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Thesis: *Bed of Sloth*

Exegesis: use of an architectural design approach in the development of the manuscript of *Bed of Sloth*.

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Primary supervisor: James George

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Centre for Creative Writing,
School of Language and Culture

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Attestation of Authorship

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Candidate's signature

Dave Moore

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Abstract

This submission is a thesis in two parts. The first is the third full draft of a creative work in Social Realist (SR) novel form entitled *Bed of Sloth* developed during the Master of Creative Writing (MCW) programme 2016. In the story two friends, formerly lovers, maintain their relationship over a 35 year period, from opposite ends of the earth and with an ultimate plan to meet up for a major trip together. It is set in the UK, France, the Netherlands and Australia. Antagonistic forces acting against them over these years are multiple, including: Class, sometimes justifiably suspicious partners and the impact of The Troubles on their respective families.

In the second part, the exegetical work reports on the research process regarding content and writing methods. Use of an architectural-style three stage model of development for the latter is described and explored. Personal motivations for writing *Bed of Sloth*, key themes and the historical context of the period are then discussed with reference to the relevant SR literature and other creative forms. The exegesis concludes with thoughts on the future for *Bed of Sloth* beyond the MCW programme; and suggests that processes with more collaborative final stages may in this case have merit.

**Use of an architectural design approach in the
development of the manuscript of *Bed of Sloth*.**

(An exegesis)

Dave Moore

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Centre for Creative Writing,
School of Language and Culture

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1. Introduction. Text to Self.

1.1. Aims and Structure of this Exegesis

This submission is a thesis in two parts. The first was a draft of creative work *Bed of Sloth* developed during the Master of Creative Writing (MCW) programme 2016.

This second part, the exegetical work, is in three sections.

The first, Text to Self includes a synopsis of the creative work and comments on the personal motivations for writing *Bed of Sloth*. This is followed by a discussion on the key aspects of the writing approach adopted. Use of an architectural three-stage approach of draft development as used is described and explored.

In the second section, Text to Text, is a discussion on key themes and the historical context of the period with reference to the relevant SR literature and other creative forms. Particular attention is given to: the ongoing burden of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) stemming from The Troubles, the importance of humour in SR works, the impact of the fighting in Las Malvinas / Falklands and the use of imagery when dealing with social division.

The final section of the exegesis focusses on the future. Key themes from *Bed of Sloth* that I can foresee recurring in my work generally as a writer, successes and difficulties associated with the work this year that will hopefully improve future writing, and the likely next steps with *Bed of Sloth* as a specific project.

1.2. Synopsis of *Bed of Sloth*

Bed of Sloth is a work of literary fiction set in the period starting 1983 and with the final scenes in the near future of 2017. The protagonists Rachel and Gus meet in a pub in London one Friday night, each with their own reasons for wanting to make a change and get away – to climb off their personal beds of sloth. He is twenty-five, she approaching nineteen.

Rachel is the daughter of a prominent politician and her family are under police protection due to the threat of violence given the state of The Troubles. So despite her privileged background there are significant constraints, some imposed some more

intrinsic. She has taken a Gap year before university, but her determination to be independent has resulted in being stuck at home. Gus is a Londoner of mixed protestant and catholic Irish extraction working in pubs, or in the family building business, but becoming increasingly aware that this is not what he wants long term.

They run off to France for the weekend but pass up an opportunity to make it a more significant break. Eventually they do get away, working together and living as lovers in an idyllic spot off the northern coast of the Netherlands. As the summer ends, Rachel heads back to the UK for her university course and Gus flies to Australia. They agree to meet up when he turns 30 for a motorcycle adventure up into Scandinavia.

However, life gets in the way; other relationships, babies, work and a continuing social tension that friends and partners refresh. They remain friends, and assist each other later in middle age to climb off other Beds of Sloth that each find themselves upon. Echoes of their time as lovers never fully fade though, adding a complexity and periodic confusion for all concerned.

In the final section of *Bed of Sloth*, Gus is approaching sixty, and he and Rachel dust off the plan to meet up for the Big Trip they had promised themselves. Will they do it? And if so, will it be what they have hoped for?

1.3. The Motivation behind writing *Bed of Sloth*

1.3.1 My interest in writing fiction

I started writing fiction in 2013 and there were two main drivers for this.

Firstly, I had completed a research degree in Human Factors / Ergonomics (HFE), taken an academic job at AUT and become very aware of the limitations of scientific reporting in fields involving people and their apparent irrationality.

Following this, I had the experience of assisting an author with the development of a character in her novel. Seeing the work in progress was fascinating - a live animal still fighting and kicking, rather than the stuffed ones on the shelf at Whitcoulls.

1.3.2. Fiction as simulation

Narrative fiction isn't a set of observations that are flawed by lack of reliability and validity. It's a simulation. Narrative was the very first kind of simulation, one that runs not on computers but on minds. It's a kind of simulation that enables us to enter social contexts that otherwise we would never know. (Oatley, 2010).

Some of us read fiction all our lives, while others say they just can't see the point. As an academic now, and researcher concerned primarily trying to understand people and their motivations, applying for the Master of Creative Writing (MCW) was partly prompted by my wanting to learn more about the psychology of why we read, and write stories. I am also interested in the practical aspects of design of communication and have done work in this area, influenced in particular by David Sless and Robyn Penman of the Communication Research Institute of Australia (CRIA).

As it turned out, the creative focus of the course was far too interesting and actually exploring the characters and themes in *Bed of Sloth* dominated my time. Beyond simpler, obvious explanations involving escapism and self-expression I was intrigued by how stories carried through media in all its forms have 'the potential to have a profound and far-reaching influence on what we remember, know and believe' (Green, Strange & Brock 2002). However, in the time available I found the work of Keith Oatley and his team on fiction as simulation to have the strongest resonance with this project. I adopted this an underlying creative principle for the purposes of *Bed of Sloth*.

1.3.3. Fiction as a way of communicating complex and shifting motivational sets

Between 2000 and 2007 I completed a PhD and was surprised to discover that instead of the world being largely understood, with just small sections of the jigsaw still incomplete, the reverse was the case. There are very few aspects of human life where we have enough understanding of the complex interactions to accurately predict behaviour in real world settings.

My research had been concerned with deaths and serious injuries from quad bike incidents on farms, a persistent problem that ACC Research Office finally conceded needed a more holistic approach than they had been using. The methodology we developed drew on investigation techniques refined in forensic psychology and aviation. At the heart of the final version of our approach was the question posed by Sydney Dekker (2002). People intentionally do things, which in hindsight are clearly ill-advised, but which ‘make sense to them at the time’.

I interviewed around 200 people regarding 136 incidents on 50 farms all around New Zealand in 2001-2. In the scientific publications I have written subsequently, the reporting conventions make it difficult to convey why the decisions they took ‘made sense to them at the time’. I found creative non-fiction involving personas and aggregated stories worked better, and developed such offerings for industry talks, trade publications, keynotes and media features. This prompted an interest in longer form fictional work.

1.3.4. My interest in Social Realism specifically

In 1969, aged ten or eleven, my dad took me to the cinema to see the Ken Loach film *Kes*, based on the Barry Hines novel (1968). I knew this was an unusual outing because Dad had already seen it - but he was going again anyway. As we drove home he explained to me that it was unusual and significant, because it was a film about us. Not heroic acts on behalf of the queen, escape to far-off exotic places or peaks at luxury in stately homes. Just about ordinary people in Britain. It was proof to me that normal lives were actually worth producing books and films about. It felt like receiving a licence to write. A permission slip.

Then I met Barry Hines in 1977. A couple of authors had been brought in to talk to the English class at the technical college I was attending. One was what I thought of at the time as a typical poet, complete with silk cravat, a massive whiskey hangover and a

habit of answering questions in a way that could only make sense to someone to who had read all the same things as him. He reinforced my negative stereotype of the literati.

The other was Barry. He told us that he hadn't read anything fictional other than comics until he was in college studying physical education. There, to complete the teaching course he was required to write something creative. He said he didn't know what to write about; so the lecturer said just write about what you know. He had played a few games as striker for Barnsley and up front for the England Schools team. So he wrote about football. From that effort the lecturer encouraged him to carry on which turned into his first published book *The Blinder* (1966). Two years later *Kes* was released and was a success nationally, he left teaching and wrote full time.

You Can't Beat a Cig Packet

I could have clocked a wonder time.
If I had wanted,
I could have beaten batman
If I had raised my flaps
And let the gale strain at my tweedy wings

A cig packet tumbled past
Clip clopping as it bounced along.
I gave it a start
Then chased
And raced behind it for a hundred yards

But then I tired
And tried to stamp it with my foot.
This brOke my stride
It cart-wheeled on
I stopped
And watched it out of sight

Well!
You can't beat a cig packet
Helped by the gale
Along a straight
And empty road.

Barry Hines. From the collection *This Artistic Life* (2009).

I had read very little other than comics as a kid, partly, I realise now, because the contexts of popular children's stories were so foreign. I was in my teens before it was pointed out to me that Christopher Robins' Nanny wasn't his grandmother, but actually a live-in servant. Comics I read had characters like Alfie Tupper who ate what we did, had a normal job but still won races.



Fig. 1. Alf Tupper. Created by Bill Blaine for *The Rover* 1949, then in *The Victor* until 1992.

A significant downside of reading Alf stories, and *The Victor* generally, was the reinforcement of the negative stereotypes of anyone with money or an education, or was foreign (obviously). I lived in Oxford in the early 1980s and developed friendships with a much wider variety of people than I had previously had any contact with. Including some who had been taken to school in a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce and had had tea with the Queen. For this group, being sent to boarding school at five was common.

They had their own problems I would never have guessed at, including very often chronically absent parents. Resultantly people I met had developed de facto parental attachment to drivers, nannies and other staff. The character Tony in *Bed of Sloth* is a father figure in this way. Hearing these stories and observing the long term impacts on 'the privileged' I realised that, despite obvious shortcomings, the 'home in time for tea' world of Gus and Kev had warmth and intimacy that could be too easily taken for granted.

And so in *Bed of Sloth* I have consciously set the pair of protagonists at a significant distance apart in the UK social system in order to explore such contextual distinctions across the divide. By spanning decades the intention was to also to look at the interaction of two people from these places in society as society itself has changed - in regards to same-sex marriage for example, and as the characters age and move through parenthood.

2. Text to Text

2.1. Approach used in the writing of *Bed of Sloth*

The approach taken for developing *Bed of Sloth* during the MCW emerged principally from a series of discussions with Los Angeles based screenwriter Jeff Stockwell (personal communications). I trained as an architect originally, and Jeff Stockwell as a writer. We have known each other since those days, and discussed creative approaches in our respective disciplines over this time. I am now Programme Leader for the AUT Master of Engineering Project Management and he specialises in films for children and young adults working with large teams including animation units

The original spirit, and important early ideas in any project, can easily be lost during a long creative process. We need workable techniques for the development of complex artefacts that maintain ‘bounce’ - the desired energy. Achieving this while also optimising speed to end point, has remained an area of interest. .

As a designer responsible for the early stages in the life of an artefact, be it a building or play, it is easy to lose sight of the endpoint, and see success as a set of beautiful plans or completed manuscript. However, the user experience with the artefact in the real world is the end result that matters. Stockwell also draws on this comparison in an interview with John Rosenberg for the University of California Riverside (UCR) Palm Desert Graduate Review.

Being (a) screenwriter is kind of like being an architect - (but) who, outside of other architects cares what the thing looks like on paper?
(Rosenberg, 2016).

There were also opportunistic reasons for taking the approach I did. Prior to starting *Bed of Sloth*, I had completed a pair of first drafts *Grace* and *The Boy with the Beautiful Arm*. They are still at this stage. Both were composed to full novel length at the first draft stage, and written entirely sequentially. However, the MCW programme has masterclasses throughout the year, plus other interactive groups and individual sessions throughout the two semesters. To take advantage of new learnings along the way, I felt a more staged process would be advantageous, one that allowed the work to be built up in layers from a simpler base. Responses and other inputs could be processed and assimilated as additions with minimal backtracking. In particular, characterisation could deepen and motivational sets become more sophisticated.

2.1.1 The Architectural process for complex design

To understand how the three stage system might apply to creative writing it is perhaps useful to firstly outline how it works in the case of a building.

The guide to services provided by the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA, 2016) is a detailed explanation of the process recognised within the industry and used as a best practice default in the event of disputes requiring legal resolution. It is typical of processes employed by designers of complex buildings internationally. In essence the three stages are as follows.

Concept Design. The first understanding between client and designer relate mostly to WHAT is to be achieved and WHY, rather than HOW. High-level aspirations for the project as a whole are captured, often in quite visionary terms. Such as: ‘The building should be an iconic gateway - providing an emphatic, confident and forward-looking welcome to visitors’. Strategic relationships between spaces, position within the heritage landscape, dominate material and structural system preferences and scale in cost and bulk are typically covered. From this a Concept Design is generated for discussion, and often only the core design team are involved in this.

Developed Design. Once all parties are satisfied, extra layers of complexity are added to the design in conjunction with all the specialist engineers and others in the broader design team. Spaces are plotted to scale, the structure is agreed, modelling of projected performance is carried out - so that it is known what size active systems need to be, and the building can be much more accurately costed. The client checks again that it is meeting the brief and within budget.

Detailed Design. This stage completes the set of drawings. For example all the information needed by the workshops fabricating the steel for the structure is generated right down to placement and diameter of each bolt hole to be drilled. Door handles are chosen and watering regime for the new trees in the driveway specified.

2.1.2. Application in *Bed of Sloth*

Increasingly in architectural projects worldwide, the value of an Integrated Design Process (IDP) is recognised. A key element in IDP is pre-Concept design preparation in the form of facilitated workshops bringing in all the parties with something to contribute to the design. The aim is to grasp the complexity of demands and interactions at the earliest stage. The people assembled therefore represent not only specialists such as engineers or landscaping designers but also those who with the necessary experience to contribute insights on cleaning the windows of the building, staffing the reception point or even demolishing it at end of life. This is also known as Ex3 - Everyone, Early, Everything.

This idea follows through into a creative writing setting I understand. Mike Leigh's approach of allowing actors to develop the characters through workshops over a period of months before the start of filming. As Eddie Marsan who plays the deeply troubled Scott in Leigh's *Happy Go Lucky* explains in an interview for the Oral History of Hollywood series.

You spend 6 months creating a character and acting his role. So he inevitably will be multifaceted (not just good or bad)... (Marsan, 2008)

Leigh engages the actors after only the bare concept with main characters and sense of plot is formed, and from there the storylines and themes emerge through a more collective and participative process. What I took from this was that perhaps for the novel I developed for the MCW it would be possible to spend a significant portion of the time exploring the characters far more fully, with help from masterclass learnings, through input from others in the Creative Writing programme and prompted by wider research of the story context. The end-product could therefore be a Developed Design with probably aspects of Detailed Design also in place.

The stages for *Bed of Sloth* therefore were as follows.

Concept Design. I wrote this fast as a 30,000 word outline screenplay. Dialogue only, with limited notes on scene context. I tried to keep the expression of themes to WHAT and WHY questions, rather than answers - HOW the story would be told and motivations revealed. In preparation I reviewed a number of screenplays, official

shooting drafts and the novels these were based on. Including: *Silver Lining Playbook* (Russell, 2008; Quick, 2008), and *Three Thousand* the first draft script for the film *Pretty Woman* (Lawson, 1987). The result was a dialogue-driven concept for story at an impressionistic level. Something akin to a cruder Roddy Doyle novel from the Barrytown trilogy - where our knowledge of the town and people is constructed just through the 'interplay of dialogue' (McGuire, 2006). There was just enough sense of the characters that actors could have been chosen.

The other characters beyond the main two protagonists were largely unIntroduced. Not to the extent of the Steven Knight film *Locke* (2014) where the others never get closer than at the end of a phone connection, but similarly scant in detail.

Developed Design. In one of the masterclasses this year Bianca Zander spoke of the exploratory stages of a novel leading from the raw first to a more complex second draft that is a 'self-reliant fictional world'. This is what the process felt like to me. The 30,000 words at raw concept stage were trimmed lightly and built upon to reach 75,000 by the end of the second draft.

Over 10,000 of this was in the form of exploratory chapters and sketches developed to learn more about how the characters would respond to various pressures. Some are inconsequential to the practical storylines, but of direct value to me as writer and indirectly beneficial to the reader I suspect. What is happening in the world of a character on a particular day impacts on how they respond in a scene. My sense is that the reader picks this up, the shift of moods 'off camera', and that it provides an important level of complexity that makes a character and scene more believable. Interviewed about the 2000 film *Bread and Roses* the screenwriter Paul Laverty emphasised the importance of this kind of complexity in social realist work.

Characters are constantly contradicting themselves in Bread and Roses (2000) which is very important to us... (Laverty 2016a).

Detailed Design. The third phase this year has theoretically been the cutting, polishing and addressing of the details. The cutting of favourite scenes has been easier in some cases for the reason suggested above. Actor and screenwriter Emma Thompson (2016) also describes this phenomenon. She suggests cutting can have benefits beyond simply making the story more succinct:

‘...because the new juxtaposition of the two bits that didn’t touch before is so much more powerful. (I) don’t know why that works but it does, in scripts and other forms of art too not just film’.

At the point of final submission my guess is that the novel has now progressed to roughly half way through this third phase. Having said that, only 90% of the Developed Design is also in place. Most of the final months of work focussed on the final sections of the manuscript. 5000 or so words were added to the final chapters. This effort was in exploring alternative endings that tied together more of the threads, and also concentrated the dramatic aspects to allow for a more traditional denouement.

There were also additions in the earlier stages in response to reader questions regarding motivational sets of the characters. It needed to be clearer, for example, why both Gus and Rachel were so ready to take a gamble with each other in the opening scenes. Additional early background on both were provided at the detailed stage.

2.1.3. Attribution and document design

One consequence of using the Concept-Developed-Detailed approach was that there was a need to consciously select an approach to attribution.

The first concept draft used a loose screenplay format. The process of moving away from this to a prose format required conscious decisions about how to handle attribution.

The opening scene of *Bed of Sloth* in the pub had a scuffle in which maintenance of pace was crucial I felt. I looked at several writers who I felt captured the type of energy I wanted here to see how they had handled this. Roddy Doyle for example in *The Guts* (2013) uses indents with dashes instead of apostrophes, which increased reading speed I found but also made the page messier and more cluttered I felt.

Cormac McCarthy (Border trilogy: 1992, 1994, 1998) provides similar lead-in clues to reduce the need for He Said She Said steerage, and uses no dashes which reduces clutter on the page, and as reader I find just as easy to follow. The closest to the format I have used in *Bed of Sloth* though is that demonstrated by Kent Haruf. At least I flatter myself that that is true.

Reading Haruf’s work, but in particular *Our Souls at Night* - his last book (2015), I was impressed by the ease and flow he achieved. This in part is due, I feel, to the lack

of overlaid attribution, and also to his overall writing process. He would type full pages without looking or stopping (Haruf, 2013a). I can find no specific discussion about the impact of this approach, but my guess is that this degree of visualisation of a scene gave him greater sense of how the characters were physically interacting too. He rarely needs to help the reader by stating either who is speaking, or whether the text is actually dialogue, because it is clear already by the preparation work he has done leading up to this. People do things as they ready themselves to speak, and Haruf often seems to capture this.

In an interview with Colorado Central Magazine (Haruf, 2013a) he describes his aim and mentions other writers he found helpful in this regard.

I've tried to write as cleanly and simply and directly as I can without being simpleminded or simplistic. When I came across Hemingway and Faulkner in an American literature class, they shocked me. I've never gotten over the shock. I read both of them regularly when I'm trying to write myself, just to get myself back into the mode of paying attention to sentences.

2.1.5. Fiction as adaptable simulation

The variable in a simulator is the participant, or in this case reader.

I have re-read these two authors (Hemingway - *A Farewell to Arms*. 1929; Faulkner - *The Sound and the Fury*. 1929) following the comment by Haruf. I can see a common interest in economy but in Haruf's case, I get the sense that the principal aim is simplicity rather than a deliberately impressionistic delivery.

In *Bed of Sloth* I try to use a more dialogue-driven approach that draws the reader in, without constantly stepping in as narrator to say who is speaking. I feel it should be obvious enough nine time out of ten, and if it's not then maybe the reader is just skimming anyway. Perhaps this betrays my personal preference for dialogue over plot driven stories.

I have enjoyed reading the Cormac McCarthy border stories, including *No Country for Old Men* this year, and appreciate that spareness. To follow who is speaking I have needed to slow down, and get closer into the story, visualising the characters and their interactions more attentively; which makes it feel more as though I am hearing it leaning on a lazy fence post somewhere near Juarez. I also find that when re-reading my

interpretation changes more between readings than it does where the punctuation and attribution is more assertive.

The fluid expression of McCarthy and to a lesser degree Haruf, that allows the story as a simulation to be modified and personalised more, was a feature that I thought could add to the reader experience for others too and so have attempted to draw on that approach, to a certain extent, in *Bed of Sloth*.

2.2. Relevant creative works

No good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in.... I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things.

Ernest Hemingway (1954). Speaking about *The Old Man and the Sea*

2.2.1. Introduction

Bed of Sloth is set across four decades, involves several locations and contains a number of themes. So the relevant creative works would add up to a very extensive list. The References (cited) and Bibliography (uncited) are obviously just a small sample of these. In preparation for the programme I looked at work that I thought could would inform me in some aspect of: literary purpose, writing process, historical context and the predominant themes I expected the book to explore.

Having completed a number of drafts now, I can say though that there was no conscious employment of particular themes, imagery or symbolism – as such. These things are in there if the reader sees them, but I write without notes, and focus on creating characters that feel real to me. The stories emerge from the characters. My reading was essentially a trail through the work of authors I thought demonstrated that best.

During the two semesters the method of selecting relevant creative works was therefore more akin to action research with each stage informing the next. From interviews with Kent Haruf I learned of his admiration for not only Hemingway and Faulkner, but also James Welch. His 1974 *Winter in the Blood* is a remarkable as a Social realist (SR)

portrayal of life in Native American communities set in the period leading into Haruf's own series, and in the same part of the Plains.

2.2.2. Relevant Social Realist works and humour

As can be seen from the References and Bibliography, a high proportion of the relevant creative work I have studied during the year has been British Social Realism, but not from

the earlier Angry Young Men era. My interest is the work that includes humour. To me SR needs this as the harder things get the more important humour is for survival. Screen writer Paul Laverty (BAFTA Guru Series accessed 2016) says,

(Humour) is something that Ken (Loach) and me feel strongly about I suppose. Humour is one thing you can do - that if you are powerless you can laugh and take the piss and undermine. And it's part of us, a beautiful part of us, and we should try to capture it.

I would argue that works from the 1970s onwards in UK SR such as: *Elephants Graveyard* (McDougall, 1976), *The Commitments* (Doyle, 1987) and *Happy Go Lucky* (Leigh, 2008) showed that gritty everyday issues could be handled better when the natural humour also found in such contexts is allowed into play.

I therefore was surprised to see the comment from BBC Head of Films David Thompson just ten years ago that works by Loach and Leigh were Miserabilist (Thorpe, 2005). The Miserabilist tag on the 50s-60s dead end kitchen sink stories surely no longer applied to such SR work. Characters were fighting back, and actually not all of them considered their lot as tragic anyway. Thompson was responsible for the 2008 remake of *Brideshead Revisited* and he reflects perhaps that section of British society for whom a life where one is required to iron one's own shirts still automatically infers misery.

2.2.3 The historical context of *Bed of Sloth*: The Troubles as in 1983

The early 1980s in the UK were politically intense and divisive. Approximately 3500 people died as a direct result of The Troubles, and the violence of these times spilled over periodically into parts of the Republic of Ireland (116 of the deaths), England (125) and mainland Europe (18).

Attacks outside Northern Ireland (NI) began in the early 1970s, and by 1974, according to filmmaker Brian Gibson in his book on the Birmingham pub bombings, 'mainland Britain saw an average of one attack—successful or otherwise—every three days'. (Gibson, 1976. p50). The Troubles also 'left a legacy of mental health issues associated with this conflict' (Ferry, Bunting, Murphy, O'Neill, Stein & Koenen 2014). Direct and indirect costs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Northern Ireland were estimated at 173 million pounds sterling for the year 2008. This a decade after the

Troubles officially ended. Ferry et al suggested that there remain ‘economic implications right across society that stretch far into the future’.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in *Bed of Sloth*

As reported, the impact continues for many, as reflected in the character of Tony the police driver in *Bed of Sloth*. One of many. ‘Northern Ireland has the world’s highest recorded rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), ahead of war-hit regions such as Israel and Lebanon’ (University of Ulster 2011).

Not all victims though were shot or witnesses of horror. In the case of Tony it is a failure of trust which hits him hardest. He has gone to NI wanting to help, and has made friends amongst the local community. The betrayal changes his world view and shakes his confidence fundamentally. In *Bed of Sloth* I seek to explore the indirect costs from the long term impacts of experiences like this for individuals and those around them. Rachel spends a number of years nursing Tony after his second stroke; which she feels is linked to the murder of two doctors – tourists from Australia.

The Brighton bombing

The year in which *Bed of Sloth* starts ended in December with the Harrod’s Christmas shopping car bombing in which six died and 90 were injured. 1983 was also the year before the Brighton bombing in which the IRA targeted the Conservative Party conference, killing five. Both of these events would have been highly significant for a family such as that of main protagonist Rachel. Her parents would certainly have been in Brighton at that conference, and that shopping area in Knightsbridge would have been visited regularly. Rachel would have been back in the country and studying at Kent University in October 1984, pregnant with Beth at the time her parents escaped that device. Both placed greater daily constraints and pressure on all, but in particular on Rachel who wanted more independence, and Tony - who was responsible for their safety in the face of such actions.

Within the UK at that time though Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet were aggressively polarising the nation and so the response to the bomb was not as unanimously negative, as it would have been if say, a shopping centre had been attacked. For Rachel, the impact of hearing British people around her comment that the IRA

'should have done a better job' would be taken as an attack on her family members personally - increasing her sense of solidarity with home and strengthening her need to be close for mutual protection. This despite her own misgivings about her place there.

Sources of Creative Work relevant to The Troubles

There is a large body of fiction collated and maintained by the University of Ulster on the CAIN website which hosts and updates a searchable list of full length novels compiled by Professor Bill Rolston. Screenplays and films were also reviewed

In particular, I reviewed those that dealt in some way with the long term impacts. Notably: Kate O'Riordan's *Involved* (1995), P.J. O'Rourke's *The Piece of Ireland That Passeth All Understanding* (1988), Brian Gibson (1976) *The Birmingham Bombs*, Guardian (1979) *IRA Link to Envoy Death*, Oliver Hirschbiegel's (2009) film *Five Minutes of Heaven*, and Antony Quinn's (2015) novel *Disappeared*. I also drew on personal accounts in the CAIN site including extracts from '*Do you see what I see?*' *Young People's experience of the Troubles in their own words and photographs*. (The Cost of the Troubles Study, 1998).

Impact of The Troubles on daily life in *Bed of Sloth*

The Troubles, and the aftermath of The Falklands dominated the media in 1983. It was the year after the Hyde Park bombing in central London that killed 11 cavalry soldiers. Strangely, images of the seven dead horses seemed to have greater impact on the public than news of the dead humans, and were certainly recycled most often in the months following - as reflected in *Bed of Sloth*. This perhaps connects with our beliefs regarding loyalty and trust in our relations with animals. Especially dogs and horses.

In 1983 people in the UK were also far more cautious about drawing attention to themselves in relation to the Troubles. Not making allegiances evident. On a recent visit to England I was standing in a queue at Starbucks in a motorway services when two soldiers in full uniform joined me in the line, talking loudly and attracting attention. I automatically moved to another queue 20 metres away, from where I had full view of the room and a close exit - this before even thinking why. I last lived in the UK a decade before the Good Friday Agreement that marked the official end of The Troubles. Military personnel were not permitted to travel in uniform on mainland Britain in 1970s and 1980s

as it would have been reckless to do so. Outside small enclaves in Northern Ireland, signs of support for either the Republican or Loyalist cause were also inflammatory enough to be considered contributory negligence if violence was provoked. In *Bed of Sloth* Gus alludes to this in his comment about his father having a No Religion and No Politics rule in their house in London.

Tony describes the risks he perceives for Rachel and Gus in the Netherlands. The motorcycle with UK plates needs to be concealed. And although not looking like an off-duty regular army member, he notes that Gus does have the appearance of the Special Air Service Regiment members of that period.

The streetscape was also different and this helps shape the backdrop in *Bed of Sloth*. Rubbish bins and lockers were removed, and left luggage facilities unavailable to prevent bombs being easy to place in transport hubs. Unattended baggage could well result in a street being sealed off within minutes, hence the issue with the bag under the bench in *The Dog* in *Bed of Sloth*.

A friend my age here in Auckland, also from London, was caught up in the Wimpy Bar bombing in London's West End in 1981. We discussed it again recently, in connection with anxiety she feels she is seeing in her children. She was rushed into the tube station by police just before the blast that killed the bomb disposal officer. The impact of that experience is still with her, and she suspects, by transference, her children, now in their late teens as she was then.

The Troubles and the Netherlands

The apparently peaceful 'away from it all' Netherlands that Rachel and Gus travel to in *Bed of Sloth* was not immune to the impact of The Troubles in the 1980s. The IRA was reported in the media at the time to have Dutch sympathisers providing safe houses and arms (*The Guardian*, 1979).

Across the nearby German border were substantial British bases housing four divisions, and so the more attractive parts of this region of Europe were popular with off duty soldiers, airmen and their families. The shooting of the British Ambassador Sir Richard Sykes and his valet Karel Straub in Den Haag in 1979, mentioned by Tony in *Bed of Sloth*, was the highest profile IRA killing in the country. However, ordinary military personnel were also targeted, and civilians died too. In 1990 a pair of young Australian men on holiday with their partners in a car with UK plates were shot dead by

the IRA. Reportedly mistaken for British servicemen, five of whom had been shot in the same place two years earlier, the killings connected the Troubles very publicly to Australasia. The families remained active in seeking justice as described by Ruth Edwards in the *Irish Independent* in 2011.

The IRA's statement of regret (it doesn't do apologies) was described by the Australian prime minister as "twisted, too late and meaningless". Ten years later, that was why another Australian prime minister refused to meet Gerry Adams.

Gus in *Bed of Sloth* alludes to the phenomenon of The Troubles touching someone across the world. This also featured in the close of the Kate O'Riordan novel *Involved*. In her story the protagonist is tracked down while under witness protection living under a new name in Canada.

2.2.4. The year after the Falklands / Las Malvinas conflict

The Falklands conflict also had a significant influence on the period, and on this story. The meeting with the young couple from Argentina in the Netherlands, and the discussions between Gus and Rachel afterwards provides extra detail on their reactions to it. As Tony the policeman mentions, given his age and background Gus could easily have been there, as a number of his friends were. This is difficult to settle in his mind when they meet and get on so well with the Argentinians. Gus has a recurring dream (deleted in the draft version in this thesis), based on the scene in the film *Tumbledown* (Wood, 1984) where his bayonet breaks off in the body of the teenage Argentinian conscript.

The reporting of this conflict was unusual. The media split with some attempting to give a balanced account of events, or as balanced as they would for a conflict elsewhere in the world not directly involving British forces. Others, notably the *Sun* 'got behind' our boys, famously pictured in their Union Jack underpants. The ability of the British arms industry to make money from both sides was brought to greater public attention, and stayed there in later conflicts in the Middle East. Hence the references in the Billy Bragg song *Island of No Return* released in 1984.

Island of No Return

*Digging all day and digging all night
To keep my foxhole out of sight
Digging into dinner on a plate on my knees
The smell of damp webbing in the morning breeze
Fear in my stomach, fear in the sky
I eat my dinner with a watery eye
After all this it won't be the same
Messing around on Salisbury Plain*

*Pick up your feet, fall in, move out
We're going to a party way down south
Me and the Corporal out on a spree
Damned from here to eternity
I can already taste the blood in my mouth
Going to a party way down south*

*I hate this flat land, there's no cover
For sons and fathers and brothers and lovers
I can take the killing, I can take the slaughter
But I don't talk to Sun reporters
I never thought that I would be
Fighting fascists in the Southern Sea
I saw one today and in his hand
Was a weapon that was made in Birmingham*

*I wish Kipling and the Captain were here
To record our pursuits for posterity
Me and the corporal out on a spree
Damned from here to eternity.*

Billy Bragg (1984).

The film for TV Tumbledown portrayed the story of a British Officer shot in the head and paralysed during the conflict. (Wood, 1984). It illustrates well the army officer recruiting strategies of the time, the excitement of the 'adventure', and the subsequent anti-climax of the confused and conflicted welcome back. The public held very mixed views on the exercise, Thatcher's motivation and its execution. The film won several BAFTAs but was received poorly by both the right and political left according to the lead actor Colin Firth, for conforming to neither ideological position. This, for me was its main strength.

In *Bed of Sloth*, Tony is surprised by the ability of the young people from both countries to get along without mention of the killings there. Tony represented those

sections in British society that felt obliged to take sides, and see a rightful position - as opposed to seeing the entire exercise as simply a waste.

2.2.6. Gus and his family within the context of 1983

The characters Gus and Rachel have grown up with this as their Normal, and so the impact is largely at an unconscious level.

Gus is from a family divided on the Irish issues in many ways. Previous generations include individuals 'Involved' in a variety of ways, and on more than one 'side'. Close friends include both uniformed members of British Army units actively deployed in the Province, and politically outspoken supporters of both the Republican and Loyalist Paramilitaries. Such confusion of allegiance was common in London and other centres with a large Irish community. It's a sadly untenable mess, and each act of violence complicates things more for him as anger and frustration builds in the people around him. He is not involved in any way with the Troubles, but the visiting cousins from the across the Irish Sea bring it with them. A barely conscious drive sits within him to leave that behind a regime that chooses his friends and enemies for him.

Children growing up in a poor place where conflict has further reduced recreational options do tend to throw stones at patrols. And not just in Northern Ireland. The Steve Earle (2004) song *Just Another poor Boy off to Fight a Rich Man's War* refers to parallels in the Middle East. The media coverage of both The Troubles and The Falklands rarely touched on the full psychosocial damage to individuals recruited at very young ages into the violence. The scene in *Bed of Sloth* where Gus visits the house of his best mate Kev for tea, and sees the elder brother 'rotting into the sofa' is an attempt to explore this. It draws on personal experience with a friend and his family in the 1970s.

2.2.7. Rachel: privilege and kleptomania

Rachel is from a family that has had to be actively protected, and so her personal freedom has been compromised in ways that she is not free speak about in detail. Car bombings of government officials and other high profile figures were a reality.

Rachel's life of privilege is not as it would have been previously or would be now, but has timeless elements. One being that money is not an issue for her unless she chooses it to be. Her desire to do the right things and be independent and 'useful' professionally is antagonised by the constant pressure of not needing to be. She seeks to make her own life less dependent than that of her mother who simply repeats 'you will learn'.

Tony points out Rachel's contradictory behaviour is pointed out to her in an early scene. She has run out of petrol money, but wants to be seen as independent from her parents, and so asks the driver instead.

Rachel also has a habit of helping herself to things she wants without paying for them. Throughout *Bed of Sloth* her mild kleptomania is expressed without consequence other than reprimand from her daughter. As a disorder it is linked to conditions including anxiety and bulimia. Her underlying causes are not stated in *Bed of Sloth*, but the implication is that her early experiences including expulsion from school and social isolation are related.

Rachel enjoys the rush of stealing, and knows she can always get the money to pay if caught. Experience has also taught her that she will probably not get arrested because she has the accent, obvious family wealth and later the status of Lawyer as shields. Resultantly, through life if she wants something she generally takes it, because she can.

This is an echo of a comment made by F. Scott Fitzgerald's (1922) character Gloria from *The Beautiful and the Damned*. While not a compulsive thief she similarly complains 'I can't be bothered resisting things I want'.

2.2.8. Social division and use of vernacular language forms

Walls

There is a recurrent theme of physical division in *Bed of Sloth* that wasn't a conscious strategy but emerged strongly anyway – because the built environment in which the story is set was shaped by exactly these forces.

The pub in the opening scene has two sections separated by walls as was normal for the time. Trouble starts when people from side one wander into the other. Europe is especially full of high walls built to protect property and the scene where Rachel and Gus argue in the car before returning to England from France is set beside the high wall of a private house. Rachel is naturally at home on one side, Gus the other.

There are windows of opportunity where this divide is bridged - akin to the green gate in the H.G. Wells (1911) short story *The Door in the Wall*. The story opens with such a window as Gus as barman is able to move between Public bar and Lounge and see both worlds.

Rachel has come to this pub with women more suited to the public bar. She is also dressed as a student, in the days of full grants when people from all levels of society had free access to UK tertiary education. She has crossed over without causing the trouble that the diners have prompted. When Gus visits The George however, he isn't allowed in the Lounge, and is denied service even in the Public.

The island setting of Terschelling is wide open with few physical barriers of any kind. The protagonists get on best on beaches and roads; both shared territories lacking physical manifestations of the social divide the two characters are trying to straddle.

Language

More subtle, is the use of language to enunciate polarisation throughout *Bed of Sloth*. Where either of the protagonists feels threatened their language becomes more defensively vernacular, less conciliatory. He resorts to London patterns, and she to how she would have spoken at school. As Gus grows angry in reaction to comments by Stephen that he should stay away from Rachel his accent changes, exaggerating his roots and creating clear space between them.

The idea for this retrenchment was prompted not only from hearing people do it, but also from an interest in the work of illustrator Ralph Steadman. Steadman represented the variations in language as spoken by the different social groupings in different settings graphically, as well as through text. Steadman was very actively politically in the Thatcher – Reagan era (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Left - Campaign poster by Ralph Steadman. Circa 1983. Right – Queen Elizabeth. Same era. <http://images.tcj.com/2014/08/RalphSteadman09.png>

3. Text - World

This final section of the exegesis focusses on the future. Key themes from *Bed of Sloth* that I can foresee recurring in my work as a writer, successes and difficulties associated with the work this year that will hopefully improve work to come, and next steps with *Bed of Sloth* specifically.

3.1 Themes

3.1.1 Globalisation of family life

I currently have three manuscripts of novels, all in early stages. A common element to each is that there are characters situated within multiple generations of migratory movement, and have families resultantly spread around the world.

This year I have searched for work set in this macro-context and been surprised how little I found. In tone I think Irish writer Niall Williams (*Boy in the World*, 2007) touches on this, and the Celtic nations certainly generate more of this type of literature. This is a function of their recent history, but even there generally migration is dealt with as a one-off detachment from a homeland.

Isabel Fonseca's *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and their Journey* (1996) sits at the other extreme as a creative non-fiction work about Europe's largest minority with no tales of any fixed home land at all. This population have a quite different value system though to the settled majority. A millionaire amongst the Romani, she reports, is someone who has spent a million – not amassed it.

Generally in contemporary fiction though home is still home, be it Europe or the Middle East (Kashua 2014). Perhaps the closest populations I have found the people characterised in the works I have in hand appear in recent stories of post war migration into Britain from Commonwealth countries. These groups are more confused, as in the work of British author, of West Indian origins, Andrea Levy. Her hopeful migrants coming to The Mother Country find an abusive reception instead of the expected loving familial embrace. Levy grew up London, at the same time as myself, as did Nick Hornby and Tony Parsons, which perhaps accounts for some of the material overlaps.

Overall though I was surprised by the lack of fiction set in the highly distributed populations so familiar, to New Zealanders certainly.

3.1.2. Coastal settings

Since childhood I had an interest in Australasia, Oceania and the Pacific rim nations. Possibly this was prompted from growing up in an island in the cold north Atlantic, where Pacific was synonymous with paradise. Once old enough to travel to these places I found the reality to be less idyllic, but more interesting. Having had the mandatory introduction via *Mice and Men* in school I went on to read a lot more of John Steinbeck's work whilst a teen. Over the years I have re-read the Monterey area-based work including *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* more than any other novels.

I have especially enjoyed reading the work of Jim Lynch this year, the author of *Highest Tide* set on Puget Sound in the Pacific North West. In particular for his delicate touch with characterisation and the appreciation of the Pacific coast setting – the pervasive impact of the maritime environment on daily lives. The sea is arguably both co-protagonist and primary antagonist as with Hemingway's Gulf of Mexico story *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Physical setting has emerged as important as a leading character in the three manuscripts I have built up to date, and I expect to explore this even more in the future. The research for *Bed of Sloth* included a return to the coast of Denmark and Norway. I went to the island of Terschelling in 1977 via Amsterdam as a teenager having my first independent travel abroad. It features centrally in the novel, and time on the beaches and dunes of the island was an inspirational experience for me as a young man.

3.1.2. Sociopolitical awareness

As mentioned in Section One, writer Barry Hines was a very early influence on me. In *This Artistic Life* (2009) he notes that his dad, a miner, instructed him, 'If you are going to be a writer, at least write about something that matters'. This influenced him to focus more tightly on social issues of the day including the miner's strike and specific incidents such as Battle of Congreve. *The Price of Coal* (1977) directed by Ken Loach dealt with a fatality at a pit prioritising a VIP visit.

Professionally I have been involved with quite a number of difficult industry situations including the aftermath of Pike River. I suspect it is inevitable that my work will have references to these kinds of experiences that impact heavily on people in the working world. It is a very complex field without easy distinctions of good and bad, right and wrong. The scene towards the end of *Bed of Sloth* where Rachel finds that the Union has used her efforts in uncovering serious worker health issues simply as a bargaining tool to increase pay, and thereby attract members, is based on an actual case here in NZ.

3.1.3. Bringing people together

In *Bed of Sloth*, Rachel has a fear of falling, despite, or maybe as in the case of her mother, partly because of, the extreme security and privilege they know as normal. Philippa Gregory (1995) in *A Respectable Trade* does this magnificently with Sarah Cole, the sister of the main protagonist Josiah Cole the small-time Bristol merchant wanting to become the big time Bristol merchant. Gregory describes sharply the precarious raft that she feels she alone clings to in their household, as a woman in a man's world.

I have tried in this work to create characters from across social levels that are equally realistic, exploring the complexities in all of their lives. Overall I feel I am an optimist, and prefer to explore solutions in stories as well as problems. Paul Laverty is a writer who also works a lot with Ken Loach. Their most recent collaboration being the Palme D'Or winner *I Daniel Blake*. Laverty has commented that:

‘...the films we do celebrate the possibility of people coming together’
(Laverty, 2016a).

I would like to think my writing attempts the same.

3.2. Successes and difficulties

The MCW programme has been hugely enjoyable, and successful in that I feel my work has developed greatly. As this thesis only has one version of one creative work though, progress cannot be gauged.

The idea of using a different approach to my previous works, using an architectural design convention, has worked better than the options I believe, principally

through allowing earlier discussion of the plot and main characters and facilitating layering. This is something I found especially valuable, and some sections such as the opening and turning points that need explanation and enunciation already have three or four layers of extra depth than they did in the first draft.

The major difficulty initially was attempting to use and compile notes when writing. I invested in specialist thesis software (Scrivener), and found it very helpful.

I realise now that I enjoy writing most when I have as little idea about what is happening next, as I do when I read. To achieve that throughout the development of a major, complex artefact requires there be a structure that permits writing freedom, without destroying overall story integrity. I feel I made some progress in that regard through the exploratory layered approach and use of Scrivener for drafting *Bed of Sloth*.

3.3. Next Steps

I believe *Bed of Sloth* could be a novel, or developed into film or television material. I am entirely open-minded about this, and eager to discuss the strengths, weaknesses and options. I have no experience in writing screenplays, but there again; I have published no novels either – so I am equally well qualified.

Thanks for taking the time to read *Bed of Sloth* and the exegesis. I very much look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Dave

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