem the real buildings: a city of darkness designed in accordance with some discordant alien geometry [...]

An interpretation of quantum physics proposed by Hugh De Witt and Bryce Everett conceives of multiple real timelines: worlds multiplying for every subatomic event.<sup>215</sup> According to this model, the further forward in time we move the more new universes appear. If this interpretation is true then ever multiplying universes spread outwards from the past producing a world for every possibility<sup>216</sup>.

In Lewis's *Narnia* books visitors from earth move between parallel timelines on Earth and in Narnia. In these two worlds fabula time runs at different (and variable) rates. Between *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*<sup>217</sup> and *The Silver Chair*<sup>218</sup> fifty Narnian years pass in a few months of Earth-time. The whole Narnian cycle, from genesis to judgement day, takes place between 1900 and 1949 on Earth.

In 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me', Eva-Persephone has travelled back to the past and met Montfalcon. Later Montfalcon also moves between past and future. Each character experiences a different chronological order to events within the Fabula

Several stories in this collection begin as they end. Although they do not form a loop in space-time, the narrative returns the central character to the same or similar plot-

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<sup>215</sup> P. C. W. Davies, *Other Worlds*, (Penguin, 1988). p128 -141

<sup>216</sup> George F. R. Ellis, 'Does the Multiverse Really Exist? (Cover Story)', *Scientific American*, 305 (2011). < <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/does-the-multiverse-really-exist/> > [accessed 24/07/2019]

<sup>217</sup> C. S. Lewis and Pauline Baynes, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, (London: HarperCollins, 2002).

<sup>218</sup> C. S. Lewis and Pauline Baynes, *The Silver Chair*, (London: HarperCollins, 1998).

point. *Architect of Putrefaction* starts as dust and ends as dust. In ‘The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near’ William returns to the same beach, the same shore, and the same fragments to begin his task again. Within the fabula-time and discourse time it comes full circle. Douglas Hofstadter refers to this as a Strange Loop. He says:

A “Strange Loop” is not [...] a physical circuit but an abstract loop. The “Strange Loop” in which, in the series of stages that constitute the cycling around, there is a shift from one level of abstraction or structure to another, which feels like an upward movement in a hierarchy and yet the successive “upward” shift turns out to give rise to a closed circle.<sup>219</sup>

In ‘Frostiana’, Gloriana’s kingdom has previously run through an iteration of a strange loop every year.

In ‘Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me’ the everyday model of a fixed past begins to be undermined by Eva-Persephone’s existence in both worlds simultaneously.

I see a litter of young [...] like animatronics, waxworks, or simulacra. The soul had gone.  
“There, Persephone,” I say, “proof that the end has already come.”  
She laughs and says, “The butterflies, the pretty butterflies, catch them for me Reverend,” and runs across a field of glass and baked clay fading as she goes.

The crumpled time in ‘Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me’ has brought two points that would not normally exist together into proximity. The text also contains suggestions of another hellish world (perhaps the future) close at hand. The past and present are read together within the text:

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<sup>219</sup> Douglas R. Hofstadter, *I Am a Strange Loop*, (New York: BasicBooks , 2007). p101-102

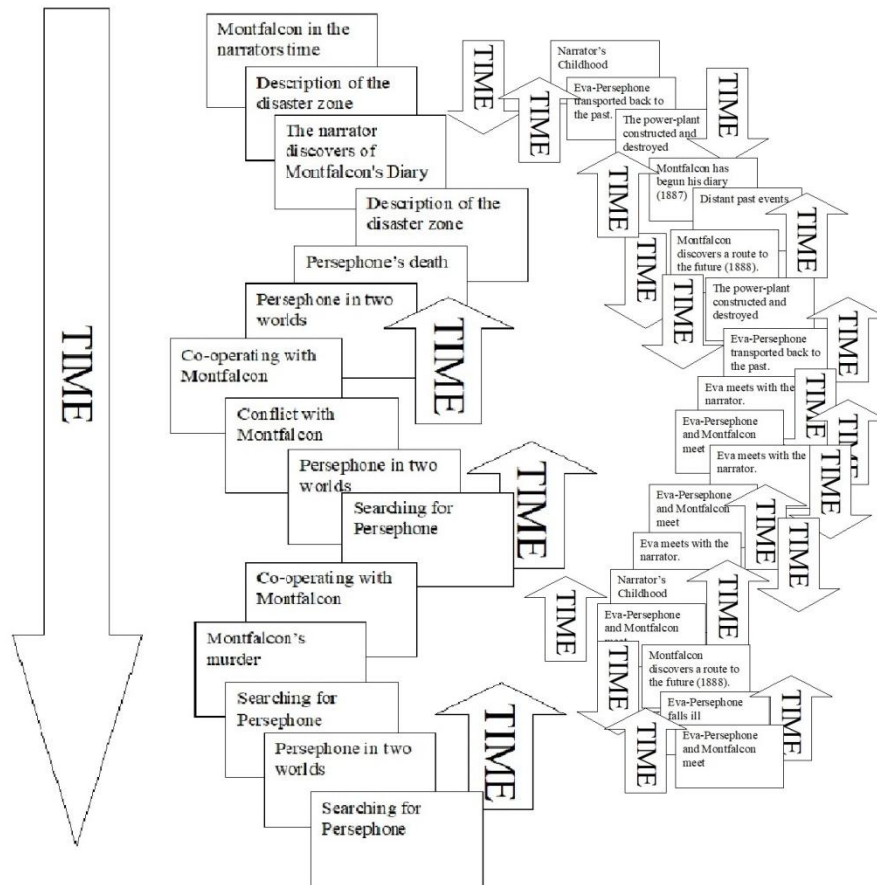


Figure 9 parallel past and present discourses

The simultaneous reading of two texts was suggested by Burroughs in *The Third*

*Mind* reprinted from the 1966 interview by Conrad Knickerbocker in *Paris Review*:

INTERVIEWER: You believe that an audience can be eventually trained to respond to cut-ups?

BURROUGHS: Of course, because cut-ups make explicit a psychosensory process that is going on all the time anyway. Somebody is reading a newspaper, and his eye follows the column in the proper Aristotelian manner, one idea and sentence at a time. But subliminally he is reading the columns on either side and is aware of the person sitting next to him.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>220</sup> Burroughs and Brion Gysin. p5

Several authors have transposed this parallel narrative into their layout: Alasdair Gray's 'Logopandocry'<sup>221</sup> uses a layout incorporating dual columns and pages of text intended to be read against each other (*pro* vs. *contra*, *arms* vs. *arts*.) Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*<sup>222</sup> (imitates) Jacques Derrida's *Glas*<sup>223</sup> in which commentaries on Hegel and Jean Genet are laid side by side along with footnotes and other introjections.

The conception of fabula-time in 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me' originated in the reversal of the usual 'growing block universe' model of time so rather than the past being fixed and the future open, the past was open but the future certain. This is a view taken in an interpretation of quantum physics by Israeli physicist Yakir Aharonov who models quantum phenomena using a method:

[...]called the two-state-vector formalism (TSVF) of quantum mechanics, and postulates quantum events are in some sense determined by quantum states not just in the past—but also in the future. That is, the TSVF assumes quantum mechanics works the same way both forward and backward in time. From this perspective, causes can seem to propagate backward in time, occurring after their effects.<sup>224</sup>

At the conclusion of 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me', a new model of time is presented. Past and future run away in opposite directions from the nexus at the death of Montfalcon. Causality does not exist in the past, but at a random point midway through history. Following the many-worlds model, many pasts emanate from the epicentre just as many futures are opened from it. This becomes the moment of creation of the story-world. The reader is now confronted with the possibility of mapping it using an

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<sup>221</sup> Alasdair Gray, *Every Short Story, 1951-2012*, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012). p135 - 184

<sup>222</sup> Mark Z. Danielewski, *Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves : By Zampano\0300 : With Introduction and Notes by Johnny Truant*, 2nd ed. edn (London: Anchor, 2000). p120 -150

<sup>223</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

<sup>224</sup> Philip Ball, 'Quantum Physics May Be Even Spookier Than You Think', *Scientific American* May 21, 2018, (2018). < <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/quantum-physics-may-be-even-spookier-than-you-think/> > [accessed 16/07/2019]

alternative chronology which leaves the fabula as fragmented and destabilised as the discourse.

## 8.1 Eve Last

*After The Lady from the Sea by Henrik Ibsen*

Elida looks for a hand, a head, and a heart. She searches the tideline among the seaweed and stranded jellyfish, hoping to find a piece of a mechanical body cast upon the shore.

Her new husband, Dr Hildred Kasteel, also hunts for the fragments of automata she needs for her experiment, but he cannot resist the other wonders he finds. He fills his pockets with beautiful stones for her. They contain sparkling gems, or have iridescent surfaces, or hold fossilised life that still writhes within its transparent prison.

The pebbles rattle. Hildred brings her another stone; it is transparent amber with a firefly pulsing at its centre.

“Thank you, Hildred. I shall wear it in a brooch.”

“You will look beautiful,” he says.

“What I really need is a mechanical heart. I have rebuilt almost two complete bodies, but without the heart the pieces will not function. Its beat provides the co-ordination so all the parts move in step.”

“I am sorry,” says Hildred, “I found only the stones. Shall I search elsewhere?”

“Take a look on the *Westenstrand*. Regen is searching on the east beach. We may find a few pieces yet.”

Hildred leaves her to search and she walks down to the water. Breakers boom and crash on the distant reef and a green wave explodes on the pebbly strand. The roar of the sea is woven with the faint fly-voice of the wind hissing. The drums of the hungry ocean call her and the stars are far-away in the black sky. Why is a voice singing over the



waves? Perhaps under the waves? Calling her down; down among the drowned men of the old world. Back to her mother, back to her father, back to her first husband.

She sings to the sea, a song her mother taught her a long time ago. Her mother sang those words with her red lips smiling in her very white face, as she carried Elida through the winter's night. The noble pirates of the court ran through the streets with flaming torches and roaring voices. There was the flash and boom as fireworks exploded in imitation of green and red dragons, that coiled and roared over the glorious liquid mirror of the great river. Had she imagined it? Dreamed it? That was so long ago, before those lands all vanished under the sea.

The lands are only remembered by Elida and the drowned who swim like fishes beneath the green waves. So she sings to them, sings to the dead who once knew her world. Their faces rise to the surface. A hundred faces in pale green, half-fish and half-human with such strange silver eyes. They exchange their stories, half-memory, half-legend. They exchange their songs. They have no word of her missing husband. "No matter," she sings to them, "no matter, I have a new one now. A new one and he is a good man."

She sings until she is interrupted by a bellow from *Pastoor* Nachtvliender who strides towards her. His black robes flap in the wind. His face is red with exertion where he has run across the beach.

"Witch?"

"There is no need for such formality, *Pastoor* 'Vliender; after all we are old friends."

"What were you doing? Summoning the damned!"

"I was singing to quiet the poor dead things. They are just children really. They forget their old lives on the land. They have just made a new start in the world. They seem so unsettled, perhaps it is because there is a storm coming."

“What business is it of yours to care for them? To succour those God has cast-out? He has closed the gates of heaven and left them rotting in the sea to punish their sins.”

“I think in his limitless compassion he has given these poor drowned sinners the world, after all most of the planet is water now. This is all the land left.”

“He flooded the world once before and drowned the sinners in the sea,” says *Pastoor* Vlinder, “and withdrew the waters again. We shall be saved if we believe. We cannot keep you with us if you do not repent. You do repent don’t you Elida? Repent your wandering on the sea? You know if it were not for Dr Kasteel you would have been thrown back where you came from with a stone around your neck.”

“If it were not for Dr Kasteel I would not have lived long enough for you to kill me.”

“Where did you come from Elida? There is no other land above the water.”

“Not anymore,” says Elida turning her back, “I must find my husband. The storm is nearly here.”

She leaves the *Pastoor* and follows Hildred’s path to the *Westenstrand*. On the horizon the strange sails at the edge of the town spin, flapping like broken gull-wings in the sea breeze. At the far end of the beach, senescent generations of sea eaten turbines poke their black tops above the surf. They mark the ruins of an old sea *dijk*.

Elida’s life was so different with her first husband, with William Lee. She lived in a tall tower far-away and long ago that overlooked the endless ocean of the world. All the fleets sailed past her window, gilded and carved with fantastic tributes to the rising seas. All day she waited and wove. She was attended by her automated servants, entertained by fantastic machines cunningly built from brass and steel, guarded by soldiers whose clockwork hearts were more loyal than any flesh. While she waited for him she wove herself a wedding gown, a blanket for her marriage bed, christening dresses and party

clothes for the children they would have one day; coverlets to warm them in the winters even as the winters ceased, and finally a shroud each so they would go together to their eternal rest properly robed. With each thread she told the story of the future that was passing them by...

Strange voices rustle in the wind. She is surprised that she has walked halfway back to the town. It seemed only a moment ago...

A lantern approaches from a tunnel in the sea defences and Hildred Kasteel and his assistant Regen trudge across the white bones lying beyond the straggly shore-plants.

“Have you found any pieces of the machines, Mr Regen, and you Hildred, how is your collecting?” asks Elida.

“There were a few remnants on the *Oostenstrand*,” says Hildred, “a scrap of a tail, a few fragments and cogs. I don’t think they’ll be much use.”

“All can be restored, all can contribute a part.”

“I wish I had your faith, Elida.”

“You call it faith?”

“You must have faith to struggle so hard to return the old world,” says Regen.

“I don’t think we’ll succeed in bringing the old world back,” says Elida, “this world is our foundation and this world is far from empty. It is merely inhospitable to land creatures. The sea people flourish and the species of fish grow more various by the day. I do mourn the old world, these mechanical beings that were beyond the weakness of flesh. It was wrong to destroy them; they should have their chance too. They should have been our legacy, our gift to the universe. They could go where we could not, could sleep a thousand years and wake as new, could sail the gulfs between the stars and multiply, but what did we do with them? Broke them and left them for the sea. The dead will not remember our old world, the dead grow more distant beneath the waves, less concerned

with their old life. All we can hope for is a legacy, that we will be remembered. Perhaps if I can restore the mechanicals they will remember us.”

“You seem sad Elida, are you tired?” says Kasteel.

“Oh, I expect it is *Pastoor* ‘Vlinders. I met him by the *wantij*. He was...Himself.”

“Over religious, over certain, overbearing?”

“Exactly,” says Elida

A small cloud on the horizon boils and spreads like spilled ink and casts its shadow over the lines of markers that stand in the lagoon. Dark waves rise over the *wantij*, the shallow water between the land and the open sea. They charge headlong to the shore and break in a chaos of spray. A broken body is flung high up the beach, a mass of silver and bronze components spilling among the seaweed of the tideline.

“I think we should retire to the refuge,” says Regen moving back towards his tunnel. The water boils up a load of bad luck and malice on the *wantij*, like a witch’s cauldron on *Walpurgisnacht*. Thunder explodes in the dark sky, metal buttons on their cloths spark, and their hair stands on end in the static.

“We must get the remnants, there has been so little lately” she says “quick, they will be washed away.”

The three of them run across the pebbles towards the metal torso as the rain spatters on the beach and dark sheets of rain hurtle across the horizon. The windmills twist in the convulsing atmosphere; their black sails groan in the squall and the bearings squeal. Their foundations threaten to break free of the piled millennia of driftwood and sea-worn architecture. The storm is too much.

“Stop Elida, we’ll not get there in time,” says Kasteel.

“No I must retrieve them, they will be lost.”

“There will be other parts, the storm is too strong.”

“But there may be a heart.”

“You will lose the heart and your life if you go there Elida.”

She can see the sense. Elida, Regen, and Kasteel shelter beneath a turbine wall. The main pivot creaks as it seeks to follow the wind and the electric flash of an overloaded generator illuminates the windows and fills the air with ozone.

A distress flare rises casting an unnatural red glare over the dark sea.

“There’s someone out there,” says Regen pointing to the wild water beyond the mud-banks and reefs.

In her mind, Elida draws a line out to sea from the broken nail of Regen’s extended finger; the waves on the *wantij* play catch with a small black object. The luminescent water traces its path amongst as a wake of white fire amid coal-black troughs and the foaming white-tops.

“Who is it?” asks Kasteel.

“Not one of ours,” says Regen.

Regen passes Kasteel a worn pair of binoculars. The vessel is caught out beyond the reef. The voice of the wind is a triumphant roar.

“How can he live in that water,” says Kasteel.

“Is it him?” asks Elida.

“It cannot be William Lee,” says Kasteel, “you have said yourself there is no hope of his return”

“Let me see,” she says.

Kasteel lets her take the binoculars. There is a dingy that holds a single dark crewman who rows steadily over the masses of foaming waves. He rows through spray that fills the air so sea and water seem indistinguishable. He rows through blue sparks that ignite incandescent sheets of fire over the surface of the sea. Still he rows on; steady at his oar-strokes, passing safely over waves no man should survive. The wind seems to shout his name, the voices calling under the waves join in the chant. All the world shouts:

William Lee has come to fetch her. After a thousand years hunting Leviathan in the darkness between the stars, he has finally returned, come to take her back to her tower over the ocean. A titanic wave lifts the boat into the air and still it floats carrying William Lee towards her. Elida catches a glimpse - she almost recognises William Lee in the strange pale face as an enormous fin reaches up from the deep and beats down on the boat raising a spout of glowing water. Then the craft slips beneath the swell and both boat and boatman have gone down into the darkness.

“Poor bastard,” says Regen.

“Where’d he come from?” asks Kasteel.

“There may be a few hulks drifting out there, a few stragglers,” says Regen.

“I thought this was the last place a man can sail from or to. I thought the sea had taken the others long ago. There have been too many storms, too many hurricanes. No one can survive forever without a safe port,” says Dr Kasteel.

“I came to you across the sea from my tower,” says Elida “and there was one, who lived only upon the darkness and the deep.”

“Captain Lee, your first husband?” says Kasteel, “was a bad dream Elida, nothing more.”

She wants to believe it. There is a lead weight in the pit of her stomach. It grows heavier by the minute until she can bear it no longer and so she runs down to beach where she can sit by the salt ocean and listen to those songs sung by the dead beneath the waves. Where she can watch the green faces rise to the surfaces and connect for a moment to a world that has been lost. It cannot be him. Yet the face seemed his. It is William Lee come out of the past to revive their contract...

Every day William Lee would hunt Leviathan. At night, she sent a signal shining over the waves to lead him home, to lure him ashore where he could be just a man, until

God called him again over the waves to hunt the great Leviathan and then he would be gone for months and she would send the light again and again he would return and bring her a sea-green dress and trinkets carved from walrus ivory and whalebone. They had exchanged rings. Before he went away he tied the rings together with a sailor's knot and gave them to the waves to hold. She should have believed longer. What were the years she had waited in God's scheme for the world? What was a thousand years? She should have had more faith...

Kasteel gathers her in his arms and together they ascend the beach to where sea has formed a barrier of storm-tossed pebbles that shelters the inner island from tempests and tides. They follow it clockwise. Plants poke salt-tolerant green shoots and suckers among the coal and flint and pumice. On their left the sea hisses and crashes and foams; on their right are mounds, parkland, ruins, and neatly planted woods and coppices. The island cannot be quiet: it is filled with the noise of the broken ships, the creak of the windmills, and the whisper of the sea.

A small crowd stand with bowed heads: in prayer before a dark mound on the beach. The boat is abandoned on the tideline. The sea beyond is flat and blue now. The black clad figure of *Pastoor* Nachtvliinder is the only storm cloud. He preaches.

"...And the waters prevail and still they increase; a man was drowned today, a bad man, a stranger, a man who sought to steal our land. He was pulled down into the ocean, thus the wicked are punished and so God teaches us his hard lesson and he shows his mercy to us few."

His two dozen followers shout amen. They, like the *Pastoor*, are dressed in sober blacks. Like the *Pastoor* they believe themselves saved. Like the *Pastoor* they believe the world was destroyed from its own wickedness. So they pray to God to thank him for their

salvation, for his wise destruction of the world, for the death of the billions who were undeserving.

Nachtvliinder addresses the crowd beyond his followers, the lively fishermen, the millers and traders and farmers dressed in their bright clothes, such as can be still made. They are subdued by the death.

“You unbelievers, you sinners: you should be joyful the Lord protects you from the outsiders.”

He leads his followers in song as the fishers and citizens shake their heads.

“The boat is intact do you think he made it ashore?” says Elida.

“I doubt it, you saw him flung into the waves,” says Kasteel.

She whispers, “I am scared Hildred, what if he has come back for me?”

“Whoever was in the boat is drowned.”

“The sea could not drown him. He was the sea.”

“If he ever lived, he is dead now, Elida, you have a place in our world. Sometimes I find it hard to believe the things you say about your life before: the palaces, your mother, your husband. It all sounds like a dream? How do you know Captain Lee was real?”

“I know it is true. My childhood and those lands before the sea rose, my mother’s kingdom. When I think of her I am dazzled by the light of the winter sun on the white snow. William Lee is painted still in bright colours, in fine detail, I see every hair on his head, every curve of his flesh.”

“But there is no evidence, nothing real, nothing you can hold in your hand?”

“There are the automata,” she says.

“But they are incomplete, they cannot speak.”

“That they exist shows my world existed.”

“That they exist shows a prior world existed, not the world you describe.”



When there was land, when she lived in her tower by the sea her mother showed her the kingdom reflected in a pool of ice. The land was laid before her painted in gold and white, the hands on the clock of winter edged forward and the pendulum rose through a cloud of fog. The hands swept through crystal and snow flake, diamonds and icing sugar. The kingdom was laid before her powdered with white, there were fabulous pirates decked with pearls who sailed over the white horses of the wave tops in gilded ships. They brought gold and treasure from New Worlds. Set all along Albion's snowbound coasts were palaces of red-brick and English stone that shone bright with candlelight, filled with noble lords rich as Croesus, strong as Hercules. There were neat villages set in rolling fields where in every inn puddings boiled, oxen roasted, and chimneys were stuffed with meat curing from the October slaughter. Dogs rested before the great fireplaces, with red tongues lolling, and strong jaws holding fast to beef-bones. She misses it all; this world that spun like an ordered machine; the mechanism that fitted together cog to cog, no space for deviation, and no room for a wayward motion. She supposes this is why she had loved William Lee; he was a creature of the sea and sky, beyond the neat regulation of mechanical reason.

She finds a metal hand washed up on the beach. The mechanism seems partially functional beneath the covering of articulated brass armour. When she holds it, it seems to vibrate and pulse with hidden energy. She carries it home through the winding streets between windmills and fish-sheds and broken boats and the last rescued fragments of the ruined world: a Greek torso in marble, an Olmec head, a section of Cyclopean wall from the infamous *Terre de Crânes Noirs d'Aix*, finials and gargoyles cast in cement, pre-stressed concrete beams crumbling under salt and time, and the skull of extinct sea turtles bleached white in the sun and rain.

Their home stands at the top of the main street: part dwelling and part pest-house where medicines are synthesized, wounds cauterized, and Kasteel stitches flesh with a needle as sharp as a fish tooth. It retains the memory of the old windmill buried in the tower at its centre. The sails are still intact but have been motionless for fifty years. It is a patchwork of parts donated from a dozen other buildings. Parts culled from obsolete cities, buried once and excavated again from the archaeology of the polder.

Back in her workshop the pieces of a hundred mechanical creatures surround her: the remains of the automata of the old world. Outside the window grow creepers whose flowers flex carnivorous petals and pout at her through the glass.

As she walks from workbench to tool cabinets the remains move in sympathy; each part maintains its function separate from the whole. Some fragment of life. Those few fantastic remaining heads, the knights, horses, and dragons whisper vague disturbed dreams. She finds her magnifying lens and focuses on the broken end of the hand; she extracts damaged gears and ratchets, making the amputation as neat as if it had been performed by a master mechanic. By the window a knight's helm with living eyes of crystal watches; its gaze follows her as she climbs a set of steps to retrieve ever finer sets of tools and ever more powerful lenses. In a glass-fronted cabinet two part-completed figures wait; one male and one female. They are patchworks beings, chimeras assembled from a thousand fragments. They are almost finished.

Outside the town is filled with daytime bustle below, the shouts of the fish-sellers, the gossip of the fishermen, the laughter and screams of children, the devout prayers of the fishwives, and the midday sermon of *Pastoor* 'Vlinder. All is muffled by her concentration on her task. The gears in the mechanical hand regress in ever shrinking iterations. Her vision is restricted. In the old days these creatures were manufactured in their thousands by other machines. Her mother had armies of them. She hopes just to remake a few, after all there are only few people of flesh living on the land, what harm

could restoring a few of the mechanicals do? When she was married to William Lee...

There is a knock at the door. She sighs and looks up from the glass.

“Come in my love.” She says.

“I have to go; the boat we saw. There is a body on the beach,” says Kasteel.

“I will get your instruments.”

She does not want it to be William Lee. Yet she also wants it more than anything – whether alive or dead. Then at least she will know if their bargain still stands, if she has betrayed him. They run to the shore and their footsteps sound hollow in the silent town. All two or three hundred remaining inhabitants are on the pebbles. They part for Kasteel; she slips behind him between the thin dry murmurs of their voices. She feels like a ghost among the strange island-women who seem half-seal with hydrocephalic foreheads and blank fishy eyes.

She recognises Pieter Geenland. He shouts for Kasteel and runs down to the rippling water, the tide has turned red. Among the waves is the ragged body encrusted with crabs and lobsters and shrimp, jellies and worms and anemones have all burrowed into his flesh.

“It is too late,” says Pieter.

“Still, we can try,” says Kasteel, “Elida, please bring my tools and my surgical bag. You fishermen, get a net to carry him, take him to my house. I will do what I can.”

Kasteel binds and bandages the ruined man and six of fishermen carry the sea-changed body through the streets to the Doctor’s house. Can this be William Lee? This wreck? These fragments and shreds of flesh nearly consumed by the ocean?

They carry him through the cobbled yard filled with urns, pots, old barrels packed with soil where captive plants bloom in obese inflorescence. The scent of climbing roses is heady in the tropical heat; with the sea on the wind, and the smell of the drowned castaway.

They carry him through the sick room with its smell of dead meat and sulphur and soap. Elida prepares Kasteel's instruments in the theatre. She has witnessed all Kasteel's miracles here. She has seen shark bites stitched, bones set, heads trepanned, and outraged flesh threaded once again with the yarn of life- cut, carded, and spun at Kasteel's wheel. She was a subject here herself before she was fit for this new life. She awoke in the sick room from her sleep. Kasteel transplanted her into this land; and the body of the hospital accepted her. The alien form of Kasteel's living bride melded with her new world. She has since graduated from lying in the white sheets through to washing the sheets to working as the hospital's keeper.

Kasteel goes to prepare in the adjoining laboratory. There are jars of preserved specimens arranged on shelves of cedar wood. Heraldic fish that float in their formaldehyde goggle with their grey swollen eyes blindly waiting, there are diseased organs cut from men that also look like dead things fished from the ocean. All night they work, like God dividing the sea and the land. Fish flesh and man flesh are separated out. Kasteel's scalpel flickers like summer lightening over the sea.

In the morning, Elida is woken by the shouts of the fish-packers outside. Kasteel works on; Regen assists as Elida is too tired, too distressed. Kasteel has arranged his piles of beautiful stones on the shelves for her.

He always says "I couldn't believe it when I found you Elida, couldn't believe my fortune."

He always tells people a girl blew into his arms during the boom and crack of a thunderstorm. Elida remembers something different. She remembers months caught on an ocean current with no sight of land. She lived on fish and rainwater and never had enough of either. Sometimes the curious dead beneath the waves would draw close and tell her of the deep while she dozed and they would leave gifts: baroque pearls, and rare and

complex shells that grew in the abyss. With no shelter from the sun she burned and with no shelter from the wind she froze and all the time the waters bore her towards the new land. Days and nights became one so it seemed it was a single endless day and a single endless night. She sailed through seas where light and darkness, water and air merged. Kasteel had found her like this: castaway, nearly dead, almost destroyed by the advancing evolution, the transformation, a symbiotic relationship with the sea life formed after too-long on the ocean. The song of her dead sisters beneath the sea still rings in her ears, still calls her, still tells her of the great cities transformed to reefs where the dead swim like bright fishes through flooded palaces and parade along broad roads lined with swaying kelp forests.

At last they are finished. Kasteel cleans his tables and washes away the traces of the surgery. She helps him scrub and rinse with lye, water, and soap over metal.

She takes Kasteel's bloodstained coat to boil. He thanks her.

"The Castaway is sleeping now."

Over the weeks she tends the Castaway she never sees his face. He is a good height, certainly the right height for William Lee, but he is swathed in bandages. William Lee is probably dead now, yet this is his world. If he were dead would it have reverted to the world she knew before him, her mother's world? Would the frost fair return and would she again attend her mother's court filled with mechanical servants and friends? She empties the blood and pus from the drain in his chest, checks the maggots that Kasteel has applied to remove the infected flesh. How would the great William Lee have become this dead thing? He was the sea; the sea could not harm him. He was the storm. He was the wind. He was the lightening.

The stranger remains silent; anaesthetized beneath the sheets.

Kasteel sleeps: she strokes his hair, kisses his forehead, then leaves him and steps out among the noise of the street.

In the town square a few oilskin-clad fishermen smoke stubby clay pipes and puff clouds of blue into the humid air as they pack silvered fish into brine barrels ready for the winter. The windmills that pump the precious water, that produce precious power, are washed in gold by the sun as it creeps over the rounded hump of the island. A pall of fishy smoke hangs over the harbour where Musselbaum's refinery is rendering a whale's carcass for oil.

When she was a child her mother showed her a great clock that shone in the summer sun. A fantastic construction of brass and iron and wood complete with figures that danced the hours, with dials that showed the movements of the stars and constellations and the great cogs and springs that told the clever figures when to begin their dance. Her mother told her that they follow many epicycles and deferents: as do the days and nights, as do the planets in the sky, and as do the heads and hearts of kings and commons...

A figure in black steps into the light from a dark weathered doorway; Nachtvliinder calls to her.

"Elida, I hear Dr Kasteel has a new creation," says the *Pastoor*.

"A new patient."

"I saw the man - he was dead. He has been eaten by the sea creatures. He is no longer a man." Says the *Pastoor*

"He was encrusted: sea-changed. The ocean can do that sometimes."

"The sea has done it to all those damned souls, brought them back as devils."

"Hildred Kasteel is a great doctor," she says.

"I think he is more than a doctor," says Nachtvliinder "I think he treads on God's territory. He does more than heal. Elida, this island was your ark. Your refuge from the

great rain he sent to punish the wicked world. Remember how you rejoiced in God's goodness when you first came here. How you prayed with me, with the brethren. But now... I have seen you waiting for something on the desolate shore. I have seen you talk to the damned, and I have seen you gathering the remnants of the wicked world that God destroyed. For what purpose? Do you recognise this man? He came from the sea like you. You told me you have repented, do not fall again. Tell me if you know him."

"How would I know this man?" says Elida

"He is another of your kind."

"My kind?"

"A sea eaten corpse crawling from the waves to take our land from us."

"Regen thinks I am your only hope," says Elida, "he hopes I will rebuild something like the old world."

"The world God chose to destroy?"

"That it was destroyed I admit..."

"By God, who in his limitless mercy saved us here?" asks Nachtvliinder

"Maybe God saved us, yes, we can still agree on that *Pastoor*."

Later she searches the beach and retrieves a few more pieces: an ear, an eye, an unidentified mechanism. Elida walks on the rough concrete surface of an abandoned jetty. She stands on a stone buttress above the swell, covered with rotten, pinkish sea-creatures. Something pulses rhythmically in a sink-hole in the rocks below her; a dull light flashes deep down where the water darkens and the shadows of fish dart between patches of weed. She kicks off her shoes and dives down into blue-green depths. As soon as she enters the water she is surrounded by the faces of the curious dead, their pale fishy eyes blink at her, their webbed fingers try to draw her into their dance. She ignores them and swims down against her natural buoyancy. Her lungs burst and her head pulses but she

catches the object and feels it drumming and beating in her hand as she swims back to the surface. The wind howls like a lonely dog and blows spray from her damp hair, but at last she has it: a heart, a burnished copper heart with its perfect clock still ticking.

She returns to her workshop with the heart beating softly in her hands. There are the two automata in the cabinet: Which should she choose?

“It’s your turn this time to be first created,” she says as she unlocks the glass cabinet and fits the copper heart in the chest of the female automaton. It has a face wrought of silver to resemble Elida. Elida takes a tool a little like a key, a little like a screwdriver and adjusts its tempo. At first each part of the body moves to its own rhythm, its own beat. As she adjusts the heart they adopt a resonant frequency, co-ordinate, entrain. The eyelids in the silver face flicker and open to show eyes of real amethyst illuminated by the glow of the processes within the artificial skull.

“Can you understand me?” asks Elida.

The machine nods, offers her a hand of brass (the other is of silver).

“I am delighted to make your acquaintance,” says the machine, “I seem to remember several different beings, many names: Astraea the twelfth hour, who lived in a great clock, this hand was Maenad who served the Queen at the autumn feast. This heart belonged to Sir Horsley who rode over a gigantic chessboard landscape; and this head belonged to the witch Miranda who performed in the court of the Sultan of Tangiers. But...Who am I?”

Elida considers, “You were built from the ruins of the old world. You are the first of a new race; you must build more like yourself. What use will your race be if you do not proliferate? You should call yourself Eve.”

A week later Elida and Eve sit by the castaway’s bed. He does not speak or move. The only sign of life is the slow rise and fall of the chest beneath the bandages.



Elida says, "They say I was like this when Kasteel found me. He pieced me together from a thousand scraps. They say I was more wound than skin, more stitches than flesh. Through his skill, his care, his love, he brought me back. I am not sure now I am grateful, do you think dissolution in the sea would have been better?"

"You have repeated the pattern Hildred set," says Eve holding out her mismatched hands, "Speaking for myself, I prefer existence."

"And this," says Elida straightening the Castaway's sheet, "Hildred's latest patchwork, is this William Lee or some other poor sailor?"

"You said before it could not be," says Eve.

"Even so... this is William Lee's world. Before William Lee everything moved like a machine, like a beautiful dance. This world is chaotic, unpredictable. One day the waters will be flat and blue, the next it will be all waves and storms and wild winds. This is what William Lee brought with him when he came in his ship. Before William our years ran with the same reliability as the machines; from feast to fast to summer masque, through rituals laid down in times beyond memory. William Lee called the sea and storm and overran the land with lightening burning from his fingertips and thunder in his voice. In the chaos people ran to the priests, and the priests tore down the old world.

Elida looks for her friends down on the shore. On the east beach she pauses as a tendril of sea takes on a life of its own and threads its way up the beach towards the town. The edges of the land appear inconclusive on the *Oostenstrand*; she walks down to the outcrops where blue-black mussel beds gleam. She splashes through the shallows among rainbow shelled barnacles and baroquely armoured prawns with chiffon seaweed flowing behind her. There is the voice in the sea, a whisper like the hiss of waves on the shore. The sea-creature crawls up out of the surf and sits among the barnacles and algae combing her green hair with a rock pool as a looking glass.

The girl says, “The mountains, the cities, my land are immersed. The future is down in the abyssal depths. We will play forever among the cold stars of the deep.”

“That sounds like a future I had once,” says Elida.

“Is that future lost? You could join us, sister.”

“There are so many lost futures, too many to choose among. I cast my mother’s ring into the sea and with it threw away the world that had been intended to revolve around me so mine could revolve around William Lee. If only there was a way to unknot those rings undo the bargain... Then maybe I could stay with Kasteel.”

An ornately horned creature resembling a scaly goat rises besides the sea-girl in a cloud of steam. Its serpentine tail and delicate umbrella-fins disturbs the pools surface. She wraps her arms about its neck and it spreads and stretches its translucent fins to fly through the ocean and carry her out to sea. She calls back, “If you change your mind...”

A few fishermen stride on stilts through shallow waves towards the reef, leathery old wading birds off to collect their crab baskets and check the oyster nurseries.

The Castaway lies silent. He is buried under layers of dressing. A dozen different tubes and wires intersect the bandages carrying materials to and from a group of obscure devices that encircle the bed. Kasteel’s machinery does the work of his lungs and liver and heart. It whirs and hisses, pumps with a regular clock beat and all the while his chest rises and falls, the blood flows in his veins, it adds nutrients, it eliminates waste from his blood stream, his endocrine system is maintained with a constant flow of subtle chemicals, and electrical signals modulate his brain. Hildred Kasteel leans forward in a fresh surgeon’s coat. He unwinds a clean white bandage at the top of the castaway’s arm, and passes it to Elida. There are so many layers of bandage. The first layer is clean but the next is red spotted, the next red spattered, then red soaked and filled with maggots and carrion worms. He scrapes the scavengers away to reveal the castaway’s flesh has healed

but the skin resembles yellow rags and barely covers the muscles and network of arteries that throb with restored life. The Castaway remains immobile.

Once Elida stood with William Lee before the green ocean where the gulls wheeled and screamed. She handed him the ring that her mother had given her. Her mother had slipped it from her slim white finger and placed it on hers the day she came of age. Her mother had told her the perfect circle reflects the circles of their years. It was the engine of the great wheel of the season's frost and thaw. The circle was the key to the winter world and the frozen river where her mother orbited with a hundred mechanical dancers through the fog and snow and frost and rime...

"Will he recover?" she asks Hildred.

"He should, but it will take time - much longer. Flesh is not like machinery, not like your Eve."

"My Eve has taken so much longer, a lifetime to find the parts to build her."

Hildred shrugs "but once you had assembled the parts they worked together perfectly."

Hildred makes an adjustment to the modulating wave that is fed into the Castaway's brain and he convulses, his limbs twitch, then flail. The Castaway's hand grabs Elida. His fingers hold her cold as iron, a manacle on her wrist. She tries to unbend the fingers but they are locked. Pain runs through her arm freezing like ice; her bones are brittle under his hand; they are going to splinter.

Hildred searches among his instruments, a tray of surgical knives clatters and a clamp drops to the floor as he picks up a bone saw. He grips the Castaway's upper arm and rests the shiny steel blade above the crook of the elbow.

"No" says Elida through gritted teeth and faint with pain, "another way."

He flings the saw aside and takes a green bottle from a cabinet and a large syringe. He fills the syringe with the liquid and plunges the spike into the Castaway's shoulder. Within seconds the fingers soften and Hildred pulls Elida from him.

"I am sorry. It must be a reflex. I will adjust the waveform."

She wonders: is this the same William Lee? The Sea-God's Prophet? Is this William Lee who mastered the oceans and the stars, made wind and water bend to his will? William Lee who cast the whole world into flux, so it became fluid in unpredictable motion? William Lee had said that equilibrium was death, life is far from equilibrium, chance could break through the contingency that held them all; like larks in amber, like flies in aspic, like fossils in the stone.

Elida touches the rubbery flesh again; the Castaway's skin is cold beneath her fingers. It was never cold when they lived in the tower by the sea. What has reduced him to this? What extinguished the hot blood. He is cold as a fish.

"Is it really him, Elida?"

"It should not be, but it is William Lee."

"But why has he returned?"

"There is the link between us stronger than death or love or life. Why did you save him?"

"You say you left your tower, you stopped waiting for him. You chose me, Elida" says Hildred.

"I am not free. We had a bargain. I betrayed him but the bargain stands. He bound the two rings."

"Superstition," says Hildred.

"No you have only looked at this little corner," says Elida, "You have only looked at this island: at the human beings at biology, at works of reason. This is not a work of

reason, this is the *Pastoor's* world: every animal a sign, the weather an omen, his faith is not madness it is the voice of God.”

“I know all about Nachtvliinder’s world – it is superstition, old stories, myths; some people find them comforting, that is what Nachtvliinder does here.”

“How could you understand the world where Leviathan swam between the stars, where William Lee was born? My mother thought her reason could defeat him, that he could not resist the motion of her mechanical world. It was after all a human world. When I invited him into my mother’s kingdom, he did not resist, he joined it and made it something else. He drove the wheels of the season beyond reason. I invited this destruction.

“I did not believe it,” says Kasteel, “I thought it one of your dreams.”

In the evening they sit at the table built from polished driftwood. The oven is warm and the pantry filled with salt fish. Still the Castaway lies in a bed at the top of the house under the care of the machines. A little supper cannot erase him.

There is a noise outside, angry shouts. Elida crosses to the window. Out in the cobbled street *Pastoor* Nachtvliinder addresses his disciples in the light of a lantern. The wind fills his dark robe like a sail; a crowd is spread out in the street, surrounding the house. She opens the door.

“What do you want?”

“You have created blasphemies; things that look like men but are patchworks and parodies of God’s creation. You have brought the damned from the sea onto the land.”

“He was damaged not dead. Kasteel has saved him. Who among you has Kasteel not saved? When the fish bite and stray hooks catch a man who stitches the wounds? When wounds fester who drains and cauterizes them? When you have sea-fevers who

provides the medicine? You, Nachtvliinder, all you bring are your own night terrors to infect these good people like the diseases Kasteel cures.”

She picks a man from the crowd, “You,” she says, “Pieter, did he not set your leg when you fell from the mill you were fixing?”

Pieter agrees, “The bone was sticking right out of the skin, now look,” he says and dances a quick Hornpipe. There is a chuckle or too among the fishermen and *Pastoor* ‘Vliinder reddens a little.

“And Mrs Hoog,” says Elida, “who cured your children of the seal-pox?”

Mrs Hoog says, “He did, they might have died”

Nachtvliinder turns on her “and God would have gathered the poor innocents from the world of tears, kept them safe for all times. You have kept them in the world to be tempted and damned.”

He addresses the retreating crowd “What use is this flesh? It is purely a vehicle for sin. When God chastises us Kasteel undoes his good work. You, Elida. You were scraps of flesh. Less than the thing that grows in the shape of a man in his house, he kept you covered in bandages, tried to give you the form of a woman when he took you from the sea.”

“I was very badly injured when he saved me.”

“He stitched you together from fragments on the shore. How many shipwrecks did it take to give you a body Elida? How many dead girls did he take from the ocean to make himself a wife?”

“I was not built by any man. I am my mother’s daughter; I am myself.”

Nachtvliinder spits. He has lost his audience

Elida returns to her workshop. She finds Eve stood before the mechanical Adam. His body is built of metal in imitation of a god, an image of Apollo.

“He is nearly complete,” says Elida.

“There never was such perfection,” says Eve.

“Except for you,” says Elida, “one day you will find a heart, or we will learn to make another like yours.”

“I do not think I need another like me,” says Eve.

“Why not?”

“We do not need him for me to produce others, this outer form, the shape of a human being is an illusion for your eyes. Have these others, Kasteel, William Lee, Nachtvliinder, have they ever done anything other than restrict you? Force you to act against your nature?”

“I am not sure what my nature is,” says Elida, “from what they say I may be a patchwork of many natures.”

“I think you said you are your mother’s daughter.”

A hand imitates a crab, finger-walks, finger clicks across the brown floorboards, oiled, varnished reflective. The silver gauntlet insinuates itself into a crack in the laboratory wall. Eve plucks it from the hole and returns it to its tank.

“The hand does not need a heart. I think perhaps the bee or wasp would be a better model for a future than men and women – they are natural builders.”

Elida looks down, “I am disappointed. I hoped you would preserve something of the human race.”

“Oh, do not be disappointed. He may live too - shall we gather some more parts? We may find a heart then you shall have your Adam, Elida.”

“My Adam?”

“He is your wish, not mine.”

Eve and Elida walk down to the Harbour. Elida does not want to believe what Nachtvliinder said. That she is a jigsaw. Her memories of the world before the rain are perfect. Her memories of her life with William Lee are certain. It is the present that seems a patchwork, cobbled together from fragments and scraps of some other world. The people move in rhythms she doesn't understand. It is like a dance she never learnt and no-one will explain. She cannot make out the melody or fathom the beat.

In the tidal zone, something splashes and scratches as it hunts among the intertwining strands of rock, water, and weed. She stands beside Eve with her green dress floating in the breeze. Out on the *wantij* the unicorns play in the moonlight: giant seahorses hauriant; stood on fern-coiled tails twisting their lithe bodies and coloured pure-white. The life below the ocean seems to hold so many more meanings than land creatures. There are more pieces of broken automata shining in the shallow waters among the driftwood and weeds and ripples. Eve beats out a rhythm, claps with her hands, and the pieces move with purpose. They drag themselves up the shore and construct strange chimera of metal that move around one another in circles and epicycles that seem to reflect some greater cosmic order.

“It only takes a brain and a heart.” says Eve, “then you can command a new world.”

In the morning they meet in the infirmary. Eve's face is a mask of silver, she reflects Elida. The life-sustaining mechanism whirs and rattles and the Castaway stirs beneath his bandages.

“His breathing is too fast,” says Eve, “We should get Kasteel.”

“Wait,” says Elida, “it will settle soon, he is just dreaming.”

He mumbles beneath the bandages



“See, just a dream.”

The mumbling grows louder. He speaks rapidly in a low voice that rustles and hisses like the waves on the rocks. William Lee raises a hand. He shivers. He thrashes under the sheets; he claws at the dressing and those that wrap him too tightly split and break as he flexes his new flesh. With a single spasm he is upright. Awake. He tears the wire and tubes from his body: from heart, and lungs, and brain.

Elida says, "William, you live."

He replies through the bandages “That was my name once, once when I sailed on the endless ocean. I flew on sails filled with sunlight beyond the warm worlds where a nameless planet drifts free of its star. Among the icy comets far from the summer’s warmth. Between the stars the slack winds left me dead in the water. I had not expected to be stranded in the doldrums so far from the Sargasso. I was left floating where galaxies were reefs of worlds. But I was a fool to think they had grown in such a shallow bay; that they could be fathomed by a mortal sailor.”

“But you have returned to the Earth,” says Elida.

“Or what remains of it,” says Eve.

“Enough of science, we return to the sea,” says William.

“Later, you are not well,” says Eve, “you might have died.”

Elida opens the window to let the fresh air in and allow the smell disinfectant and decay to escape. William Lee swings his legs onto the edge of the bed, wrapped in ragged bandages.

“It was not the deep sea that injured me, it was the shallows and the land. Let me go back.”

He raises his arms above his head and draws circles in the air and whistles a tuneless note. The bluster of the wind catches it and carries it around the tower until the

whole world shudders in sympathy. But he cannot sustain the magic. The note breaks and fades and the world returns to rest.

“Sleep now, William,” says Elida, “you will grow stronger with time.”

“I cannot, I cannot stay here. Come back with me,” says William Lee.

“I have spent too long on the land,” says Elida, “I cannot return.”

“But I must. I must get back to the sea, Elida. The land is killing me. Come with me now.”

The words seem stuck behind his lips - all that dribbles out is the black ink. He vomits fragments of paper (the words pelican, sea, sky, flesh, deceit, and love).

“I am dying, Elida, take me back to the sea.”

He tries to raise himself from the bed but cannot. Elida places an arm beneath his shoulder to help him, but he is a dead weight. Eve has a more than human strength and raises him to his feet. Eve and Elida support him between them. They descend to the ground floor and carry William Lee out onto the street where a wind blusters in from the shore. A green stormy light hangs over the town and the windmill sails turn steadily. Black sea birds, like cormorants but with long scaly necks, sit on the roof crests. They are ready to fly but none the less they stay earthbound on the tiles and chimneys watching for a sign.

The smell of the ocean blows in with the sound of crashing waves and William Lee raises himself to his own feet. He takes Elida’s arm in iron fingers.

“You must come with me back to the sea,” his grip is like steel on her wrist again. Eve tries to hold him back but his strength has grown too much.

“I cannot go back to the sea. I have been on the land too long,” says Elida.

Still he moves inevitably onwards.

The cobbles ring with hobnails and hard boots. Kasteel shouts at them to stop. But William Lee moves at a steady pace towards the *Westenstrand*, not fast enough to outpace

Kasteel, but with the ocean in sight his strength has returned. He is like a wheel rolling down the slope. All Hildred can do is follow. There is the crash and hiss of waves on rocks and he grows stronger with every step he takes. A hundred yards from the sea the dark robed figure of *Pastoor* Nachtvlinger emerges from the shadows of *Musselbaum's* refinery. He carries one of the great flensing knives used to cut blubber from whales. He blocks William Lee's path with the flensing knife held before him.

"I see that I have caught all the devils together," says Nachtvlinger, "now, hell wants you back."

"Out of my way, landsman" says William Lee, "the sea is calling."

"I am here to clean the world of monsters like you," says Nachtvlinger, "I was chosen to keep this land pure. Only those made in God's image shall live."

*Pastoor* Vlinder swings the blade and William Lee laughs as he reaches out to catch it, but it shears through bandages and fingers. William Lee hesitates astonished at the injury as Nachtvlinger swings again slicing deep into his shoulder parting bandage and muscle and bone. William Lee crumples and falls. A swirling mass of black clouds rumble above them.

"Nothing on the green sea should hurt William Lee," says Elida, "he is God's chosen,"

"But he is not on the green sea," says Nachtvlinger, "He is on the land and here I am God's chosen."

Elida tries to cover William Lee, to protect him, but Nachtvlinger brings the blade down again on his head and the light leaks from the wound in his skull. She holds him in her arms as blood like ink flows from his lips and lightning flashes in the sky. The thousand sutures where Kasteel has stitched him back together come apart. Eve steps forward placing her metal body between Nachtvlinger and Elida.

He swings the blade, his face flushed from the violence. His black robe is soaked with darker stains. The metal glances from Eve's carapace and she catches him in one arm.

"I am the creation of neither one of your God's," she says "I am my mother's daughter," and the silver hand presses into his rib cage and pulls out a beating, bloody heart.

The *wantij* boils beyond the *Westenstrand*. Where William Lee had been, a thousand fragments of meat float in an inky puddle turning into starfish and worms. *Pastoor* 'Vlinder is a shapeless mass of dark cloth on the road.

"I did not think I had made a killer," says Elida.

Eve offers her a hand, "You gave me the skills to survive."

The waves lap the beach as Elida washes *Nachtvlinder* and William Lee's blood from her body. The parts of hundreds of mechanical beings litter the shore like tide-stranded crabs. When she was young she had seen the magic of mechanical people dancing, jewelled knights like enormous chess pieces, fantastic dwarfs and clowns and mythical beasts all animated by machinery, by the power of iron and fire. Now their remains seem to recall that world too.

She lies in the water and lets it carry her a while. She drifts again beyond windmills rotating sails as the sky whispers. Beneath her more hands are crawling from the sea. A knight's head with eyes of white fire blinks from beneath a clump of seaweed. The sea seems drained of energy as it carries her on a listless wave, and deposits her among the rocks and weeds where the girl from the sea combs her green hair.

"I have something of yours."

The girl from the sea holds out her open hand. On the greenish skin is a circle of gold.

She says “William Lee is gone away into the darkness and the deep, so here is your ring.”

Elida leans closer to the girl on the rocks, she smells of the sea, of dog whelk, of wrasse and codfish. On the beach lie fish like the mythical capitalists, coated in gold and argent, wide mouths hanging permanently open to draw the world inside and reduce the riches of the ocean to rubbery flesh. Even in death they try to fill distended pale bellies with the swarms of flies. A wave bursts near the shallows in a spout of foaming water.

Her mother danced on the frozen river. The knights orbited her on the ice. Wherever her mother turned, the air swirled with mist as the moisture froze to rime. Her mother had picked her up and kissed her as the cold snowflakes fell on her face.

Her mother’s ring is in her hand again. It has returned, come full circle. The air around her seems to chill. She is her mother’s daughter; and she is the centre of the circle too.

Beyond the town the skeletons of ships wrought in steel join the ferocious Pliosaur and ancient whales in the graveyard of the rocks. Rib cages of once and future evolutions protrude from dimming waves...

Monkfish and priestfish in cassocks and hoods of brown flesh chant the hours; the leader of the school is dressed in a scholar’s gown, while a great green sea dragon raises itself onto the beach, and lies couchant, half-asleep.

Somewhere over the waves, the world of the sea god’s chosen fades in a heavy fog. In her mother’s kingdom, all was snow, in the winter the great river froze solid and the sleighs carried her far out across the frozen sea. Her boat sailed across a world of ice.

Elida clenches her fist around the ring. It is heavy and cold. The last remnants of that world, passed down from her now mythical kingdom. She could return, but how long did she know that world? She spent eighteen years there. She has spent a thousand years waiting in the rain for William Lee; a thousand years adrift in a world of water. What will

she do with the old world?. Her project, her Eve is complete, she at least will survive. Elida hands her mother's ring to Eve. You are the daughter of that world more than I am; it is your future now. I will stay here with Kasteel. Eve places the ring on her finger and steps out onto the sea where a crust of frazil ice immediately extends from her toes. She slides forward onto the ice that thickens into a pathway as transparent as glass that holds the fantastic forms of heraldic sea beasts trapped within its matrix. Eve skates out across the still green of the frozen ocean with a hundred other mechanical creatures orbiting her in a clockwork dance.

Elida walks back from the shore to where Nachtvliinder's disciples wail and shiver and pray by the body. Kasteel and Regen lean over the *Pastoor's* corpse.

"It's a shame" says Regen, "He was one of your best."

"Well, we'll see what we can salvage," says Kasteel, "we shall build them a new priest."

"Do you think we overdid this one?" says Regen, "a touch too much brimstone? We could give them a nice one next time. You know - tea and sardines at the vicarage, bicycle trips, boy scouts, and butterfly collecting. "

"I don't think it would work, some of them need the hellfire to keep going," says Kasteel.

"What about the sailor?" asks Regen.

Kasteel answers, "I'm afraid he's gone; there was very little there to start with."

He calls to Elida, "My love, could you fetch my bag and round up some fishermen to carry the body. I am afraid we are going to be busy tonight."



## 8.2 The Complete Symphonies of Victor Frankenstein

‘Eve Last’, like ‘*Dísir on the Langstrand*’, is inspired by a Henrik Ibsen play. In this case *The Lady from the Sea*.<sup>225</sup> In the original play Ellida lives with her husband, a doctor, but had previously agreed to marry a sailor who she believed had drowned. The sailor returns and Ellida must decide between him and her family. But this is not Ibsen’s world. In ‘Eve Last’, Elida wonders:

Why is a voice singing over the waves, perhaps under the waves? Calling her down; down among the drowned men of the old world. Back to her mother, back to her father, back to her first husband.

The setting for ‘Eve Last’ transposes the Ibsen plot to a future Earth where the remains of previous civilisations are constantly recycled. The world is flooded and the only land left is a polder that has been built from ruins. Like other stories in this collection the text also contains borrowed fragments, particularly of ‘Frostiana’ whose world is integrated within the fabula. The town also contains familiar elements of Roscaven from ‘Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss’ as ‘a pall of fishy smoke hangs over the harbour where Musselbaum’s refinery is rendering a whale’s carcass for oil.’

Unlike Roscaven, in Elida’s town, there is no visible God, no True Image. *Pastoor* Nachtvliinder leads his followers in song praising a wrathful God who demands faith but remains secretive and invisible. Elida questions if this is God’s nature and invites his anger.

Elida occupies her time trying to create a new Adam and Eve for a mechanical Eden. She engineers them from the remains of machines washed up from the sea. Elida’s husband, Hildred Kasteel, does the same with human castaways. Both Elida and Kasteel

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<sup>225</sup> Ibsen and others V3 p127 - 212



are Victor Frankenstein-like figures, building their own futures from scavenged remains of a destroyed world. Elida is also Kasteel's creation, as is William Lee. By the end of the story it is apparent that everything and everyone is built from fragments. Even the zealot *Pastoor* Nachtvliinder was constructed by Kasteel to keep his other creations going through his faith. It is a *Frankenstein* world.

'Eve Last' is told from Elida's viewpoint; we see the world through her eyes. Her husband, Kasteel, is mostly in the background. A certain lack of affect has clung to them from the original cut up. The plot is driven by *Pastoor* Nachtvliinder, who appears regularly as a threat that provides the pivotal action: He is 'Over religious, over certain, overbearing', he has a touch of Ibsen's overzealous priest, *Brand*<sup>226</sup> in his unrelenting commitment. Castaway William's island appears too; little bits of cyclopean architecture reminiscent of 'those barrows and burials in the *Terre de Crânes Noirs*' appear among the other ruins.

Unlike the fetish figure of Miranda in 'The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near', Elida and Eve have their own motivations. As a character I conceived Eve as being as far as possible from the compliant, mechanical 'Future Eve'<sup>227</sup> of de L'isle Adam. The title, 'Eve Last', refers to the first Eve, Lilith, in the Kabbalist myth, who was expelled from Eden for demanding equal rights.<sup>228</sup>

The mechanical Eve of 'Eve Last' is not animated by the word 'Life' inscribed on her forehead like Miranda. Miranda remains fragmentary animated only by castaway William's fantasy. In 'Eve Last', Eve's heart brings all her parts together as in unity. Elida says of her creations that '[...]without the heart the pieces will not function. Its beat provides the co-ordination so all the parts move in step.'

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<sup>226</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays: Five*, (London: Methuen, 1986), p20 -114

<sup>227</sup> Haining, p96 - 226

<sup>228</sup> Scholem, p163

When Eve is brought to life by the insertion of a beating mechanical heart she announces the origins of the parts, which have been salvaged to build her:

[...]Astraea the twelfth hour, who lived in a great clock, this hand was Maenad who served the Queen at the autumn feast. This heart belonged to Sir Horsley who rode over a gigantic chessboard landscape, and this head belonged to the witch Miranda[...]

Eve accepts this patchwork identity, but rejects Elida's offer to create her a mate. She asserts her identity as non-human and suggests that a civilisation based on a colony of social insects may be preferable.

Even the memories of the inhabitants of this world are *Frankenstein* like creations. The contents of Elida's head, her history, may also have been built from disparate fragments and her memory of her past life is possibly a confabulation. Kasteel suggests this when he tells her, 'Captain Lee, your first husband?[...] a bad dream Elida, nothing more.'

Elida finds meaning in the fragments of her memory. Though whether this is a truth she has stumbled upon or a delusion is ambiguous as William Lee also shares similar memories.

In previous commentaries I have shown how the mind naturally forms juxtaposed fragments into a unity. Within cut-up texts these gestalt objects tend to be spatially and temporally static because of disordered deictic sequences. Ballard described these effects as spinal landscapes<sup>229</sup>. These are Max Ernst's timeless lagoons of *Europe after the Rain*<sup>230</sup> or *the Eye of Silence*<sup>231</sup>, which are filled with fantastic reefs and mirror-surfaces, and the occasional hallucinatory figure emerging from the entropy of fractal textures. These are the visual equivalents of Ballard's anomic, narrative-free, compressed novels;

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<sup>229</sup> Ballard. p87

<sup>230</sup> Ernst.

<sup>231</sup> Max Ernst, *The Eye of Silence*, (St Louis: Kemper Art Museum, 1943), Oil on canvas.

and the amorphous free-jazz of Burroughs cut up. Although the cut-up fragments are sewn together to form a body, they remain inert. They need *Frankenstein's* spark of life: something to make the parts move together.

If two metronomes are left in proximity on a wooden table their oscillations effect each other until they tick in resonance; they become entrained:

Entrainment describes a process whereby two rhythmic processes interact with each other in such a way that they adjust towards and eventually 'lock in' to a common phase and/or periodicity<sup>232</sup>

Entrainment has been a theme in all of the stories of this collection. It acts as an antidote to the fragmentation, to the static landscapes. The fragments that are entrained operate as one system. They have a deeper connectivity than two static parts; they are animated. Entrainment is the opposite of cut-up; it integrates fragments into a whole through rhythm. Unlike the static paintings, the two dimensional gestalts, this provides a gestalt through time – a narrative flow. The tendency for entrainment:

has been described in a wide variety of systems and over a wide range of time scales (i.e. periodicities): from fireflies illuminating in synchrony, through human individuals adjusting their speech rhythms to match each other in conversation, to sleep-wake cycles synchronizing to the 24-hour cycle of light and dark[...]<sup>233</sup>

Musicians playing together synchronised their performances to each other's rhythm.<sup>234</sup> Groups performing co-operative physical tasks such as the Whalers singing the 'Whale, ho!' in 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss', can co-ordinate their movements through

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<sup>232</sup> Martin Clayton, Rebecca Sager, and Udo Will, 'In Time with the Music : The Concept of Entrainment and Its Significance for Ethnomusicology', (2004) <<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/experience/InTimeWithTheMusic.pdf>> [accessed 31/07/19].

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. p3

<sup>234</sup> Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat : How Music Plays the Mind*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).p112

entrainment. In 'Eve Last', Elida's alienation from the townspeople is expressed in terms of musical entrainment:

The people move in rhythms she doesn't understand. It is like a dance she never learnt and no-one will explain. She cannot make out the melody or fathom the beat.

In 'Frostiana' the kingdom is complete because it follows 'epicycles and complex deferents.' In '*Dísir on the Langstrand*' the swarm of rats are entrained, so much so that they actually form a whole being, the Rat-King. The Rat-King exists only through entrainment: his being is in flux as he dissolves into his components and reforms all the rats ticking together. He may even reform as a whole composed of a different set of components as in the fight with the Germans at the Sanatorium. It is the entrainment which makes him.

When objects move in synchrony they have a good gestalt. They are perceived as part of a unity. When Yolanda and the Rat-court dance:

A pitter-patter of notes fell from her lips, faster and stronger so they all joined together in a stream that grew broader and deeper until the voice came back and although it could not charm the rats into the sea it could propel the rats and the men and women together around the dance floor.

Entrainment is important in musical experiences, in getting the 'groove' when performing and listening. Elizabeth Helmuth Margulis claims that there is a deep sense of entrainment between musicians and audience in performance.<sup>235</sup> In the '*Dísir on the Langstrand*' Yolanda's song entrains the townsfolk and puts them completely under her control:

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid. p111

The deputation hung in the air like marionettes on strings, she made them raise an arm and a leg, made them all step in time, made them spin and form a dancing circle

Yolanda's song charms rats and people. The idea that music can have this effect has appeared in literature since the Sirens in the *Odyssey*. It has been suggested that the musical elements of language, its prosody, has an entraining effect. Gertraud Fenk-Oczlon shows how vowels are responsible for most prosody:

Vowels carry the pitch modulations that convey grammatical and lexical information. The tight bond between vowels and pitch is supported by experimental findings suggesting strong interactions in the processing of vowels and melody, but not between consonants and musical information.<sup>236</sup>

Steve Mithin argues for a strong connection between music and language. In *The Singing Neanderthal*<sup>126</sup> he has suggested that music was the precursor to symbolic language. Anthony K. Brandt, Robert Slevc, and Molly Gebrian, take a similar view in 'Music and Early Language Acquisition', describing language as a subclass of music<sup>237</sup>. Donald Wesling argues that rhythm is important for organising language in *The Chances of Rhyme*:

[...] whether for play or emphasis, non-literary language does employ its own intricate rhetoric. Rhyme-like features, usually discontinuous, are so much a part of the common discourse that they go literally unperceived. Indeed, observation of language habits outside literature suggests English could not do without a sound-linking device that so valuably organizes both language and mind."<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Gertraud Fenk-Oczlon, 'What Vowels Can Tell Us About the Evolution of Music', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8 (2017) <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/PMC5614962/>> [accessed 10/02/2019]

<sup>237</sup> Anthony K. Brandt, Robert Slevc, and Molly Gebrian, 'Music and Early Language Acquisition', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 3 (2012) <[http://www.frontiersin.org/Journal/Abstract.aspx?s=86&name=auditory\\_cognitive\\_neuroscience&ART\\_D\\_OI=10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00327](http://www.frontiersin.org/Journal/Abstract.aspx?s=86&name=auditory_cognitive_neuroscience&ART_D_OI=10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00327)> [accessed 11/09/2015].

<sup>238</sup> Donal Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme : Device and Modernity*, (Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 1980). p28

However Aniruddh D. Patel (2008) is reluctant to confirm this when examining a broad range of languages.<sup>239</sup> Although he agrees that specific rhythms of strong and weak stresses do characterise a native speaker's language use.<sup>240</sup> More recently in 'Aesthetic and emotional effects of meter and rhyme in poetry' Christian Obermeier et al found that 'both rhyme and regular meter led to enhanced aesthetic appreciation, higher intensity in processing, and more positively perceived and felt emotions.'<sup>241</sup>

In '*Dísir on the Langstrand*' Yolanda's song leads rats and later men. She says "if you sing men the right song they behave just like rats." Anthony Storr claims in *Music and the Mind* that Hitler's 'incantatory style affected crowds the same way as can some music.'<sup>242</sup>

Daniele Schön and Barbara Tillmann writing on entrainment in speech and music say:

[...] the degree of regularity is certainly weaker. Nonetheless, when one is listening to speech, the temporal regularity of the alternating stressed and unstressed syllables would cause the listener's attention to time-lock (couple) to this temporal pattern going from one stress to the following.<sup>243</sup>

Burroughs believed that this sort of language was deceitful. He wrote 'in the beginning was the word and the word was bullshit.'<sup>244</sup> Language allows us to lie and others to control us without us realising. Burroughs argues that cut-up is more truthful; Storr agrees that language can be deceptive and seductive. He says that:

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<sup>239</sup> Aniruddh D. Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). p151

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. p148 – p149

<sup>241</sup> Christian Obermeier and others, 'Aesthetic Appreciation of Poetry Correlates with Ease of Processing in Event-Related Potentials', *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience*, 16 (2016) <<https://doi.org/10.3758/s13415-015-0396-x>> [accessed 18/11/2017].

<sup>242</sup> Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind*, (London: Harper Collins, 1992). p47

<sup>243</sup> Daniele Schön and Barbara Tillmann, 'Short- and Long-Term Rhythmic Interventions: Perspectives for Language Rehabilitation', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1337 (2015) <<https://nyaspubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/nyas.12635>> [accessed 15/05/2019].

<sup>244</sup> Burroughs. p154

[...] prose, especially if it is ‘musical’ in the sense of employing rhythmically balanced phrases like those of Gibbon, or if it is of notable clarity like that of Freud or Bertrand Russell, can so beguile us with its elegance that we fail to appreciate its content.<sup>245</sup>

Burroughs writes in *The Ticket that Exploded* ‘The word is now a virus[...]It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system. Modern man has lost the option of silence.’<sup>246</sup>

A similar idea occurred to Richard Dawkins when he coined ‘meme’<sup>247</sup> (from gene) to describe how ideas survive and spread not because of they are true, but because they are in some way attractive.

Burroughs suggests adding a dose of entropy is the solution for this problem. He cut and spliced recordings as the cure for the language virus. He says ‘The more you run the tapes through and cut them up the less power they will have.’<sup>248</sup>

In ‘Birds of a Feather Flock Conjointly’ M. S. McGlone and P. Tofighbahsh show how alliteration and rhyme appear more truthful, and how ‘participants misattributed processing fluency to a perceived truth advantage of rhyming aphorisms over non-rhyming versions.’<sup>249</sup>

They demonstrate how the removal of these prosodic elements may really make a text less likely to be believed just because it sounds less true. When Burroughs cuts up a page and puts the pieces in a different order he really does reduce the deceptive prosody. Unfortunately he also disrupts the meaning. Ballard writes of him, ‘in books like *The*

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<sup>245</sup> Storr. p165

<sup>246</sup> Burroughs. p39

<sup>247</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, New ed. edn (Oxford University Press, 1989). p189-201

<sup>248</sup> Burroughs. p168

<sup>249</sup> /10/M. S. McGlone and J. Tofighbakhsh, 'Birds of a Feather Flock Conjointly (?): Rhyme as Reason in Aphorisms', *Psychol Sci*, 11 (2000)  
<<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.395.886&rep=rep1&type=pdf>> [accessed 10/10/15].

*Ticket that Exploded* and *The Soft Machine*, you see this attempt to go through language to something beyond.<sup>250</sup>

Ballard argues that the text contains latent meanings, hidden messages that cut-up reveals. In his paper 'Rorschach Audio', Joe Banks addresses the propensity to find hidden meanings in entropy. He writes of these illusory voices heard in white noise that 'the fog of noise that degrades these signals still seduces some people into suspending disbelief.'<sup>251</sup>

Banks adds how the willingness of an audience to believe there is a meaning there adds to the likelihood of a perceived message - faith in its presence produces the vision of intentional messages from material that would otherwise be disregarded.<sup>252</sup>

Burroughs believed in a secret language underneath the ordinary meaning. Tzara's joke that cut up is 'infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar'<sup>253</sup> becomes paranoia or even mystical interpretations of the text.

Entrainment is visible in these worlds in ways beyond music and language. In 'Frostiana', Dr Dee's clock regulates Gloriana's realm. On the frozen river automata skate and wonders dance in a stately circle. In 'Eve Last' Elida's past includes this clockwork kingdom:

[...]the land was laid before her painted in gold and white, the hands on the clock of winter edged forward and the pendulum rose through a cloud of fog. The hands swept through crystal and snow flake, diamonds and icing sugar.

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<sup>250</sup> J. G. Ballard, Simon Sellars, and Daniel Finbarr John O'Hara, *Extreme Metaphors : Selected Interviews with J.G. Ballard, 1967-2008*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2012). p349

<sup>251</sup> Joe Banks, 'Rorschach Audio: Ghost Voices and Perceptual Creativity', *Leonardo Music Journal*, 11 (2001) <<https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/09611210152780728>> [accessed 18/10/2014] . p78

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. p81

<sup>253</sup> Brotchie and Gooding. p36



In 'Frostiana' the people have previously performed their tasks just like clockwork; each year the same, like a stuck track on a record:

The great cogs and springs are sluggish in the cold; following the twelfth strike, clever figures begin their strange stately dance; they follow many and various epicycles and complex deferents as do the days and nights and centuries and years, as do the thoughts and fancies of men, and as do the heads and hearts of kings and commons alike.

In 'Eve Last' the clock-like periodicity of Gloriana's world in 'Frostiana' has been replaced by the organic rhythms, by the ebb and flow of William Lee's world. The circling currents and unpredictable weather systems are liable to disrupt the lives of the citizens without warning. 'Before William Lee everything moved like a machine, like a beautiful dance' but the new world is:

[...] chaotic, unpredictable. One day the waters will be flat and blue, the next it will be all waves and storms and wild winds. This is what William Lee brought with him when he came in his ship.

Elida claims she loved William Lee because she was bored by the clockwork regularity of her mother's realm. Although Elida believes William Lee is the spirit of entropy, as he lies unconscious:

Kasteel's machinery does the work of his lungs and liver and heart. It whirs and hisses, pumps with a regular clock beat and all the while his chest rises and falls, the blood flows in his veins, [...], and electrical signals modulate his brain.

So although he is a model of chaos, of strange attractors, and aperiodic systems he too is regulated by the clockwork spirit.

It is open if Kasteel has accidentally recreated beings from a previous age. In his small corner of the world he denies any way of being other than his science and Elida tries

to follow him in her construction of Eve. Kasteel's creation, William Lee, brings with him the magic of the sea God, while Nachtvliinder fulfils his role as God's chosen on the land in his fight against him. In the end only Eve triumphs and, like Gloriana, sets off across the ice to found her new kingdom.

'Eve Last' binds together several of the other stories here, but also questions their nature: 'Frostiana', 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss', 'The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near' are part of the fabula of 'Eve Last', but are framed by the unreliable memories of fragmentary identities. They are left occupying a liminal zone between history and dream.

## 9. Conclusion

Over the five years researching and writing this thesis my practice as a writer has changed and developed. Initially this transformation was concentrated on various craft processes and structural narrative elements that resulted in a move away from obviously avant-garde use of the cut-up method. I removed some of the more distracting elements of cut-up such as unusual idiolects and poetic, but distracting, descriptions. I continued to use cut-up as a source for narrative ideas, which were often incubated through shorter texts using multiple iterations of the method.

These stories developed from ‘Frostiana’ to ‘Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss’ becoming more narratively orthodox while still incorporating the theoretical themes derived from the method. ‘Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me’ explores some of the temporal dislocation symptomatic of cut-up. ‘The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near’ incorporates more obviously fragmented elements and signs of cut-up. Fragments and gestalts are significant themes in ‘*Dísir on the Langstrand*’. ‘The Architect of Putrefaction’ and the final creative piece, ‘Eve Last’, tell the stories of fragmentary worlds.

Each story has an accompanying essay listed below:

<b>Story</b>	<b>Essay</b>
‘Frostiana’	‘Entropy and Language ‘
‘Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss’	‘The True Image Of God’
‘ <i>Dísir on the Langstrand</i> ’	‘Midway between Music And Noise’
‘The Architect of Putrefaction’	‘Pessimism and the Laws Of Thermodynamic’
‘The Voice of Your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near’	‘The Shape of Cut-Up’
‘Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me’	‘Discourse and Fabula Time’
‘Eve Last’	‘ <i>The Complete Symphonies of Victor Frankenstein</i> ’

Nietzsche's eternal return provided a reference point in several essays. He writes in *Of Immaculate Perception*:

Your spirit has been persuaded to contempt of the earthly [...] to be happy in gazing, with benumbed will, without the grasping and greed of egotism – cold and ashen in body but with intoxicated moon-eyes! [...] truly you do not love the earth as creators, begetters, men joyful at entering upon a new existence!<sup>254</sup>

Zarathustra's criticism of 'pure knowledge', like Heqc's,<sup>255</sup> assumes a disconnection between theory and the world. This theoretical work does not stand as separate to the creative practice. The narratives and commentaries are deeply entangled with the process of cutting and reordering, with structuring and imagining, with the cognition and aesthetics of the cut-up method.

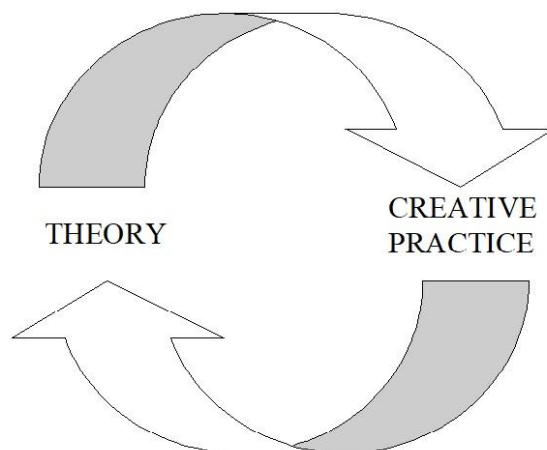


Figure 10 interaction of theoretical and creative processes

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<sup>254</sup> Nietzsche and Hollingdale. p145

<sup>255</sup> Heqc.

Like Nietzsche's Eternal Return<sup>256</sup> and the cyclic cosmology<sup>257</sup> suggested by some modern physicists this process should not have a real beginning. The beginning of the project was, in a way, a cheat – a singularity. A few scraps of theory cut-up and reordered and allowed to run away with themselves. From this point of initiation, the theory and practice together form a sort of strange loop where they become entwined. The practice takes the theory as its raw material to transform into fiction. But the theoretical commentaries in turn take the practice and its artefacts as their subject.

The creation of a narrative is a process that takes place over a spectrum of domains within a nested hierarchy of abstraction:

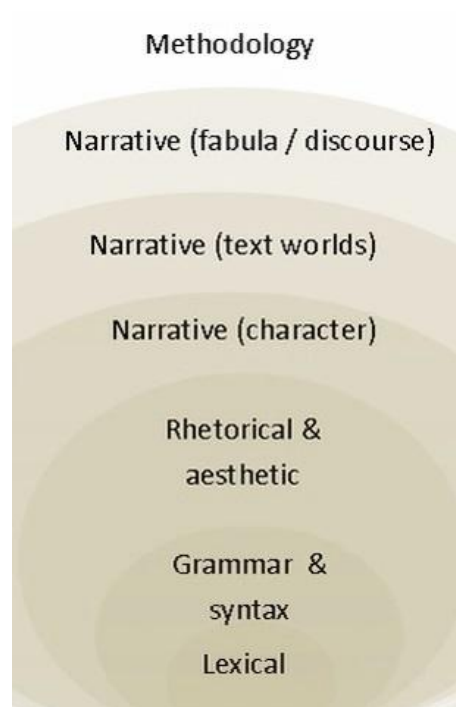


Figure 11 domains within the writing process

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<sup>256</sup> Nietzsche, p221

<sup>257</sup> Davies, p141

These range from the concrete matter of language though rhetorical and textural effects through to various broadly defined narrative concerns up to the most abstract level of methodological approach to writing.

These domains are permeable. They merge into one another. They all draw upon broader areas of knowledge. To construct a story I might use a lexicon from Tudor history, from painting, from second hand book selling. I might structure a story like a song with choruses. It might be structured like Ballard's condensed novels in *Atrocity Exhibition* or his story that is told only by its index,<sup>258</sup> or like Alfred Jarry's 'The Passion Considered as an Uphill Bicycle Race'.<sup>259</sup>

Often analogues to musical structure have been most useful in my practice. The parallel narratives of 'Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me' and 'The Architect of Putrefaction' were conceived as fugal structures using vertically entangled themes. While the dialectical process of the sonata form provided a basis for structure of 'Frostiana'.

At the start of this thesis, stands a singularity, a point outside of the process where the four research questions were posed. The first was:

How can the cut-up method to disassemble text and explore how the fragments can be constructed, reconstructed, or deliberately misconstrued to create a new text?

This can itself be cut up and reconstructed to frame the other questions. In structuring this conclusion I have used the reconfiguration in Figure 12 of the original question which implied the remaining three and now frames them.

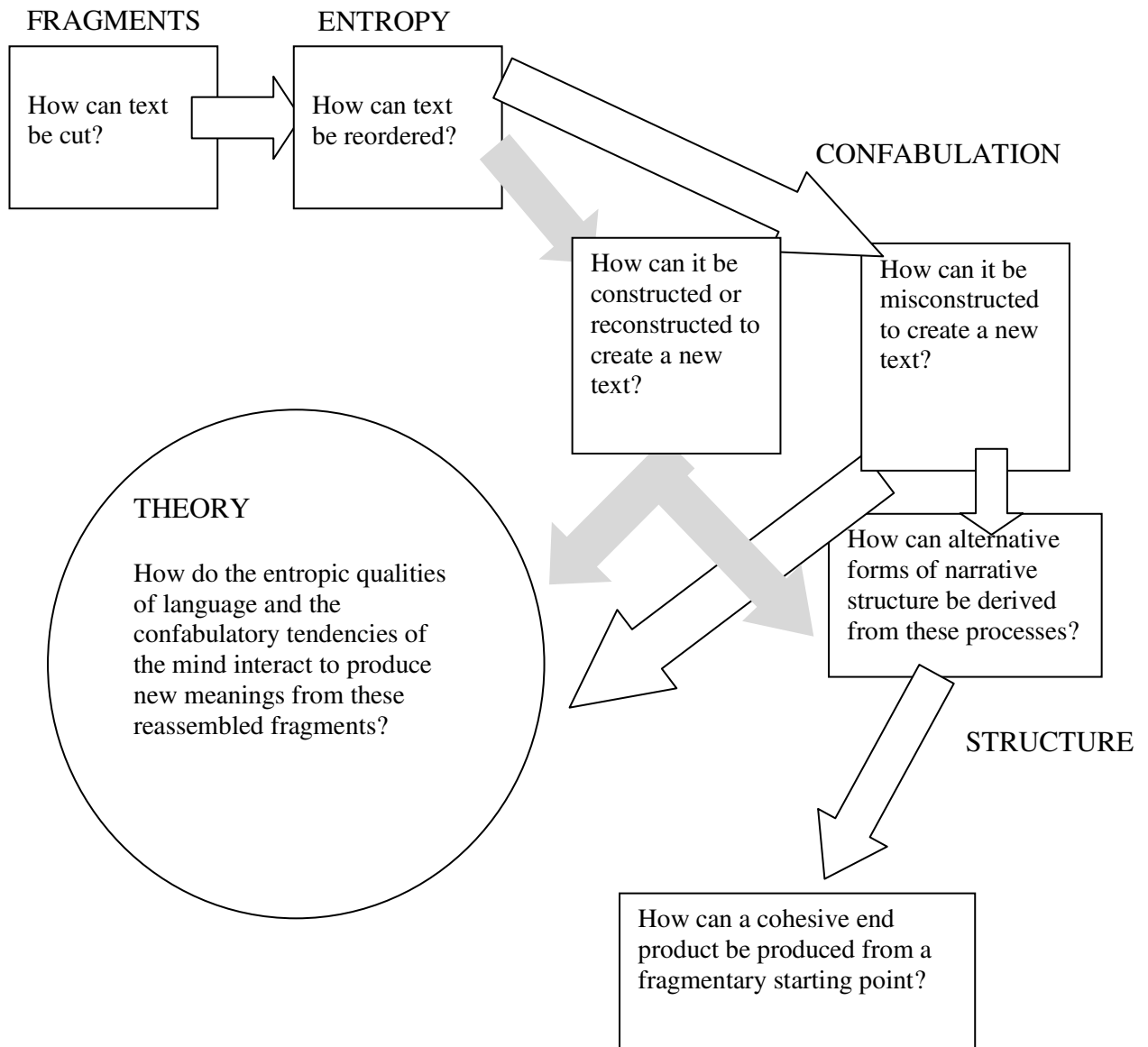
This includes mechanical and aesthetic aspects of the creative practice and those features visible in the artefacts associated with it. This reconfiguration of the question also

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<sup>258</sup> Ballard. V2 p434

<sup>259</sup> Alfred Jarry, Roger Shattuck, and Simon Watson Taylor, *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*, (London : Eyre Methuen, 1965). p122

makes explicit that three of the questions relate directly to creative practice and are a restatement of the model of my creative process that appears in 'Entropy and Language'. I have explored these through seven stories incorporating themes borrowed from various aspects of Cut-Up: fragments, entropy, confabulation, and structure.



William in ‘The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near’ progresses through his narrative arc, yet returns to the point he started. It is as if he has climbed M. C. Escher’s staircase,<sup>260</sup> which through a trick of perspective appears to end up back where it started. On this staircase ascending and descending figures meet each other even though they move in opposite directions. In the essay ‘Discourse and Fabula Time’ I referred to Hofstadter’s idea of a strange loop:

The “Strange Loop” phenomenon occurs whenever, by moving upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system, we unexpectedly find ourselves right back where we started[...]<sup>261</sup>

A strange loop is not just a feedback loop. It involves a degree of paradox, in that what at first appears a hierarchical progression returns the loop to its point of origin. This Escher staircase structure can be seen in the essay ‘Entropy and Language’ and its relationship with the story ‘Frostiana’. The essay discusses how separate text-worlds are used in ‘Frostiana’. In response to the research in subsequent drafts the narrative of ‘Frostiana’ altered to emphasise the text-worldness of certain elements. This is done through the images of Gloriana that appear throughout the story in their own separate frame. Even the epistemological world of Gloriana’s past reign is framed as a puppet show within the story.

The first part of the question (Figure 12) and the first decision made by a practitioner is *how can a text be cut?*

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<sup>260</sup> M. C. Escher, *Ascending and Descending*, (1960), Lithograph.

<sup>261</sup> Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach : An Eternal Golden Braid*, (New York: Basic Books, 1979),p10



There are many examples of ways in which practitioners cut their text detailed in the ‘Introduction’ or Appendix 5. My own methods vary somewhat from these (see appendices 1 and 2) and there seem to be infinite variations possible.

In ‘Pessimism and the Laws of Thermodynamics’ I used the OED definition of ‘fragment’<sup>262</sup> and discussed how a part may be perceived as separate from a whole. This seemed to be further complicated by whether cut-up was applied to a physical printed page or virtual text composed of a linear series of words and symbols. However much as in *Dísir* on the *Langstrand* when Yolanda:

[...]hacked his body into quarters.  
Each quarter retreated to a different corner and fell apart into a hundred rats, the rats became a swarm.

On closer examination an example of physical cut-up such as Burroughs’ physical four fragments, when viewed as a text sequence, are actually clusters of fragments (see Appendix 4 physical and virtual Cut-up.)

At this stage cut-up will have disrupted all the domains shown in Figure 11. The further down the hierarchy of the writing process the target domain is situated the less structure will remain. For example a cut-up on the level of the sentence as used by Bowie<sup>263</sup> will leave syntax and lexicon intact but have a severe effect on rhetorical and aesthetic qualities. At first this will be perceived by a reader as possessing exaggerated originality in the paragraph structure followed by increasing confusion as to their context. The higher narrative domains will be lost.

My initial research was largely descriptive, an attempt to produce taxonomy of cut-up and related aleatory methods. I focussed on how fragments could be measured and

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<sup>262</sup>Dictionary.

<sup>263</sup>Yentob.

their degrees of random reordering. In ‘Entropy and Language’ I showed how the idea of entropy can be applied to increases and decreases of the disorder in a text.

At first I developed a multi-dimensional classification, (see Appendix 6 A Taxonomy of Cut-Up) but on consideration reduced it to just two properties which together described how various methods effected the entropy of a text.

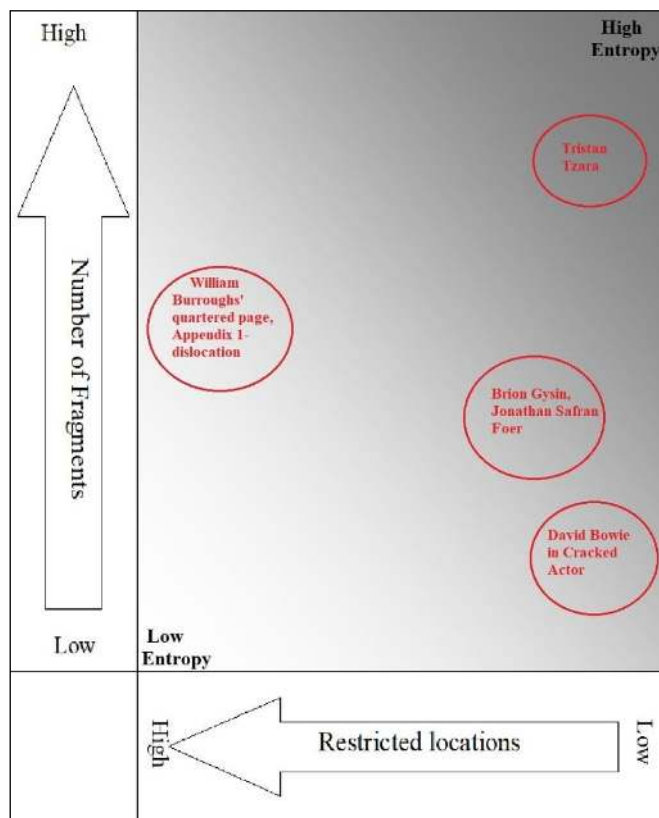


Figure 13 Simplified taxonomy of cut-up method

The idea that texts can be constructed, reconstructed, or misconstrued to form new texts with new meanings has always been central to cut-up. These new meanings are open to interpretation. As their generation is random the meanings are dependent on what practitioners and readers project onto them. This varies from Tzara’s ironic “beyond the

understanding of the vulgar<sup>264</sup>” to Burroughs’ practices variously as a paranoid cutting through the language virus,<sup>265</sup> to reveal the latent content,<sup>266</sup> or as a modernist finding a truer depiction of reality.<sup>267</sup>

That a piece of writing “can be constructed or reconstructed to create a new text” implies deliberate, conscious process as per Burroughs and Acker above. Burroughs suggested collaging a whole novel from other authors’ work.<sup>268</sup>

The poet Quentin Rowan actually produced a spy novel this way as he felt he was unable to write it using conventional methods. This was withdrawn and pulped due to plagiarism when his borrowing was discovered. He had copied work by 37 different authors in the first 34 pages. Lizzie Widdicombe in *The New Yorker* suggests if he had presented it as a post-modern collage he would not have got into such trouble. She also commented that it actually took quite a degree of skill to construct the text in this way.<sup>269</sup>

Rowans’ novel was deliberately constructed from fragments. However the fourth question in Figure 12 asks how fragments can be deliberately misconstructed to create a new text. The new text is created from error, chance, from interference, and from noise. This is rephrased as a theoretical consideration in the question:

How do the entropic qualities of language and the confabulatory tendencies of the mind interact to produce new meanings from these reassembled fragments?

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<sup>264</sup> Brotchie and Gooding. p36

<sup>265</sup> Ibid. p36

<sup>266</sup> Ballard, Sellars, and O’Hara. p349

<sup>267</sup> Kramer.

<sup>268</sup> Burroughs.

<sup>269</sup> Lizzie Widdicombe, 'The Plagiarist’s Tale', *The New Yorker February 5, 2012*, (2012) <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/02/13/the-plagiarists-tale>> [accessed 01/06/2019].

Martin Heidegger's concepts of knowing and knowledge<sup>270</sup> in *Being and Time* offers a model of textual interpretation where an initial fragment of text allows a reader to construct a provisional theory of the text. This theory then provides context for the rest of the text. The provisional theory of the text is then modified by the next piece the reader reads and so on in an interpretative loop. This loop does not need to be applied only to meaningful text. It appears to work overtime as described by Banks in 'Rorschach Audio'.<sup>271</sup> The mind attempts to interpret a text until overwhelmed by the limits of memory.

Similar processes occur within neural nets such as Google's *Deepdream*<sup>272</sup> software. This suggests that these may take place at a quite basic level within perceptual systems.

Hirstein<sup>273</sup> suggests this process occurs naturally in the mind when it is presented with incomplete information, and Teufel et al<sup>274</sup> also show that there is top down as well as bottom up input into sensory systems. Where sensory information is lacking the mind will fill in the gaps with what it 'knows'.

Readers (and writers) fill in these gaps in normal text all the time. They may imaginatively fill in unwritten background of text-worlds. Lisa Zunshine writes:

[...] our Theory of Mind jumps at the opportunity (so to speak) to speculate about their past, present, and future.<sup>275</sup>

Readers easily interpret rhetorical figures that refer to absent wholes. There are examples such as *metonymy* and *synecdoche* where the reader readily fills in missing information. A

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<sup>270</sup> Martin Heidegger, John Macquarrie, and Edward S. Robinson, *Being and Time*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962). p191

<sup>271</sup> Banks.

<sup>272</sup> Mordvintsev.

<sup>273</sup> Hirstein. p6

<sup>274</sup> Teufel and others p4

<sup>275</sup> Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction : Theory of Mind and the Novel*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006). p18

reader can interpret a sentence with jumbled or missing letters. We seek out a probable meaning and naturally messages as containing meaning so a listener will interpret Stanley Unwin's mangled version of Goldilocks as the story they know:

So off she went, and she went trittly-how down the garbage path, and at the left right-hand-side goal she passed a [sniff] poo-pom, it was hillows a humus heapy in the garbage!<sup>276</sup>

This is what makes proof reading familiar work so difficult. *The Guardian* reported in November 2018 that the quote "never fails to disappoint" got through eight proof-readers and made it to the front cover of a book before its negative nature was spotted and a whole print run of pulped.<sup>277</sup>

The mind reads new meanings into the ambiguities created by entropy. In 'Entropy and Language' Ernst's techniques of Frottage and Grattage<sup>278</sup> provides a parallel example in painting to the coherancing or confabulation that takes place when confronted with the ambiguous text produced by cut-up. Initially the process tends to produce only small areas of coherence. The explanation for this lies in the short temporal span of active memory and the process of chunking.<sup>279</sup>

The process of turning these small areas of apparent coherence into larger pieces of writing was described in 'The True Image of God'. These produce different narrative structures dependent on whether stories were a result of contextualising a single starting fragment as in the case of the stories 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss', '*Disir* on the *Langstrand*', and 'The Architect of Putrefaction'; or from contextualising multiple

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<sup>276</sup> Stanley Unwin, 'Goldylappers and the Three Bear Loeders from *Rotatey Diskers with Unwin*', (Castle Pie, 1961).

<sup>277</sup> Naaman Zhou, 'Never Fails to Disappoint': Roxy Jacenko Book Pulped after Cover Misprint', 2018 (2018) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/19/never-fails-to-disappoint-roxy-jacenko-book-pulped-after-cover-misprint>> [accessed 21/11/2018].

<sup>278</sup> Berger.

<sup>279</sup> Thalmann, Souza, and Oberauer.

fragments and drawing them together into a single narrative as in ‘Frostiana’, *‘Dwell the Whole Dark Year with Me’*, and *‘Eve Last’*.

‘The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near’ stands apart from these others as it was derived from fragments and themes ‘sampled’ from ‘Frostiana’, and from William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

The seven stories in this collection are organised as a history on the lines of Julian Barnes’ *History of the World in 10½ Chapters*<sup>280</sup> or as a mosaic novel defined in the Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction as ‘A book of short stories that share a common setting or characters and which taken together form a larger narrative.’<sup>281</sup>

I adopted various strategies to increase the sense of cohesion between the stories (see Appendix 7 Unifying the Collection). This was enhanced through incorporating elements from earlier stories into the epistemological worlds of the later narratives.

Taken together the seven stories can be seen as comprising a single fabula narrated in historical order. ‘Eve Last’ and ‘Frostiana’ in particular share a common historical point as a reference. A sense of unity is also increased by using the repeated themes set out in ‘Entropy and Language’ of fragments, entropy, confabulation, and structure. As noted in ‘The Complete Symphonies of Victor Frankenstein’ entrainment also plays a significant thematic role in most of the stories.

When reading a text the reader starts at the individual word and builds their interpretation up. They work upward through the domains in Figure 11. Starting from the level of language and syntax and building an understanding of the text through a process something like Heidegger’s circle of Knowledge and Knowing.

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<sup>280</sup> Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, (London: Picador, 1990).

<sup>281</sup> Jeff Prucher, *Brave New Words : The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).p121

Creative Writing is traditionally modelled as a reverse process of the reading process. An example can be seen in *Ready, Set, Novel*<sup>282</sup>, a writer's workbook, intended to be used to plan out a novel. Here a practitioner is directed to start with finding a 'pitch', deciding on a tone, a genre, and an overall plan of the narrative structure. The writer then builds character profiles, settings, and a fictional world; all prior to writing the first draft. This process builds from the top of the hierarchy of domains in Figure 11 and works down to the level of language.

Cut-up builds text from the bottom up like a reader reading. It does writing the 'wrong way around' and uses chance combinations of text to invent scenes and characters only later contextualising them in a world. The writer discovers the narrative through the writing rather than imposing it from an omniscient position outside of it.

Like Escher's staircase whether a writer starts at the bottom of the hierarchy or the top they end up at the same point. The choice between the two approaches to the process is a matter of aesthetic choice, but it is the top down approach which currently dominates Creative Writing practice.

The originality of this research lies in both its approach to theory and to creative practice.

Writing does not arrive from nothing: it is built from experience, from reading, and in this case some of those voids in the creative works are filled by elements of the cut-up process and the theoretical approaches itself.

The process of writing in this project absorbed other literary works: Shakespeare, Ibsen, Daniel Defoe, Mary Shelley and the occasional piece of cyclopean architecture out of Lovecraft.

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<sup>282</sup> Lindsey Grant Chris Baty, Tavia Stewart-Streit, *Ready, Set, Novel*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2011).

The intertextuality might be seen as a form of Deformance.<sup>283</sup> This is the rather kabbalistic critical practice suggested by Samuels and McGann, which bears some resemblance to cut-up. Here texts are partially destroyed or transformed through various Oulipo-like strategies to reveal hidden meanings.

The research reached beyond creative writing and drew upon other disciplines. It explicitly uses biographies of Burroughs, James II, and Robert Cecil. It draws widely on historical sources and incorporates histories of England and Norway. It is to a degree ekphrastic, drawing on works of Elizabethan art in 'Frostiana', the religious image in 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss', and the Surrealists in Paris in 'The Architect of Putrefaction'. The theoretical essays use the paintings of Ernst, de Chirico, and Ensor as visual analogues for issues involving figure and ground.

Theory in the various commentaries is interdisciplinary and drawn from cognitive science and cognitive critical theory. Stockwell, Joanna Gavins, Reuvun Tsur, provide insights into the cognitive poetics of cut-up. The thesis draws on Gombrich and Ehrenzweig from art theory. The exploration of entropy is based on thermodynamics and Shannon's information theory.<sup>284</sup> Both the neuroscience of perception and neural-network computing provide models with which to examine confabulation, and the neuroscience of memory to examine the structure of written texts.

Even though the benefits of approaching cut-up from a cognitive perspective were recognised by Daria Baryshnikova<sup>285</sup> in 2016 no more work seems to have been published on this approach. A second paper also appeared in 2016 on 'How Burroughs

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<sup>283</sup> L. Samuels and J. McGann, 'Deformance and Interpretation', *NEW LITERARY HISTORY*, 30 (1999). <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/24448>> [accessed 20/06/2017]

<sup>284</sup> Shannon and Weaver.

<sup>285</sup> Daria Baryshnikova, 'Cognitive Narrative Studies and the Possibilities of Cut-up Prose Analysis', *Literary History*, (2016) <[https://www.academia.edu/24112482/COGNITIVE\\_NARRATIVE\\_STUDIES\\_AND\\_THE\\_POSSIBILITIES\\_OF\\_CUT-UP\\_PROSE\\_ANALYSIS\\_%D0%9A%D1%9A%D0%B8%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B0\\_%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0\\_XLVIII\\_2016\\_156\\_pp.49\\_62\\_](https://www.academia.edu/24112482/COGNITIVE_NARRATIVE_STUDIES_AND_THE_POSSIBILITIES_OF_CUT-UP_PROSE_ANALYSIS_%D0%9A%D1%9A%D0%B8%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B0_%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0_XLVIII_2016_156_pp.49_62_)> [accessed 20/06/16].



plays with the Brain, or Ritornellos as a Means to Produce Déjà-Vu' by Antonio José Bonome<sup>286</sup> however this does not use cognitive theory but a more phenomenological approach.

This Thesis is the first in depth examination of the cognitive effects of Cut-Up Method.

The originality of the creative works derives from the aesthetic dichotomy between the two final parts of the research question: How can alternative forms of narrative structure be derived from these processes? And how can a cohesive end product result from the fragmentary starting point?

The first is a relic from my art education where 'truth to materials'<sup>287</sup> was always emphasised; if a method is used it should be left visible. The painting is a material object as well as an illusion. Ideally the use of brush and knife and rags should not be concealed. In response to this some artists have even employed novel materials considered to hold symbolic meaning. Anselm Kiefer<sup>288</sup> uses straw, bitumen, photography, and lead sculpture as well as oil paint. The sculptor Joseph Beuys '[...] incorporated such substances as powdered copper and iron in drawings[...]and as an allusion to alchemy gold[...] tea, fruit, vegetable, and herb juice. '<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Antonio José Bonome, 'How Burroughs Plays with the Brain, or Ritornellos as a Means to Produce Déjà-Vu', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 18.5, (2016) <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2962>> [accessed 01/09/2019].

<sup>287</sup> Ian Chilvers, 'Truth to Material', *Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, (2009) <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803105953905>> [accessed 18/07/2019].

<sup>288</sup> Sandy Nairne, Geoff Dunlop, and John Wyver, *State of the Art : Ideas and Images in the 1980s*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987). p43

<sup>289</sup> Ann Temkin, Bernice Rose, and Dieter Koepplin, *Thinking Is Form : The Drawings of Joseph Beuys*, (New York ; London: Thames and Hudson in association with Philadelphia Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1993). p89

This suggests that the signs of the cut-up should be left in the work. The material (language) should draw the reader's attention to itself and the processes that have been used to create the text.

An apparent strain in twentieth century culture is the creation of cultural artefacts with aesthetic intentions opposed to cognition: this is perhaps more apparent in avant-garde classical music.<sup>290</sup> In Schonberg's *Serialism* composition method, where '[...]tonality needed to be banished because it had become [...] the musical language of a complacent and decadent social stratum.'<sup>291</sup>

Cut-up is a form historically opposed to cognition. From its origins within the Dada anti-art movement<sup>292</sup> and sometimes with Burroughs<sup>293</sup> it works specifically against a reader's cognitive systems.

The first question assumes that the artefacts of cut-up method will remain visible, perhaps even at the cost of fluid cognitive processing.

The second question, 'how can a cohesive end product result from the fragmentary starting point?' contains an aesthetic assumption that the end result will work with cognition.

While cut up produces novel juxtapositions of images and ideas, unusual grounds<sup>294</sup> and blurring effects of figure and ground,<sup>295</sup> it destroys the musical elements of language. The process of fragmentation and the random mixing of the fragments erode a large proportion of the prosodic, musical/poetic features, the structures, and rhythms that carry the flow of a literary text. In 'The True Image of God, I identified that there are

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<sup>290</sup> Justyna Humięcka-Jakubowska, *Music Perception of Avant Garde: Musical Structure and Time*, (2011).  
<[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228953564\\_Music\\_perception\\_of\\_avant\\_garde\\_Musical\\_structur\\_re\\_and\\_time](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228953564_Music_perception_of_avant_garde_Musical_structur_re_and_time)> [accessed 10/09/2019]

<sup>291</sup> Philip Ball, *The Music Instinct : How Music Works and Why We Can't Do without It*, (London: Bodley Head, 2010). p130- 138

<sup>292</sup> Short. p17

<sup>293</sup> Burroughs. p39

<sup>294</sup> Stockwell.p63

<sup>295</sup> Evans and Green. p65

limited the number of unstructured fragments that can be perceived as coherent before the cut-up text becomes patternless in the way described by Ehrenzweig<sup>296</sup> and Stockwell.<sup>297</sup>

For some writers this may be an advantage; Burroughs and Burns both maintain a high level of fragmentation and Ballard, while not using the method, goes some way towards imitating the ‘spinal’ qualities.<sup>298</sup> All these writers later retreated from full-blown cut-up.

Ballard returned to a more conventional narrative form following the stories of *Atrocity Exhibition* and Burns wrote of his cut-up novel *Babel* that ‘I had fragmented myself out of existence, and this side of sanity, I don’t think I could do any more with that.’<sup>299</sup>

Burroughs himself moved away from the extreme version of cut-up. Even in *The Ticket That Exploded*<sup>300</sup> published in 1962 the narrative becomes less random, even if retaining some of the surrealist and fragmentary qualities of *The Soft Machine*.<sup>301</sup> Burroughs claimed to be able to cut up by eye,<sup>302</sup> simulating cut-up qualities is a similar way to Ballard.

There is room to expand the cognitive approach to cut-up method. Lexical attraction models of language could provide quantitative analysis of changes in entropy for various cut-up texts. This has taken place indirectly in ‘Telling the World’s Least

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<sup>296</sup> Ehrenzweig. p99

<sup>297</sup> Stockwell. p22

<sup>298</sup> Ballard. p87

<sup>299</sup> Burns and Sugnet; *ibid.* p164

<sup>300</sup> Burroughs.

<sup>301</sup> William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, Fourth Estate pbk. edn (London: Fourth Estate, 2010).

<sup>302</sup> William S. Burroughs and Bill Morgan, *Rub out the Words : The Letters of William S. Burroughs 1959-1974*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2012). p45

Funny Jokes' by Chris Westbury et al, which suggest that certain sorts of humour can be quantified using Shannon entropy.<sup>303</sup>

Westbury used trigrams (essentially cut ups on a scale smaller than an individual word) to generate neologisms and calculated their entropy. In blind trials he found that the higher the entropy of the word the funnier a reader would find it.

The creative practice and methods can also be extended. I am continuing to explore aleatory methods that affect the various domains of the writing process in a more targeted way. Brian Eno did this at the level of methodology with his *Oblique Strategies*<sup>304</sup> and it seems similar systems could be developed to be applied to most of the levels of the process from rhetoric up to narrative and text worlds.

The benefits of these methods are they provide another mode of working. A mode where rather than trying to work from pitch, plot, character notes, world building, research that is 'cold and ashen in body,' a practitioner can start from a text that has that Frankenstein spark. Where its own weird poetry suggests a hundred other meanings, that builds golden towers high above the dust, that forces you to 'empty your eyes and bite the star.'<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Chris Westbury and others, 'Telling the World's Least Funny Jokes: On the Quantification of Humor as Entropy', *Journal of Memory and Language*, 86 (2016) <<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749596X15001023>> [accessed 01/02/2019].

<sup>304</sup> Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt, *Oblique Strategies : Over One Hundred Worthwhile Dilemmas*, (1975). < <http://www.rtqe.net/ObliqueStrategies/OSintro.html>> [accessed 10/08/2017]

<sup>305</sup> Tzara and Caws. p138



# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – cut-up using dislocation in Ms Word

pies and cakes, the potato salad, and grave-salmon, but the next day another hoard came, every day a hoard perished there in the cold waves, but the next day another hoard appeared creeping along the mooring ropes and riding on the goods-crates, bursting from barrels. She grew tired and by the long summer days of June her voice seemed weaker and the rats stronger. The notes that had flowed like water stuck like thoms so she had to drag them from her throat. The lands she conjured up seemed faded and false. At last she stood on the beach in agony as the song clawed its way from her mouth, and perished still-born, on her lips - the siren call silenced. The ten thousand bodies that had danced about her stopped and stared back at her, twenty thousand black eyes watched her, she had not seen that look before. The countryside and the town were full with rats. They cleared the grain from Bjornsen's basement and chased Mrs Bjornsen so much that she spent all day stood on a ladder where they couldn't reach her. They stole from the grain merchants and bakers and big houses. However many traps they laid, however much poison they put down it was never enough and more rats replaced them. Now she missed Otto more than ever. She was no longer a Rat-Wife so what was she? It was as if she had stayed as a fisher-girl on the sea,



pies	and	cakes,	the	potato	salad,
and	grave-	but	the	next	day
	salmon,				
another	hoard	came,	every	day	a
hoard	perished	there	in	the	cold
waves,	but	the	next	day	another
hoard	appeared	creeping	along	the	mooring
ropes	and	riding	on	the	goods-crates,
bursting	from	barrels.	She	grew	tired
and	by	the	long	summer	days
of	June	her	voice	seemed	weaker
and	the	rats	stronger.	The	notes
that	had	flowed	like	water	stuck
like	thoms	so	she	had	to
drag	them	from	her	throat.	The
lands	she	conjured	up	seemed	faded
and	false.	At	last	she	stood
on	the	beach	in	agony	as
the	song	clawed	its	wave	from



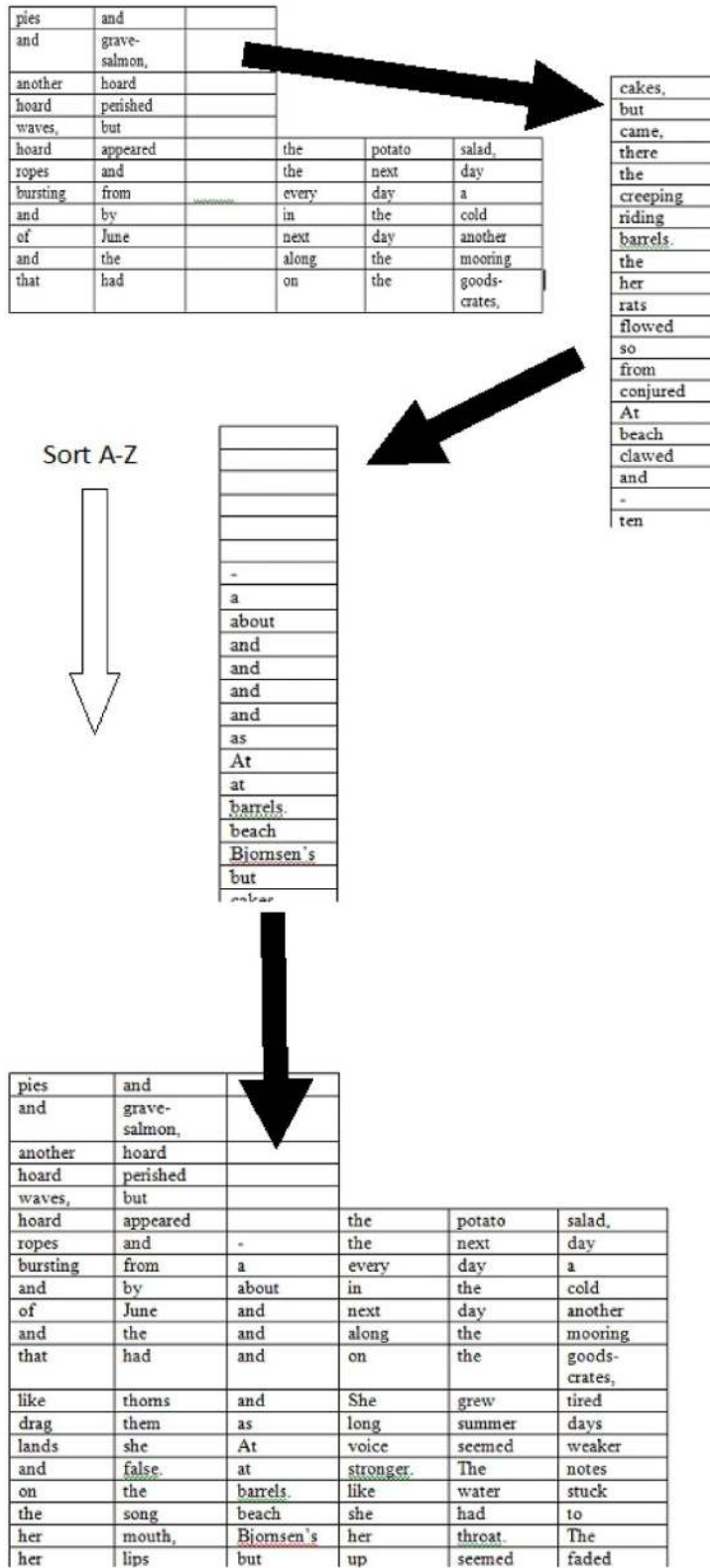
pies	and	cakes,			
and	grave-	but			
	salmon,				
another	hoard	came,			
hoard	perished	there			
waves,	but	the			
hoard	appeared	creeping			
ropes	and	riding			
bursting	from	barrels.			
and	by	the			
of	June	her			
and	the	rats			
that	had	flowed			

the	potato	salad,
the	next	day
every	day	a
in	the	cold
next	day	another
along	the	mooring
on	the	goods-
		crates,



pies	and	cakes,			
and	grave-	but			
	salmon,				
another	hoard	came,			
hoard	perished	there			
waves,	but	the			
hoard	appeared	creeping	the	potato	salad,
ropes	and	riding	the	next	day
bursting	from	barrels.	every	day	a
and	by	the	in	the	cold
of	June	her	next	day	another
and	the	rats	along	the	mooring
that	had	flowed	on	the	goods-
					crates,
like	thoms	so	She	erew	tired

Appendix 2 - pseudo-randomisation using sort function in MS Word



Appendix 3 Indexed discourse showing chronological order, and characters subjective experience of event order.

Event – first line of section	discourse order	date index	Narrator subjective time	Montfalcon subjective time	Persephone subjective time
The poet Henry Montfalcon attempts to flag me down.	1	27	14	13	45
A few weeks later all is silence and static.	2	29	16	15	35
when the eye of Jamzin’s green woods opened and I would float gloriously motionless	3	15	2	0	2



she had become Persephone; taken her new name from Montfalcon's poem, even taken dead Montfalcon as her new love	4	10	0	9	22
I viewed the dawning of the new age. The Hierapolis power plant	5	21	4	0	4
I took shelter deep underground:	6	23	10	0	10
I stop the car: Jamzin has changed	7	28	15	14	46
Once the Hierapolis reactor shone	8	22	9	0	9
Now there are only ruins.	9	30	17	16	37

Henry Montfalcon once compared them (the mines) to Pluto's Gates on Mount Etna	10	11	0	10	42
I find his(montfalcon's) diary lost in the ruins	11	31	18	17	38
Montfalcon's Diary August 1887 I had a successful season	12	3	0	1	0
When I was young only old Mr Sheppherd remembered Montfalcon	13	14	1	12	1
bronze age kings had made strange sacrifices (Sheppherd)	14	1	0	0	0

witches had held covens in the days of King James (Sheppherd)	15	2	0	0	0
Montfalcon had summoned up the devil (Sheppherd)	16	12	0	11	43
Now I have returned and that Jamzin has gone	17	32	19	18	39
.It surpassed Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukishima	18	24	11	0	11
so Persephone fell away from my world	19	25	12	0	12
and dropped into the arms of Montfalcon	20	5	0	4	17
I find her, or at least a version of her among the mines	21	33	20	19	47

. I have memories of lips and darkness and flower scented woods.	22	20	8	0	8
She lasts a few days clutching my hand in her cold fingers	23	34	21	20	48
With my heart breaking I place the remains in the ruins of St. Peter's	24	35	22	21	49
Montfalcon's Diary August 1887 While he fiddled with his paints and sorted his brushes	25	4	0	3	14
She was very much alive	26	6	0	5	18
I remember Eva too. I felt happy returning to my former home	27	17	5	0	5

Mr Sheppherd had warned us	28	16	3	0	3
She agreed to accompany me but I thought I should acquire some more suitable clothing for her first	29	7	0	6	19
The first time I saw her, my Eva	30	18	6	0	6
Later we sat beneath a portrait of Montfalcon	31	19	7	0	7
How many days? How many weeks? How long have I waited?	32	36	23	22	23
“But this is Heaven,” she says, “Are you ready to dance with me?”	33	37	24	25	26

Then Montfalcon comes. He emerges from the old mine. He sits beside me with his saturnine features shaded by that broad brimmed hat	34	38	25	26	27
I(montfalcon) procured an axe and spade and after cutting though six feet of dead ivy	35	13	0	23	44
I left her waiting in the mine	36	26	13	24	25
.Together we gather charcoal branches. Find kindling.	37	39	26	27	28

Montfalcon's Diary June 1888 Persephone and I returned to London.	38	9	0	8	41
Together we search the woods and we find many sorts of black fruit	39	40	27	28	29
I take to avoiding his company and yet we both crave the visions,	40	41	28	29	30
I don't believe you," her ghost says, "the worst of the contamination was blown northwest. Here there is so much life, so much beauty	41	42	29	30	31

<p>“The butterflies, the pretty butterflies, catch them for me Reverend,” and runs across a field of glass and baked clay fading as she goes.</p>	42	43	30	2	13
<p>As instructed I perform the ritual before Pluto’s Gates. Just to see her face again. Just to bring a little light to this new world.</p>	43	44	31	31	24



the long summer,” he says, “we had all the long summer together, but now she is gone. You are the one who calls her back to this ruined land!”	44	8	0	7	20
let us not quarrel over the one we both love. Let us go and find her and ask her, let her choose of her own free will	45	45	32	32	32
I free myself of Montfalcon. All it takes is a heavy stone	46	46	33	33	33
I take a trip out on the river	47	47	34	0	34

I spread the blanket above the strandline; the skeletonised superstructure of a grounded tanker rusting	48	48	35	0	36
“It is a beautiful day,” she will say as she lays her long white body on the desolate ground.	49	49	36	0	15
“Oh, it’s you,” she says, “have you found a dancing master.”	50	50	37	0	16
Then I will stay here with these flowers forever, and with my own poet. Have you seen him?	51	51	38	0	21
alone and accursed at the end of the world.	52	52	39	0	40

event	classification	discourse order	date index
The poet Henry Montfalcon attempts to flag me down.	Montfalcon in narrators time	1	27
A few weeks later all is silence and static.	description of disaster area	2	29
when the eye of Jamzin's green woods opened and I would float gloriously motionless	Narrators childhood	3	15
she had become Persephone; taken her new name from Montfalcon's poem, even taken dead Montfalcon as her new love	Eva-Persephone falls ill	4	10
I viewed the dawning of the new age. The Hierapolis power plant	Power plant constructed and destroyed	5	21
I took shelter deep underground:	Power plant constructed and destroyed	6	23
I stop the car: Jamzin has changed	Description of disaster area	7	28
Once the Hierapolis reactor shone	Power plant constructed and destroyed	8	22
Now there are only ruins.	Description of disaster area	9	30
Henry Montfalcon once compared them (the mines) to Pluto's Gates on Mount Etna	Monfalcon discovers route to the Future	10	11
I find his(montfalcon's) diary lost in the ruins	Narrator finds Montfalcon's diary	11	31
<i>Montfalcon's Diary August 1887 I</i>	Montfalcon has begun his	12	3

<i>had a successful season</i>	diary		
When I was young only old Mr Sheppherd remembered Montfalcon	Narrators childhood	13	14
bronze age kings had made strange sacrifices (Sheppherd)	history	14	1
witches had held covens in the days of King James (Sheppherd)	history	15	2
Montfalcon had summoned up the devil (Sheppherd)	Monfalcon discovers route to the Future	16	12
Now I have returned and that Jamzin has gone	description of disaster area	17	32
.It surpassed Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukishima	Power plant constructed and destroyed	18	24
so Persephone fell away from my world	Eva Persephone transported to the past	19	25
and dropped into the arms of Montfalcon	<i>Montfalcon and Eva-Persephone meet</i>	20	5
I find her, or at least a version of her among the mines	Persephone's death	21	33
. I have memories of lips and darkness and flower scented woods.	Eva-Persephone meets narrator	22	20
She lasts a few days clutching my hand in her cold fingers	Persephone's death	23	34
With my heart breaking I place the remains in the ruins of St. Peter's	Persephone's death	24	35

<i>Montfalcon's Diary August 1887</i> <i>While he fiddled with his paints</i> <i>and sorted his brushes</i>	<i>Montfalcon and Eva-</i> <i>Persephone meet</i>	25	4
<i>She was very much alive</i>	<i>Montfalcon and Eva-</i> <i>Persephone meet</i>	26	6
I remember Eva too. I felt happy returning to my former home	Eva-Persephone meets narrator	27	17
Mr Sheppherd had warned us	Narrators childhood	28	16
<i>She agreed to accompany me but I</i> <i>thought I should acquire some</i> <i>more suitable clothing for her first</i>	<i>Montfalcon and Eva-</i> <i>Persephone meet</i>	29	7
The first time I saw her, my Eva	Eva-Persephone meets narrator	30	18
Later we sat beneath a portrait of Montfalcon	Eva-Persephone meets narrator	31	19
How many days? How many weeks? How long have I waited?	Persephone in two worlds	32	36
“But this is Heaven,” she says, “Are you ready to dance with me?”	Persephone in two worlds	33	37
Then Montfalcon comes. He emerges from the old mine. He sits beside me with his saturnine features shaded by that broad brimmed hat	co-operating with Montfalcon	34	38
I(montfalcon) procured an axe and spade and after cutting though six feet of dead ivy	Monfalcon discovers route to the Future	35	13

I left her waiting in the mine	Montfalcon in narrators time	36	26
. Together we gather charcoal branches. Find kindling.	co-operating with Montfalcon	37	39
<i>Montfalcon's Diary June 1888</i> <i>Persephone and I returned to London.</i>	Eva-Persephone falls ill	38	9
Together we search the woods and we find many sorts of black fruit	co-operating with Montfalcon	39	40
I take to avoiding his company and yet we both crave the visions,	conflict with Montfalcon	40	41
I don't believe you," her ghost says, "the worst of the contamination was blown northwest. Here there is so much life, so much beauty	Persephone in two worlds	41	42
"The butterflies, the pretty butterflies, catch them for me Reverend," and runs across a field of glass and baked clay fading as she goes.	Persephone in two worlds	42	43
As instructed I perform the ritual before Pluto's Gates. Just to see her face again. Just to bring a little light to this new world.	searching for Persephone	43	44
the long summer," he says, "we had all the long summer together, but now she is gone. You are the one	<i>Montfalcon and Eva-Persephone meet</i>	44	8

who calls her back to this ruined land!"			
let us not quarrel over the one we both love. Let us go and find her and ask her, let her choose of her own free will	co-operating with Montfalcon	45	45
I free myself of Montfalcon. All it takes is a heavy stone	Montfalcon's murder	46	46
I take a trip out on the river	searching for Persephone	47	47
I spread the blanket above the strandline; the skeletonised superstructure of a grounded tanker rusting	searching for Persephone	48	48
"It is a beautiful day," she will say as she lays her long white body on the desolate ground.	Persephone in two worlds	49	49
"Oh, it's you," she says, "have you found a dancing master."	Persephone in two worlds	50	50
Then I will stay here with these flowers forever, and with my own poet. Have you seen him?	Persephone in two worlds	51	51
alone and accursed at the end of the world.	searching for Persephone	52	52

## Appendix 4 physical and virtual Cut-up

He hates that play. He hates witches  
France awakes. Thank God. It was a dream.  
he was, at last, the King of France. He bears  
than factual description. His predecessors were  
hundred years with the other Kings of France.

James By-Grace-of-God, King of Great  
awake and his dream was not pleasant. Poor

James, King of Great Britain, Ireland, and  
Not a nice dream. Not like the dream he had that  
the title, but it is a hereditary aspiration rather  
intermittently at war over the issue for five

Britain, Ireland, and titled King of France is

gone. He has a cold coming on. He hated the  
attending. Why had Salisbury made him attend?  
everyone knows he hates witches. James knows  
play had spoken of the death of kings foretold by  
obvious that he does not like to hear of the death  
He does not like predictions, horoscopes, and  
sneezes. The play was also full of blood and traitors.  
many traitors in his life already. James shivers  
down bolster beneath his head that feels like a rock;  
opens an eye. Opposite him stands the old queen, Gloriana.

James. Damn that play. He should not have  
play. He may even have caught his death by  
Nobody had warned him even though  
why. It's because he is not wanted here. The  
witches. He is a King and it should be  
of kings. They are trying to drive him away.  
enchantments and the play was full of them. He  
There has been too much blood and too  
beneath his woollen covers; there is a feather-  
and he is desperate to keep warm. He

Figure 14 text physically cut into quarters

The solution is to treat all fragments as conceptual. Burroughs method of dividing the page into 4 actually yields about 45 fragments.

He hates that play. He hates witches. James, King of Great Britain, Ireland,  
and France awakes. Thank God. It was a dream. Not a nice dream. Not like the dream he  
had that he was, at last, the King of France. He bears the title, but it is a hereditary aspiration  
rather than factual description. His predecessors were intermittently at war over the issue for  
five hundred years with the other Kings of France.

James By-Grace-of-God, King of Great Britain, Ireland, and titled King of France is  
awake and his dream was not pleasant. Poor

James. Damn that play. He should not have gone. He has a cold coming on. He hated the  
play. He may even have caught his death by attending. Why had Salisbury made him attend?  
Nobody had warned him even though everyone knows he hates witches. James knows why.  
It's because he is not wanted here. The play had spoken of the death of kings foretold by  
witches. He is a King and it should be obvious that he does not like to hear of the death of  
kings. They are trying to drive him away. He does not like predictions, horoscopes, and  
enchantments and the play was full of them. He sneezes. The play was also full of blood and  
traitors. There has been too much blood and too many traitors in his life already. James  
shivers beneath his woollen covers; there is a feather down bolster beneath his head that feels  
like a rock; and he is desperate to keep warm. He opens an eye. Opposite him stands the old  
queen, Gloriana.

Figure 15 the same text shown as a word sequence



## Appendix 5 practitioners methods

- Tzara's<sup>306</sup> method used individual words pulled from a hat.
- Gysin<sup>307</sup> and Safran Foer's 's *Tree of Codes*<sup>308</sup> cut holes in the text.
- Burroughs used pages torn into quarters<sup>309</sup>, or folded into each other.<sup>310</sup> In *Naked Lunch*<sup>311</sup> Burroughs' novel was assembled from disparate sections. In *Cities of the Red Night*<sup>312</sup> the process was reversed and a coherent narrative was reassembled to resemble a Cut-up. The British novelist Burns used a similarly method to Burroughs cut up.
- Burns describes his method as consisting of "a pair of scissors, paste and, most important, a large table top so I can place things side by side"<sup>313</sup>.
- Kathy Acker collaged other writers work into her own to create her post modern novels. This is as suggested by Burroughs<sup>314</sup> in his essay on 'Creative Reading'. Acker's *Great Expectations* quotes the first paragraph of Charles Dickens novel with the 'Peter' replacing 'Pip'<sup>315</sup>. She edits and rewrites eight times 'once for meaning, once for beauty, once for sound, once to the mirror to see how it looked, once for rhythm, once for structure, and so on.'<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Brotchie and Gooding. p36

<sup>307</sup> Burroughs and Gysin. p24

<sup>308</sup> Foer and Schulz.

<sup>309</sup> Burroughs.

<sup>310</sup> Burroughs and Gysin. p96

<sup>311</sup> Burroughs.

<sup>312</sup> Burroughs.

<sup>313</sup> Burns and Sugnet. P163

<sup>314</sup> Burroughs. p42

<sup>315</sup> Acker and Dickens.p1

<sup>316</sup> Wollen.

- David Bowie in the film *Cracked Actor*<sup>317</sup> uses whole sentences/clauses to assemble lyrics.
- In Breton's related *Exquisite Corpses*<sup>318</sup> and its variations<sup>319</sup> individual words are provided by practitioners who maintain a predetermined syntactic order.

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<sup>317</sup> Yentob.

<sup>318</sup> Breton and Watson-Taylor.p288

<sup>319</sup> *exquisite corpse* exhibit similar properties to cut up text but is produced through ignorance of intention – information regarding each players contribution is withheld from their collaborators while composing the poem.

## Appendix 6 A Taxonomy of Cut-Up

Much of my initial characterisation of Cut-up focussed on examining fragment size, the hierarchical space within the text in which the fragmentation took place i.e. at the level of word, sentence, paragraph etc. and further characterising how Cut-up worked across a spectrum of these levels.

PROCESS	ELEMENT	MEASURE
Fragmentation	Structure of textual hierarchy <sup>320</sup>	Focus of effect
Fragmentation	Structure of textual hierarchy	Spectrum of effect
Fragmentation	Fragment	Size of fragment

Figure 16 categories to classify fragmentation of text

This concern is reflected in ‘The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near’, where William finds “the grains, granules, and fragments; the scraps, shreds, and particles; the flotsam, jetsam” and in ‘The Architect of Putrefaction’ where Moonflower sorts the various grades of dust

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<sup>320</sup> Letter  
Word  
Sentence  
Paragraphs  
Section  
Page  
Chapter

In his study of dust he learns [...] to sort the grains, granules, and fragments; the scraps, shreds, and particles; the flotsam, jetsam, and finely worn sand blown thousands of miles from the distant deserts of Morocco and China and Old Cockaigne-by-the-Sea.

Entropy can be defined in several ways<sup>321</sup> including through the laws of thermodynamics<sup>322</sup> and again trying to construct my taxonomy I introduced various qualities that could be assessed

PROCESS	ELEMENT	MEASURE
Entropy	Methodological Restrictions	order imposed through the rules/algorithm/limits including the starting conditions
Fragmentation and entropy	Proportion	Proportion of text effect applied to

Figure 17 categories to classify entropy of text

These were used to estimate the positions of various texts in a hierarchy of high and low entropy

<sup>321</sup> Oxford English Dictionary on-Line.

<sup>322</sup> Seife.p33

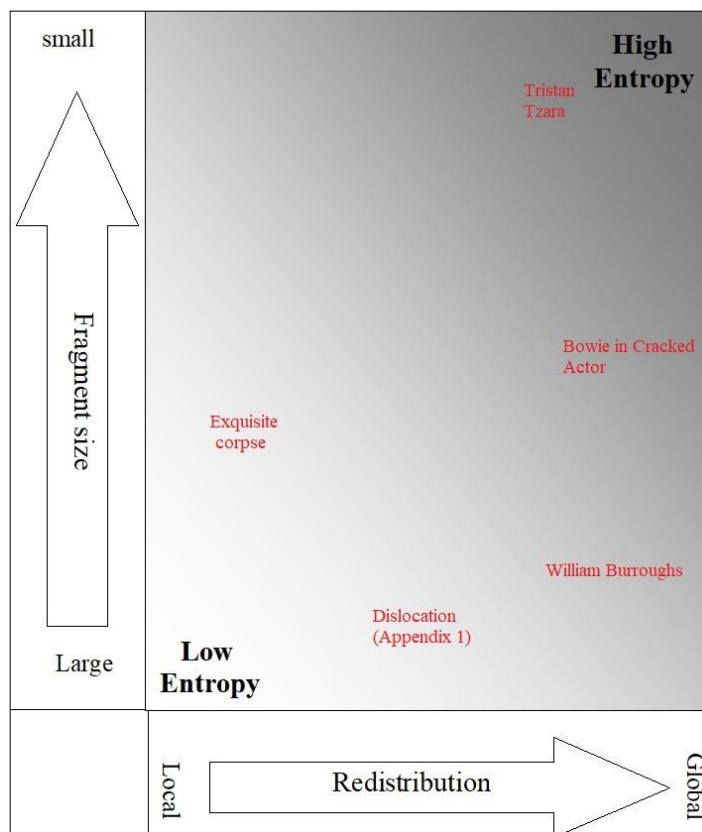


Figure 18 Fragment Size and Distribution

After much work on these processes and possible processes I found I was measuring the Cut-upness of the text across an ever larger number of dimensions.

PROCESS	ELEMENT	MEASURE
Entropy	Redistribution	Global to local

The models of hierarchies and spectrums of disruption gave some more practical insights into the results of specific methods. I also considered the apparent resemblance of shorter Cut-up to poetry. It is noted in ‘The Shape of Cut-Up’ that “in shorter pieces of work this seems to more often resemble poetry” and in ‘The True Image of God’ how

“Within a limited frame a reader is likely interpret noise as containing meaningful information.”

This is the domain of the third and fourth part of the question in Figure 12.

I related constructing texts from Cut-up to memory and attention in ‘The Shape of Cut-Up’. However I was also aware that there is a non-linear relationship between the number of fragments and the number of possible combinations: this increases factorially (for 4 fragments  $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4$  etc). As a result it becomes quite difficult to see possible combinations in only a few tens of fragments. This lead me to re-examine entropy and I found that rather than classifying Cut-up methods using multiple dimensions (Structural focus and spectrum, fragment size, proportion, redistribution) I could use just two.

Jacob D. Bekenstein writing in the *Scientific American* states that the two scientific definitions Boltzman Entropy<sup>323</sup> and Shannon Entropy<sup>324</sup> have been found to be equivalent:

As an objective measure of quantity of information Thermodynamic entropy and Shannon entropy are conceptually equivalent: the number of arrangements that are counted by Boltzmann entropy reflects the amount of Shannon information one would need to implement any particular arrangement<sup>325</sup>.

If the measure of entropy is the number of possible states of a system: it logically follows that the more fragments the higher the entropy. This will be reduced if the degree of rearrangement is restricted by a methodology applied by the practitioner. The more degrees of freedom for the fragments to be rearranged the higher the entropy.

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<sup>323</sup> Oxford English Dictionary on-Line.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Jacob D. Bekenstein, 'Information in the Holographic Universe', *Scientific American*, 289 (2003). <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26060403>> [accessed 10/08/2015].

Appendix 7 Unifying the Collection

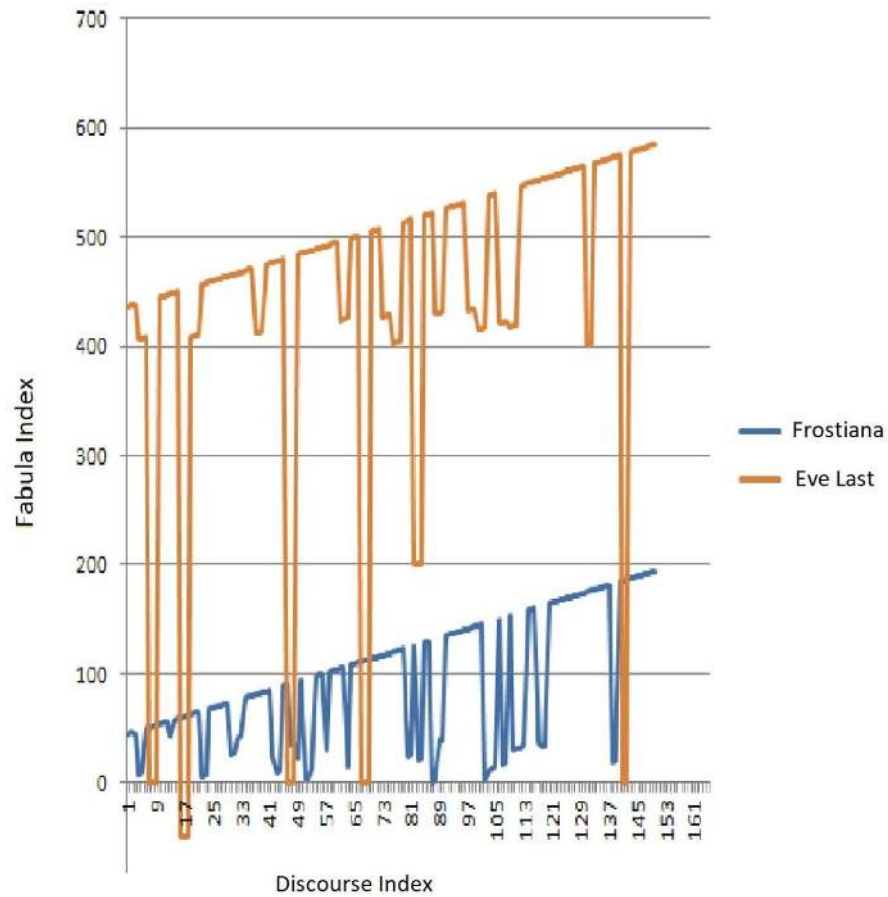


Figure 19 Overlap between fabula in Frostiana and Eve Last

Figure 19 shows shared fabulas both rooted the shared epistemological text-world of Gloriana's reign. These are shown as a more orthodox display of discourse and fabula index than figures 1 to 3 in 'Discourse and Fabula Time'.

There is a degree of ambiguity of setting of 'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss'. It can be no earlier than 1880 due to the technology available, however it may filling a future-

retro template such as the steampunk of Moorcock's *Warlord of the Air*<sup>326</sup>. The location is given as Roscaven but does not refer to a particular country but shares the '*Westerstrand*' with 'Eve Last'. '*Musselbaum's refinery*' appears in 'Eve Last', but a '*Musselbaum*' also appears in Montfalcon's correspondence and it seems a similarly fishy world to 'Eve Last'. I have included it as the earliest possible historical point in the series fabula but this could be positioned alternatively as the second to last story.

Geographically it is also ambiguous: *Westerstrand* is Dutch and Norwegian for west beach, and the character names are northern European including English. Roscaven could be Breton or Cornish derived from? Ros (red) Avon (River) as is the name of the ship '*Penkaryth's Pride*'.

Within the series fabula several of the stories overlap or occur in close historical proximity. These are however separated geographically in the same world. The work is presented as a history, in fabula order. Some of the stories are located at specific points in time: 'Frostiana' in 1608, the date of the first frost fair, John Dee's last year of life, and after the composition of Macbeth.

'Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss' is more problematical. It gives no date and no external locations to Roscaven. The Technology employing explosive harpoons and steam tractors should set it no earlier than the 1870's and imply pre-20<sup>th</sup> century time frame, however in this collection it could have been placed at the end or second to last as it contains a level of technology compatible with 'Eve Last'

'*Dísir on the Langstrand*' again has a specific historical setting: Yolanda is 19 in 1913 when she meets Otto giving her birth date as 1894.

'The Architect of Putrefaction' is set in the Paris of the Surrealists, when Moonflower becomes an apprentice which would make him about 14 in approximately

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<sup>326</sup> Michael Moorcock, *The Warlord of the Air*, (London: Quartet Books, 1974).



1932 and as he is aged 50 at the end of the story this would be 1968, a suitable year for the overthrow of the old order.

‘The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near’ is set following the plane crash of William en route to Tangiers. So starts post 1954 (assuming the identification of William with Burroughs),

‘Dwell the Whole Bright Year with Me’ is set a hundred years after Montfalcon's death. as his last diary entry is 1889 this would be approximately 1989.

‘Eve Last’ is set in the distant future set approximately 2000 years after ‘Frostiana’ or at least following a future second Great Flood.

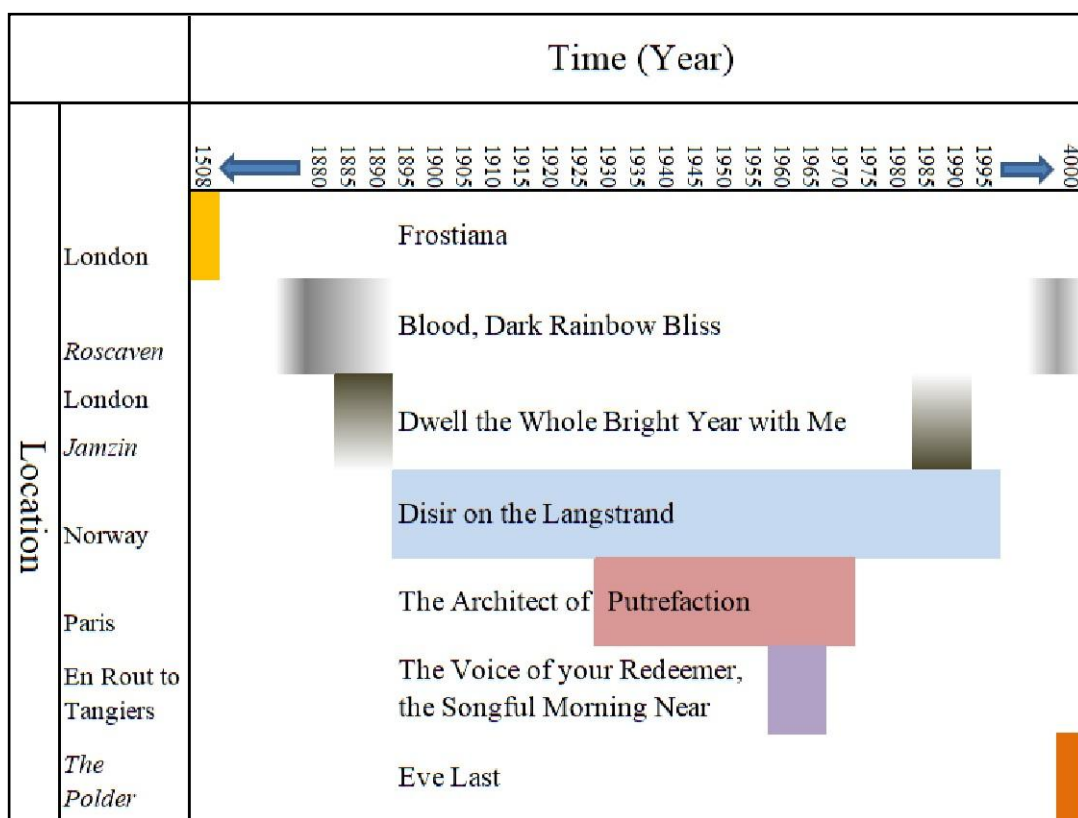


Figure 20 Geographical location and historical settings of the collection

The most problematical to fit within this geography is ‘*Dísir on the Langstrand*’ which includes a lot of actual 20<sup>th</sup> century history connected to other parts of Europe where the other stories take place.

The idea of entropy influenced the plot of the story, in ‘*Frostiana*’, through the idea of heat death<sup>327</sup>. The overall narrative arc of the collection continues this theme. As well as *Frostiana*'s world's loss of energy, ‘*The Architect of Putrefaction*’, and ‘*Eve Last*’ feature worlds moving inevitably towards various apocalyptic changes and the overall eschatology of the fictions presented as history moving builds towards some ultimate apocalypse.

The essay ‘*Midway between Music and Noise*’ used the examples of anthropomorphic figures in Ensor and De Chirico paintings need only a few signs to be read as human. In ‘*The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near*’ the character Miranda is built only from scraps of detritus – the fragmentary bodies appear in several stories in ‘*Frostiana*’ as a fragmentary image, these fragmentary bodies develop as a theme through the stories to ‘*Eve Last*’ where the Elida’s physical and epistemological worlds are revealed to be made of fragments.

Further unity is also achieved through a series of shared internal references. This is similar to the repetition used in ‘*The Voice of your Redeemer, The Songful Morning Near*’ described in ‘*The Shape of Cut-Up*’. This is similar to Burroughs’ jazz<sup>328</sup> and the technique used by Moorcock trying to mimic some of Burroughs Cut-up style in *A Cure for Cancer*<sup>329</sup> and *An English Assassin*<sup>330</sup>. Colin Greenland quotes Moorcock saying of his method:

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<sup>327</sup> Davies.

<sup>328</sup> Burroughs and Gysin. p 95

<sup>329</sup> Michael Moorcock, *A Cure for Cancer : A Jerry Cornelius Novel*, Revised ed. edn ([London]: Fontana, 1979).

While I strive on one hand for the effect of randomness on one level. The effect is achieved by a tightly controlled system of internal reference[...]<sup>331</sup>

Figure 17 below shows some of the internal references within the collection. The mechanical knight appears several times for extended sequences while Musselbaum only appears once in stories other than ‘Blood, Dark Rainbow Bliss’

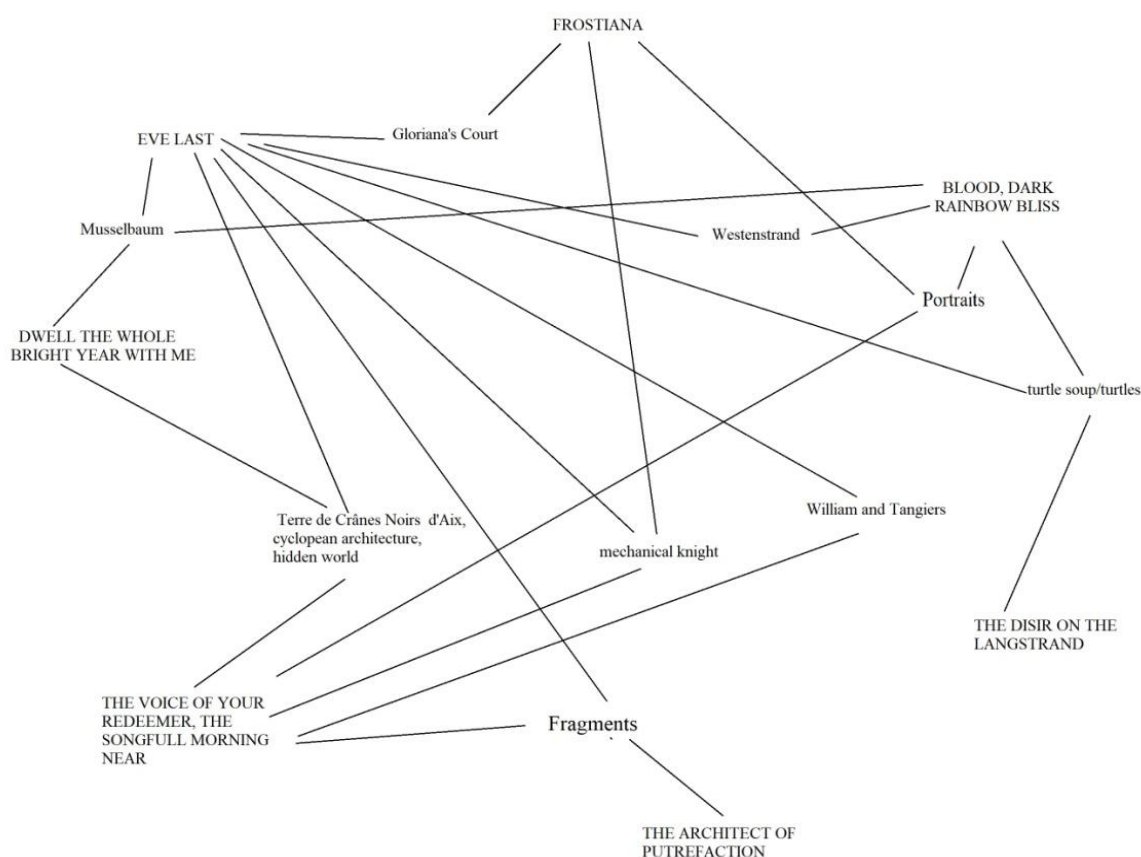


Figure 21 Shared internal references in the collection

<sup>330</sup> Michael Moorcock, *The English Assassin : A Romance of Entropy*, Revised ed. edn (London: Fontana, 1979).

<sup>331</sup> Colin Greenland, *Entropy Exhibition : Michael Moorcock and the British 'New Wave' in Science Fiction*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983). p146



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