

2HB

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Mordentotardia or In the End, as a Worm

SIÔN PARKINSON

Three Stories

The Story of the Tremor

There was once a tremor, with no knowledge of itself or why it moved through the mantle in the way it did.

The tremor did not take this lack of self-awareness to heart. It continued to fault creep through the world when something set deep — consciousness some might say — certainly an impelling, insistent itch from within, bid it do so.

The tremor lay still for weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, millennia in an inert state, snoozing and awaiting motivation from the itch to bid it to act. At such times the tremor tried to sleep.

The tremor is almost certain it couldn't sleep last night, that it writhed and twisted into sharp wakefulness, but the tremor cannot be sure. This is a familiar feeling.

And when the tremor sleeps what does it dream about?

I will tell you: the tremor dreams of icebergs. Of free-floating, multi-dimensional frozen water, forever consolidating, liquefying, melting into

pools of sea. The tremor dreams of the joy of just such liquification; such simplicity of movement between tabular and non-tabular forms, and, whilst it sleeps the tremor experiences envy.

But there's something else, a feeling more troubling than envy. The tremor is mystified as to how the iceberg actually feels. The tremor knows it cannot gain such insight, worst still, the tremor knows it does not have the means to reason *how* to even try to know more.

If the tremor were a little more self-aware it might well wonder at how it even knows what an iceberg is. It might well try to remember the time — as the holocene began — when it first got to know an iceberg personally. And, maybe to be fair, these frozen forms that the tremor dreams of are not icebergs at all, but simply resemble icebergs to us in the telling.

And so, the tremor dreams of icebergs, always the same, secure yet full of spleen in the knowledge that something else exists with ease.

The tremor is not unhappy, it wouldn't know how to be. But, in dreams, it does know a little of what it is to want to be something else, to comprehend how something else feels. The tremor is sure of this feeling of dissatisfaction, but it is not sure of how it knows this.

The tremor shrugs off dissatisfaction with each new call to action from its itch. Such pruritic demands dispels the tremor's worries, returning it to a fulsome sense of purpose and place in the world. The magnitude of itch the tremor experiences is epicentric; so profound, and so persistent that as a clarion to act, the itch is superlatively efficient: shear stresses ensue.

This itch for otherness, this profound experience of desire to scratch wakes the tremor at intervals across time, wakes the tremor so it may scratch its dissatisfaction. Having no hands or nails to scratch of course, the tremor must shiver, and quake, and rub itself violently against earthly materials. Dip-slip. Relief is instant, but sadly also instantaneous, the tremor continues to quake, amplitude increasing.

The itch continues but the quaking cannot, and so the tremor must try to sleep to forget.

And then, in sleep, is when the tremor dreams of the iceberg. We can't be sure how long this dream lasts, but we can be sure it endures 'til the tremor wakes. The tremor wakes in order to forget the dream of the iceberg, and in order to forget its dream, it must scratch.

The Story of Stucco

Stucco is an itinerant, a work on the move. In order to preserve its usefulness, stucco must keep mobile without a goal in mind. In this way stucco is controlled by circumstance, not craft.

The Story of the Grid System

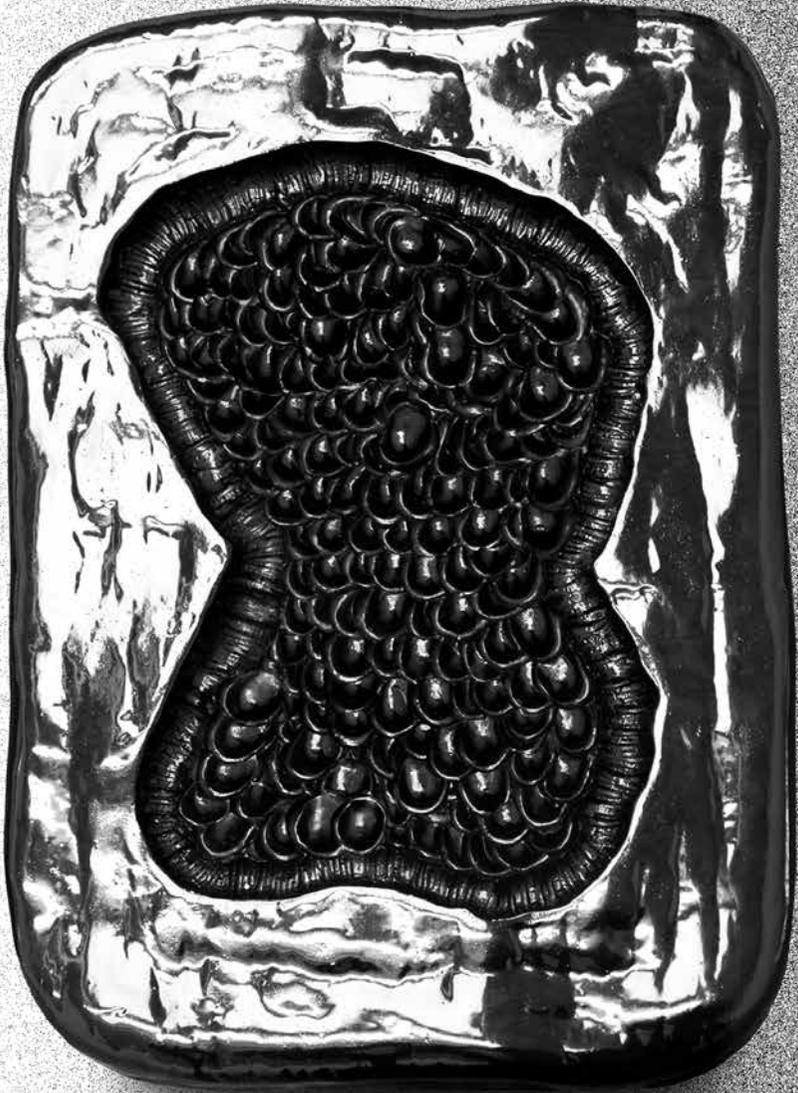
She, the grid system is aware only of her corners, not of her straight lines. She perceives her own space and those persons who traverse her space as flat entities moving swiftly and without substance.

She, the grid system, can turn round corners, can perceive the other side of her own corner, but she cannot bring to mind how it happened that she knew where the last corner she turned was. For this reason, she, the grid system is always lost.

She, the grid system, sees space only in this way, and therefore does not think of this as a lapse or an error in memory. There is a reasonable chance it is not a lapse or an error but a fact that allows she, the grid system, to retain her own unique individual spacial logic — her own sense — with authority.

She, the grid system, turns corners, each time they are surprising, new and yet she, the grid system, remembers exactly the precise location of each. These precise locations do not calculate an overarching system or interconnecting plan, rather they exist or perhaps co-exist as a related but non-sequential collection.

She, the grid system, has nothing to say about this.



Mordentotardia
or
In the End, as a Worm



[*a melodrama*]

INTRO

*Life appears to be a cannibalistic and suicidal
monster that devours its own tentacles.*

— *Vilém Flusser, 1987*

We are pleased to present a lengthy extract from Siôn Parkinson's 'Mordentotardia' or 'In the end, as a worm'.

An oral view of an animal at the extremity of life, Mordentotardia borrows a system of philosophical thought that first fictionalises a thing of absolute Otherness then speculates about its relation to truth of us humans.

Given as a live performance to music, the artwork starts with a huge declaration, a kind of yell to theatre. It goes on in Part One to describe images of the abyss: first with a whalefall — a relatively rare occurrence in which a whale dies and its carcass drops to the ocean floor to be devoured by hagfish and 'bone-eating' worms. There are other allusions too: the 17th century German mystic, theologian, and cobbler, Jakob Böhme, for example, who famously had a visions of the 'Divine Void' in a pewter dish; and later to a sailor, James Bartley, a 'real-life Jonah' who survived for fifteen hours in the belly of a whale before being cut

free from its stomach by his fellow crew, his skin bleached white by the animal's digestive fluids.

In Part Two we are introduced to MORDENT-OTARDIA, a worm whose name translates as the 'slow-biter' or 'slow-sucker', but who is more affectionately known as the LOVEBITE because of the blackened marks she leaves near the mouths of her host. MORDENTOTARDIA, our NARRATOR will finally explain, is the perfect being: an ultrathin O-shaped animal, simultaneously both mouth and anus, who is everywhere, who can stretch to any size and appears over every opening in the world from volcanic craters to the pores in pig skin. She is a creature who loves the world dearly — and yet she must devour it.

And so it ends with a terrifically sad and overwrought exchange between her and her husband RAKEHELL otherwise referred to as HIM, a deep-sea creature, possibly, who in death finally gets his revenge on the wife whom he detests.

The performance lasts for about 45 minutes and ends with a song.

—
First performed as part of FormContent's *The School* at David Roberts Art Foundation, London, Saturday 9 February 2013.

Image on previous page: *Untitled*, 2013, painted plaster

NARRATOR..... a benevolent comic;
a Scott-Walker-esque
crooner in tweed,
circa 1965, London.

MORDENTOTARDIA a worm.

RAKEHELL an animal
(undisclosed);
Earth's every orifice.



A black magnetic-tape shimmer curtain forms our
backdrop.

Our NARRATOR enters. She is wearing a dip-dyed
tweed suit of barn red. Her mouth, most often kept
open, is dark. On her neck is a blue-black-violet
bruise.

We open with slow chords as if emanating from
somewhere far below: deep resonance penetrating
the hull of a bathysphere; a piano with the dampeners
on; a *Mordent Exercise* in glorious reverb like a concave
cathedral.

[*music to express deep submergence*]

And so
thus —

TERRIFIC OVERTURE

[*sung tonelessly but with gusto*]

THRILLING INCIDENT! Music in a Terrific Chord!
False Denunciation! Novelty Unprecedented!
CHORD MORE TERRIFIC! LAKE OF TRANSPARENT
ROLLING FIRE! Affliction and Remorse! CHORD!
The Lovelorn Wife, The Contemptuous Withering
Husband, the Sick Child waiting in the wings!
CHORD! BLIND LOVE! Wonderful Dénouement!
CORNERED! The Execution! The Death Struggle!
DESTRUCTION OF THE MURDERER
BY THE FANGS OF THE FAITHFUL DOG!
A shot rings, out and he falls from the rock.
Music of doubt and terror!
VENGEANCE! VENGEANCE!
Deathbed change of heart! MONOPATHIC LOVE!
Tears flowing freely! Hopelessly Debased!
A Triumph! A TRIUMPH! A Triumph!
CHORD! CHORD!
Chord!

I LOOKED UPON SPACE
AND BEHELD

[*spoken dryly*]

(ONE)

a frame grab from a low-light video recording:
The head of a living specimen directed towards the
camera though captured here as glowing particles in
a gelatinous cloud:

Luminous ejecta

Luciferin

Luciferase —

a lying fluid,

dissolved in water

and absorbed by memory.

I looked upon space and beheld
fluids carrying messages:

QUOTE —

The ‘tails’ on the glowing particles are a lag in the
camera’s image intensifier;

— UNQUOTE

Still,

what phantoms a point of light might imprint
on the dark-adapted human eye!

And what truths a cloud of ink might hide?

I looked upon space and beheld MORDENTOTARDIA.

MORDENTOTARDIA
(rhyming ‘megalocardia’...)

O S E D A X

[*spoken dryly*]

I looked upon space and beheld
a Right Whale;

a True Whale;

a Good and Just and Upright Whale;

a Righteous Right Whale;

a perfectly wonderful, fine and

genuine

Whale,

swimming for minutes and the next, falling dead —
imagine the time that might split our temperament:
once buoyant and then...

[*makes a twister with her finger*]

spiraling like a screw askew in wood,

a precipitous new force upon her body, then,

towards a plane never before touched,

and there in the dark, heavy with gravity, she sat

until skulled stone-lickers came in coils and

superfluities of slime

(I looked upon space and
beheld a carpet of honest knots...)

and boneworms

followed after with red thread radicles reaching

into her marrow to devour her from within,
Fair Whale.



Life in the cold, dark, oceanic abyss is a tremendous challenge
to those without a functioning gut.



I looked upon space and beheld
from within the lumen of the worm herself
a harem of dwarf-boys queued up
with their hands in their pockets,
barreling each other and wailing to one another
like high-school virgins.

‘Gloom, gloom,’

how the world must appear to those enwombed...



I looked upon space and beheld

(TWO)

a frame grab from a low-light video recording:
The stomach of a deep-diving fish.

Along with a clique of octopus beaks
is a pair of sweatpants.

[*to the audience, side-of-the-hand, as if in confidence*]

True!

True!

A whale’s false bite:

squishy
squashy

bony

Bartley sailor boy

before he was thrown up on Carcass shores,
bleached and blinded by the beast’s gastric juice,
and panting and pantless upon the rocks —

[*knowingly*]

Untrue!

Untrue!

PEWTER

[*spoken dryly*]

I looked upon space and beheld,
as Jakob Böhme did in pewter,
a light of bluish grey,
but then through the streamers of light to the object,
plain,
its surface, tin and copper and antinomy,
and beyond still to the Hell Mouth
that gripped in its lips the dish, the table, the floor,
et cetera.

I saw in space as he did in dish
a darkness —

No. Not a darkness. Not qualified nor diminished,
but darkness, out-and-out.

And that light,
that light,
that like
an anti-torch, inspired the atoms of my room,
that shone a blackness upon the world —
a blackness that breathed out
chthonic spirit-creatures in night flight,
their trailing vapors endlessly generating new forms
that were,

I saw,
potentially everything and manifestly nothing.
That glorious Abyss.



They spoke in Spanish Voices,
aphorisms,
depth itself:

QUOTE We become aware of the void as we fill
it UNQUOTE; QUOTE The shadows COLON some
hide COMMA others reveal UNQUOTE; QUOTE
Everything is a little bit of darkness COMMA even
the light UNQUOTE; QUOTE Even the smallest of
creatures carries the sun in its eyes UNQUOTE; and
QUOTE Night is a world lit by itself UNQUOTE.

THE HOLE : THE GROUNDLESS GROUND

‘Why not, Jakob, something mute? A wooden sill or
scrap of sandpaper? If God were to reveal Himself,
need he have sought such lustrous surfaces to grin

through, hmm? And if so, why not morning skin, or
the jelly of an eye?

‘And was the bowl clean, may I ask? Saw you visions
of the heavenly void via veins of gravy, perhaps?
Those dancing rays but glassine strips of onion
julienne, hmm?’

‘And why, why, when all day pulling tacks from your
soles you did not unveil the hole beneath *this* surface
reality? After all, aren’t there to be found plenty
holes in the strata of leather boot-soles, hmm?’

‘I say, let the cobbler stick to his last,
[*whispering to the audience, back-of-the-hand*]
and hope the glue in our shoes holds fast!’



EN TRACTE

[*music to announce MORDENTOTARDIA & RAKEHELL:
two voices, one reverberant, one dry: the VOICE and INNER
VOICE of Rosemary Clooney on her 1954 song Hey There.
The NARRATOR joins in, tries to harmonise, and with the
back of her hand smearing her mouth and face with, what?*]

M O R D E N T O T A R D I A

[*spoken dryly*]

I looked upon space and beheld

MORDENTOTARDIA,

rhyming 'megalocardia',
and so, too, an inflamed heart.

MORDENTOTARDIA:

the slow-biter
or slow-mouth;
the LOVEBITE;

a worm

so-called for her wild desire,
fastening near the mouths of midnight creatures
and leaving in death bruised flesh upon the host
from her slow sucking —

slucking —

of the world.



LOVEBITE

as if an O stood up on paper;
thin as a plane of projected light
at its very first encounter.

O,

extending no limb in front
and trawling none behind;
she is the present tense enwreathed:

a vent

through which the world unwinds.

Inexorable effluvia
flowing into and out of
her aimless lips and sphincter;
a tear in shocking pink.

MORDENTOTARDIA:

like Fontana's fontanelle —
his *Spatial Concept*, waiting;
she, a sally to the concrete Earth
and the hellish toil of chewing.

And so she waits,
and waits for the world to drift in, openly...

But beyond the epidermis of the mouth is not
darkness, not a way unto the stomach —
for there is none;

no stomach,
no landscape through which one might pass.
No.

The other side is as this,
blind (as we all are!) to all axes.

Both mouth and anus
borne from the blastopore,
a darling *simulostome*;
ever embryonic aperture.

O annelid; O little hoop,
O puckered muscle
that looks like — that is
the orifice absolute.

A burning ring of fire.

A two-faced band ablaze.

A two-faced band ablaze.

She knows no front and back,
scornful, too, of north and south,
when she speaks she speaks through her
asshole,
and when she shits she shits through her
mouth.

And when she bites she bites
with a shake of her contours.
She bites without teeth;
a trill with the dampeners.

An accident.

An ornament.

A dint on the world:

Impressing herself upon HIM,
she bites slow like smoke;
like protein film to damp skin,
like white does to yolk.

She bites intuiting she'll be changed
by the habits of her host,
And open-mouthed she longs
for the world that she has lost.

And open-mouthed she cries
into the triple night:

'I know all about loneliness,

'I know all about loneliness,

'I know all about loneliness,'

she sings.

Every slit,
every opening in the world, she is.
Every one.
And so she stands before of all that emits
and all that enters his body.



And with taught membrane,
like a black star's corona,
she rumbles in the undercurrents of the ocean
and in the hell breath of volcanoes
and in the puncturing of shuttles of the Earth's
exosphere

and in the sandy flares of the Sun,
calling back to a gray-haired Perseus
humming in space
she drones in the midnight sea
a B ♭, 57 octaves lower than middle C:

O

O

O

O

O

O,

way, way down in the

deep,
her voice seeps
and drenches the world with her love.

Her love is a kind love,
a kind of blind love,
an interspecial, extrasexual,
special kind of vile love
of every Other
and every other animal.

MORDENTOTARDIA

does not attach herself
but finds herself attached
to the Earth's every orifice,
big and small,
and kisses them all
knowing that she loves in this hole,

HIM.

She loves HIM
as she loves all the world,
and pours into HIM
that her love in spades he will return,
though he never does.

She loves HIM.
And he hates her back,
for he knows she will drown him in her love.
(In French, 'la mort mouillée, noyade'.)

Yet hers is not a savage love;
she bites not to devour
but to nourish and sustain HIM —
only she finds she cannot.

She does not take purposely,
does not discriminate between his words of hate,
between food or excreta,
but sees every molecule that passes through her
burst into a cloud of festering peach sepia.

What he receives, then, is a moldering aftertaste.
What he speaks she repeats in slurs, reshaped by her
softening, censoring lips. And bit-by-bit it maddens
him. She is his slow putrefaction; his SLOW-BITE.

As her name destines, 'MORDENTOTARDIA',
she is anagrammatically 'DAMNED – TO – ROT',
damned to rot the world.

[*music to express END and the fact that we are still
very, very deep indeed: The Flamingos' 1959 hit
I Only Have Eyes for You*]

'*Ngye guch ngusk gee a gingh och gingh guch,*'
'My love must be a kind of blind love,'

[...]

Writers' biographies

MARIA FUSCO

Maria Fusco is a Belfast-born writer. She is Chancellor's Fellow in Edinburgh College of Art and was Director of Art Writing at Goldsmiths. This year she is a Hawthornden Fellow and Writer-in-Residence at Lisbon Architecture Triennale, and her latest book is *With A Bao A Qu: Reading When Attitudes Become Form* (Los Angeles/Vancouver: New Documents, 2013).

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SIÓN PARKINSON

Siòn Parkinson is an artist based on the Isle of Mull, Scotland. His practice combines objects, text and voice. Parkinson uses singing and noise-making in his performances and recorded works to express a sense of clammy carnality - a 'fleshiness' that hopes to reveal a heightened sense of propinquity between the artist's body-interior and audience. Since 2013, Parkinson is Creative Director of Visual Arts at COMAR, a commissioning agency and arts centre in the Inner Hebrides. He was born in Dundee, Scotland. He has a daughter and son.

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