

Sickness in the Sacristy

Megan Rudden



Aquatic Needs

Shona Macnaughton pissed herself in front of an art gallery in Dundee. I was in the audience but didn't follow her megaphone invitation outside because I wasn't sure how long the next part of the performance was going to take, and I also needed to pee. If I had known car park incontinence was encouraged, I might have seen it for myself. A body that oscillates between leakage and flow is not the same watery as neoliberal rhetoric, where fluidity means circulation of capital; Margaret Thatcher's liquid manifesto. Artistic labour as performance, mothers and artists work for free. They laugh under pressure, underpaid, postpartum bodies let warm aspiration dribble down their left leg. The crotch of the costume turns a darker grey. Ask the audience: what is collective care? After classless individualism, toilet training and Tony Blair.

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Automatic Writing

listen to the water another piece of paper bob thats not who its about
feed the pink redness the water is red spilling blood another waterfall
its not for them its her shes standing there no bathing save her she
might fall in or another story listen you can hear her voice breathing
red water voice breathing dont joke about something like that its another
ghost that doesnt mean ghost where the question is where back to the farm
a lake or a pond outside the door why chickens so many of them I dont
know how long have you met him she drowned on the farm in the water need
water pink flesh let her out let it out the bloodletting from under the
water who can you be now look its the same as before you remember her is
always her why the farm I dont know the farm chickens dont eat

Baptism

When I was five weeks old I was baptised wearing a long white gown to suggest cleanliness, purity, virtue, holiness. I screamed inconsolably as the water was poured over my head, my face turned pink as I gasped for air between cries. It is common practice in the Catholic church for children to be baptised as infants. Augustine doctrine assumes that all people are born with original sin and therefore must undergo what is called a 'minor' exorcism during the baptismal ceremony, regardless of age. The water represents cleansing sin and bad spirits. After the baptism, a party took place in the church hall, but I spent most of the evening squeezed between the grubby pink tiles of a toilet cubicle, latched onto my mother's nipple. While my dress was symbolic, hers was impractical, or not designed for breastfeeding. She retreated to the privacy of the cubicle for fear of spilled flesh or showing too much of it. The process of leaking and feeding between mother and child must be contained and hidden, despite the unsanitary conditions.

Bess

Harry Houdini died on the 31st of October because a student punched him in the stomach. Before his death, Houdini agreed that if communication beyond the grave was possible, he would contact his wife Bess with a codeword. Every year on this day she would hold a séance in hope of contact, but after a decade of attempting to reach her dead husband, Bess gave up saying 'ten years is long enough to wait for any man.'

Bible Cake

Google search: most read book in the world, realise I've forgotten the bible is a book. I can only understand it as pure symbol now, the object-meaning has transcended the text. I think again of the bible cake, a text-made-object, replicated in edible sponge. Something once spiritual, that has lost all meaning; doctrine mocked by kitsch icing. Hundreds of small dusty bibles lie abandoned in bedside drawers of empty hotel rooms, masculine power absorbed by neglect and reproduction. A few days after my first communion I try to eat what is left of the cake, the sponge is rich and heavy, the icing sickly sweet. My body rejects his word; I throw up again.

Cells

Before, I had thought of the more obvious spacial analogy, like cages or prisons, containment or a kind of trapping. But standing beneath them I become aware of my body, and another meaning. Things that were solid and immobile become a conglomeration of tiny units, nucleus, plasma, and membrane all interconnected with one another. The edges of things seem more permeable, objects less fixed. In the moments before sleep, I get the feeling that I am becoming larger then smaller in a kind of circular wave, but this time my eyes are open. Experiencing something simultaneously huge and microscopic, or trying to make sense of both at the same time, is disorientating. The cages are interdependent, like parts of a larger, living organism that is this building. I want to anchor my feet to the floor, but then I realise I am already attached or weighed down by gravity at least. The boundaries keep the viewer out, but the Cells are not prisons, they are protective beings, working to keep their insides safe, the same capacity of bodies to defend against invasion, but I need a less war-like metaphor. These insides are spider legs, cold wire, bulbous shapes, words stitched into something softer, fabric beds not slept in, wooden chairs, glass balls that are eyes. In the absence of a figure, this was the closest I could imagine to seeing pain, as if the ungraspable concept was materialising here, in steel and latex and cushion. Something beyond language was reflecting every possible heartache and sadness, in a way that understood me more completely than I could know myself. I burst into tears. Embarrassed by such an overtly public display of emotion, I retreated to the bathroom, where I stifled gasped breath as salty fluid leaked from my eyes. I sat alone on the closed lid of the toilet, sobbing. Louise Bourgeois once said science is truth and art is pleasure, but in the end science has the last word. I think she meant death, as I can't imagine a more articulated truth.

Cubicle

We are told the leakages of our bodies must only flow in private. Tears and vomit and breastmilk and urine and blood, confined to the solitude of the toilet cubicle, a private cell in an otherwise public place.

Sometimes we invite others in with us, a friend or drunken stranger, those we trust or desire. This claustrophobic rectangle becomes a place of unsanitary bonding, where leaking bodies are no longer fearful.

The Davenport Brothers

When Harry Houdini was performing in Australia, he went to visit the grave of William Davenport. It was in such disrepair that he ordered for the stonework to be fixed immediately, and new flowers brought to the cemetery. William's brother Ira was so touched by this sentiment that he taught Houdini the 'Davenport Rope-tie;' a trick that had converted hundreds to Spiritualism under false pretences. It was used by the brothers to escape during their infamous spirit cabinet materialisations, and the secret of the rope-tie was guarded so closely that not even Ira's children knew his method. It was said the Davenport Brothers were visited by the ghost of John King, who informed them of the exact dimensions to build their cabinet so that it might enable materialisation; seven feet high, six feet wide, two feet deep and about eighteen inches off the floor. The brothers were magicians, who never claimed psychic powers, yet they outraged many members of the public. In England, 'cabinet smashing' had become a popular sport and pieces of wood falsely claiming to be parts of the Davenport cabinet were sold on the black market, for five times what it cost to make the original cabinet.

Ectoplasm

Part of the human body, external to it, unstable, sometimes soft, occasionally hard, from time to time vaporous, variable in volume, visible only in semi-darkness, presents to the sense of touch a humid and slippery sensation, leaving in the hand a residue, without definite taste, in other respects fleeting and transient, of uncertain temperature, fond of music.

Excess

I left the church, but I still crave the drama, the excess, the guilt, maybe even the sickness.

Flesh Fluid

Being a body of water / as water / in water, is understanding that the self is not singular. Ingestion is commonality, drinking is becoming other(s). If we are mostly made of water then why divide fluid from flesh; a woman isn't a womb or a vessel or something contained. We can still talk about material conditions without reducing ideas to physical parts or discursive ideology, there are still viscous bodies that must be accounted for within this sea. Ask how instead of what. Watery bellies jiggle flushed with fluid or pregnancy, breast milk toxicity in which we are all implicated, planetary intimacy. Anthropomorphic secrets flushed down the toilet. But to say watery flesh does not mean to sacrifice boundaries entirely, flow can discriminate, rivers still choose their own sea. More like becoming jelly-fish-flesh, semi-fluid, gel-like, half-melted membrane simultaneously sponging into each other, falling apart and coming together.

Flesh Jelly

Teeth slide into this liminal substance, not liquid, or solid, it is a suspension, content in its transitional state. The jelly is usually pink or red, and I think that's because of my insides and the notion that what I am biting into is actually flesh or maybe I can't separate language from the body. I encourage others to eat my flesh-jelly. The substance I serve to them might be transparent or panna-cotta-opaque, depending on how much I've decided to give up. I present it to them on a patterned plate dressed up in whipped cream, cherries disguise my flaws as something more appealing. I urge them to feast on my sacrifice, to cannibalise me, to spit out the stone and tie the stem in a knot using only the dexterity of their tongue.

Florence

Florence Cook was only fifteen years old when she first performed using a spirit cabinet. Like the other mediums who achieved star status within the séance circuit, Florence was young and beautiful, but she was also the first to fully materialise a spirit body. Katie King, the ghost who chose her as home and conduit was also something of a celebrity herself, daughter of the infamous John King. John made ghostly appearances at séances across the country, later informing the Davenport brothers of the exact dimensions to build their cabinet so that it might enable materialisation. Katie aroused a great deal of attention, including the patronage of Mr Blackburn, who funded Florence's career. Coming from a poorer family, the appearance of Katie offered Florence not only fame but social mobility, passage from the public sphere to the coveted private séance room.

Fruit of the Dead

Persephone's hunger was responsible for the seasons we now call autumn and winter. By trick or temptation, she could not resist the fruit of the dead, and ate the small pink seeds that trapped her in the underworld. In some versions of christianity, it was the pomegranate that expelled Eve from the garden of Eden, not an apple. Those flesh seeds trapped her in a different kind of hell, somewhere more mundane and less fantastic, to suffer the human condition; embarrassment rather than eternal hellfire. The tragedy of Eve and Persephone was that they knew too much about the boundaries of material conditions. While Persephone is gone, her mother Demeter mourns so deeply her loss that she neglects her duties to mother the earth. The soil becomes barren and fruitless. Before swallowed pills and thigh injections and rods inserted into arms and coils pushed inside vaginas, there was the pomegranate. It was thought that by eating a few of its seeds one could alchemise a pause in fertility. Knowledge of early contraceptives; sterility potions or maleficia, depending on your politics, were passed on through generations of Weavers. Ingested seeds mythologise the body in hope of wisdom and autonomy.

Gods and Sacrifice

Eileen said Jesus couldn't have been a woman because a girl on a cross is a dead animal in a trap and that's not enough suffering to mean anything. Men don't even really have a body until it bleeds, and when it does each seeping wound is noted down as a matter of cultural importance. Whole religions are formed around the man who suffered, they say Gods and Sacrifice. Her pain is expected, to be kept in private and ignored; nothing spectacular to see here. A girl on a cross isn't a contradiction, she is mundane and inevitable and won't stop complaining about the holes in her hands. A girl on a cross is on fire, but this time there's thousands of crosses and it's probably her fault otherwise why would there be so many of them up there, burning? She won't be remembered as a martyr, because living without money isn't faith or a choice that she made. She was only trying to survive without making any grand gestures, or being set on fire.

Gossip

Gossip which once meant companion in childbirth, not limited to the midwife, became a term to describe friendship between women. As the social position of women began to deteriorate, female friendships were subject to suspicion and the word gained negative connotation. By the end of the century, women could be punished by law for any act of perceived disobedience. Those of the lower classes heard to be 'nagging' or 'riotous' faced the punishment of an iron cage. This torture contraption, first used in Scotland, was placed over her head, preventing the wearer from eating or drinking for days at a time. A metal bit thrust into the mouth which would tear her tongue if she attempted to speak. Silvia Federici said that historically women have been seen as the weavers of memory. They keep alive the voices of the past and the histories of their community, telling stories to future generations in order to create a collective sense of identity and profound cohesion. The weavers of memory pass on medical remedies, knowledge of contraception and abortion, ways to heal a broken heart, and an empirical understanding of bodies and human behaviour. To label such wisdom as 'gossip' was an attempt to belittle and invalidate this form of knowledge production.

Hair Dye

My great gran came back from the dead to tell me she liked the new colour of my hair and I said "thanks but don't you have anything better to do?" I always thought the most banal part of dying was that it happened to us all but maybe eternity is boring and sometimes it's worth the trip back to see if anyone has had a haircut. My great gran used to bleach her hair in a bucket so maybe she knows a lot about dying or was just trying to make conversation.

Helen

Helen Duncan was the last woman in Scotland to be charged under the Witchcraft Act. Helen was a medium, famous for her dramatic displays of ectoplasm production during séances. The charge against her was supposed treason, it was said she had communicated with the ghost of a dead ship captain before the military had any knowledge of his battleship sinking. To think this treasonous might suggest the authorities believed in her ability to contact the dead. During the séance, Helen would take her place within the spirit cabinet where she would enter a trance state, groaning and convulsing, as her entire body vibrated towards the climactic primordial oozing, when white ectoplasm was thrown up from her insides, spilling out of her mouth. There were very few recorded male ectoplasm-excreters, it was mainly women mediums of the lower classes who became conduits for this watery spirit substance. In the few cases where men produced ectoplasm, it would materialise in the form of webs or shed skin, translucent body casts of hands and feet. More commonly seen, was the erotically charged performance of a woman squeezing ectoplasm from every bodily orifice; mouth, nose, nipple, ear and vagina all became sites of violent leakage. To behave as such in public would not have been acceptable for a woman of any social standing, yet the séance was one of the few places it was possible to transgress the strict boundaries of gender norms and class expectations. The confines of the cabinet make it possible for her to perform as leaking body and necromancer.

Holy Water

On the windowsill of my childhood bedroom there was a bottle shaped like Mary, with a tiny imitation blue crown screwed onto the top to keep the water inside her plastic body. A priest had blessed the contents, making it Holy, and when I was younger I believed this divine interception gave regular tap water magical properties. The priest commands the water to become less viscous and more transparent, the temperature drops below freezing but the fluid remains molten ice, pure liquid. It always smells like hypocrisy and nothing. Once converted, he uses the holy fluid to cross the foreheads of the sick, while on celebration days he will sprinkle the entire congregation with watery promise. Small pools of it are kept at the door, to bless unclean parishioners before they enter the church, and children are submerged in baths of it on first entry to their father's house. They scream because the water is ice and smells like nothing and they are too young to be held accountable for sin.

Human Resources

A few weeks later I sat in front of my boss and another stoney woman in a room designed for interrogation. I was asking for a reduction in hours, so stressed I began to cry, this time no jumpers to hide behind. As my boss left the room, the other woman, who seemed neither human nor resourceful, began to write, and I wondered if she was noting down my tears. The room was silent except for the scribbling of her biro on a lined paper clipboard, as the salty water leaked from my eyes into the minutes of the meeting. Later, it would collect in a puddle at the bottom of a stale grey filing cabinet, and without tasting the water for salt, people will wonder if there is a leak. I was dismissed from my job with the consolatory offer of two counselling sessions. I refused and walked out the of store, shedding what was left of my skin for the birds to eat.

Jean

Arthur Conan Doyle was born in Edinburgh to a strict Catholic family. After the death of his son, Arthur became a devout Spiritualist, who spent his life trying to convince his good friend Harry Houdini that communication beyond the veil was possible. Houdini was open to ghostly contact, yet was never convinced of any proof. Arthur's wife Jean was a medium, who on one occasion held a private seance for Houdini in the hope of contacting his mother. The spirit wrote to him through Jean's hand, but this still was not enough to convince the famous magician, who said his mother would not have been capable of such grammatically perfect written English. Although he wanted to believe, Houdini embarked on a tirade to publicly expose false mediumship, and during one such exposure he asked the medium Margery Crandon to enter a large cabinet which left only her legs and head sticking out. A vocal supporter of Margery, Arthur was outraged by Houdini's behaviour and their relationship never fully recovered.

Jelly

This jelly is not gelatin either, something more like agar, red algae, sweet seaweed congealed. Not the pure pig protein of blood boiled ligaments, tendons and skin, less cruelty more artifice. The animal body is more than throw away bones, soup flavour (extracted), lip collagen (injected). Replicate the jelly-texture without violence, ask the sea politely if it can spare the red greenery. Teeth sink. More of a slice than a bite, slivers divided in saliva glide across the sides of incisors. To think of flesh as something so synthetic and separate, from others and animal bodies; a slug belly, conjunctivitis goo, albino axolotl gills, vodka jelly shots. All the same pink slime.

Katie King

Katie King was the first ghost to materialise in Britain. Her conduit Florence, had caught the attention of respected scientist William Crookes who, not fully satisfied with elemental discovery, had decided to devote his studies to the paranormal. He and Florence developed a very close relationship as he studied her through a series of test séances, becoming increasingly convinced of the sincerity of her mediumship. Yet the more science and its enforcers intervened in the realm of the dead, the more violent the testing criteria became for the living. Her body would be bound with tape or silk, thread pulled tight around her neck, wrists and body. These sharp lines of disbelief cut into her, squeezing bulges of more fattened flesh where knots were tied, then sealed with hot wax that would sometimes drip beyond the rope and boil the resistance of her skin. Soon, heavier leather straps, padlocks and chains were employed in this nonconsensual bondage. The strain on these adolescent bodies and minds was considerable. One such test involved Florence completing an electric circuit, so that any movement would register on a galvanometer, while her friend Mary Rosina had thread laced through the pierced hole in her ear with a needle. Bound, penetrated, blindfolded, dripping in wax and sweat and fear that her talents might fail her, the girl is pushed into the cabinet. Four wooden boards and darkness are all that is left to protect her. After several years of studying Florence, photographing Katie, and raising the eyebrows of his peers regarding his intimate association with young mediums, William returned to more orthodox scientific research in an attempt to keep his reputation intact. Unaffected by his brief foray into Spiritualism, William went on to invent the Crookes tube, later used by J. J. Thomson in the discovery of the electron, and became president of the Royal Society. Florence died alone and in poverty at the age of forty-eight.

Lentil Soup Beyond the Veil

Downstairs in the cinema room, Elsa Richardson is ruminating over séances and watery food. Spiritualism appealed to the radical working classes because of its non-hierarchical structure, and often aligned itself with progressive social action. It was thought that ingesting meat could effect a medium's ability to connect with the dead and so many Spiritualists became vegetarian, understanding that bodies hold on to trauma. Elsa is talking about mediums who perform elaborate necromancy rituals at sensual dinner parties, a wild distortion of upper-middle-class dining. I think this sounds romantic and empathise with them; I too am fed up of men telling me to eat their flesh and so offer mine as a disruption to hegemony. I throw up the eucharist, expelling it from my body as etiquette gives way to blasphemy and ghostly intervention. This is a space in which the most female of duties are enchanted, erotic, subversive.

Marie Rose

Virgin mother made French (mum says you can't call me that) red sauce mixed with mayonnaise (no it's ketchup here) catholic contortions, ruined complexions, saintly rejections (of men) as if red sauce could imply a multitude of things (drunk wine, cut roses, confessed sins) red violence, pink redemption (blood is sicker) prayer beads fetishise her suffering over and over (and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over) again, fleshy soup, prawn sauce, the Mary Rose sunk pink.

Margery

Scientific America offered a cash prize of \$2500 to the first person who could materialise a spirit body or produce a psychic photograph under test conditions. Margery Crandon was one of the competition finalists, before Harry Houdini locked her in a cabinet. Margery was a beautiful woman who often performed spirit communication without any clothes on. She would leap into the lap of her sitters and on occasion was known to produce an erotic display of ectoplasm by secreting white spirit substance from her vagina. During another séance, she produced a lump of wax with the impression of a spirit fingerprint. Margery never received the prize; she failed to perform while trapped in Houdini's cabinet and the ghostly thumbprint, that was much too solid, actually belonged to her dentist.

Masked Magician

LOVELY ASSISTANT "MAGICALLY" SLICED AND DICED!

SEXY ASSISTANT MYSTERIOUSLY VANISHES!

MAGICIAN'S ASSISTANT GETS HER REVENGE IN SHOCKING SWITCHEROO!

VOLUPTUOUS VIXEN VANISHES!

THE SECRET OF THE GIRL CRUSHED IN BOX ILLUSION REVEALED!

MAGICIAN STRETCHES HIS ASSISTANT LIKE A RUBBER BAND!

SHE'S CAGED, SHE'S SAWED AND SHE SURVIVES!

Materialisation

To fully materialise a spirit requires a great amount of energy. It is necessary for the materialised figure to display an exact balance of transparency and flesh to be believed; a ghost is a more permeable body because it knows different boundaries and so to materialise, in this sense, is more about performing and less about becoming solid. While the apparition appears beyond the confines of the cabinet, another more permanent body lies limp inside it, slumped in a trance state, she is protected by darkness. The wooden cubicle provides sanctuary from negative spirits and drunk spectators, curious hands that hope to squeeze human flesh and expose her as a fraud. For them it is pure entertainment, and like a cheap night at the theatre, tomatoes rest at their feet anticipating failure. If the one-woman-show does not provide enough excitement in the form of ectoplasm excretion, the tomatoes will become projectile aids to heckles that always demand more. Some materialising mediums only provide private sittings, from the safety of their own living rooms. To their clientele, the home is symbolic of family, truth and inherent morality, and these more affluent mediums often did not need to charge attendees to make a living. Soon those operating within domestic circles were seen as the epitome of spiritual excellence. In rejecting the sale of their psychic bodies, these women gained a respectability the lower class mediums literally could not afford. The public medium had to sacrifice her private body in order to live, leaving her exposed to all kinds of physical and psychological attack. The spirit cabinet was the only remaining layer of protection for the public mediums, and even then this flimsy cubicle was often susceptible to invasion. Alongside the development of materialisation, a new phenomenon of 'spirit grabbing' was taking hold amongst the spiritualist audience, where sitters would attempt to seize the spirit body or break entry into the cabinet, hoping to expose fraudulence and trickery in the name of truth.

Memory Weavers

The Weavers of Memory were belittled and silenced and humiliated and burnt alive by The Men Who Ruled Things. The Weavers of Memory refused to collapse under the weight of endless spawning, they lived alone, made friends with animals and only took from the Earth what they needed to survive. They got what they wanted without work. The Men Who Ruled Things knew that magic could not coexist with the rhythms of industry, and feared so deeply the power of memory they sought to eradicate it entirely. Violence was the main economic tool used to enforce a new world order, in which there was no place for Memory Weavers who could not be controlled. The new order is rational, bureaucratic and secular, concerned only with the accumulation of capital. It was a disenchanted landscape. The Men Who Ruled Things were free to exploit the people and the land as they wish, while poorer bodies are turned over to the state, sold as flesh cogs divided by age and colour and gender. In the new mechanical world, the poor bodies are stripped of their magic, useful only as labour power or to produce new workers, they become entirely dispensable to the state.

Mesmerism

Doctor Franz Mesmer said that all living things are connected by a magnetic fluid, that permeates the universe. Illness and disease are caused by blockage, the cure is to release the flow. To become an energy field or, for a change in polarity, his patients ingest magnetised water. Gargled magnetite coats the contents of their mouth, forming a grey paste that tastes like liquid rust of old coins bathed in rain, or a burst lip sucked through the gap in your teeth. Magnet drinking is less invasive than being suckled by leeches or letting blood, whether by surgical incision or animal feeding, they result in the same light-headed blood loss. To take in is more effective than giving out. Yet to mesmerise is to hypnotise and fluid is only a tool, the real magic is in the suggestion.

Milk

Homogenised: fluid forced through a small gap at high velocity for a more viscous consistency. No layer of cream to peel off the top. Impossible digestion in favour of whiter white and thicker flavour, creamy molecules enter the bloodstream directly. Almost liquid, fat emulsion like unmixed wall paint or intravenous injection, globules stirred into a dishonest drink with longer shelf-life. The gluttonous opposite of lactation, stolen milk made worse.

Morwenna

Downstairs, Morwenna Kearsley is also thinking about jelly and summoning. This time gelatin photographs and Lee Miller, a ghost that must deliver herself without language. The exhibition text I am handed on the way in to the gallery is another ingredient to be consumed alongside the jelly-material. It is an integral part of the meal, delicious and haunted and slippery; Lee Miller in Hitler's bathtub. Like Morwenna, I don't mean the jelly-object as metaphor, I mean materiality. The jelly-object is too clean, too contained, too overly concerned with impressing others, too aspirational, too kitsch, too American Dream, too defined edges, too wholesome, too inoffensive, too moulded, too frivolous, too sure of its place on the table (centrepiece) jelly-as-material like ectoplasm, like mucous, like slime, like thicker than water, like almost flow, like hair gel, like coagulated, like transitional, like stasis, like congealed, like blood, like insatiable, like desire, like malleable, like liminal, like saliva collected in your mouth from talking for too long without swallowing –

[swallow]

Oak Tree

By placing a glass of water on a shelf just above head height and calling it An Oak Tree, the artist attempts to perform transubstantiation through naming, using language to transfer emotional or intellectual values onto material objects. To understand the glass object as tree-substance requires a degree of faith, and it is faith that enables the miraculous. Not everyone entertains the art doctrine and some may dismiss works of art and their artists entirely. The great believers, however, may claim to see things that don't seem to be there at all. Like a cinema or a theatre or a book, the gallery is a place where suspension of disbelief is encouraged. To look through the portal that a painting is, means to view another kind of reality and to question its relationship to our own. When we enter, we allow for new experiences or feelings to arise, made possible by faith or material.

Penny Dainties

In almost every message I have received from beyond the veil, the medium mentions sweets. They hear the colour of rustling papers, see through a transparent tub, taste old confectionary memories that no one sells anymore. My great gran always had a jar full of sweets in her kitchen she would offer to us. My dad, who wasn't a dentist, is obsessed with teeth, meaning excessively sugary things were forbidden fruits of my childhood. This only intensified my longing for the contents of the plastic jar, and might be why I remember these sweet encounters so vividly. The flavour of things rarely eaten is usually more, and as an adult I am grateful for the low dentist bills.

The Phantom Bride

Carter's stage assistant, who is also his wife, begins the illusion by taking a seat on a wooden chair attached to ascending ropes. The chair is lifted several feet above the ground, and upon his command she vanishes into thin air, as the chair falls from beneath where her body should be. He originally called this trick 'The Magical Divorce,' but his wife didn't find this so funny and suggested 'The Phantom Bride' instead. Many classic magic tricks involved women disappearing, women turning into animals, women being sawn in half. The latter became one of the most iconic routines of all time, and was invented at the height of the Suffragette movement. The assistant will squeeze herself into claustrophobic compartments, sliding her limbs into corners to avoid being cut into even smaller pieces. These women must take up as little space as possible; to be small is encouraged, to stay thin is necessity. Bess Houdini was barely five feet tall and never weighed more than ninety pounds. Her dismembered body is then reconstructed as the magician releases her from his box, power made visible by her wholeness. Despite all this movement, she must appear neither breathless nor perspiring, but emerge full of wondrous gratitude for her captor. She steps out of the box, sparkling with astonishment as real as the diamonds that adorn her skin tight leotard. Her work must always appear to be his, and so the magician throws up his hands to welcome his applause. It always arrives in abundance once the woman is gone / sawn in half / turned into something else and less human.

The Physicians

In the new order, medicine became a monopolised profession. Medicinal remedies were stolen from common knowledge, adapted, renamed and sold back to the poor bodies as chemical products they could once get from the Earth for free. The Weavers held vast knowledge of healing plants and herbal remedies, but real magic is never profitable and so the Weavers were made to forget. The Physicians, intent on separating the mind from the body and the body from knowledge, did not allow the Weavers to partake in the new mechanical healing because they knew too much about the truth of bodies. In areas like midwifery, that was the sole domain of Weavers, this detachment was particularly dangerous. While the Rulers built disenchantment factories all over the cities to alienate men from the products of their labour and the bodies of others, the Physicians worked to alienate the Weavers from their own bodies and the products of these. Early alienation made assimilation into the workforce a more fluid procedure. The Physicians scaled other bodies like rabid explorers, labelling the most intimate parts they discovered after themselves. The names of dead men penetrate female flesh like eternal flag poles; Fallopius, Gräfenberg, Bartholin, Douglas.

Pink

Upstairs we sat at a large table, that might have been round but might have had edges and Francis McKee told us he liked sports writing. Maybe the last true purple prose he said. I'm more interested in pink poetry but not like drunk-tank pink, I mean decadence. Cheap magenta pink snatched from the pallid cheeks of aristocracy, reproduced with more intensity and in a deeper hue. Hot pink that refuses to stay in its place, a burlesque dress swirling on a dimly lit basement stage. An erotic descent into anarchy. Baby pink that is infantilising, repulsive and gorgeous, childlike in its sophistication. Bubblegum pink ingested in small squares, chewed up and spat out as a vulgar habit, only to stick to someone else's shoe. Pepto-bismol poetry that smells like mint, full of synesthesia and disappointment.

Piss Christ

Piss Christ aroused one of the biggest scandals in contemporary art. The photographic work depicted a crucifix floating in a liquid mixture of urine and blood. An incredibly serene image, the bloody urine elevated to something of the sublime, an illuminated cross floating in golden womblike stasis. Andres Serrano, a self-identified christian, defended the work saying that he was only trying to emphasis the human reality of the crucifixion, to remind us how christ would have not only bled to death, but shit himself and pissed himself too. This body horror was too much for the Sunday churchgoers, who wanted their Jesus depicted as sacred and transcendental, or at least replicated in tiny plastic and sold in the Vatican gift shop. Not the flesh and piss and blood that Andres forced them to consider. To base an entire religion around the body that leaks, only to cry sacrilege at the sight of leakage, or the hypocrisy of the church.

Primark

Near the end of my shift in Primark, a woman told me I was a witch. "Do you think this is right for my niece - I don't know, pink or red?" Her question snapped me out of the strip-light trance of folding endless clothes for minimum wage. She stood closer, holding a small t-shirt up to her chest. I replied in the smiling way of a trained customer servant; "both are nice, how about the pink?" Compliment first, then suggestion. She was half way through a remark about horizontal stripes when she stopped her sentence abruptly, turning her whole body towards me. "You have to wake up," she said, her eyes turned crystal as they stared into my soul or the back of my head, wherever she was looking it was not a surface. I stuttered a question-marked "sorry" as she continued to tell me the things I once knew but had now forgotten. "When you were a child, you could speak to them. You heard their voices so clearly, but as you grew up the adults told you these friends were imaginary, so you began to forget. To fall asleep. You are a witch, but not awake. That woman standing behind your shoulder, she is trying to speak to you. You can hear her, I know you can, but you have to listen with that thing that is not your ear." I didn't need to turn round to know that no one was standing behind me but I felt it, which is more than seeing. She held her hands over mine, not quite touching, as if my knuckles were radiating some kind of magnetic field or too hot heat. "Oh and stop picking the skin from your hands, you're leaving a trace of you everywhere," she gestured as if tearing skin like a loaf of bread, to be tossed for birds to eat. Then, recounting more of my childhood like the memory was hers, she stopped just as abruptly as before. "Yes, I think she would like the pink," her eyes changed as she held up the shirt once more before lowering it into her mesh basket. She mouthed thank you, her eyes bright again. She was gone, and I was still standing beside the pile of tiny striped t-shirts, but now I wasn't sure why. I ran into the stock cupboard to cry between rails of cellophane wrapped jumpers. Once I was sure my face wouldn't betray my feelings, I went back onto the shop floor, but the place looked too different.

Protect Me From What I Want

After visiting her exhibition in London, I got one of the 'truisms' tattooed on the back of my leg. Language seeps past the surface, or another type of wound. The body responds to the invasion of tattoo ink by sending white blood cells, called macrophages (meaning big-eater in Greek), to try to swallow the ink and extract foreign particles from the wound. But the macrophage acid has no effect on the pigment and so the big-eaters can only contain the attack by making a reluctant home in the dermis, stomachs full of inky bile. New tattoos leak as they heal, while old ink is a meal regurgitated and eaten several times over, as each macrophage dies and lets go of their perpetual dinner, new cells arrive to eat up the leftovers.

Psychic Silverware

The Amazing Randi and Uri Geller went to war over bent spoons. Uri claimed to be able to bend silverware using only his mind. Randi said this was nothing more than a trick, a simple exercise in sleight of hand. Being a magician, Randi had no issue with deception as long as it was honest. He detested any claims to psychic powers, calling Uri a fraud and a conman. He even succeeded in exposing his spoon-bending trickery live on television, but it made no difference; Uri Geller was a telekinetic household name. Because a magician could emulate metal bending meant nothing to those who had decided what to believe. As Uri said, 'anyone can imitate the Mona Lisa, but that doesn't make them Leonardo Da Vinci.'

The Reformers

The Church was now divided into parts; the believers of the old ways and the Reformers, two violently opposing sides who were in conflict over every aspect of the Church. The Old Believers venerated saints and godly images, they thought the bread they ate was true christ-flesh, and often prayed to Mary. The Reformers were iconoclasts, who wanted rid of Popes and purgatory, they ridiculed transubstantiation of the eucharist and said mothers were less holy. The Old Believers enforced priestly chastity, while the Reformers valorised the family and encouraged their ministers to marry. Yet both sides came together over one common goal; the eradication of the Weavers. They cited Eve's behaviour in the garden as their reason, she was made from Adam's deformed rib and so created to be under the subjugation of man. Unlike the old believers, the Reformers thought children weren't responsible for the sins of their father, but the same could not be said about their mothers. If Eve listened to the snake and ate the fruit, surely her daughters would do the same. The pain of childbirth was penance for Eve's appetite, and so they cried witchcraft when Weavers showed knowledge of midwifery, contraception or abortion. The Weavers were forced to reproduce until their wombs collapsed, and if they refused they were burned alive. The Reformers tied them to the stake and the Old Believers lit the fire.

Resurrection Meringues

Beat four large egg whites in a bowl, don't let the yellow yoke contaminate. Add caster sugar slowly, slowly, too fast and she will weep sweet tears later and in private. When the mixture is glossy, dry those eyes. Sickly clouds of icing sugar powder her face, folding, folding until smooth and billowy. Softest shell, softer insides.

Saint Rose

It was said that Saint Rose of Lima was an incredibly beautiful woman who attracted a great deal of unwanted attention. She purposefully ruined her complexion by applying herbs to her face and blistering her skin with hot peppers, in the hope it might dispel unwanted glances. She also cut off her hair. The church interpreted this as Rose spoiling her beauty so as not to encourage the temptation of men, but I don't think this had anything to do with why I took her name. Rose articulated a rejection of patriarchal desire before I had the language to understand it. Her life was an attempt to exist outside of the male gaze, yet to be articulated as such, a rebellion while still within the confines of the church. Rose lead, in many ways, a queer life. She rejected heterosexual marriage and longed to live amongst women, but her mother wouldn't allow this, so she lived in isolation, taking a vow of celibacy. It was said that Rose was visited often by visions of the devil and other spirits. As a weaver of memory, she wrote mystical poetry, was skilled in embroidery, held knowledge of herbs and flowers, which she grew and sold to help the poor, and was one of the first recorded vegetarians. I left the church, but I still keep Rose as part of my name.

Sickness in the Sacristy

I have been practicing metaphorical cannibalism since I was young because I used to go to church every Sunday. Catholicism is founded on the idea of bodily sacrifice and oozing fluids, of blood that leaks from holes in hands and feet, to be drank from a gold chalice. The altar is a theatre, rich with stories and metaphor, velvet ceremony and clouds of incense inhaled kneeling on plush cushion. Whispering latin into clasped hands, before raising up to sing in violent crescendo. The first time you ingest his body you have to wear another white dress and confess all your sins before the meal. I can't imagine this part took too long, considering I was eight. During my first communion I was so ill a nun had to help me be sick in the sacristy toilet, an act audible to the rest of the church. I carried on with the ceremony despite my sickness and the congregation clapped when I ate the bread-flesh. I remember thinking it was like eating a flying saucer without the sherbet; the first disappointment of many the church would offer me. After the mass, I threw up what I had eaten of his body into a plastic bag in the car, but the plastic bag had holes in it and the sick fluid leaked yellow bile onto my white dress. I was so thirsty but I couldn't keep down any liquid, so my gran gave me a blue handkerchief full of ice cubes to suck on. There was a cake shaped like a bible but I couldn't eat it.

The State

So many poor bodies died during the Black Death that labour became scarce. For the first time, the poor bodies could make demands that were previously unimaginable, requesting more time for leisure, higher wages and shorter working days. They refused to pay rent or taxes and roamed the streets dressed in flamboyant clothing that made them indistinguishable from the Men Who Ruled Things. With this transference of power, they entered the golden age of peasantry. As the poor bodies realised their collective strength, they made more and greater demands. The Church and the affluent bodies were terrified of the changing power relations, and so put aside their differences to join together with the Men Who Ruled Things, to create a new force called the State. The first step in regaining control was to instigate a new class division amongst the poor bodies, making a common enemy out of the Weavers. The Weavers, who were previously valued members of the collective, were demonised and subjugated, as a period of intense misogyny ensued. State-managed brothels appeared all over the land, to remedy the Heretics and the poor bodies and the Men Who Loved Men. Prostitution was acknowledged as a public service, even by the Church, to protect family life and subdue youthful uprisings. Violence against the Weavers, so long as they were also poor bodies, was fully supported by the State. The new order was not a natural progression from the old ways, but one created through force, enslavement and violence, a counter reaction to revolt, and it was not long before the State gained absolute control.

Stigmata

Therese Neumann didn't eat or drink a single thing except the eucharist for twenty six years. She was born on Good Friday, baptised by Easter Sunday and regularly witnessed visions of the crucifixion. It was soon discovered Therese was a stigmatic, meaning she exhibited bloody replicas of christ's wounds upon her own body. She bled from her eyes, her left breast and from the holes in each of her hands, which seeped more if any remedy was applied to them. She spent most of her life in leaking illness, visitors would come to see the visceral spectacle of the secreting woman in the hope of restoring their own faith. Never fond of things beyond their control, Nazi soldiers made an attempt to arrest her, but even men who had inflicted the most gruesome of torture upon the bodies of others were too afraid of the gaping wound that was this woman. She was held under scientific observation for fifteen days, with the conclusion that no food could have passed her lips in this time, except the holy wafer. After she died, no rigor mortis was reported and her body remained so limp that the doctors wondered if she might still be alive. Her corpse smelled entirely of nothing.

The Tongue

Most fearful of all was that visceral muscle that lay dormant in the Weaver's mouth. The tongue, or the production of language, the refusal of silence. Erotic threat, or to contaminate, to eat and lick and taste and kiss and worst of all; to make a noise. A flexible matrix makes a gossip, tongue wagging as queer knowledge. Women who whisper secrets.

Transubstantiation

The eucharist meal is one of passive ingestion, controlled by the clergymen, it is an exact ritual. Only members of the catholic church can take part in the meal, others may receive a blessing but not eat the sacred bread. The consecrated host is locked in a decadent gold box behind the alter, which you must bow down to before taking a seat. [Form an orderly queue, move slowly down the aisle, when you approach the priest place left hand on top of right, or receive him on your tongue] Within this doctrine, it is vital to understand the bread and wine is the body and blood of christ, the physical appearance of the objects do not change, but through the performance of transubstantiation, the objects become the 'true' substance of christ. To understand the meal objects as Jesus-substance requires a degree of faith, and it is faith that enables the miraculous. [This is my body which will be given up for you]

Typewriter

Doctor Rogers designed a spirit cabinet containing a typewriter that wrote texts of its own accord. The particular typewriter used during his show was invented by a close friend and fellow spiritualist. The Yost typewriter used an early mechanism in which text was produced beyond sight in another, more tiny, darkened room. This time language materialised spirit thought matter. The cabinet addition only amplified the already present separation of the hand, eye and place where the letter strikes the page; the writer who is disconnected from language production is called conduit instead of author. Various occult methodologies influenced the invention of typewriting machines, and in ghostly reciprocation, the commercial availability of the typewriter provoked an explosion of automatic writing. The spiritualists claimed contact with the dead, while psychologists and Surrealists said secondary self. Despite all arguments, it was agreed that connection was made through the unconscious, but to say out of body experience is to deny the value of the body who types. The new mechanical worldview made people machines, so why make a distinction between a woman and a typewriter. It was thought being passive was a virtue of femininity, so women were employed as channels for the stories of others and dead male authors. Mediums and automatic writers and secretaries and typists and switch-board operators; the new technological proletariat. Exploitation of the spiritual workforce was considered long before Marx said dead labour; automatic writing called upon spirits as a source of endless language, and wages mean nothing to the dead.

Water Memory

The idea of water having memory was originally conceived by Jaques Benveniste, a French scientist who caused international controversy when he published his findings in the scientific journal Nature. I first heard the idea from Olaf the talking snowman in the animated film Frozen II. While the magical characters of Frozen had no issue understanding water memory idea, the scientific journal editors were more skeptical. They hired a team to investigate, and ultimately discredit Jaques' theory. One member of this team was The Amazing Randi, a famous conjurer who made it his life's work to disprove the existence of mediumship, offering a prize of \$1million to anyone who could scientifically prove paranormal activity. The success of the water memory theory could have monumental consequences, not only within the fields of standard medicine, but also in homeopathy, another widely disputed field in which chemicals go through a process of water dilution. During a Ted Talk in February, Randi took a 'lethal' dose of homeopathic sleeping tablets in order to ridicule this method of alternative medicine that he called pseudoscience.

White

moon shimmers frosted dawn absolute white morning light fine cream
jasmine white magic white ultra white timeless rock salt cream tea white
chiffon pure brilliant white calm clouds white mist porcelain doll
vanilla white orchid white milky pail bone china almond white delicate
seashell summer linen vintage chandelier barley white cotton cream snow
scene silk breeze chalky white clouded pearl bleached lichen new meringue
gentle moon