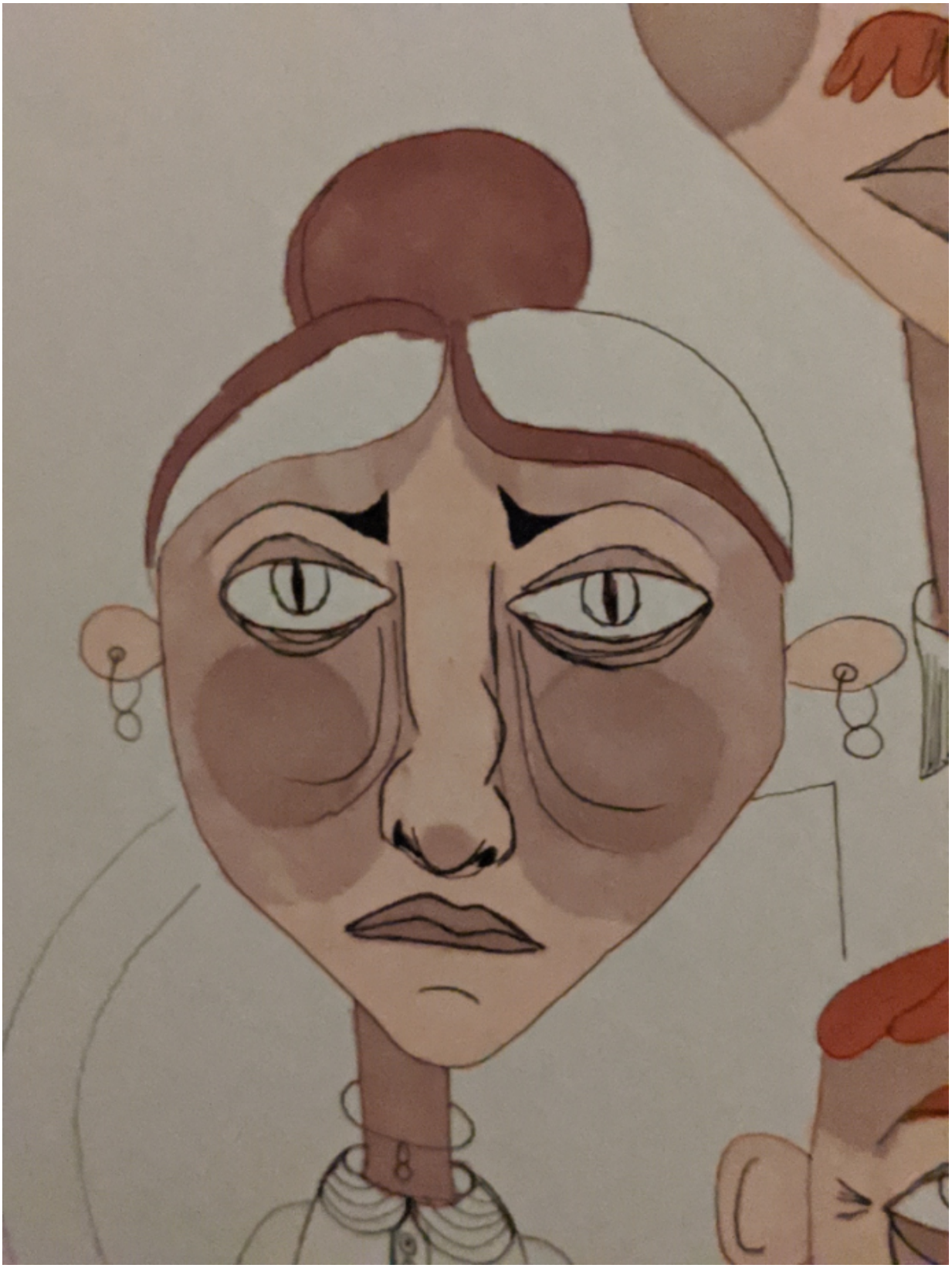
Rachel Genn

“There is so much more to this than simply real life.”

United Kingdom, 26 March – 27 April 2020

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https://boasblogs.org/curarecoronadiaries/there-is-so-much-more-to-this-than-simply-real-life/

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Picture drawn by daughter Y.

I am writer and Creative Writing Lecturer at Manchester Writing School. I am at home with my partner X (male 50) my daughter Y (female, 12) and my daughter Z (female, 9). Home -schooling is happening and both X and I are trying to work from home up to now. However, I wish to include my twitter feed from this time, too.

I feel I will be shuttling in this diary from "ongoing accomplishment" of the crisis or rather crises (as remit suggests), but also in my mind will be Miklos Szentkuthy's idea that entering into a diary is role play.

Please search out my twitter feed from 26th March to present day (@RachelGenn).

March 26th 2020 (approximately)

There was a period before lockdown where I was simply not swept up by this. Had booked trips (speaking at i-docs in Bristol, visiting Universidad de Granada, Desperate Literature in Madrid, Centro Federico Garcia Lorca). Partner snowboarding in France (show video of social distancing joke) Y (daughter 12) had cough on Monday of first week of isolation) Z (9) kept going to school. Once they were both off and X was working from home the lack of quiet began to strangle me. I felt suffocated and repetitive noises hatchet into any thought even peripheral ones. I went to the attic and shouted at a tree-surgeon "How long will you be doing that for please? " She said, "a couple of hours? Are you trying to sleep?" "no, work," I said. Y as always is saddened and disappointed by my aggression. The aggression mounts with a decrease in the silence I need to put myself together. The children fight almost constantly day 1 to 3 of being alone together in house. Weekend before we go up to rocks at Burbage Edge, Y sullen and reluctant gets blisters and tries to makes a

misery of the day but fails. This week, PE, yoga cooking, fajitas, soup, a tomato sauce for ravioli. Me for last two days PE too.

Weekend was lax but children got on, this ultimately is all I ask for. Drank alcohol without any of the feelings that it might be deserved. Stopped drinking coffee after a number of violent outbursts in first week of home school, had to email the neighbours to apologise.

Older child has dyed younger child's eyebrows with fake tan. The idea of sex seems absolutely out of human experience at this point. As capitalism grinds to a halt I feel I am barrelling on with capitalisms' work in energy at least. Like trying to decide what is internalised misogyny and what isn't I try to attribute my numbness and discomfort to something. The children can sense that peace means more to us than anything and are learning the new rules of keeping the peace. I have spent my first couple of weeks in a molasses of intertia- a stasis that feels inescapable-unpicked by urgency, agency, motivation.

Children are very much enjoying not going to school but a late night last night means the little one is murderous today, she and I grind off each other at the best of times. Not being able to get on school websites/classroom is eroding the confidence the little one has in the continuity of school and when she senses the rules getting bendy she flips out. Today she gave me the middle finger at close quarters and then swore on my life she didn't. How to tell them how important truth is in a time where ballast have shifted?

"I feel the need to disappear."

31st March

Sleeping better than for a long time, finite amount of terror possible that it gets processed in infinite ways. My 4am couple of hours of ultimate terror (where imagining my own beheading was relief) – and made me feel on waking I had done a full time job- is in abeyance. The younger one is fighting me. Wouldn't do PE this morning, the more obsessed by rules and order I become the more the kids back off. I, who am against everything that tries to impose its will on me! My eldest wants to talk to me about piercings and hair dyes and phone models (I dropped hers yesterday) and I accuse her of winding me up (her little heart cannot understand me, my big heart would like to tear itself out). I used to be fun. I feel the need to disappear. To get out from under this lid. Dreamt last night that our plane landed on a railway track in narrow gap between chain link fence and made sparks and infernal screeching grind for about half a mile. Home-schooling? If I thought what they learned at school was nourishing I would care about home-schooling. My own mother sailed away from all of us during menopause. I lost a language to communicate with her. I feel the grief of this rupture still now, watching her rock in a corner, my heart was broken that she didn't care about me anymore (which upset me more than the fact that I couldn't help her). In quarantine, how can I pretend. I must reveal myself and this will frighten the children to death. See tweets and photographs from these dates *@RachelGenn.*

1st April

Children put a ton of Dec's mum's sweeteners in my tea. April fool. Lay awake for about 2 hours absolutely pining for the blonde in my daughters' hair which seems to have dulled since we've been in here. Yesterday we walked to see my sister who is vulnerable and is isolating with her asthmatic husband. They leant out of an upstairs window to speak to us. A couple of days ago we took them some fry's chocolate

creams and some detol wipes in a carrier bag which she got me to fling onto the grass and she says she will bring it indoors in 9 days when any virus will be dead. Though she is already frail, has COPD and takes steroid inhalers (which thin her skin) she continues to smoke. She looks well however and my eldest Y and I talked to her and my brother-in-law but the neighbours were out, the child about three whizzed about on his bike and mostly they were the requisite distance but it didn't feel right not to beckon such a small child or engage with him in some way. He must have felt it too as he stared intently at us as we spoke from the pavement to them in the upper window. My sister told us off for going too close to the gate and for touching the privet hedge. We left very soon as it was so awkward. I waved and blew a kiss from a distance to the child who I thought was waving at me but my daughter with better eyesight told me the kid was waving at my sister. The children have now taken to walking around me gingerly as if I were a noxious spillage. They made penis shaped scones and we had them with cream and jam. We talk a lot about why it is not illegal to walk in the countryside but preferable to walk around other people in the city. Drones are around the peak district to spy. The oppression worsens. Yesterday my partner was offered furlough which he took for the health of the company but now understands others have been kept on and is heartsick and his low morale affects me very much. Yesterday my friend sent me two sachets of testosterone; I asked my doctor if I could try some to find the mental acuity I used to enjoy before all hormones started to deplete. They said no. HRT helps but I don't think it's oestrogen I am looking for. Will start it when my period finishes. Still not drinking coffee and attention is much improved. I had hit a point where I was permanently seeking without finding.

1st April,

pranks all day smoking toilet, tobasco biscuit, cup balancing, cream in dressing gown, all faced with misery by me, actually unable to appreciate fun. Started to think

that I will write something about anticipation. Saw absolutely no future. X's sadness really deeper than my own. Also, thinking about the ghost or prosthesis of capitalism, experiencing capitalism as a phantom limb. Children finding it hard to be together, the more unwanted the little one feels the more unwanted she wants to feel and clings to the unwanter. Y cried for her friends and her smashed phone.

2nd April

No PE, park. Kids good, X sneezing all day, literally nose running all day (pollen?). Always worry about his autoimmune disease (now cleared) but would hate it to reemerge because of viral load. Bow and Arrow used half-heartedly in park. I did a route on bike and felt stronger and fitter than week before. Thinking about notion of futurity.

3rd April

11 am put on testosterone after PE (all did it today). Children have been fake-tanning. Postponement of my book not so long and not as serious as previously thought. Mood swings so distinct and wide-ranging feel like am in VR. Z writing play about Easter and performing it, loves us to laugh at her. Applying for Quarantine funds to make the Abattoir piece. 11.20, testosterone has made tongue feel more agile and less calcified than normal, feel a bit dreamy but maybe a dreaminess that is going somewhere? I feel sentences getting shorter and feel more inclined to use declarative statements. Put in pitch about Futurity very quickly to editor. Perhaps it's shit (point is I think it WILL DO — prob of focus of late means that I do not think anything will do- I can never get closure). But do I? I am imagining confidence? Tongue feeling more normal by the minute. There is a documentary coming from the bathroom, I am working away. I don't feel the physical pain of interruption that I

normally do. Didn't panic when I felt I had lost a doc, stuck to solving it (easily solved to be fair). Eyes widening a little. Food tastes very weird. Roughness and creakiness of tongue diminishing.

4th April

Repotting pants, children learning dances in bikinis inside. Went to shops to get peanut butter for cookies (ridiculously good) X seems brighter. Someone accused me of tweeting like I am bird looking for its mate. Questioned my sanity. Don't know if testosterone making me paranoid but I found this controlling and outrageous and began to truffle out the origins of someone wanting to clip my wings. Why are they afraid of my power at this moment? My sister has taken a dip (not been out at all for weeks) and she couldn't speak to me when I called. My daughter slept with me as she had a man in her eyes when she closed them (clown/rockstar). She asked me whether seals really balance balls on their noses. Considered together in the dark animal free circuses. Roll up roll up! See the....wheels/ropes/stripes/bench. We laughed. It was a good connection. I can never pretend what she is saying is funny if it isn't. This was a relief. Perhaps it is an index of adulthood. Is the epidemic forcing them to grow up?

5th April

Cleared the garden, read Malina for Bookklub. A bad choice for quarantine, the tilt of the form and the relentless and desire-free analysis of trauma in its multiple forms was intense. Sunday Zoom bookklub, felt very resentful that people seemed to be satisfied doing this in their own homes. When (couples) muted sound I found it very uncomfortable. Likewise whispering. My head was also very large on the screen. Great detail of my forehead. I joke on Twitter that my house no longer has private

parts. Testosterone seems to have increased my libido and I flirt quite openly with the abyss of social media. Self-monitoring has lowered. There is literally no where in the house where one can be sure of privacy (no locks etc). Boris Johnson gone into hospital. No one cares. Writing application for TENDER a collaborative film.

6th-8th very focused, find Twitter doesn't entrance me now, I don't feel the pull of it, don't feel the need to stay in it or go to it. Have been calm around children's skirmishes, some jealously enraged door banging from the smaller one. All doing PE together, having breakfast, an enmeshing, a myceliumising, and entangling of roots to form an intricate defence has begun that was broken by Capitalism and its structures and socialising methods. I will find it difficult to succumb to the movements of those machines again, especially where the children are concerned. Youngest is very proud of a sentence today (they are doing schoolwork in separate rooms now) the sentence ends with "slaying the vines as she went." The children are reluctant to go outside for some reason (they blame bees) but I think it may be more as one child is normally a cat that tracks slices of heat when she can get them. Keep diving into interesting conversations on Twitter for which I feel utterly qualified to contribute to and then being ignored. This is being a man without benefits. Children doing knitting, making up tiktoks.

8th of April

Z found X cuddling me in bed and screamed and slammed two doors almost off their hinges. Having a small fire each night to get rid of garden waste but have discovered it is advised against because of the vulnerable.

9th April

Y went and saw her friend across a field came back refreshed but reminded of what true socialising can do, give a direction for the sap rising in all of us indoors. I imagine silent retreats make people unbearably horny via similar mechanism. I have had to go to bed with pains in ears and a spiky throat for 3 nights but it seems to be gone in the morning. The road Clapped for Carers with trumpets and cymbals (Clap for Carers) and feel inhuman since I am not happy that Boris Johnson has come out of ICU. (Best to show or hide your inhumanity from children?). Even masturbation is practically impossible. Germany has given a number of ventilators to UK for free and this has piqued my hatred of Brexit.

11th April, Easter Saturday

Went for walks, everything has a lid on it, thinking of Haushofer's The Wall. How oppression works. The airborne nature of it. With no preciousness, booze has changed its role. Though I drank on Saturday and Sunday. Saturday I managed to finish a novel to mark. Yesterday the children went on the roads on bikes. This scares me but I am proud of them. We cannot no matter how I try, sit down to watch a film together (going to look at why this is). Pains in ears still happening.

13th April

Today I was supposed to go to Granada (Lorca Archives/Meeting people from the university who are experts on Duende, Lorca's house, Desperate Literature event in Madrid, Zikhr with Andalusian Sufis) all I can do is tweet about it. Did not waste my testosterone on weekend. Have put it on today. I feel a disinterest in triviality which I suspect is my internalised misogyny rather than a super-specific effect of testosterone. Sleeping very well even if alcohol onboard. X rather more restless than I had imagined he would be. Without work we flounder and he is in bad mood, I still

have work to do of course. Reading around the anticipation piece today.

14th April

Children had fight about make-up and eldest kicked sister then door then took off on the bike and sat distant from the granny on her drive. I read an entire novel about a white transexual Urdu lover. Went for a walk, felt sanctioned. What does it mean for these things to be imposed upon us rather than we choosing it. How does that colour the future? Kids getting sick of each other. Want to watch Jane the Virgin, the youngest is 9, I have given up. The emotional labour distribution comes into stark relief in lockdown. There is no hiding from the hard work, how deep that goes and who does it. Who does it until the problem is fully addressed or solved. Who finds a way out and doesn't falter at hurdles. Who digs deep to give. Who uses part of themselves to patch up another. Who becomes a human puncture kit. X is watching my every move. Wondering what signals he should be looking out for. Today I woke up crying and wondering why I am so weak and volatile and insignificant. This is not Corona related. I put on an extra pump of oestrogen as well as the testosterone. Read Pause by Mary Ruefle to pump me up to write my own piece. They want to make churros. We have no fucking flour and about 100 chocolate eggs. My youngest is unable to limit herself already and they want to make more mess and more fucking treats? I am veering wildly and it is because of the work goading me, the more I know I am the only one to do this, the more personal the silent attack of the work to be done.

"The rituals of the days have less and less to adhere to."

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I am afraid that the last few days, though keeping to a schedule (kids go visit their distanced granny on bikes in afternoon) and food is cooked and eaten, the rituals of the days have less and less to adhere to, they fall through each other and no-one can make anyone else make them be taken seriously. Rituals have cried wolf. The cover of my book was revealed and because of the ceiling in place I cannot expend what I have on hope for the future, I cannot throw my grappling hook into what could be an abyss. There has been fighting, the kids are sleeping together, getting up way too early. The little one grouchy all day and physically attacking us. I am very stressed if they are shouting or attacking each other but there is no symmetry; if they are happy and laughing with each other I have to manufacture relief to feel that is in no way a counter to the steep lack of coping that I slide into if voices are raised. My drug self-admin has become slightly chaotic and on two nights I have had a strong lust for alcohol but cannot say that it had the slowing effects on my thoughts that I like and associate with it. I would like my contradictions to remain private. I am parading them to the children and my partner and I see them watching me make no sense and swinging from brittle conclusion to its opposite and it is painful and humiliating. Did Zikhr by Facebook on Thursday night but swear that I can feel a lack of intention that is the energy of the physical gatherings. A circularity that cannot be enacted via Facebook. Today is wet and I can see us staying in all day and somehow the culpability of that failure will not be unseated. We may walk to a bakery. I will not try to make them come with me because I don't have the strength to battle with them and drag them with me in misery. Partner said I do everything on my own. My desire to be alone is large but I miss them.

18th April

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Today is 18th April. Y will be 13 in 43 days. There is very little joy in this (though I know it is there on paper). Bored does not mean what it used to and my tits are lolling in new spots. I let this irritate me rather than putting on a bra. I smell like a teenage boy.

21st April.

I began reading a book on Saturday in the sun and it's the most "normality" I have felt since lockdown began. I am used to being manipulated, I was shocked at what a good storyteller can do: make you forget then remember what they have already revealed of their intentions (I am put in mind of a cate paddling its paws into a lap, pushing pulling, massaging manipulating). It is my daughter's 13th birthday, she is living languorously having long baths and taking hours to apply make-up. I keep calling her Cleopatra. I cannot fight it though I have to inhibit attacks. The "weekend" was enjoyable and found it hard not to drink early. Friends had a zoom meeting poetry reading bombed by hardcore child pornography- a friend described it bluntly and circularly I think, oh I am just imagining the worst but am reminded it happened was witnessed by over a hundred people and (NOT ME NOT ME) I say to myself this cannot be real it cannot have happened and then its outline twitches to show that oh yes it is made of this reality. And at this point I think more globally about tethering ourselves to the internet and allowing it to have roots in us and I feel the pull of a black despair saved for our worst moments.

27th April

It is now 27th April and I think I haven't been updating as things have swung into a routine. I lay off the testosterone when I am not trying to focus. Felt on Saturday like I did what I found a hole in the universe when I was in Barcelona (I think we had had

some snide whizz at a do down Brick Lane) an area that I am moving closer to which might be where one is lost but equally where one is found (hiding and abandonment look the same form the outside). Had to do administrative stuff for work, bike rides and distanced visits continue but am ageing due to lack of spontaneity. There is talk of easing lockdown but I am more afraid of trying to get back into the robes of normality. Reading Malcolm Lowry, who manages to evaporate presence from the present on the page. I feel purified when I read him, aware that there is so much more to this than simply real life. I tweet, I have forgotten: Is there more to life than waiting for lockdown to end? Am about to start a piece about seduction for TE and VH. To be seduced it means to share possibilities that you do not yet understand. In Blood by Bashevis Singer there is a piece where the male butcher explains to the female one that he will know when he meets the one who he is destined for because she will get him right here and he snaps his fingers at his navel. Something of my core is dimmed in lockdown. It feels that there's no use in radiating with no one to warm their hands. The children have been good at getting on with lessons but as always, Z the youngest, can sniff out my hormone changes like a jaguar and screeches up and down my menstrual curve with me. The bike rides have been rained off and we are eating much more meat than we ever have done; there's a Roman air to our evenings. Talk is of easing off lockdown and being beyond the peak but the lack of information in Tory speech has flipped over to a Trumpian self-aggrandising (and we are to swallow this unquestioningly). I am unable to let this go (but I don't know where I send it so that I can continue). My relationship with lockdown has definitely changed. My nephew has been ill for two weeks without telling my sister and she was so upset. Especially after our last uncle on earth died of it last week.