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Exegesis: *Why I Chose Not To*

Creative Thesis: *It Would Kill Your Mother*

A Creative Non-Fiction

Masters of Creative Writing (MCW)

2017

Abstract

'It Would Kill Your Mother' is primarily set in Whangarei, a town that became a city, in Northland, New Zealand. It captures the time period from the 1960's through to the early 2000's. It follows the main protagonist, Ella, through her discoveries of complex individual histories, including her own, that impinge upon her life in traumatic ways. The story of Ella's lived experience inside a white middle class narcissistic family where incest is rife, follows a traumatogenic narrative that jumps forwards and backwards in time, place and reality. Ella's only safe place is at her family's beach property in Doubtless Bay in the Far North, where isolation, weather patterns and beautiful pristine coastal landscape, reflect her changing circumstances over time, providing metaphorical expression of her complex inner landscape whilst also giving her 'a place to stand' in relative freedom. A sense of foreboding is seeded early with the various turning points and multiple traumatic events leading Ella to places and people who offer her a deeper knowing of her 'selves', unveiling, in time, long held secrets that expose intergenerational incest, adultery and highly sexualised environments that appear commonplace, leaving family members scarred and divided in the mistiness of middle class patriarchy and hypocrisy.

The exegesis *'WHY I CHOSE NOTTO'* is really what I have chosen to call, a Creative Companion to my Thesis. It explains the reasons why I chose to break away from the convention of following the pre-ordained structure of the exegetical component for the MCW at AUT. For me personally, it served no purpose and only arrested my ability to talk about my work. It does however, showcase my work against a backdrop of mental illness that I have struggled with my entire life. I wanted to tell my 'truth' which I must stress, resisted being told. I did consider comparing my work with other examples of intergenerational incest

within New Zealand, however my research drew a blank. I also began to feel that the act of comparing my work with others who had suffered in similar ways to myself was inappropriate. How a person chooses to tell their own personal narrative of a traumatic upbringing should be applauded for the fact that it exists at all. Literature regarding illness of any kind is impoverished and I suspect that is because our stories are 'mis-fits' when it comes to meeting the criteria for a marketable story to please its' readers. Memoirs of incest in the context of my own country are limited to one or two authors whose incestuous histories occurred in another place and time or have, I suspect, been fictionalised into novels. This reflects poorly upon New Zealand with its' alarming rates of child sexual abuse and speaks through its silence and absence of how hidden the nature of childhood trauma actually is. It also illuminates the socio-political, economic and cultural forces at play that keep the holders of secrets silent, their stories left untold. Memoirs on incest in other countries were easier to unearth. I have read at least a dozen American texts, however I could not find myself inside them. I have embedded within my 'creative companion' my own artistic and therapeutic works to capture the essence of what exists for the traumatised individual, where words fail them. All artwork and poetry that features within this document are my own work. I feel the creative companion frames and informs the creative body of work in a way that assists a reader to place themselves more comfortably in a world of discomfort that could dis-orientate and confuse them if read after the creative body of work. The opposite however, could also be true, in that the creative body of work is just as likely to engage the reader in a way that urges them forwards to find their own way through what may be experienced as 'difficult to stomach material.' The choice, of course, is not mine to make.

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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 or of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and sincere appreciation to my literary mentor James George. I thank him for his undying and relentless patience, his willingness and generosity to give me his time, expert guidance and a real desire and willingness to understand my truth. With his gentle powers of persuasion to trust in the process of becoming a writer, he has been invaluable and inspirational. Additionally Mike Johnson, Siobhan Harvey and Darryl Hocking for their inspirational and insightful master classes, each bringing their own unique gift of teaching styles into the room. A major key to my moving forward with a degree of clarity and renewed energy following a series of tragic events that threw me of course, was provided by the UPC Postgraduate Centres Writers' Retreat at Vaughan Park. Here in the tranquility of a Recreational Marine Reserve, I would like to acknowledge the vitally important roles that Dr Kathryn Owler and Associate Professor Jenni Billot played in unblocking my overloaded thought processes that had me writing for the first time in weeks. Also the custodians of Vaughan Park and the excellent Chefs who worked tirelessly to provide much needed brain food by way of a healthy nutritious diet, cooked and prepared with passion and a smile that made all the difference. My cohort of Masterful Creatives, the class of 2016 while I remained mostly aloof, adrift from my life as I had known it, reached out to me in ways I will never forget. Your empathy and kindness was overwhelming and I thank each and every one of you. In particular, I would like to thank Alexandra Frazer, for her support in teaching me about the art of poetry. Your willingness to help me break open my own fledging and somewhat awkward poetry for the purpose of including these amateur works in my submission made all the difference. At a time when you are also challenged by outside events, you found the time for me, for which I will remain forever grateful. To Donna, your kind and gentle nature soothed me in troubling times and I discovered in you, the best kind of support a person like me could possibly wish for. I will forever be grateful to you for seeing the wood in the forest I was blind to. Without your masterful mind and incredible sensitivities I would never have completed this work. You are and will remain a lifelong friend.

For the multitude of ways my own family contributed to my work during what has been a tumultuous time for us all, I thank you for your relentless faith in me, your unconditional love and support in the craziest of times and especially for reminding me to breathe deeply when I forgot. Timby and Cara, Bradeon, Caden and Kalaya, Kallum and Karen, Geena and Josh, you are my world, my everything. To Aunty M, forever there, forever caring and watching out for me.

A special thank you to Greg Finucane, Neuro-Psychiatrist, who not only restored my faith in men, you listened in a way no other possibly could and saved me many times over the years. Your undying faith in me to make a difference in the world has been humbling. To Toos, Traude and Mark for your guidance in troubling times.

Margaretteanne, your motherly caring and encouragement to write down the bones of my story has been an early seed sown in my journey to becoming a writer.

Thank you so much for all your gentle listening and expert guidance

Finally, to my husband Chevy, my 'zig' your 'zag'. Your unfaltering faith in me despite the trauma we have both endured created the loving and patient atmosphere a fledging writer needed the most. You are my best friend, an undying 'listener' and the only driver I have ever known not to make me car sick when I write! Finally, Stormie, Bear, Ruby Scooby Doo and Lochie, your daily loyalty and ability to make me laugh when I didn't think I had it in me, you have shown me what many humans have failed to do so.

Dedication

I dedicate this Memoir to Dodge, like a brother you embraced me and anything I needed to do with a relentless enthusiasm, forever a source of encouragement and acknowledgement for who I was and what I stood for. I miss you so terribly much, touching my life in a humorous but sincere manner, reminding me that all in life, at the end of the day, is what it is. I am always looking for stubborn daisies and piwakawaka, our sign that you are near. Till we meet again, I love you.

R.I.P - 3/7/54 to 24/6/16

My father, the late Bernie Saunders, my Benson, your Hedges, who gave me the gifts of writing, artistic endeavours, teaching me how to knit and how to swim, reminding me that to get anywhere in life, one has to be prepared to make waves. I'm glad I told you and that in your own way, you said sorry, the word that seems the hardest word to say. I miss you and will forever listen out for the grey warbler, the morepork and the tui. May you rest in peace Dad, my forgiveness setting us both free.

R.I.P - 12/1/1926 - 26/7/16

My mother, the late Monica Saunders. I thank you for your support and corroboration of my story that you initially resisted believing. As a mother I know the guilt you suffered in my choice to write the truth. I thank you for filling in the blanks and for sharing the horrid secrets you held yourself for far too long. What a life you could have had Mum. What a life we could have had. Thank you for everything beautiful and creative you brought to my life. I miss you everyday. Fly high and let your hair down. It is well overdue.

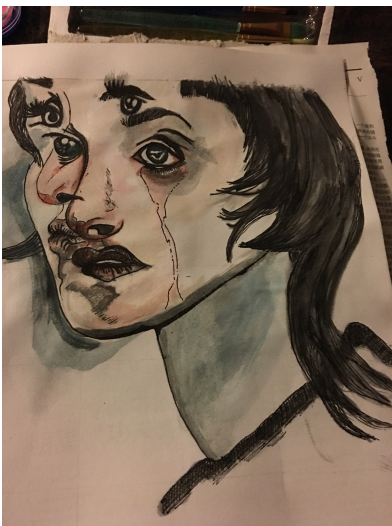
R.I.P - 4/4/27 - 5/4/17

WHY I CHOSE NOT TO

A Creative Companion to the Thesis: *'It Would Kill Your Mother'*

Dear Reader,

Ella may be freaked out by you, I'm not. What you see on these pages, is what you get. It's nothing short of a bloody miracle that Ella has written anything at all. Until you've lived with Ella, inside Ella, you won't get it, so that's where I come in. I want you to know what it took from Ella to come this far. It took guts, it took bravery, it took courage beyond common com-



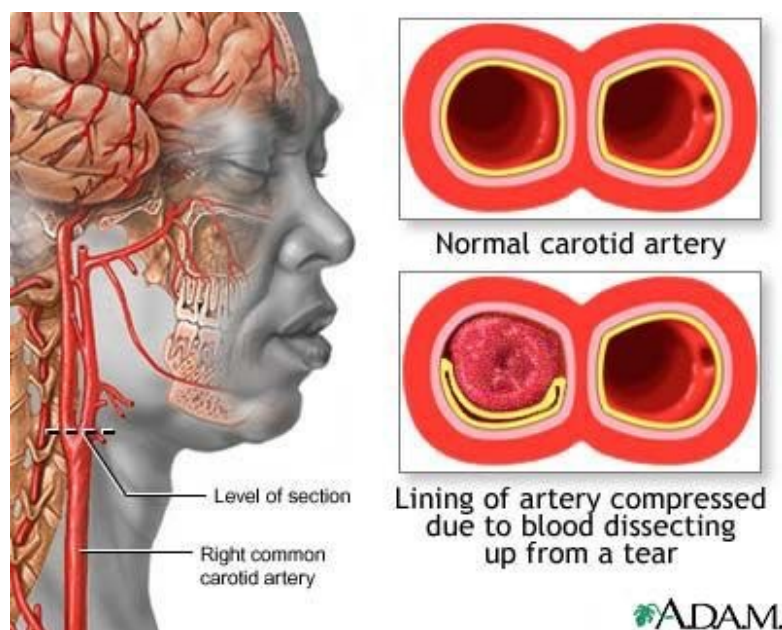
prehensibility. It took 15 kgs from her frame as she pounded the asphalt before, during and after she had written anything about herself. Extracting the shit from the deep recesses of her soul had its price. Running set her free for a while, allowing her to feel less floaty. It also made her feel good enough about herself to continue for another few pages. She escaped into her artwork when words failed her. Words failed her a lot. All artwork scattered throughout this document is from her own hand. She wrote her raw, clumsy poetry when she felt tapped on the shoulder by one of us, wanting to show her something she had forgotten about her life. And sometimes, it all got a bit much for us too. Whenever this happened we would all join hands with Ella and walk together pretending the 'forgetting' with her. Sound crazy? We don't give a shit. In our world, along with Ella, it's called survival.

From a deathly place we chose to live. Now that takes some extraordinary effort and personal will. **From Lily**

Dear Reader,

The fact I don't know who you are, that I don't know anything about you at all, is terrifying. I'm telling myself that it doesn't matter. But it does, a lot. You see, I'm not altogether sure who I am at any given point in time. It's only in hindsight that I know who I've been. That's the nature of Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It's a conundrum that has arrested my ability to write this from a place of 'knowing' — 'knowing you' 'knowing me'. The default position within my family was one of crazed chaos. I can do chaos with frenetic finesse because I knew no other way of being in the world. You need to know a few things: This creative companion to my thesis is in a somewhat different format to what is normally expected. Here's why:

* As a direct result of a near fatal traumatic brain injury in 2002, the internal layer of my right carotid artery was dissected from the base of my neck and up into my grey matter. This caused the formation of a 'flap' inside my artery which attracted the formation of a large clot. Little bits of this clot began to break off and travel up into the tiny arteries feeding various areas of my brain. My wiring is faulty now, so writing in an academic/critical way is very difficult. It looks a bit like this image which I sourced from google images of "dissected right internal carotid artery". ([pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com/pin/400x320_2.jpeg) 400x320 2.jpeg)



Also, during the fragmented two year period I worked on my thesis the following events arrested my writing further:

- * My mother tried to kill herself in April 2016 with a pair of scissors. I'd just moved my parents into a Rest Home two weeks prior.
- * My best friend died after a long and ghastly battle with bowel cancer in June 2016
- * My father died suddenly on the 26th of July 2016.
- * My husband contracted a life threatening neurological disorder which left him paralysed for months.
- * My 24yr old son became severely depressed and suicidal requiring me to move in with him for six months until we could stabilise him.
- * I discharged my mother from the Rest Home and bought her home to live with my husband and I. She died suddenly after a short and painful condition on the 5th May 2017.
- * So writing anything at all was enmeshed inside all of this. From Ella



Oh What A Tangled Web

I don't know why I dislike her
 But I do with all my heart
 I scratch her face from the photos
 Kill her off with red-tipped darts
 I know I'm not her favourite
 My brother, he holds that space
 Which of course creates a problem
 When his truth is always laced
 Mum would react immediately
 Belt with buckle is unleashed
 My brother's smirk is so satisfied
 His smile of yellowed teeth
 He became my door to freedom
 Taking advantage of my needs
 A slave to his growing sickness
 Of sexual power and ugly greed
 He set up many couplings
 And said what I had to do
 A plaything for his minions
 Hirelings for me and you
 Red Riding Hood in the forest
 Where boys were really wolves
 Watching from a lofty vantage point
 Where you had to be my mule
 Such was my desire to
 Be popular and loved
 I couldn't tell a single soul
 His fist in a velvet glove
 There was one who was no fawner
 For whom I ached for most (cont'd)



Ella at two years old

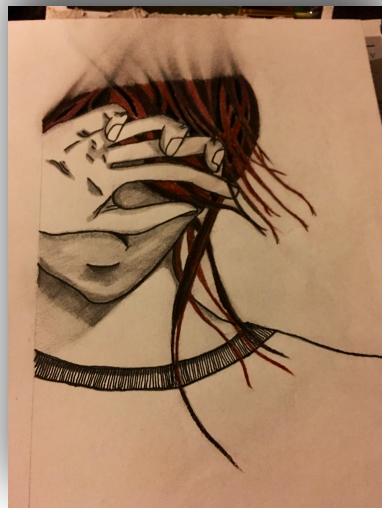
But the price to pay was lurid
 And would render me a ghost
 Eventually I reached an age
 Where freedom came more easily
 Too late by then to see the wrong
 My world so dark and sleazy
 My mother-hate began to fade
 Replaced by careful wording
 Dodging toads and desperate vultures
 My stomach contents curdling
 He moved on then to all my friends
 Demanding I repay the favour
 So one by one he ticked them off
 My friendships a sour flavour
 My mother-hate even more diminished
 Since my brother left our home
 I was all that she had left
 Since the greasy pimp had flown
 I have to wonder if she'd have loved me
 every bit as she loved him
 That my life would have been different
 And not drenched in sexual sin

By Ella

A COLLABORATIVE ESSAY:

Meredith Maran (2016) interviewed twenty memoirists on why they expose themselves (and others) in the name of literature. The voices of some landmark memoirists including New York Times bestselling authors Cheryl Strayed, Sue Monk Kidd and Pat Conroy shared their insights on what motivated their writing of things personal. I read the book fervently to find myself upon the page. I found myself behind the eye balls of other writers, sitting on their shoulders typing out the same words. There was a thread of commonality amongst all of us. Ismael Beah, a child soldier from Sierra Leone, wrote to '*prove his existence*'. This struck a chord with me. I grew up in a white middle class family fuelled by narcissism. I was meant to be 'seen at all times' but not heard. The 'seeing' part was the worst.

No Look No See



It was inside of the 'seeing' I was exposed to many forms of sexual abuse and incest both inside my immediate family and spreading like a virus out into the extended family and friends that infiltrated my world. I think I always knew I *had* to write my way through this, to reach a place where I could both understand my upbringing and finally be heard. I wrote to find the redemption in it all. And the beauty to be found inside the purpose, meaning and value of my life.

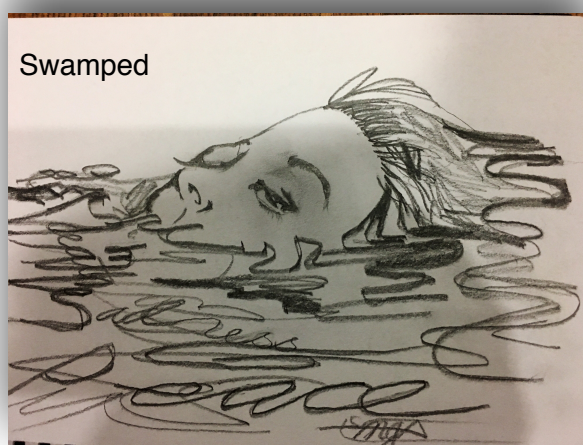
It was in reading some of Pat Conroy's words that I felt we had looked deep inside the same mirror. He eludes to this feeling I have. That I am not yet finished with this material from my

past, that some of it despite making it onto the page, still clings to the membrane lining my brain, still leaking into my thoughts.

“I’ve come to realise that I still carry the bruised freight of that childhood everyday....It weighs me down and fills me with dread....I’ve got to try to make sense of it one last time, a final circling of the block, a reckoning.” (pg 38) And like me, who wrote most of this whilst my parents were still very much alive...Pat Conroy states:

“I’d always wanted to tell the full story of my family, but I had to wait until my parents died” (pg 40)

Reading Mary Karr’s book on *The Art of Memoir* (2015) gave me some much needed comfort. Especially her description of how everyone who dives deep enough into their own memories, drowns a little. My past seemed bogged down in a fathomless swamp where I had to kick hard to stay afloat.



The following passage in her preface elucidates the gruelling mission writing my personal narrative was:

“In some ways, writing a memoir is knocking yourself out with your own fist, if it’s done right....Places and times you may have ached after wind up erecting themselves around you as you work.” And further:

“Nobody I know who’s ever written a great one (memoir) described it as nothing less than a major-league shit eating contest. Any time you try to collapse the distance between your delusions about the past and what actually happened, there’s suffering involved.” (Preface pg xx)

Ella always worried that if she wrote about everything that happened to her, no-one would believe her. I think this worked against her in a variety of ways.

Lily has a point here. There are things, big grotesque things, that I couldn’t bring myself to write about. I think the weight of my personal carnage stopped me from writing initially. Only in deciding I didn’t have an obligation to reveal everything or anything in particular about myself, did I feel more freedom to start putting black words on white paper. As I read more memoirs I saw how effective it was to focus on the main themes of your trauma, rather than to give a whole lot of examples of the same thing that happened a hundred different ways. I realised too, that one of my motivational drivers was to expose people to certain realities, like how gender, race and politics are often what keeps these realities ‘hidden’ from public view and thus a wider discussion. I knew I couldn’t have been the only one to have experienced the trauma that I had, however locating a memoir, particularly in my own country was a futile task. Literary examples of mental illness as a result of father-daughter incest were rare and those I did read from overseas were not my stories. Whilst heart wrenching in their own way, they did not reflect the exact father-daughter relationship I had experienced. Neither did they echo a particular New Zealand context (and therefore the particularly New Zealand kind of bigotry and wilful forgetting).

Virginia Woolf, (as cited in Bradshaw 2009) as long ago as 1912, lamented the fact that literature lacked a voice about illness in her essay “*On Being Ill*”.

“Considering how common illness is, how tremendous the spiritual change that brings, how astonishing, when lights of health go down, the undiscovered countries that are then disclosed, what wastes and deserts of the soul a slight attack of influenza brings to light....it becomes strange indeed that illness has not taken its place with love, battle, and jealousy among the prime themes of literature.”(pp 101)

Not a lot appears to have changed. This fuelled my motivation to reach out to others who had suffered in similar ways. To shine a light on a way forward through their own darkness and perpetual confusion. There is so much to tell about how ‘possessed’ I am by my past, however no literary or academic vessel could contain it. What I will say is the writing I have done has helped me explain myself to my ‘selves’ because I am more than just Ella.

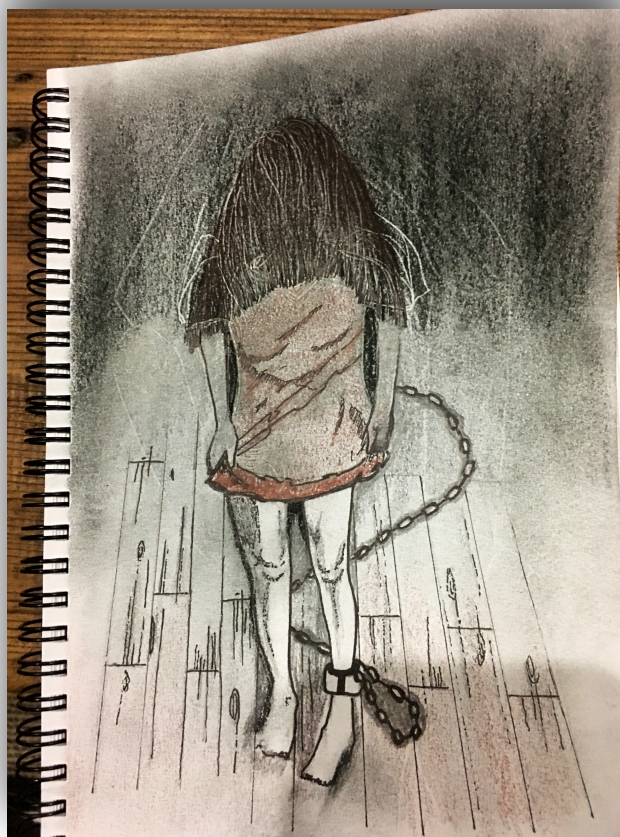
David Chanoff (as cited in Nash 2004) had to say about this conundrum we all face when writing our personal narratives.

“The voice coming at you contains a world. It’s not merely telling you things, it’s telling them in a way that reveals the habits of mind and quality of feeling that give your subject his uniqueness. That’s all in there, wrapped in an idiolect of vocabulary and syntax and inflection. Getting the key to it gives you access to a mind....Capture the personal voice and you’ve gone a long way to capturing the person.” (pg 23)

I’m still finding my voice among many. Nash (2004) concludes that we tell stories that describe precious moments of social and self awareness that are “all too rare in more conventional forms of research” (pg 24).

Ella’s feeling of being ‘possessed’ by her past was something even I couldn’t help her with. And I tried. I tried bloody hard. I can’t recall a moment in her life when she has not been completely enmeshed; tethered to her past in a way she became haunted, both night and day. She only ever had nightmares, forever threatening, keeping her shackled to the very forces that traumatised her so extensively. I think this next piece of Ella’s art illustrates this well:

EASY GAME



Schwab (2010) talks about the transmission of violent legacies in a way that elucidates their prominence over other historical information or stories of personal involvement. What she calls 'haunting legacies' are those events we all find so difficult to capture on the page. Such violence holds a relentless grip on our repressed memories which are deemed 'unspeakable'. Violence is unable to be processed in the way non-violent memories are, so they all but remain unreachable in the deep recesses of our psyche. For Ella, the violence was such that she couldn't hide its invasive nature and believes its effects have been passed down to her children. This thing she's written has been all about her kids. Her primary motivation being, to pass down a more enlightened and personally healthy legacy to them. In the latter part of *"It Would Kill Your Mother"* when Ella became a mother herself, reflects this more precisely:

'The saddest realisation to have come out of my experiences, is hard to admit, let alone own up to. There were many times I was not available to my children emotionally. I was busy trying to find a good reason to wake up in the morning and face another day of precarious fragility. I must have been quite robotic in the way I met their needs. I retain an undermining sense of guilt that I exposed my children to men who hurt them, physically and emotionally. I seemed unable to extract myself from these situations soon enough to save them. Not until the emotional and physical paralysis I experienced, began to melt away, allowing me to see a way out that was safe for all of us. My scars became their scars by a natural process of osmosis'. (pg 335)

I am always looking at my adult children for signs that my past has damaged them in some way. I feel the burden of responsibility for them because I basically raised them on my own when my parents weren't dragging them away from me. I cope with this along with the unrelenting fragmented flashbacks that permeate my everyday reality. I cope by forever running listening to upbeat music to raise my spirits and keep my depression under control. I cope by ridding my garden of the weeds (sexual abuse) that threaten to choke my beautiful plantings (hope) and I cope by creating images and prose to rid my mind of its traumatic intrusions. I live in a state of 'constant irrationality' because nothing has ever made sense to me. And more often than I would like to admit, I cope by becoming some-one else altogether. The following passage from *"It Would Kill Your Mother"* illustrates these dissociative periods well, as does the artwork below:

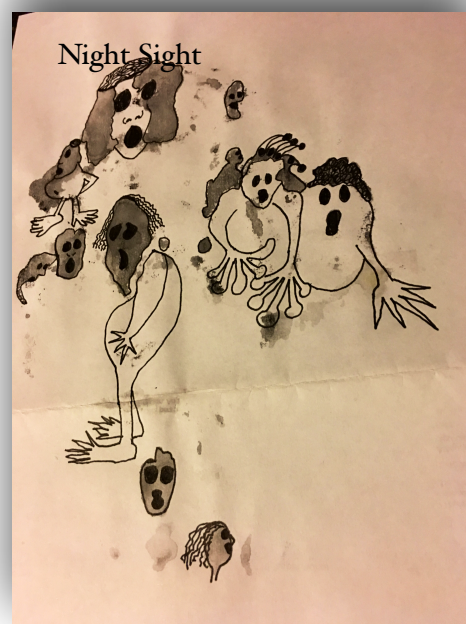
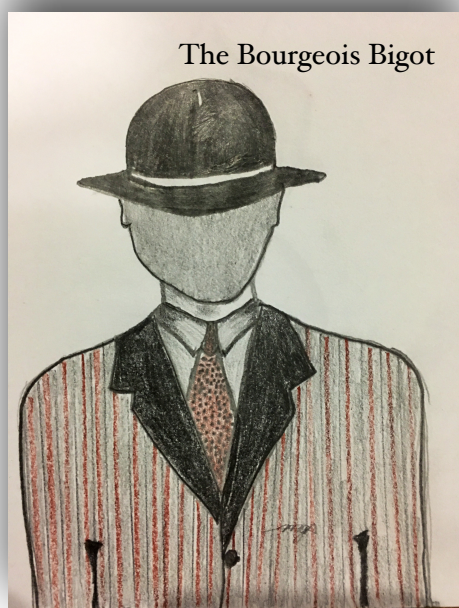
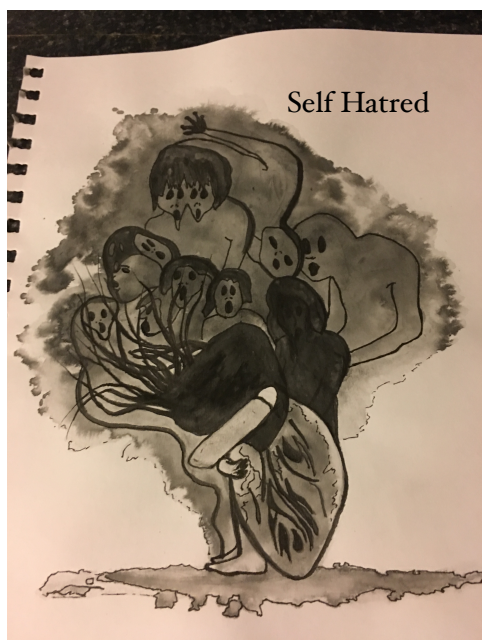
'Sometimes waiting for my father 'to finish me off' took on a life of its own. One minute I'd become a part of the lacy curtains wafting in the breeze of my open bedroom window. Next I'd be floating outside morphing into a beautiful bird, swirling high above the ground until people became little dots that could be any-

thing other than what they were. I'd swoop downwards, tipping the leaves of trees as I flew past, out towards the ocean where my real family lived. Our flock rising up high, then when the timing was right, diving into the waves to catch fish unaware. Fish were easily seen when the sun shone right through a wave.' (pg 69)



I think the 'waiting for my father' was like a deep psychological torture. These more individual violent acts were followed by horrendous physical abuse after having to 'go and pick my own stick' with which he used to beat me 'to within an inch of my life' as he would so aptly put it.

Schwab (2010) likens these particular acts of violence to 'liminal spaces' that bring us to the bottomless depth of human misery. She calls it a form of 'soul murder' that escapes psychic time. Real time doesn't heal this depth of human suffering in the way it heals other types of wounding. Felman and Laub (1992) highlights how our artistic endeavours 'bear witness to' much of what can never fully be grasped. It seems timely to share more of my art with you now:



It's timely to talk a bit about the 'having of' Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I think there's a distinction that needs to be made. Firstly, pathological labels can both validate *and* undermine an individual's experience of daily living with these mental disorders....and they *are* literally dis-orders. The out-dated definition for these types of disorders fell into that terrible

category of having ‘multiple personalities’. It’s a little better defined these days and I much prefer the more enlightened name it has been given in the Holy Mental Bible. I came across a wonderful article in my research by Doctors’ Warwick Middleton and Jeremy Butler. Dr Middleton delivered a plenary paper titled *“Always Daddy’s Little Girl: Abuse During Adulthood”* in 2011. To be honest, he’s become my guru because he highlights with an academic rigour, how the issue of incest and especially those women who continue to be abused into their adult years, has all but been ignored in the writing of others whose place, one would think, would be mandatory to acknowledge and encourage further research into this complex disorder. Middleton describes how it begins with *“chronic inescapable trauma in childhood, where in order to not be overwhelmed or to minimise the affect or realisation associated with traumas, frequently involving a major attachment figure, the child dissociates, i.e., there is a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity and perception”* (pg 5). He goes on to explain that when this trauma *“predates a stable sense of identity the dissociated memory, affect and functioning becomes organised around compartments separated by varying degrees of amnesia”* (pg 6).

So what we can’t handle, our mind shoves into our unconsciousness or it is ‘taken over’ by a part of us that is kept separate from the rest of our consciousness. Dr Middleton calls them ‘compartmentalised identity states’ which can take on various roles like a ‘compliant victim’ and other states that aren’t consciously aware of the abuse, who are thus able to maintain a life-saving relationship with the abuser. What used to be known as Multiple Personality Disorder is now formally known as Dissociative Identity Disorder. Not everyone who suffers trauma develops this disorder, however according to Dr’s Middleton and Butler’s study “the percentage of patients with DID who have experienced ongoing incestuous abuse (usually involving a father) during adult years is at least as high as that reported in their study i.e 13% or around one in eight.” (pg 3) Further, Russell (1986) undertook a community study on reported incestuous childhood abuse and found that “DID occurs particularly where childhood abuse started early, and has been severe and prolonged” (pg 4).

I found it particularly chilling to find that clinically, it is very rare to find dissociative patients with incestuous histories extending into adulthood who *don’t* meet the criteria for DID. The following quote by Middleton is alarming:

“In order to be still alive (and not chronically psychotic) these patients will have needed to dissociate to the extent that a diagnosis of DID defines. Of course such individuals are at particular high risk of suicide (and I expect, of being murdered or dying by misadventure)” (pg 4).

(Ella found typing that part somewhat troubling. In order for a diagnosis of Complex PTSD to be made, other mental disorders apart from DID are present in the individual. Ella has the full whammy but does not wish to

Haywood (2012) writes about liminality, art therapy and childhood sexual abuse, primarily in relation to its relevancy for art therapy in the healing of traumatic sexual experiences. She describes liminality as being *“about borderlands and thresholds and the edges of things”*. (pg 80)

I feel when I dissociate Ella occupies a liminal space ‘of refuge’ whilst Lily takes on a more concrete space in that it is effectively ‘she’ who wears the brunt of my parents wrath. Turner (1967) “suggests that the person in the ‘betwixt and between’ liminal phase of a rite of passage becomes ‘structurally invisible’ unseen by the rest of the social group”. (pg 81) Indeed, the ‘switching of bodies’ and ‘personas’ went unnoticed by my parents. My husband, having ‘seen and heard’ the very different qualities of Ella and Lily is testament that the dissociation I undergo is visible to the highly trained observer.

Haywood (2012) makes the point that because sexuality is at the centre of the transition from childhood to becoming an adult, early childhood sexual abuse places children in a space of ambiguity, a paradoxical state of ‘not-child-not-adult’. She validates my lived experience when she states; *“I think the ambiguous, ‘betwixt and between’ aspect of liminality is really useful in understanding how abused children feel about themselves and how others respond to them.”* (pg 82)

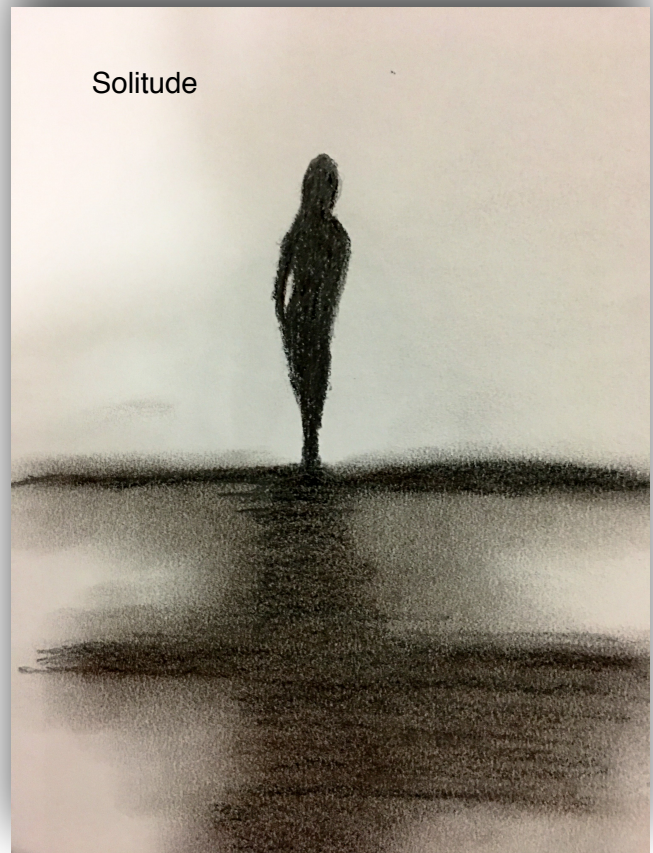
This space of moving from a place of ‘knowing to the unknown’ which mirrors many of my dissociative episodes is illustrated well in the following passage from *‘It Would Kill Your Mother’*.

‘On and on it went, a body swapping game, remembered for its protection, only now revealing its precarious position in permitting these things to happen, while she lay lifeless, wordless, my NO! floating away with me, out of reach, out of mind, no voice box between us, her silence, my silence, rolling with the punches until ‘it’ was over, then forgotten, locked away, until now.’ (pg 304)

I believe much of what traumatises us when we are very young, cannot be fully retrieved....not in the same way one can retrieve a lost file on a computer. What we remember are bits of ‘happy’ amongst a lot of hurt, a thought that inspired this poem and art work:

The Happy and Hurt

I feel pulled to gather the pieces
 Crouching, I sift through the dirt
 Eyes weep in dust-filled spaces
 making piles of 'happy' and 'hurt'
 this snuffling smells of my ancestors
 a pattern entrenched in their groins
 these men who prey on innocence
 laying bare - little girls loins
 they bury the horrors so deeply
 the forgetting that they are there
 decades pass like the dream-time
 until something stirs in the air
 nostrils switch, eyes squinting
 ears pinned back, for the hearing
 spirits drop clues inside the nightmares
 then the mind enters a clearing
 hints and hunches from the 'hurt' pile
 begins to build up a picture
 'I know' rises up from the gallows
 lines joining dots of the clincher



I also experienced very uplifting almost spiritual freedom in another liminal space at my beloved Doubtless Bay. Here, the beach and it's surrounding landscape and weather patterns provided me a place that Alan, Lew, Hall and Williams (2008) refers to as a 'retreat from the turmoil of life in order to establish contact with one's inner self. In solitude the symbolic act of meditation is about entering a liminal space for the purpose of 'setting aside time to attend to the hearth of your inner life'. (pg 354).

The following passage in *"It Would Kill Your Mother"* illustrates one of these welcomed escapes to the beach:

'No place was better than the beach. Space enough for me to be myself without getting into trouble. A teenagers' paradise where talking out loud to oneself is welcomed by the tropical winds of the east coast, warm on tender skin, blowing the cobwebs of a carefully woven but tangled web of deceit, away, along with the sting it left pulsing sharply in my heart, already softening now, from the cold hard stone it'd become the previous night.' (pg 85)

I was *more* here, more myself. The ground beneath my feet, whilst sand, felt one hell of a lot more stable than anywhere else in my world. Here, I could pretend to be anyone I wanted to. What I loved the most was the ability to disappear amongst the sand hills knowing at that particular place and time, no-one in the whole wide world knew where I was. That feeling, that liminal space of breaching a threshold into pure solitude, was pure magic. I felt at one with the landscape here and everything it offered. I think the land spoke to me too so while this space shaped me, I also felt I added something to this spiritual place that had been missing for centuries.

For Ella I think the art work she disappears into is far more healing than the writing. While all the shitty stuff she writes empties out the dark recesses of her mind (that part she has direct access to), she is still deeply fucked over by the process of re-remembering the crap she was/is engulfed by. I watch her as she paints, draws, sculpts with clay and I'm with her when, like a magpie to things shiny, she obsessively collects rocks, feathers, skeleton leaves and bits of ocean weathered glass. She looks happy and hopeful, her mind flooded with creative juices ready to spill. It's another way she can communicate more freely with the world. Her art forms the words that have not yet been invented to express her pain. They speak of the 'unsayable' stuff so many of us carry around on our shoulders. It reminds me of something Cheryl Strayed said when in conversation with Maria Popova.

"When we see a painting that we love, we're not standing there thinking about the artist who made it - we're thinking about how that painting makes us feel, what reflects to us about our lives and the world. And so I love when love exceeds...its creator, which is the goal of art...; when it becomes not about the person who created it, but about the people who consume it...this is especially true in memoir, where you're writing about yourself - it has this horrible, false reputation of being the narcissistic form, which I think is pure bullshit. No good memoir is really about the writer - and yet it's deeply about the writer."

Sometimes Ella will see a piece of art and copy aspects of it, adding a bit of herself into it. Like this illuminating piece below:

In My Minds Eye

By Ella



In terms of genre what is this thing I've written? I've really tried to be honest. To write as closely to the truth as I possibly could. It's an open ended answer I think. I don't really want to pin it down yet. There are definitely elements of memoir in that I write about a fairly well defined period of my life and there is a sense of sequentiality there. It also has elements of auto-fiction, especially in the childhood sections where I bounce and bash my way out of the frying pan into the fire which is how auto-fiction really works. Its like my pen is writing through the traumatic experience of the world whereas memoir is much more sequential than that. Each passage is there to suit a certain narrative role and then it folds away and another one takes on that role. Auto-

fiction is way more chaotic. Auto-fiction is both literary and artistic and is, according to Hugueny-Leger (2017)

“ a form that not only resorts to the features of both auto-biography (coincidence between author, narrator and character, use of real events and experiences) and fiction (choice of sequences and re-ordering in a non-linear order, inclusion of dreams, invention of episodes), but also often merges artistic mediums and narrative threads, creating fragmented texts”(pg.5)

As such, these texts sit on the boundaries between both genres. With the exception of ‘inventing episodes’ I think my work resembles a lot of these qualities. There is a thread moving through my work where it feels like I’m establishing a kind of living embodiment of ‘writing my way to truth’ as opposed to the more formal auto-biographical and memoirist modes of taking truth/facts and writing them into narratives. So maybe it has the essence of auto-fiction being a fictional metaphorical self-translation. It is something I am not yet ready to categorise. My intention was to have it read like a novel and I think it does in terms of character development. I’ve got characters in all sorts of guises.

Psychologist Carl Jung developed a theoretical approach towards the human psyche which introduced the idea of the collective unconscious containing a number of psychic structures he called archetypes. He had the notion that our minds used these ‘universal images’ in such a way that led to distinct psychological behaviours. These attributes of an individual’s personality, he saw as being ‘inherited’ from the individual’s past lives. In the video file Academy of Ideas (2017) Jung explained it:

“from the unconscious there emanate determining influences which, independently of tradition, guarantee in every single individual a similarity and even a sameness of experience, and also of the way it is represented imaginatively.”

Further, Erich Neumann(2014) a student of Jung, added:

“The archetypal structural elements of the psyche are psychic organs upon whose functioning the well-being of the individual depends, and whose injury has disastrous consequences”. (pg xv)

From my own research into archetypes in light of my thesis, I have a mother who exhibits characteristics of the Good/Bad mother who also possesses elements of the Monster archetype, in that she inspires dread and embodies evil, is hostile towards others and represented impossible barriers towards her child, (Ella). I see Ella as having the attributes of many archetypes including The Innocent, who is primarily child-like, believing that if she tries hard

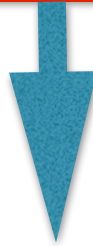
enough, everything will turn out fine. I believe Ella also has elements of the Care-giver archetype who is moved by compassion, generosity and selflessness to help others, especially her parents. Lily, I believe is a mixture of psychic elements as well. First and foremost she emanates characteristics of the Warrior Hero who is tough and brave, overcoming difficult times and tends to see others as enemies. Lily too, has elements of the Rebel as she embodies a lot of Ella's repressed rage about situations that no longer serve Ella and encourages her to see these disempowering structures that lie in her path. As for Ella's father, he is the male equivalent of the mother in many ways, however he is also very much the Ruler and the Villain, capable of cruelty and maliciousness. While the father has very human qualities outside of the family home, he is devoted to the crime of sexual abuse, incest and adultery, bringing into the home a negative force, a honed cunningness and a degree of madness which seems embedded in his narcissism and sadism. The villainous father figure is also represented in a brother, a partner and also an institution like the whole hospital system that dehumanises the main antagonist, Ella. Look at this scene from "*It Would Kill Your Mother*":

My Doctor burst into the room, demanding to know what stage I was at and what pain relief had been given. In the absence of such detail he ordered I be taken through to a delivery theatre where he found the bulge was stuck, heart rate dipping dangerously low, threatening its life, including my own. Foul language was filling up the room, its pitch close to boiling point, tin kidney dishes sent flying across the room twanging loudly above the delirious noise of a woman on her way out of sanity. This woman, this foul mouthed wench, kicking and screaming, was me, as the scissors cut into my skin, all the way from my vagina down to my anus without any local anaesthetic. All in a frantic attempt to remove the stubborn but failing bulge. Suction cap, forceps, pulling, dragging and suddenly, over the top of all this excruciating intervention, I heard my Doctor yelling, "PUSH, PUSH NOW, OR THIS BABY WON'T SURVIVE... TOO LATE FOR A CAESAR... SO PUSH... NOW." (pg 114-115)

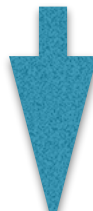
This happened in the delivery suite and the doctor is kind of moronic, unable to get to a point where he realises Ella is actually a human being, that feels pain, that has emotional needs. It's almost as if he's unable to see he's not looking at an x-ray. It's just another manifestation of the Villainous/Ruler father figure.

It's unusual to have both a monstrous father and a monstrous mother figure in the same text. Sometimes you get it in novels but then they are created from the imagined spaces in the author's mind. Of course, monstrous father figures are a lot less common which is, as much as anything, a nod to the patriarchal world we live in. People are less likely to reveal the monstrous father figure in the psyche, even now. It speaks to the thematic core of my work which lies beneath my narrative and speaks to the wider, less visible issues of marginalisation, prejudice, bigotry, bullying, the passive-aggressive male dominance that littered my life. There's also the 'gas-lighting' going on, where the parents are trying to make the child feel there is much more wrong with them than there really is. And that serves their own needs and purposes. I think the chapter titled "*The Looney Bin*" (pp 79 to 86) where the parents try to have Ella committed to the Mental Health ward encompasses so much of what life was like on a daily basis. But getting back to where I think my work sits in terms of genre, it's complicated. It's definitely a hybrid and I think the model on the following page illustrates my thinking around my 'genre-straddling' thesis.

AUT MCW
CREATIVE THESIS 2017
A MODEL FOR
IT WOULD KILL YOUR MOTHER
By: Michele Alexander



NARRATION



AUTO-BIOGRAPHY
an auto ethnographic
approach to history

FICTION

TESTIMONY

MEMOIR - a
personally resonant
approach to the
rendering of history

AUTO-FICTION where
elements of cognition and
aesthetics feature in the
text reminiscent of a
fictional metaphorical
self-translation

My work straddles these three main genres so is a hybrid of sorts, a creative non-fiction piece I am yet to settle on. There comes a point when you realise after ten drafts that something needs to connect everything together. I struggled so much with structure, reluctant to follow along behind everyone else who'd ever written about their traumatic childhood. It was something my husband said to me shortly after my mother died. He's a dissociation-spotter. He asked who I thought was writing a particular piece I'd just read out to him. It suddenly struck me that Lily had taken over in those weeks after my mother's death because I was so angry with her about a lot of things. I liked the way the piece sounded. Lily's voice was reflective of a universal truth and that's what I think my writing needed, that raw authenticity that could bring to the reader another layer of understanding. A universal level of understanding of all the shit that was spilling out on to the page. It wasn't until I introduced Lily into the narrative as a character that I felt everything connected, like a bridge to Ella and a bridge back to Lily. It completed the loop where I was flicking back and forth and unable, as Ella, to go into the places only Lily could write about. Prior to her motherfucker point of view coming through the narrative, it felt like there was a veil of opaqueness over my work, preventing me from going deeper into the truest form of truth I knew was there. Lily became a literary device if you like, a sideways glance giving the reader a more intense experience of our lives.

Two very influential texts in my research were Lidia Yuknavitch's *The Small Backs Of Children* (2015) and her earlier memoir *The Chronology of Water* (2010). Her writing gave me the strength and motivation to 'cut to the chase' and get closer to that part of me that knew so much more. Lidia Yuknavitch reminds me so much of Lily with the way she doesn't give a fuck about what anyone thinks. I think Ella takes on more of Lily's vernacular as she develops more of a sense of self agency through the therapy and course she attends. Lidia is so brave and courageous and her writing is so raw yet exquisitely beautiful simultaneously. I think one of the major things she inspired me to do was to talk about the secret holding....to know that what I was writing needed to be revealed. I knew I was ratting on my own family and my own culture but Lidia's work booted some dumb-arsed loyalty to my abusers, aside. Suddenly I could see how important it was to talk about what had been decades of women like me, in little old New Zealand, keeping their white middle class mouths shut. A culture where keeping up appearances was more important than telling the truth. More important than anything like personal safety, your mental health, the list goes on. All this incest happened in my family because the bloody women who married into the pedophile family from up north were told to keep their mouths shut. They were also told to protect their daughters, but I don't think my Mother listened to that part. It happened because it

just wasn't talked about....it was such a bizarre space where sex with peers was disgusting but incest was okay! I'm a sixties child so when the Rolf Harris case hit the media, something hit me in the guts. He was the same age as my father and as I watched the case unfold I just felt my skin crawl with a knowing of what I had to do.

I think this poem I wrote is quite timely now:

Borderline

*Hanging out beyond the borders
solivagant on an awkward aisle
safer boundaries I am blind to
covered over by white mens lie
A life that doesn't feel my own
commonality I've never seen
Just a puppet fit for purpose
No shower can leave me clean
His mind mutilates my cortex
my thought-full-ness drenched in shame
He pulls my strings and I follow
leaving me the one to blame
Confronting him, he was ninety
that smarmy smirk that creased his face
"So why did you not report me?
It's in your head that's just a case."*



The ritual of 'bed-time' when I was young was nothing short of a mission steeped in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. I lay traps for the 'dark man' meticulously placing biscuit wrappers under items of clothing, pins and needles sticking up out of rubbish I collected to litter my floor. Closing the blinds a major undertaking, ensuring no gaps remained where an 'evil eye' could peep in through the windows. I'd lie in wait, ears on full throttle listening for his presence, beads of sweat along my hairline, soon becoming drenched such was my unmoving, over-heated attention to anything at all that may let *him* know

I was there. This next poem was inspired by these thousands of nights and is titled ***“You’d Best Forget”***

*I know that he is out there
 crouching inside the shadows
 a peeper and a boys name
 black, his outline mellow
 His eyes can burn through windows
 his breath a pungent stench
 he waits until I am sleeping
 when my body’s no longer clenched
 When he comes it is a nightmare
 Only bits I can re-call
 I ‘know’ because he hurts me
 and my pjs are on the floor
 I try to tell my mummy
 about the monster in daddy’s pants
 she is angry for the extra washing
 she rolls me over and I am spanked
 My brother has a leaky bladder
 at night he always wets
 I am blamed for trying to copy
 my mummy’s love I do not get
 So I suffer the dark mans visits
 wake up early to hide the mess
 I tell my daddy about him coming
 and he says “you’d best forget”
 So I decide to leave my body
 when the dark man comes to play
 and I do what daddy tells me
 and say the dark man has gone away*



Ella at five years of age.

The poem speaks to the power a child's mind can have over her circumstances, turning a three year old into a highly trained and fastidious sleuth in order to catch that which evades her. It is no match for the power of her white middle class upbringing however, which through its many hidden practices, holds a firm foundational position which allows its leaders to rule over their kingdom in whatever way they choose.

Ella's marginalised position within the family is reinforced by the fact she is the only girl, of less worth to the empire than the sons who are raised in their fathers likeness. I think there is a real awareness within Ella of the cultural context which permeates and colours her world. She baulks at her parents very confrontational racist views as if to have their blatant prejudices bounce off her. The following passage, one of many, shows how she feels about her world of white privilege and the inequalities she feels very acutely.

'Walking back to my class, I felt lighter, no longer dragging the trench coat of dread. I thought about Sarah's parents refusing to make a statement. I realised my parents, while far from perfect, were still prepared to stand up for what they believed in, even if most of that, I disagreed with. It seemed the middle class aren't only seen as posh, but powerful too, sometimes for the right reasons. What my parents didn't know yet, was that the leader of this 'gang' came from their own ancestry, a fact I'd quietly delight in revealing to them'.
(pg 97)

Ella's world was very controlled by her parents, well defined and firmly entrenched inside cultural beliefs that are well illustrated by the following passage:

"I went out of my way to forge some friendships with some like-minded souls. A shy beautiful Maori girl Anne from art class who like me, struggled with her abilities to be creative, and two of the girls from my form class who always sat on their own. Sarah and Lucy, one Scottish, the other Chinese. It did me the world of good, taking my mind off my own vulnerability hiding under the surface, focussing me on the lives of others rather than my own. With the holidays soon upon us, I even invited one of my new friends up to the beach, something I seldom did and I was soon reminded of why. I'd wanted to ask Anne, but when I was asked the mandatory Stanford screening test of approval she failed on every count. Sarah passed through but not Lucy who was Chinese".(pg 92)

Margo Jefferson, former theatre critic at The New York Times and a Professor at Eugene Lang College The School for Liberal Arts, is interviewed about cultural memoirs by Lenarduzzi (2017). I feel there's definitely cause to see my work in this way. Jefferson says, 'she began to think of memoir as a form in which the very particular individual is dramatised, theatricalised, and fictionalised in some way - as we all know, memory is a form of fictionalising. A very particular self is at the centre, which

is always seen not just against the background of, but intimately shaped by and responding to, this much larger cultural context which is historical, aesthetic, political, social....it is all of those things.'

Bakhtin, Holquist and Emerson (1986) observed "that when one looks inside himself, he looks into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another" (pg 287) Ella disliked a lot of what she saw in her parents eyes when they were speaking from their privileged and racist positioning.

I can see how everything from the language spoken and behaviours demonstrated by my parents, were imbued deep inside my sense of self, that was, very fragile and fragmented. But I was always one to champion the underdog and believed I held a decent moral ground quite divorced from that of my parents.

Yuknavitch (2017) too, exposes the cultural and political landscapes she is surrounded by in a way that challenges the status quo. She was ruminating on living a swimmers life when she wrote:

"I've come to understand late in my life...that the ways in which women protect the egos of men is another way we give ourselves away. These miles I've swum - I'm no longer willing to give them away to a man who cannot feel secure without the adoration of a woman holding her breath so that he might float." (pg 8)

I feel that way about my running and wonder if all the kilometres I've covered over the past fifty years was about 'running away' from a lot of things. Self responsibility and a sense of social responsibility were not the least of them. My zealous reading of Lidia's work leached under my skin and set up 'home'. I am now no longer comfortable with conforming to pre-ordained structures or rules - especially when it comes to my writing. Its like she gives permission to tell it how it is having been kept silent for so long. Her writing seems to legitimise the way I have started to think about the 'where to' from here. Like Lidia, I feel the stories that need to be written from a traumatic place need to be new, edgy and yes, god forbid, chaotic! Trauma is complicated so why not write it how it is?

Lidia Yuknavitch's workshops on Corporal Writing strike me as a bold move away from the world of academia with it's specific outcomes, it's rigid curriculum. Yuknavitch proposes that this form of writing highlights how much of our traumatised histories have settled into our bodies and taken up residence. She's trying to access a model that is new, a different way of storytelling than what we see in mainstream contemporary literary works. We may not remember the facts as they unfolded but I believe Yuknavitch is attempting to find these traces of trauma at the corporal level, that which still resides within our bones. I'm so excited about this eventuality. In an interview with Suleika Jaoud (2016) she says of her own work, being a 'misfits journey' rather than the traditional hero's journey. This concept is so relatable to what my journey has felt like.

It still does. Further, she does not believe in romanticising a story simply for the benefit of telling a good story that will sell to a particular cultural market. Yuknavitch also acknowledges much of what the research into ‘writing the traumatic’ espouses, that shaping a narrative that is full of chaos is impossible. In Koven (2013) Lidia makes the following remarks that echo the commonly held belief that writing trauma lies beyond current linguistic capabilities and is also echoed in many works of life writing scholarship on trauma including Cathy Caruth (1996); Haaken (1998); Gilmore(2017) and Kaplan(2005) to name a few.

“that no rocks, no swimmer, no words are up to the task”. (pp 179)

In an interview with Porochista Khapour (2017) Lidia shares her ideas that sparked her writing *The Book of Joan*. She talks about being ‘possessed’ with the Joan of Arc figure and what inspired her latest novel. She remarks: “I was thinking about celebrity culture and climate change and capitalism, and also about diversity and how we treat one another and the construct of whiteness and colonial impulses.” (pp 140)

Yuknavitch contends that feminists, scholars and artists alike have been making waves about all these influences upon their lives since the beginning of time. Further into the interview she states:

“When you have to build your identity, for a variety of reasons, from the pieces of wreckages, you can never enter what society calls the “legitimate environment” and feel whole.....I’ve been thinking lately about how some of us have identities that are crumbling at the edges, but those edges hold whatever the shape is. They define shape.....I did interviews with people I know. I asked them:....If I say ‘misfit’ do you identify with that word at all? and they would tell little stories, and I had a suspicion that if we put all the stories together, it would make a bigger story about how we’re not nothing, and what’s useful about us, and maybe people even need us because we have a willingness to be and do and say things that other people don’t.”

Giving a nod to one of the earliest writers of auto-fiction, Marguerite Duras, Yuknavitch (2004) shares one of her quotes that sheds a light on the liminal space I felt I dipped my toes into with my own writing of *It Would Kill Your Mother*.

“Since the basis of my work is the very relationship between words and pictures, between the visible and the expressible, I am not bound to the forms ordinarily available to a novelist or a filmmaker. I am in that liminal space most closely related to desire and the unconscious. It is here, at this edge, desire and death reassert creative possibility away from society’s death grip.” (pp 75)

Lily speaks to this place in between desire and death, that liminal space I seemed to hang out in. Here’s what she says:

'As for Ella and the personality she had prior to the head injury? She's just a shell of what she used to be. That's the part that really sticks in my throat. Watching what was left of her trying to chase down her former self. She only got as far as the outer edge of her shadow.' (pg 175)

So where to now with my writing? I'm nowhere near finished with this Thesis, despite twelve odd drafts and a complete re-write when I introduced Lily into it. I'm mindful that I didn't rise up through the ranks of the literary world with a degree in English. In fact, I almost flunked School Certificate English! So I realise I am still learning the 'craft' of writing as I go along. I'm a novice with motivation by the truck load. I guess I want to see my authorial voice become much more defined and crisp so someone could pick up my work and recognise it as mine straight away.

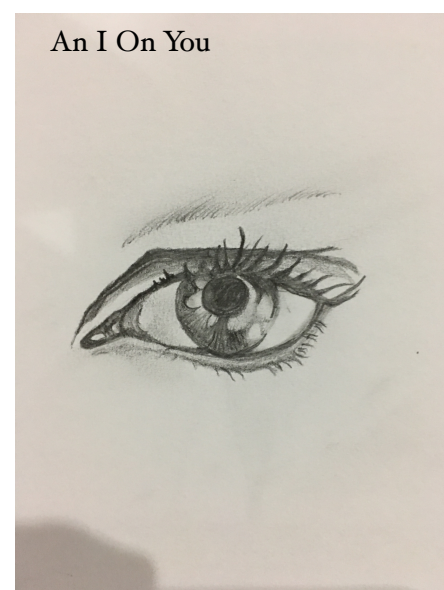
I don't want to stop writing because I feel I have something important to say, to women, to the vulnerable, the marginalised, the broken down crazy as head-cases out there like me, and the world. This genre-straddling piece of personal history I've written is my way of fighting back against the wilful sadistic ignorance that seems to be everywhere. Watching the white bigots gather up like vultures in the wake of President Trumps arrival on to the political stage, takes me straight back to those dark places in my heart and soul as a child. We have to keep on talking about it, challenging it, pushing back on the force of it. Women all over the world are enslaved by their own inheritance, so the more we write for them, the greater the chance they will hear us and follow our blazing trail. It feels like history and its vast shadow still has the ability to block out all the light in the world, and it's here, in the present. Many places I wrote from felt like bogs or swamps where I'd collapse from it's enduring vacuum that sucked me under. Daylight seemed fogged up by mind-full confusion where boundaries were porous and derelict. But I also felt in places, like Doubtless Bay in the Far North, that I possessed a fighter's spirit who longed to be free.

One of my motivations for approaching "*Why I Chose Not To*" in the way I have was due to the paucity of literature on illness and particularly on trauma that causes mental illness, and how one can possibly write mental illness. Such literature I found remarkably impoverished especially around father-daughter incest, a cause Dr Middleton from Australia is championing. I am aware that I could be criticised for not deepening my theoretical focus, giving more attention to the numerous works in the fields of auto/biography studies, life writing and of course trauma studies. While I have not included the vast amounts of scholarly works such as those by Caruth (1996) whose focus is on our unclaimed experiences, Gilmore (2001) who writes on the limits of auto-

biography; Kaplan (2005) on Trauma culture; LaCapra (2001) on writing historical trauma and Haaken (1998) who reminds us of the perils of looking back and our use of memory, I have read these works with fervour and great interest. It was in my reading vast quantities of research that I came across a journal article reviewing trauma narratives in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. I found it a little disheartening to find the authors, O’Kearney and Perrot (2006) found evidence for PTSD-related narrative fragmentation inconclusive and showed a paucity of specific self-referential content.

I think we have to get better at what we do when writing about our personal and very traumatic experiences that shape who we become. Getting better at what we do possibly means busting through pre-conceived ideas and boundaries that define the various genres that are utilised to write about ones life. Getting better is about being more ME and doing what I feel best serves my writing, my understanding of my ‘selves’ and being unashamed to show just how mentally dysfunctional I can be. This document itself contests to the fact that I raised very early on, in that I never quite know who I am at any given point in time. Maybe the very authorship of this creative companion, that blurs the boundaries amongst Ella, Lily and myself, and does not rely on the works of others to demonstrate its’ effectiveness, is how one writes mental illness? It’s the most authentic I can be. I can’t *not* have DID when I write because it is a fixed ‘dis-order’ of my personality. That is why there is art where words failed me. That’s why I staggered through lines of half-arsed poetry because my mental decline throughout the pain of writing my Thesis needed to be represented somehow, on the page where only blankness glared back at me. I hope my readers have a lot of patience and forgive me for not entering into a more scholarly, pre-subscribed way of formatting this exegetical work in order to show a better mastery of critical knowledge related to my personal reflections that fill these pages. The scope and limitations of this component at Masters level, in my humble opinion, is better suited to show casing my own work and those who most inspired me. That is Why I Chose Not To presents a multifaceted reflection that I had control over. Something I had very little of throughout my life.

I have a story to tell. A story worthy of your time.



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