

Thesis: Swing On A Gate
Exegesis: The Chaos of Writing Fiction

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed : _____ Samantha J. Harris

Date: _____

Abstract

This creative thesis “Swing On A Gate” is a novel that explores the context of a suburban riot, its possible causes and consequences. Because such an event has multiple viewpoints, the thesis has been written in third person subjective through the eyes of six main protagonists, and at times in third person objective through the narrator’s point of view. This fictional novel is influenced by the so-called UK ‘Blackberry Riots’ of August 2011, particularly those that took place in Croydon, South London. The novel does not come down on one side or the other, but explores some of the underlying complexities through narrative points of view. The novel draws a contrast between the past and the present, and attempts to explore through the characters’ eyes some of the actions and reactions surrounding the event. Many commentators saw these riots as differing from previous UK riots (based on inter-ethnic conflict or overtly political themes), in that they centred on desire for consumer goods, while others saw the riots as a symptom of social polarization and disenfranchisement.

The exegesis discusses some of the complexities and chaos in creating the novel, which at times mirrored the chaos and confusion surrounding the event itself.

EXEGESIS

The Chaos of Writing Fiction

THE CHAOS OF WRITING FICTION

“The Chaos of Writing Fiction” is an exegesis accompanying my creative thesis “Swing On A Gate” which is a novel that explores the context of a suburban riot, its possible causes and consequences. Because such an event has multiple viewpoints, the thesis has been written in third person subjective through the eyes of six main protagonists, and at times in third person objective through the narrator’s point of view. This fictional novel is influenced by the so-called UK Blackberry Riots of August 2011, particularly those that took place in Croydon, South London. Many commentators saw them as differing from previous UK riots (based on inter-ethnic conflicts or overtly political themes), in that they centred on desire for consumer goods, while others saw the riots as a symptom of social polarization and disenfranchisement. The novel does not come down on one side or the other, but explores some of the underlying complexities through narrative points of view. The research for this exegesis is split into three key sections.

The first section, Text To Self, locates my thesis in my own experience and concerns as a writer. It explores distractions, development of ideas, reflections and memoir, and creating order out of chaotic ideas and implosions. The second section, Text-To-Text, discusses my research practices, and draws my own work into a conversation with other texts such as objective and subjective materials from online newspapers and public report, reportage vs fabrication, literary influence including poetry and testimony by people who experienced the riots, genre, and characterization. The third section, Text to World, assesses the extent to which my voice as a writer emerged from the chaos of the creative process, matched in some ways by the chaos of the riots themselves, and considers the possible audience or target market for the novel. It also reflects on the controlling ideas that developed over the creative process. It concludes that the complexity of the elements that contribute to the riot means its causes

and ultimate meaning can most probably never be resolved. This in turn reflects on the nature of truth in fiction in general.

TEXT TO SELF

Distractions

Rain is dripping on the window sill. One solitary drop, drip drip dripping. It's driving me crazy. Someone outside is drilling from time to time, my stomach wants to eat again, and I'm trying to write. These are some of the things that I would say bring about the chaos that goes with creativity. It would be nice to think that the creation could be one long linear process where you start with a word, then a sentence and paragraph, and end with a book in some form or another. But every time there is a distraction, or some research, or something to read, or a lecture to attend, the telephone, someone at the front door, the list goes on, the creative process is interrupted and there is a need to start again.

As a novice writer, it feels like the creative process should have meandered quietly in and out thought, but for me it didn't, certainly not for this thesis anyhow. At times it felt chaotic, fragmented and often schizophrenic. Maybe that is the nature of the topic, and/or maybe the nature of the structure of this storytelling.

Development of Ideas, Reflections and Memoir

This thesis was influenced by the 'Blackberry Riots' of August 2011 in Croydon, South London, England (Wardrop, 2011). Before writing anything, I needed to gather as much information as possible in the timeframe allowed, to effectively portray some of the opinions and views behind how the riots occurred. At that time, I had already

formed my own views, whether right or wrong, but I didn't want to be biased in any particular way so that I could portray the views and experiences of others, particularly of the people who experienced the event. The logistics of travelling to interview these people was not permissible, financially or practically, so there was reliance on online newspaper articles and commentary for empirical evidence, (see Text to Text section below) which allowed the forming of creative ideas for this piece of work. Perhaps part of the reason behind my own feeling of chaos was the chaotic nature of the event itself, and it became clear that its reasons for occurring were also in fact chaotic, random and confusing, didn't add up logically, and so in effect the creative process mirrored the event itself.

A fictitious novel set in a fictitious suburban setting in South London in 2011 seemed a perfect place to start. The creative process began with the research of various newspaper reports and magazine articles online, particularly ones that related to the event in the Croydon environs. Then I wrote a series of random short stories or vignettes, that at first seemed to have no connection and were loosely based upon personal memory and experience without attempting to be autobiographical, for example Strawberry Fields, Black Jacks, The Orange Teapot, The Tiger Rug. These short stories later ended up incorporated into the work as different chapters. At this point, most of the characters had no names (apart from X or B or A), no fixed abode and no particular intention. One short piece remained the same, which was the letter at the beginning of the thesis which is written in second person but, in context, received as a reader in third person limited.

Some of the stories were initially written in first person and second person, mainly to make the stories and the people in them more real to me from an authorial point of view, then later switched to third person. In a way I was beginning to get to know the characters on the page and was starting to feel like I knew them.

Creating Order Out of Chaotic Ideas and Implosions

“Writing does not follow a linear formation ... Creative Writing is by no means always a linear process. Its well-spring is sometimes hidden, even from the writer.” (Ali, 2007)

Initially, I formed the idea to travel the story through linear time from 1977 to 2011, which at that point seemed a logical and straightforward place to go, because real time travels that way. The story would start at a point and travel in a straight line through to the end point, and the riot would be the climax. However, I wanted the timeline to explore through the eyes of the characters, whoever they were at that point, their past and their present. So the idea to travel through approximately forty years, whether backwards or forwards in time, with snippets of the lives of three generations was formed, partly because of my own memories and experiences. I very quickly established, that a linear timeline was not going to work, due mainly to the varying viewpoints, timeline, and the different characters.

I also had a very wide physical and emotional landscape in mind at that stage, that seemed to get bigger and bigger the more research I read. The ideas needed to be boxed and confined into some sort of framework, like a starting block for a race, in order to have somewhere to place ideas and points of view. At that point confusion and chaotic thought were well and truly setting in, ideas were imploding on me, and I needed to settle on some order and structure.

Visualizing the story as a shape, then drawing the shape on paper was helpful, and so several ways of dealing with the structure came to mind. Whether this process fitted into any traditional structure such as the hero's journey or three act structure, as

discussed in *The writer's journey: Mythic structure for writers* (Vogler, 2007), is debatable, but for me this shaping process was helpful.

Firstly, I contemplated the storyline as a square, cut into four equal parts each with their own story. I imagined that the story would intersect neatly in the middle of that square, for example the four quarters of a community each with its own viewpoint that would cross in the middle with an event like a riot. Croydon is actually like that after all, split into East, West, South and the North End Road where the two main shopping malls are located.

The old town of Croydon and the market sit on a hill that inclines towards the railway station where the commuters come and go. So, I then considered the form of an oblique line – a storyline that started at the bottom of an (imaginary) hill and ascended to the top with events intersecting at various points resulting in a positive outcome; or in reverse a storyline that started at the top of a hill and travelled downwards with a negative outcome.

Then circles: a storyline within a story within a story, like concentric circles, one story circled by the other, somehow each story relating to the other, maybe an intergenerational story that flicks from timeline to timeline within the same building as seen in the television series *Marchlands* (Kent, et al., 2011). Then as a zigzag: a story that jumped from one timeframe and event to another eg: from 2011 to the 70s, from 2011 to the 80s, from 2011 to the 90s, or in reverse 70s to 2011, 80s to 2011, 90s to 2011.

The zigzag seemed at first the easiest path to follow, particularly as the vignettes or short stories developed, because they were exiting onto the page in this kind of zig-zagged, almost schizophrenic chaotic fashion, with a chaotic multi character point of view. Over time, however, once the realization set in that the storyline was evolving into a series of short stories with similar themes but no real connection, structure had to

be revisited because that was not the intention. I was writing my first novel, and there needed to be smooth transition points between each scene. A way of fitting everything together so that it was linked with smooth transitions was what was needed. I had the pieces of a jigsaw, but no clear picture and more chaos. At that stage, my main protagonist(s) had not been established. An anchor was needed, and the landscape was far too wide in my mind, and needed to be narrowed down.

I imagined at first one street. This would enable the characters to have places to drift in and out of, and places where dialogue could be created and emotions and opinions could be exchanged. This was not enough because I couldn't work out how the writing was going to smoothly jump from one time to the next (unless I had a tardis or a time machine). I still needed something solid, something that could evolve, that could show the transition of time, and somewhere for the characters to come and go with their points of view, where they could talk and come alive with their emotions through the ages. A house or a building seemed the perfect place. One house or building which would act as an anchor to the story.

The research provided an answer for the anchor. Kennedy's sausage shops had several branches in South London. Sheen et al. (2008) described in a You Tube documentary how significant these shops were to the communities where they were located. One of these Kennedy's shops was in the old town very near to where the Croydon 'Blackberry Riots' (Halliday, 2011) took place. Although now closed down, and closed at the time of the riots, for more than a century, generations of customers flocked from in and around town to buy Kennedy's sausages. The Croydon shop (McQueeney, 2007) sat at the bottom of Surrey Street Market (Londontown, 2013) very close to the hub of the August 2011 riots and close to the intergenerational family business, Reeves (Davis, 2012) furniture shop, which was destroyed by arson during the riots. Surrey Street Market (Shevey, 2013), itself has historical and social resonance

(Paton, 2013) not only in itself but also in its location and has been in existence for many centuries. Kennedy's closed its doors for good a few years before the Croydon riot, or it too could have been a victim like Reeves Furniture shop (Reuters, 2011). A fictitious version of the same seemed the perfect anchor for my storyline, and also the concept of a cobbled road with a market that led the reader to the shop and the community that frequented it. Although my shop waivers through good times and bad, it survives unlike the real Kennedys, a high street victim.

So through that, it was decided that the sausage shop could stand for the decentralization and breaking up of our communities, a symbol of the old town and the old ways, a symbol of hard work and integrity and would also be a place where characters could come and go and air their points of view. It also allowed for something traditionally English, like the humble sausage, to act (almost strangely) as a symbol for pride. London Pride became the name of one of the varieties in the story. The shop and all that went with it could stand for hard work, for tradition, and pride, and also in a sense a vehicle to show the effect of town planning on small business, and maybe that decentralization of our retail areas can have a part to play in affecting our communities and the people that live in them. The shop and the market road would draw a contrast between the old community and the new community - the centre, the old town and the new.

TEXT TO TEXT

Objective and Subjective Material from online newspapers and public report

In August 2011, the world press was awash with news of widespread rioting, rampaging and looting through England, particularly the country's capital and the Greater London area. On 9 August 2011, Seamark, Martin, et al. (2011) cited that "sporadic rioting,

looting and arson attacks broke out across the length and breadth of London as the orgy of violence which began in Tottenham at the weekend showed no sign of abating.” Payne and Quilty-Harper (2011) provided online an “interactive map of suspected rioters and incidents between Saturday 6th and Tuesday 9th August 2011”, and on national television the Metropolitan Police Commander, Adrian Hanstock, (2011) advised that “levels of violence escalated quicker than we anticipated”. Huffington Post World placed a photo of a woman jumping from a burning building in Surrey Street after rioting took place in Croydon, and cited that “riots and looting have broken out all across Greater London and are now spreading across the country following the shooting of Mark Duggan by police in Tottenham, North London on Friday, August 8th” (Hoffer, 2011). An inquest into the death of Mark Duggan by police was cited in The Telegraph as “sparking the London riots” (Duffin, et al., 2013).

In December 2011, a collaborative social research enquiry between one of the major British newspapers, The Guardian, and the London School of Economics, was released and posted online, providing insight into reasons why the riots of August 2011 may have occurred. *Reading the Riots* was useful in developing point of view, character arc and also ultimately storyline. Rusbridger, Rees, et al. (2011) cite in *Reading the Riots* that “1.3m words of first-person accounts from rioters were collated” in their interviews and “the aim was to examine the attitudes and experiences of those involved in the riots.” Interviews took place across the country with 270 people directly involved, “Of these, nearly 30% were juveniles (aged 10-17) and a further 49% were aged 18-24 37% of those appearing in the courts on riot-related charges were white, 40% were black and 6% Asian.” Rusbridger, Rees et al. also cite their findings indicate that 20% of rioters were female. Over 70% of interviewees cited poverty, policing, government policy, unemployment, police shooting of Mark Duggan, social media, media coverage, greed, and inequality as reasons for being involved in the riots. Over

50% of respondents cited boredom, criminality, moral decline and racial tension as being reasons. Interviewees were also angry with and resentful of the way they were treated by the police on an everyday basis, particularly since the introduction of the Stop and Search scheme, which has allowed police to randomly stop and search members of the public for weapons, drugs or any other incriminating material, (Metropolitan Police, 2013).

According to *Reading the Riots*, the rallying of rioters and communication to participants in the riot was fuelled by the free messaging service available on BlackBerry phones, known as BBM, not through traditional social media such as Twitter or Facebook as previously thought. It was also suggested in the report that although gang membership played a role, “that during the riots the postcode warfare that was for them a fact of life had – for a short time – melted away”, and “that the four nights of rioting saw a truce as otherwise hostile gangs suspended ordinary hostilities to focus on other targets.” (Rusbridger, Rees, et al., 2011).

My particular focus for this thesis has been on the Croydon area, just one of the London suburbs that were affected by the riots. After reading the Guardian/LSE report, questions that I raised to myself were why had so few participants or rioters been interviewed when such a wide landscape had been affected, and did the research team allocate the proportions of race and age over the people interviewed or was the proportion completely random - according to the report the race divisions are not equal in proportion. I was confused, because each of the towns targeted during the riots have different racial groups divided into their own different proportions. So how could this be a true picture? Surely, many more than the number interviewed had been involved in the riots, and why didn't the initial reporting also focus on the people affected by them, people that worked there, people that grew up there, the uncles and aunties, the parents, the grandparents, the business owners, people at the pub, young children (how many are

still having nightmares?), the local bobbies, the commuters, and so on? At this point I could feel a story emerging. Why in such an extensive and prestigious report with so many experts on board, and possibly heavily funded, were the opinions and observations of those affected by, rather than involved in, the riots not discussed? Were they not as important, and was their contribution not valued or valid? Also, did the people affected by the riots see it coming, five years ago, ten years ago, even thirty or forty years ago? To me the report seemed to only skim the surface and seemed superficial, perhaps even formulaic. As Ali (2007) cites in *The Outrage Economy* “Two plus two equals four and nothing over, as the Gradgrinds would say.”

There was some debate as to whether the police had had appropriate direction from their seniors, and as cited by *Inside Croydon* (2012) “100 back-up police were left sitting in a car park, watching while Reeves Corner burned on 8/8” and that “a senior Met officer in command ordered police from outside the capital not to come to the assistance of local Croydon police and fire-fighters who were under attack from rioters, because the back-up were not able to use the London force’s radio system ... the lack of police cover meant that the fire brigade could not tackle Reeves’ blazing furniture store without fear that its fire-fighters would be attacked by rioters. ... Those officers put in peril on the streets included under-trained back-office personnel and anyone from the police station who could wear a uniform, according to one officer who spoke to *Inside Croydon*.” So effectively, the riot could have been allowed to become bigger than it should or could have been, in the Croydon area at least.

The widening poverty gap between the rich and poor in the UK almost certainly could have also fuelled these riots. Gentleman and Mulholland (2010) cite an “Unequal Britain” and “an increasingly divided nation where the richest 10% of the population are more than 100 times as wealthy as the poorest 10% of society.” As cited by

Buljubasic (2012) one year on from the Croydon riots “it wouldn’t take much to ignite tensions and riots would happen again, it’s just when”.

Reportage vs Fabrication

I considered delivering the thesis in a reportage style (Van Beynen, 2012) but, in the end, a fabricated riot in a fabricated setting seemed a whole lot more practical when I was writing from many miles away and was unable to physically be in the landscape in question. I also realised I wanted the freedom to flex my imaginative style as a writer beyond the factual landscape, and didn’t want to make any promises to the reader that I couldn’t keep or justify. It wasn’t appropriate to write a journalistic style story with places and names taken off Google maps either. So based on that, I fabricated a fictitious landscape that sits somewhere in South London, and consists of three areas, the old town, the new town and the centre. Although the emotional and physical landscape has been fabricated, the resulting storyline has not only been based and influenced on factual research and empirical evidence of an event that actually occurred and one that could well happen again, but also on personal memories of my own.

Literary Influence

At times, the novels I referred to for help during the project threw me into more chaotic thought and panicked me. I felt humbled and at times overawed by the nature of the authors’ script. How could I ever possibly write as well as these authors, who effectively were my mentors?

At the very beginning of the thesis, I was looking for guidance on how to structure the storyline. I referred to *The Help* (Stockett, 2009), a fictitious storyline in a

historical setting written on a linear timeline. Three main protagonists explore the racial viewpoints of American society in the Sixties, from an Afro-American point of view and a rich white person's point of view. It is a novel that depicts the viewpoint of three main protagonists, in two very different fictitious physical landscapes; and social and emotional landscape, that of poverty and wealth. *Brooklyn* (Toibin, 2010) set in 1950s Ireland and Brooklyn, New York, was also helpful in terms of structure in that the storyline travels through time again in a linear fashion, and bounces from one physical landscape to another, with one main protagonist who emigrates to America for a better life, however Toibin uses factual places as landscape and backdrop to his fictitious characters. While *The Help* and *Brooklyn* were useful and inspirational in a sense that they both used vernacular voice to allow the reader to understand the context of the characters/protagonists, and visual props to indicate time and era – dress, mode of travel, cuisine, architectural landscape, in terms of structure they weren't exactly what I had in mind.

In *Sarah's Key*, de Rosnay (2007) weaves two stories with a historical theme, one in the past, one in the present in a fictional sense, and then runs the two timelines side by side in a linear fashion. I admired the way she could flit from present to past, from past to present but at the same time create two linear stories that run together in a parallel sense in the reader's mind.

The Girl You Left Behind (Moyes, 2012) again was also influential because it dealt with a storyline that flitted from the past to the present, from the present to the past, and zig-zagged from one time to another smoothly and effectively without the reader being jolted out of the storyline at any given time.

Late for Tea at the Deer Palace. The Lost Dreams of My Iraqi Family (Chalabi, 2010) was also influential in the sense that although it dealt with the intergenerational historical journey of a family from Iraq, time was dealt in a way I felt would work well

for my project. Chalabi chunked the present time into separate blocks, particularly one at the beginning and one at the end (like bookends) and then journeyed through a long timeframe (more than a century), but kept all the elements of the storyline linked together. The anchor for her story was the Deer Palace, where events and people came and went.

At the start of my thesis, I was toying with the idea that I might take a satirical or marginally humorous stance to the storyline. Even though the riot itself was not at all humorous, I thought that maybe I might be able to throw in a dig at the authorities surrounding the event, for example the town council, the town planners, the big retailers and big brands, politicians and the government, the police force, though at that point I hadn't set any characters firmly in place. *Queen Camilla* (Townsend, 2006) came to mind in that the author picks on an authoritative concept, in this instance the monarchy, and then places it in an ordinary landscape and setting. The reader then walks alongside the protagonist's journey and can laugh at the authority's misfortune. Similarly *Number Ten* (Townsend, 2002) where the author berates the government instead of the monarchy. As the thesis developed however, I realized that this wasn't going to be the way my novel was going to go, although I still very much admire and enjoy Townsend's satire and humour.

Beloved (Morrison, 1997) was helpful for writing violence. In *Beloved*, the reader knows that a child has been killed, and the child flits in and out of the pages first alive and then as a ghost, but it is not until close to the end of the book that the reader becomes aware of how the child died. The subtext, the actions of the characters, the setting and landscape write the violence, not the words. The reader intuitively knows that there has been some sort of violence at some point, but it is not "blood in your face" graphically described. *Beloved* helped me develop the tools I needed to described violence, and that I didn't need to be obvious or blatant, just create more show than tell.

When I was trying to incorporate factual events into the thesis, I referred to *The Ice Storm*, (Moody, 1994) where in some parts of the novel the author effectively lists up to twenty factual events into one paragraph and then runs the paragraph directly into his fictional storyline. If I had been making a movie, I could have had a visual scene where someone opened a newspaper to a particular headline, or a character drives a car listening to a radio announcer quote an event that has happened, but this was words on paper, a novel, and so to read the way Moody (1994) had achieved this was also helpful.

The movies *Crash* (Haggis, n.d.), and *Do the Right Thing* (Lee, 1989) were useful as they dealt with multi-protagonist viewpoints attached to a central theme. *Do the Right Thing* also coincidentally dealt with the simmering antagonisms that eventually lead to a riot in Brooklyn, New York.

Trapped: Remarkable stories of survival from the 2011 Canterbury earthquake, (Van Beynen, 2012) in a sense was incredibly moving and affecting, as it tells the non-fiction stories of people involved in a horrific event. Although Van Beynen's journalistic technique was not the way I wanted to approach my writing in the end, I was writing fiction, in a sense it was useful as it tells the story of very recent history.

The movie, *Ladri di Biciclette - The Bicycle Thief* (de Sica, 2006), helped give me ideas for one of my characters, as it deals with a man with core values and a hard work ethic who ends up stealing after being stolen from and is a victim of his circumstances. In effect, my character Joe ends up a frustrated victim of his circumstances.

Brick Lane (Ali, 2003), was the very last novel I read during the thesis. Although quite a different storyline, I found there were surprising similarities in the physical and emotional landscape. However, Ali calls her rioters protestors because they have a cause to fight for, unlike the perpetrators of the London riots of August 2011, who it seems have been labelled greedy and opportunist, and that they were

driven by want and desire. It seems that anyone who has an opinion about the UK/London riots labelled those involved as rioters or looters or arsonists, but are the actions of rioting, looting or committing arson a result of their own protests? Perhaps they too, like Ali's people, should be named protesters, protestors against not having enough money, not having enough work, or enough prospects, or the way they are treated in the community by the powers that be. Or perhaps they could be labelled the brainwashed, after all, if they hadn't been led down a path by the media that they needed all the consumer goods they stole, like it was their right or that they were life's necessity, then perhaps they wouldn't have believed they needed them in the first place. Imagine, the brainwash riots, or the brand image riots.

Ali's storyline seemed to lilt along the voice of the first generation Bangladeshi immigrants portrayed in the storyline. Nazneen and Chanu's daughters speak for the many British offspring children of immigrants who have sought a different or better life, and could almost speak for Ama or Jaswinder, in this thesis, or in fact their children who know no different life.

Poetry about the riots found online was at times a powerful influence, and also helped me understand how people were feeling on or around the time of the riots. There was plenty of opinion. Some poets seemed pro-riot, and others anti-riot, almost frightened. For some there was a level of frustration simmering for things that people could not have and things that they felt that they could just help themselves to, and if a life got taken in the process then who gave a damn, (Ellison, 2011). Some poets were angry with and blame the government, the media and the police (Dady, 2011). Others castigate the rioters themselves (Lacdael, 2011), and another shows concern about their community after the event (Inkтуition, 2011). One poem in particular stood out, (Duggan, 2008) in that it showed how proud someone could be about their community.

Genre

I set out with no particular genre in mind. From the outset the intention of the creative work was to air a point of view, or several depending where the research led, through the writing, and through narrative and character voice. On reflection and upon completion though, I think it could sit somewhere in the genre of social realism, perhaps contemporary naturalistic social realism, (University of Cambridge, 2010) mainly because it deals with a factual historical event, albeit recent, and also because it takes the reader through snippets of history from 1977 in a social setting.

Characterisation

Sarah: In a way, she is a herald of shame and pity and disdain for the world she once knew. She wants to help, but really knows there is nothing she can do, it is what it is.

In the end, she can only offer a sense of distraction and a return to something they all loved once, the return to nature (picking strawberries). In some ways she starts out the unlucky one, but in the end is the lucky one as she can go back to her home in the countryside away from the trouble.

Jaswinder: The English girl with Indian (now Pakistan) heritage - she is probably the one that changes the most, she succumbs to society and gives up on her family beliefs.

Angela: A little bit naive, didn't see the trouble coming, should have. Little bit head in the sand, oblivious to what's going on around her. Shocked by what happened, and remains loyal and anchored to her community, decides to stay and put something back into the community

Ama: Her parents, the Mensah's, brought their daughter to England for a better life, which ultimately turns out to be a tough life. After the death of her son Morton, Ama

can't see that this was a better life, and questions her parents intentions. The better life where she married the policeman, a symbol of a pillar of the community, who in her eyes let her down, and was working the night of the riots and was unable to help their son.

Joe: "Good old reliable Joe" who works in the back of the sausage shop . He becomes a more dominant character as the storyline develops, and struggles to make ends meet, never enough money despite working like a Trojan. By the time of the riots he just helps himself to whatever he can get his hands on. Sick of not having, so effectively not driven by greed, but driven by desperation in a materialistic sense.

Uncle Albert: the wise elder who drinks too much: The victim of his time of a colonial past, and of his mind-set. He would have been a child during World War II. He had success on the back of the rise of the stock market, but a downfall when it crashed in the Eighties. He holds a candle for a world he knew that has evolved into one he no longer recognises. He has a stereotypical viewpoint. Begrudges immigrants, but in the end accepts the world he lives in even though he can't make sense of it.

As the story evolves through the generations, three more characters develop, Morton (the son of Ama, and Mensah's grandchild) - the good boy who ends up a sacrificial lamb; Ranjit (the son of Aisha) and his friends, Ella (Angela's daughter). In effect they are minor characters who help to carry the storyline along and drive a point of view home.

TEXT TO WORLD

As the thesis grew, progressed and developed, the controlling idea emerged as an anti-consumerist viewpoint, which surprised me as an author, as instead of the rioters being to blame, I ended up placing a proportion of blame on the big brands and the big

retailers that were targeted by the rioters. The creation of fictitious brand names in the storyline such as Devine, Devine Mini Me (they've even got the children), Divine Home (and the housewives), upsize milkshakes from the Big Beef Cafe that get spilled on the floor (like he really needed that big one anyway), and the Big Beef Almighty that Sean Hanson wants more tomato sauce for (as if there wasn't enough already), MeMeMe magazine, the oh so special Tidies jeans, and limited edition Crowns running shoes, act as symbols of a consumer society that believes that these manmade things are so important, and I guess they are to a point. Nice things are nice to have, however, at what price? To cost someone their life? To destroy someone's business and livelihood by arson, a business that might have been built over generations, handed down from father to son, father to daughter.

The portrayal in the thesis of advertising screens at the Centre, surrounded by plastic plants in plastic pots, that roll around and around with promotional campaigns effectively conditioning the shoppers to buy even while they have a rest from shopping and recharge their batteries with something to eat, further drives home an image of media and brand influence on our societies. The Centre also acts as a symbol of dominance over the old town which holds together the parts of our communities that have stood the test of time, that represent small business, family cohesion, friendships and kind, thoughtful, considerate neighbours and neighbourhoods, ethnic diversity, and hard work ethic, and more than anything hope rather than despair.

To come back to my original question, why did the riots happen, it seems there are no conclusive answers as to why a riot might happen. The research has shown that these riots happened because they could, perhaps due to a mixture of authoritative complacency and arrogance, over exposure to advertising and the media in all its realms that perhaps wires society into believing that it can have it all and needs it all. Some rioters were opportunistic in their actions, apparently not convicted by any particular

belief, other than the drive to go and take through violence and anarchy, whatever they wanted to from those that worked hard for a living. But maybe the rioters really did have an axe to grind and are a victim of their own unfortunate circumstances. It seems that there are no conclusive answers.

Riots, like arguments in the home, relevant or not relevant are often sparked by one single thing, a tipping point perhaps. “*The Tipping Point* is the biography of an idea, and the idea is very simple. It is the best way to understand the emergence of fashion trends, the ebb and flow of crime waves, ... the phenomena of word of mouth, or any number of the other mysterious changes that mark everyday life is to think of them as epidemics. Ideas and products and messages and behaviours spread just like viruses do.” (Gladwell, 2007, p. 7)

In the case of the Blackberry riots, Mark Duggan was killed by police in Tottenham and a whole melting pot of simmering issues came to a head on that day, and the days that followed. Maybe a bored and frustrated collective just wanted to let off steam. In this case a bunch of people who were perhaps bored students or unemployed workers, or not, perhaps they were respectable members of the public normally, perhaps they just wanted to shop for free and have for a moment all the stuff depicted in the media that there were saturated with day in, day out. Maybe it was an opportunity to take revenge on the world they live in. July and August are the summer school holidays in England. Ironically such a large proportion of the perpetrators were of school age.

Perhaps the world as we know it, is changing. As Priestley (2013) cites on Ehrlich “if we spent more time making love, drinking wine, reading books, reciting poetry and looking at beautiful scenery, our lives would be a lot better than if we spent them slaving all the time to be sure we can buy the next computer, next cellphone, the next car. People ought to think a lot harder about what they want their lives to be like”. Easy to say, I guess, if you’ve got plenty of money in your pocket.

Perhaps in life, some of us behave admirably, some of us don't. Can truth, honesty, kindness and respect go along way? The point is now this type of anti-social behaviour, cannot be ignored even if there was the desire to, it could come knocking at any of our doors, any time, any place, unpredictable, chaotic and fragmented.

As a writer, I can no more deliver an accurate answer as to why a riot might happen as can the next layman. What I can do though is deliver an opinion, or a point of view. Writing has given me that voice. This exercise has been personal as well as academic. I was born at St Mary's hospital in Croydon (now Mayday), and I went to primary school there. My grandparents' ashes are scattered at the Croydon Crematorium. For generations, my family bought sausages at Kennedy's in Croydon and bought fruit and vegetables at Surrey Street market. A visit to Kennedy's, I suppose, became a family tradition, something to look forward to. Maybe everyone needs things to look forward to. Some of my family still live in Croydon. The storyline has been influenced by personal experience, particularly the parts in the Seventies and the Eighties, but mostly it has been delivered through empirical evidence and literary influence.

In terms of the market that this thesis might appeal to, I would like to think that it has given ordinary people of Croydon a voice and so effectively the people of Croydon might enjoy reading it, young and old, or even Londoners in general, but also, it might lend itself to a suburban demographic anywhere in a westernised world, as it is something that could possibly happen to them, and maybe already has. How to get published? I can only hope that by applying for representation from a British literary agent, that this thesis might one day be considered by one of the leading British publishers. I understand the market to be competitive, and if this should fail, then perhaps it could lend itself to indie, self, or e-publishing to get it out to market.

The chaos for me has been in the complexities of the different elements that made up the structure, the research, the emotional attachment to the event and the storyline, the distractions all around me and as the storyline developed the feeling as a writer that the characters, though fictional, became very real to me and that I knew them well. At times I looked forward to chatting with them on the page. The event itself I felt was chaotic in nature, random, schizophrenic, fragmented and confusing, and so at times was the thesis. For me the biggest thing to come out of this is that life still goes on, in its own chaotic framework, it still goes on, good and bad, the world still keeps turning, and in the words of Henry Porter from *Vanity Fair* (2011) “Perhaps it is not more complicated than this – the British rioted because they could.”

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