

2HB

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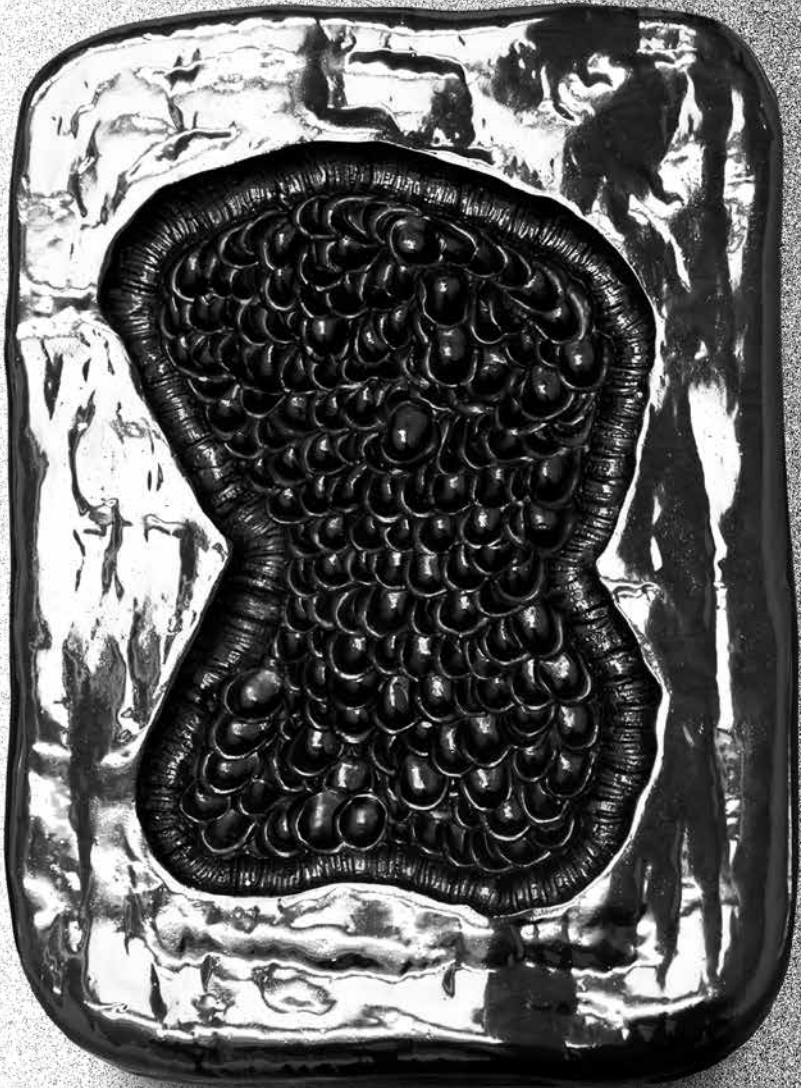
**Three Stories**

MARIA FUSCO

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**Mordentotardia or In the End, as a Worm**

SIÔN PARKINSON



Mordentotardia  
*or*  
In the End, as a Worm



[ *a melodrama* ]

## INTRO

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

— *Vilém Flusser, 1987*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MORDENTOTARDIA ..... a worm.

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



A black magnetic-tape shimmer curtain forms our  
backdrop.

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

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

[ *music to express deep submergence* ]

And so  
thus —

## TERRIFIC OVERTURE

[ *sung tonelessly but with gusto* ]

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

I LOOKED UPON SPACE  
AND BEHELD

[ *spoken dryly* ]

(ONE)

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

Luminous ejecta

*Luciferin*

*Luciferase* —

a lying fluid,

dissolved in water

and absorbed by memory.

I looked upon space and beheld  
fluids carrying messages:

QUOTE —

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

— UNQUOTE

Still,

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

And what truths a cloud of ink might hide?

I looked upon space and beheld MORDENTOTARDIA.

MORDENTOTARDIA  
( rhyming ‘megalocardia’... )

OSEDAX

[ *spoken dryly* ]

I looked upon space and beheld  
a Right Whale;

a True Whale;

a Good and Just and Upright Whale;

a Righteous Right Whale;

a perfectly wonderful, fine and

genuine

Whale,

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

[ *makes a twister with her finger* ]

spiraling like a screw askew in wood,

a precipitous new force upon her body, then,

towards a plane never before touched,

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

until skulled stone-lickers came in coils and

superfluities of slime

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

and boneworms

followed after with red thread radicles reaching

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



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



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

‘Gloom, gloom,’

how the world must appear to those enwombed...



I looked upon space and beheld

(TWO)

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

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

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

True!

True!

A whale’s false bite:

squishy  
squashy

bony

Bartley sailor boy

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

[ *knowingly* ]

Untrue!

Untrue!

## PEWTER

[ *spoken dryly* ]

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

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

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

And that light,  
that light,  
that like

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

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



They spoke in Spanish Voices,  
aphorisms,  
depth itself:

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

#### THE HOLE : THE GROUNDLESS GROUND

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

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

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

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

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



#### EN' TRACTE

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



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

[ *spoken dryly* ]

I looked upon space and beheld

MORDENTOTARDIA,

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

MORDENTOTARDIA:

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

a worm

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

slucking —

of the world.



LOVEBITE

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

O,

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

a vent

through which the world unwinds.

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

MORDENTOTARDIA:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*A burning ring of fire.*

*A two-faced band ablaze.*

*A two-faced band ablaze.*

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

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

An accident.

An ornament.

A dint on the world:

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

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

And open-mouthed she cries  
into the triple night:

'I know all about loneliness,  
'I know all about loneliness,  
'I know all about loneliness,'

she sings.

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



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

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

O  
O  
O  
O  
O  
O,  
O,

way, way down in the

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

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

MORDENTOTARDIA

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

HIM.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[...]

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