

Terror on the Southbank

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The crowds have started to return to the Southbank. Families once again are queuing for overpriced ice cream, next to vans belching out their diesel fumes. Small groups are standing respectful distances away from human statues and the occasional busker. If you were observant, you would notice that the person sitting outside the Tate Modern on one of the benches was not what it seemed. Wearing a face mask that it had found on a street, a scarf which was wrapped tightly around its neck to conceal its gills, and also wearing an oversized overcoat and mismatched shoes which seemed to have come from the bottom of the River Thames. When the creature moves, the dry scaly skin rustles like old leaves. A faint, salty residue on the greenish grey skin gives off a pungent aroma, very much like a salt and vinegar Pringle. As evening falls and the families depart for their trains back to the suburbs, the creature heads back to the foreshore ready to be refreshed. It is almost time to feed. It pants with effort of breathing on land and lets out intermittent grunts as it squelches in the odd shoes towards the water's edge. The coat, shoes, face mask and scarf discarded, the creature slips gracefully into the water, and its tall thin scaly body is now sleek and smooth in its natural habitat. Once it is fully dark, the creature will re-emerge strengthened and hungry- looking for its next meal. A drunk making their way home from a post-lockdown beer with his mates? No, our creature has more refined tastes. It has developed a taste for the fitness fanatics, the highest muscle to fat ratio and the most expensive little watches. The ones who excite it the most have ear pods and Under Armour gear. Tonight's victim, who has recently received confirmation of his place in the London Marathon, is dreaming of his PB; he is mentally planning his fitness programme with the aim of going under 4 hours, and as his feet rhythmically pound the pavement, he did not notice a long, greenish grey scaly arm reaching out towards his ankle.

The end is swift. The rich oxygenated blood quickly ingested, helping the creature with its transition from primitive river bed dweller to part of London's rich cosmopolitan community. It takes the Garmin off his lifeless wrist and adds it to its collection. Satisfied for the night, the creature settles outside the Globe Theatre and watches the dark waters of the Thames.

The next morning, the victim's lifeless body is discovered by an early morning commuter, who decides to alert the Metropolitan Police. A few hours later, a cross Scottish policeman called DI Duncan arrives by the river where the runner's body has been discovered, accompanied by DS Burnett and the forensic team. DI Duncan, sipped his cup of microwaved coffee and in between gulps poses a question about forensics impatiently to his colleague. DS Burnett responds with "Nothing much yet Sir but the forensic team have remarked on a strong smell of salt and vinegar." DI Duncan looks unimpressed with this information and grumpily replies "Probably just some fish and chip wrapper that some lazy person has left lying around, I hate fish and chips." He adds unnecessarily. "No Sir, not fish and chips, it is apparently more like a salt and vinegar Pringle." He seems even more dissatisfied with what she has just said. He grunts and then responds crossly "A salt and vinegar Pringle? Not what runners usually eat? I hate salt and vinegar Pringles. I much prefer Mackie's of Scotland Sea Salt, with a nice single malt."

In the distance, crouched beneath Blackfriars Bridge, the creature watches the scene with interest feeling stronger every day, it can feel the transition is not far away, the transition from monster to human form. Some nights, it would swim up the freezing river and look longingly at the Houses of Parliament, and it feels as if it would belong there, it needs to belong there. It feels desperate to become a part it. All it has to do is hatch a plan. It knows exactly what it needs to do....

But plans sometimes need to change. DI Duncan has made sure of that, he has been pacing around, shouting at his team and muttering about leaving no stone unturned. When the creature emerges from the river on this particular morning, stones are literally being turned over in front of it. Its eyes meet the gaze of an intelligent looking police sniffer dog that is currently investigating its discarded coat and shoes with great enthusiasm. On seeing the monster, the dog stops his activity and lets out a growl and a whimper as he stares into the eyes of pure evil. The surrounding roads have been sealed off, there are six members of the forensic team, DI Duncan, DI Burnett and two sniffer dogs looking for answers about what happened the previous night. The creature realises it needs to retreat and discreetly submerges itself back below the surface, never fully emerging from the water as it observes the sniffer dogs and the eight police officers. From its underwater hiding place, Plan B is figured out, it needs to accelerate the transformation process. It estimates it needs about six more blood feeds until it is ready for the final victim, this would be chosen with a little more care, as with the final mouthful, it would take on the identity and live its new life in their shoes. But first things first, it needed to find five more victims and it couldn't afford to be choosy. Things were about to get, like, a little bit messy!

Nightfall, the creature emerges from the shadows and sees a double decker bus, the passengers all on the top deck. The side of the bus is advertising the new musical 'Frozen' and a new thought enters the creature's head. It quite fancies seeing it and wondered if it would be as good as the film. Or, how about 'Hamilton'? That could be good.... The monster stops in its tracks and tries to rid itself of these intrusive human thoughts. It had business on the bus. The driver is the first to lose his life with a swift extraction of blood and humanity and then one by one, the upstairs passengers come down to meet the same fate and are arranged creatively on the lower seats.

At dawn, and ready for its final transformation, the monster wanders towards the Houses of Parliament. It lurks in the shadows until it hears the pounding of feet. Suddenly, it positions itself ready for ambush, it hears indistinct voices in the distance, but the jogger's replies it hears clearly. "I have been busy pushing forward the vaccination programme and saving lives" and then hears the feet pounding nearer. The monster is poised. This is the one. The unsuspecting jogger did not notice a long greenish grey scaly arm reaching out towards his ankle. The end is swift. The rich oxygenated blood quickly ingested, helping the creature with its final transition from primitive river bed dweller to part of London's rich cosmopolitan community.

How the horror/comedy genre influenced my writing process

Before starting this assignment, I needed to understand what was meant by the horror/comedy genre. I found that it covered not only films but television programmes and literature. Some examples of the genre are films and books such as 'Pride and Prejudice and Zombies'¹ which is both a book and a film, and television shows such as 'Inside No 9'.² I also started to learn about the theories of horror comedy, such as the superiority theory, incongruity theory, relief theory, benign violation theory, tickling, humour and laughter theories. It seemed the challenge was how to combine the horror and the comedy into something that works well together as on paper it feels as if it should not work. *'What is more perplexing from a theoretical point of view is not that some fusions of horror and humor fail, but that any at all succeed.'*³

In my first assignment, I wrote a short story about Humpty Dumpty. I tried to build anticipation throughout the short story but showing Humpty as a victim who then gets his revenge at the end in a comedy twist. The story combines incongruously a classic nursery rhyme with contemporary storytelling. I decided to use Laurence Fox as the comedy element of the story as he is a controversial figure, and I thought the idea of him being possessed by Humpty would be mildly hilarious, this then gave me the idea for my main assignment, which was to have a monster possess Matt Hancock, a figure who is currently in the public eye.

The inspiration behind 'Terror on the Southbank' was that it needed to have a strong sense of location, based on the area around the Tate Modern, and I combined it with the notion of the pandemic we have been dealing with for the past year. I thought that it would be interesting to imagine that while we were all shut away in our houses for months and the world stopped, that a

¹ GRAHAME-SMITH, Seth. and Jane AUSTEN. 2010. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* London: Titan.

² Inside no9 is a BBC Comedy horror series written by Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith, 2014-present

³ CARROLL, Noel. 'Horror and Humor'. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol.57, no.2, 1999, p145. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/432309

monster would come out of the shadows into the normally heavily populated area of London. I was inspired to do this because of the animals that came out into cities which would usually hide away during lockdown. The police element of the story is inspired by police detective programmes, such as 'Broadchurch'⁴, where there is a dark humour in the awful events that take place and DI Duncan and DI Burnett are strongly based on David Tennant and Olivia Coleman, well how I imagine them anyway. There is a juxtaposition between the police procedures and the world of the monster. I choose not to give the monster a gender as I thought it would make it more ambiguous and also then leaves it up to the audiences' interpretation. I also decided not to state that any of the victims were female as this is a common cliché, which I did not want to repeat. The only two genders stated throughout the entire story are that of the first victim and the final victim, everybody else's gender is never discussed or mentioned.

To add humour, I decided to add the details that the monster smelt like salt and vinegar Pringles and the brand of sportswear. I also used the superiority theory, when the taste of the monster is discussed, and Garmin's are referred to as 'the most expensive little watches'. This is making fun of joggers and humans, who the monster sees as less superior. I tried to build the suspense by talking about the monster's transformation but keeping the identity of the final victim secret. I chose Matt Hancock as a final victim because he has recently been in the public eye due to allegations and he also represents power as a politician, I thought he would be a good addition to the story as he is often filmed jogging away from journalists saying "I have been busy pushing forward the vaccination programme and saving lives" which frankly is quite hilarious. I also loved the idea of the monster being Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. At the end of the story, I thought it would be great to go full circle and repeat the description of the first death for the final death as this leaves the story on a cliff-hanger but also wraps it up nicely after the twist is revealed.

⁴ British Crime Drama broadcast on ITV between 2013 and 2017, written by Chris Chibnall

In conclusion, my final assignment has been a useful experience in creative writing and it has been a challenge to meet the criteria of the horror/comedy genre. I have tried to use examples of what I have learnt in my tutorials. It was helpful to hear other people's stories through this process as it gave me inspiration for my own and helped me check I was on the right track. Their feedback was also helpful as it highlighted areas for improvement which led to a better story. I am inspired to continue to learn more about this genre and to experiment with my creative writing.