

PATTERN PAPER

PATTERN PAPER

Ms. B.

THE HYSTERIC EPISODES

SHARON YOUNG

"the words bliss, passion and intoxication had seemed so beautiful to her in books."

Madame Bovary

C O N T E N T S

08	A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION 	16	A CASE STUDY 	52	POST SCRIPT 	90	POST, POST SCRIPT 
----	---	----	--	----	---	----	---

A NOTE ON THE
TRANSLATION

“Most translators have an agenda” says Nicola Luckhurst in the preface for her translation of Freud and Breuer’s 1895 *Studies in Hysteria* for Penguin in 2004. Most publishers have a specific readership to cater for, hence a can of worms is opened when the remit of ‘staying true to the original’ is given. For example should mistakes be corrected? Sentences finished? The grammar ‘cleaned up’? Should theoretical language be used when a vernacular one will do? Should hindsight be used to reinterpret the developments in theory or show the naivety of the original? Should authoritative tones be used when dealing with ‘important authors’? Should metaphors be updated so a contemporary reader will be in on the joke or should they be required to do their own research?¹

In this image-text work I am revisiting the realist novel *Madame Bovary*, written by Gustav Flaubert 1856. *Madame Bovary* is a novel about

a provincial woman in France in the 1800’s who is miserable in her marriage and has two affairs. She is a pitiable character and Flaubert spends a lot of time making fun of her bad taste and middle-class pretensions. Her choice of reading is gauche and her overspending is bourgeois and without having the means to support it she allows merchants to take advantage of her. She is naive but also very unhappy and we do have some sympathy for her. In the end her lover leaves her - he reveals himself to be a selfish coward by sending her a letter and running away. She commits suicide by drinking arsenic. (Spoiler!)

Hysteria is a bodily illness with no organic cause – the cause is psychological and is famously written about by Sigmund Freud as he developed and founded psychoanalysis as a young doctor in the late 1800’s. Freud discovered, by having conversations with his patients, that this illness was caused by repression – an inadmissible

thought was pushed from consciousness and came out in the body – in the form of symptoms. For most of the women Freud spoke with the repulsive (or repressed) thought was related in some way to their sexuality.

I’m interested in what it might look like to revisit hysteria today. I have a hunch it has not gone away, even though medically the term is not in use. I am interested in it from a psychoanalytical point of view. Although a lot has changed for women since the 1800’s I see frameworks in place today – even in London, in 2021 - that contribute to this repression, particularly in women, and as experienced in my own life. I am using this work as a space to express what that illness might feel like through the language of image-text. I am doing what Flaubert did in identifying with the character of Emma Bovary at the same time as making fun of her. Flaubert famously wrote to his friend Wilhelm Fliess “*Madame Bovary, c’est moi!*”. I am doing the same.

My role as an artist is not so much to ‘stay true to the original’ but to offer a ‘transcreation’ of *Madame Bovary*; to transform the novel into contemporary art practice. In linguistics a transcreation sits somewhere between a translation and an interpretation from one form into another. In this case it will be a transcreation from a prose novel about a bourgeois housewife displaying hysterical symptoms in the 1850’s to an image-text work based on contemporary autofictional experiences of hysteria today and thus drawing parallels between the two experiences.

I will be using photographs mostly taken in the 21st century in a way that evokes a sense of timelessness in an aesthetic of a bygone era but this is not an attempt to reproduce the visual aesthetics, as I imagine them, of the period in which Flaubert was writing about (1852). Rather my aim is to translate that same sense of nostalgia, wistfulness, indulgence in



bourgeois society and boredom so well described as satire by Flaubert into today's experience of middle class society, housewife culture and petty provincial dealings. This visual aesthetic will function as a backdrop for the profoundly disturbing bodily and psychical experiences of hysteria described in the text through poems which are taken and appropriated from the original text by Flaubert as well as the inclusion of a fictionalised contemporary case study of 'hysteria' written in 2020.

Madame Bovary was written 50 years before Freud published his writings on hysteria. The two texts hold remarkably similar descriptions of symptoms such as convulsions, coughs, glazed expressions, inability to speak, unfinished sentences, dizzy spells among others as well as similarities in the style of prose through which they are represented. Freud himself remarked how his studies read more like detective stories than medical

reports. Charles Baudelaire, in a review of Madame Bovary in L'artiste (1857), linked Madame Bovary to hysteria and later the term 'Bovaryism' entered the language of psychoanalysis as a useful description of a bored, bourgeois, woman presenting with hysterical symptoms.

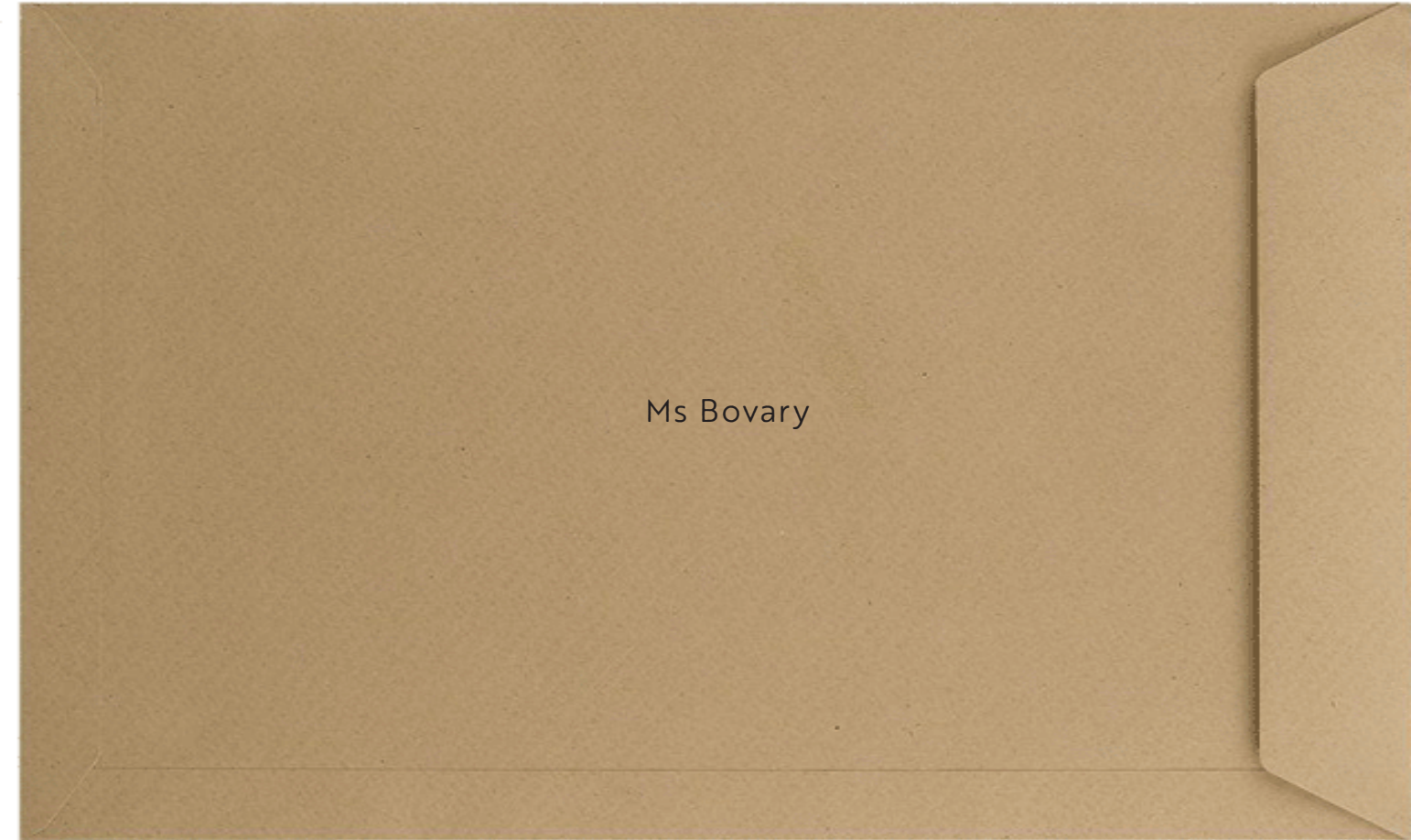
I offer this transcreation of a 'realist masterpiece' alongside contemporary female experience to assert my conviction that hysteria has not gone away. I'd like to know why.





PART

1



Ms Bovary



Her lungs heaved
as if they would burst









Suffocating
 in the dead of night
 softly spoken words

e c h o e d
 and
 r e e c h o e d
 r e e c h o e d
 r e e c h o e d
 r e e c h o e d
 r e e c h o e d
 r e e c h o e d
 r e e c h o e d
 r e e c h o e d
 r e e c h o e d
 multiplied vibrations





a mild pain

a simple prick

tears trickled onto the pillow

dreaming between the lines

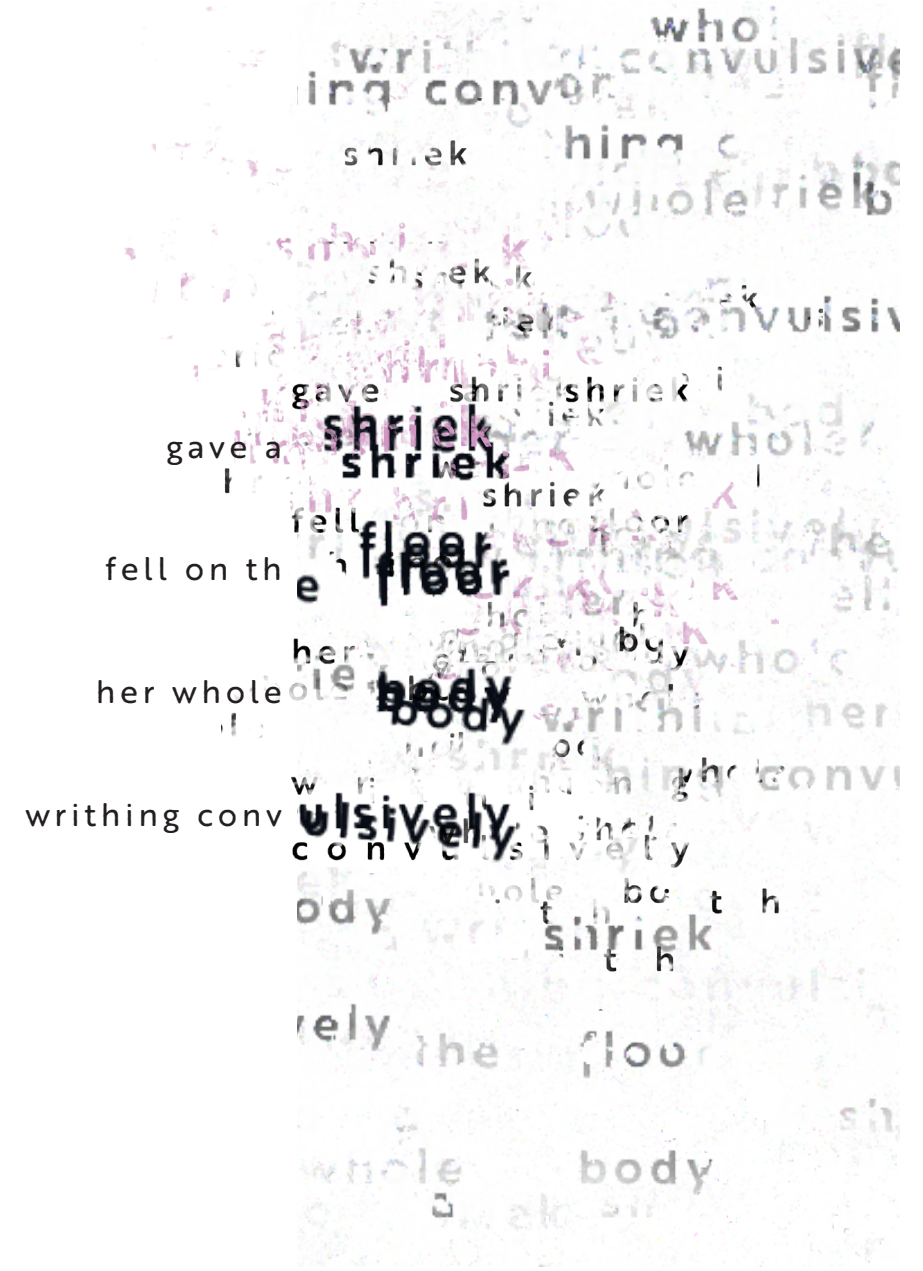
certain it would never end

a rosy haze

fringed with gold









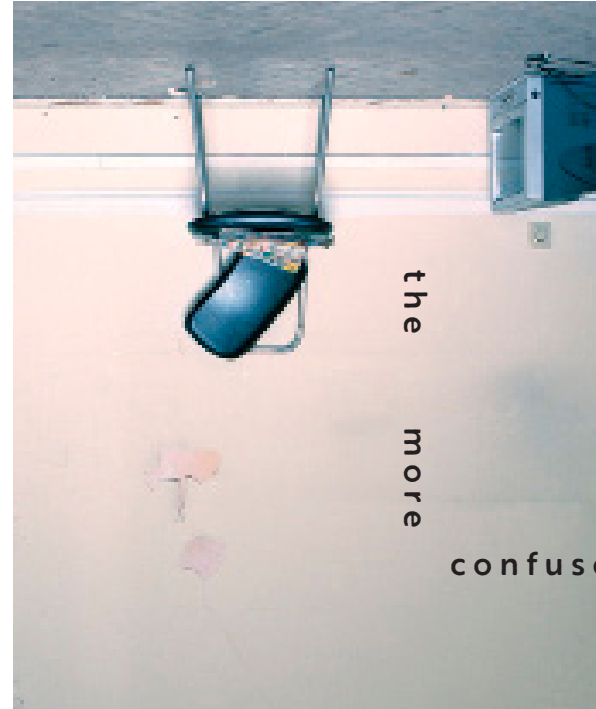


The blue sky pressed down upon her

thoughts,

to fix her

The more she tried



the more confused

she became.



BROWN PAPER

BROWN PAPER

symptoms such as
convulsions

Hysteria

cou

nausea
vomiting
dizziness
spe

Hysteria
is a
illness
with no organic

with

Hysteria

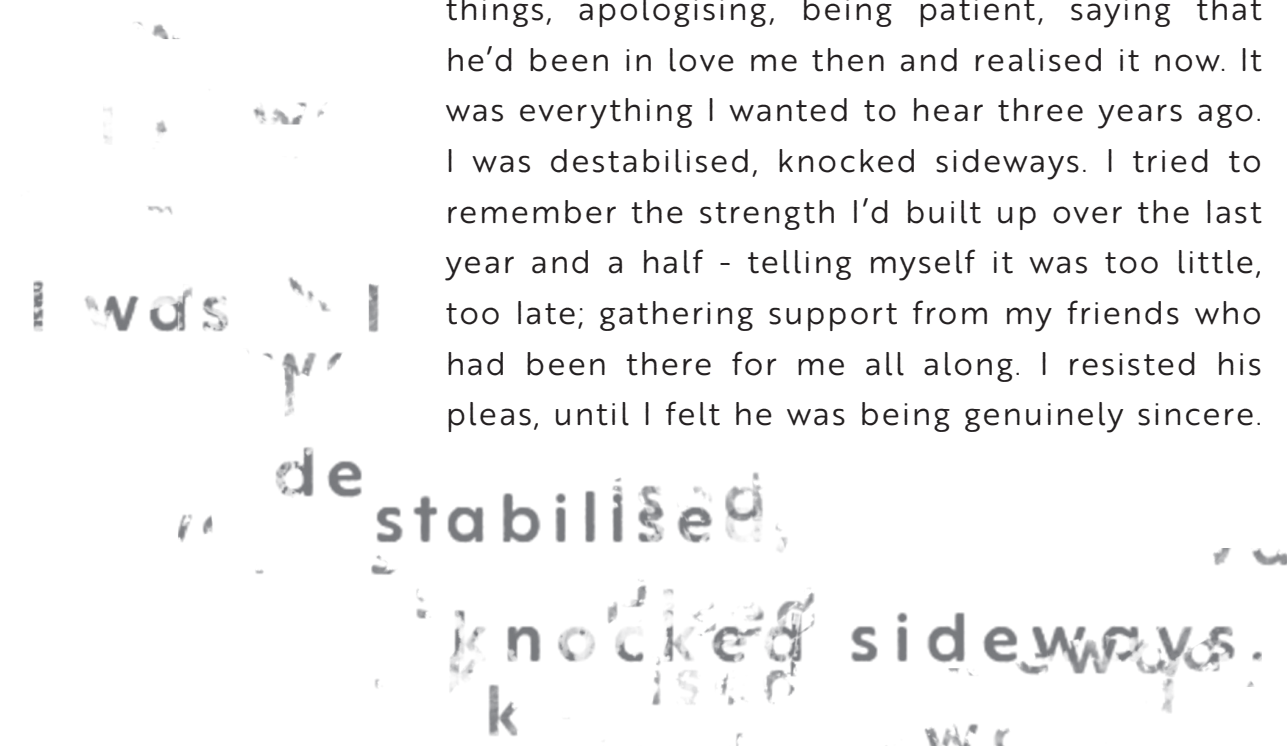
Hysteria is illness
Hysteria
Hysteria

Hysteria



PART
2

The narcissist returned after three years. He got in touch approximately three months before that on Instagram, **priming me**. Saying all the right things, apologising, being patient, saying that he'd been in love me then and realised it now. It was everything I wanted to hear three years ago. I was destabilised, knocked sideways. I tried to remember the strength I'd built up over the last year and a half - telling myself it was too little, too late; gathering support from my friends who had been there for me all along. I resisted his pleas, until I felt he was being genuinely sincere.



Then I gave in. Texting every day. Video calls from his car, his kitchen, Instagram dm's of romantic quotes. I got butterflies again. He sent me a post that said "Maybe the universe had to break us so that we could fit when we were together." And at first I thought it was cute but later had the uneasy realisation that it wasn't the universe that had **broken me** - it was him.

He came back to the UK and quarantined for two weeks. After that he had a job set up in Manchester for five weeks and was only going to be in London for an afternoon. I thought it would have been reasonable for him to want to see me at this point after everything but the invitation didn't come.

Eventually he suggested coffee, but it was more of a maybe, let's see, if he had time, he had a tight schedule, needed to get on the motorway. Somehow, I thought this meant that we'd agreed to have coffee. Didn't go to the studio and waited all day for him to message. I thought he would want to see me. I thought it wasn't too much to ask. I thought I'd be the first person he'd want to see after all he'd said. As the day went on there was **nausea**, loss of appetite, stomach churning. I messaged him 'so are we having coffee?' A phone call came in and he said he was already on the motorway. He sounded genuine enough but I **exploded** in anger and hung up the phone on him. He left a message on my phone saying he was really sorry for the misunderstanding and that he thought we'd agreed not to meet. He didn't want to upset me, that was not his intention and please could we talk later. I calmed down, accepted the

misunderstanding and talked to him later. And the next day, and the next day for the four weeks or so he was on that job. Took his daily phone calls, looked him in the eye, talked to him about all of my life and listened to all of his. Held nothing back. Cut off contact with the other men I was talking to in one of my moments of 'clarity'.

He had every Friday off but never suggested that he might come to see me. He **toyed** with the idea that I might go to him. I would have to stay in his bedroom and not leave though, he said. I wasn't sure if this was a joking reference to sexual **fantasy** or if he really didn't want me to be seen. Either way it made me uneasy and I never went. His colleague went to London every Friday to see her boyfriend. The fact that this possibility didn't cross his mind was a **warning** sign I acknowledged to myself but didn't want to overthink. (He would often tell me not to overthink things.) He said it was because she couldn't go without sex for a week but I wondered if maybe it was because she loved him. Maybe she just wanted to see him. The fact that this possibility didn't seem to cross his mind was another warning sign I acknowledged. But I didn't want to put too much pressure on him. So I let it go. I'd quite often think of these things

afterwards and it felt petty to bring it up later.

We continued to talk when I was at the studio, when I was in bed, between lecture prep and coffees with friends. Video calls drained my battery. My sleep was upended and my days were a blur. I took my clothes off. So did he. He showered while I **watched**. He turned me on. Told me things he'd like to do to me. It worked. It doesn't often work when men do that to me. He was working nights and my schedule, wherever it could, seemed to merge into his. It never happened the other way around. His regime. We talked about the past, remembered moments of kisses, when he put his hand around my stomach and pulled me into him from behind at a gig, how good it felt to fit together, when he put his fingers around my neck for the first time, when he pushed me into the wall to kiss me at a tube station out East. Conversations of our dreams of how we hoped it would all work out, that maybe it would, he'd told his family about me and thought we'd get on; would I tell my parents? Talked of his recovery, how proud he is, of therapy, of breath works and transcendental experiences, our children. I talked about my divorce, my PhD and art work, my teaching and writing and how I had lost work

in the pandemic. He talked about the fun he has with people he works with, how he loves doing a good job and gets validation from being the best. About how much he gets paid (without ever putting a figure on it I knew it was substantial). We talked about other people we'd been seeing. I was upset that he'd been seeing someone else (an old girlfriend he'd reconnected with when he was on a job in South Africa earlier this year) when I felt that we hadn't fully finished things between us. I felt as though he owed me a resolution. The fact that I had been seeing other people was only because I had no choice - he left me because he wanted to work on his family life - so to hear that he was exploring other possibilities before talking with me was deeply hurtful. But I didn't feel I was allowed to have that point of view so I didn't say anything as it would have appeared **unreasonable**. I thanked him for telling me.

One morning he'd come off a week of nights and was clearly tired, angry and emotional. He was looking for a fight, or so it felt. He got into bed, said he was tired and lonely and he couldn't even drink and that he missed his mum and wished she was still alive. I felt an intense burst of compassion for him, stopped my work and

got into my own bed to be as close to him as I could. In that conversation, as we lay there with the screen between us, he dropped casually in that he'd received an old photo from someone he knew when he was 17 of him lying in a field. How it was weird to see himself looking so young. This was his way of telling me that the old girlfriend he'd been seeing in South Africa was still texting him so I asked him directly if that's who he meant. He said yes, as though it should be no big deal. I asked him why he was telling me this and he said 'don't be a dick'. I said let's talk about this later as you are clearly tired. Then I rang him back and asked if I could ask one thing - did she know about me? "No, she doesn't but I was going to tell her" was his reply. I went **ballistic**.

went ballistic

I yelled "It's too fucking late. This is all too little too late." And hung up. **Blocked** him for a week. I needed to focus on my exam.

I had these moments of absolute clarity all along; I'd say it was characteristic of our relationship (or maybe it's me). He'd do something that cut me deeply, I'd blow up in **anger** to hide my pain, he would blame me for overreacting, make me feel like an utter bitch, I'd apologise and we'd start the process all over again. He had emailed me throughout the week but I'd ignored him. In those emails he had asked if we could talk so he could explain and that my reaction was '**insane**'. Another one saying that this was his last message and he truly wished the best for me.

After my exam I wanted to share my success and relief with him. I replied that day saying "Needed to focus on my exam. We both said we didn't want any drama but we bring it out in each other." Since then he's been totally withdrawn. Saying that our past casts a long shadow and that I will never trust him and he doesn't want to constantly have to explain himself.

He has moved in around the corner but hasn't arranged to see me. I sent a message saying "Isn't it interesting that when reality hits you can't

our past casts a long shadow

live up to all the empty words? I hope one day you become the person you want to be." Which is, I see now, a very hurtful thing to say but at the time I thought I was seeing clearly again; bringing some profound insight to the situation. He said his priority is his kids and moving in - he said it in a way that I should obviously agree with. He needed to acclimatise, that I shouldn't pressurise him and that he doesn't respond well to being guilt-tripped into doing anything. I know my place.

But then I miss him, I long for his attention, I want to see him; can't stand the fact that he's around the corner and doesn't want to see me. Or hasn't even tried. I feel utterly **rejected**. I cried. Let it out. Accepted my place as low down his priority list and felt better. Talked to a friend who affirmed my perspective. I shouldn't have to pressurise someone into wanting to spend time with me or feel bad for expecting someone to want to put me first, especially after all that's happened.

Then he texts to say I'm annoying. That I'm not the only one with feelings. That I'm personal and nasty and that I make him feel like shit and he doesn't want either of us to live like that. I reminded him that I apologised for blocking him (without mentioning that he never apologised

about the South African woman). I felt really bad for the personal attacks I made on him, casting aspersions on his recovery and potential. Later that day I asked him if he would please come over for a cup of tea, that I'd really like to see him and that I wouldn't be horrible. He said 'Of course. Thank you.' But that maybe next week would be better and we'd talk later in the week. I asked if he was ok and he hasn't replied.





he felt it

between
his
fingers

her
sensuous
desires

he didn't
hurry

rekindling
her
sadness



She could not see things
clearly though she strained
with imbecile persistence to
fix her attention upon them.







Immense

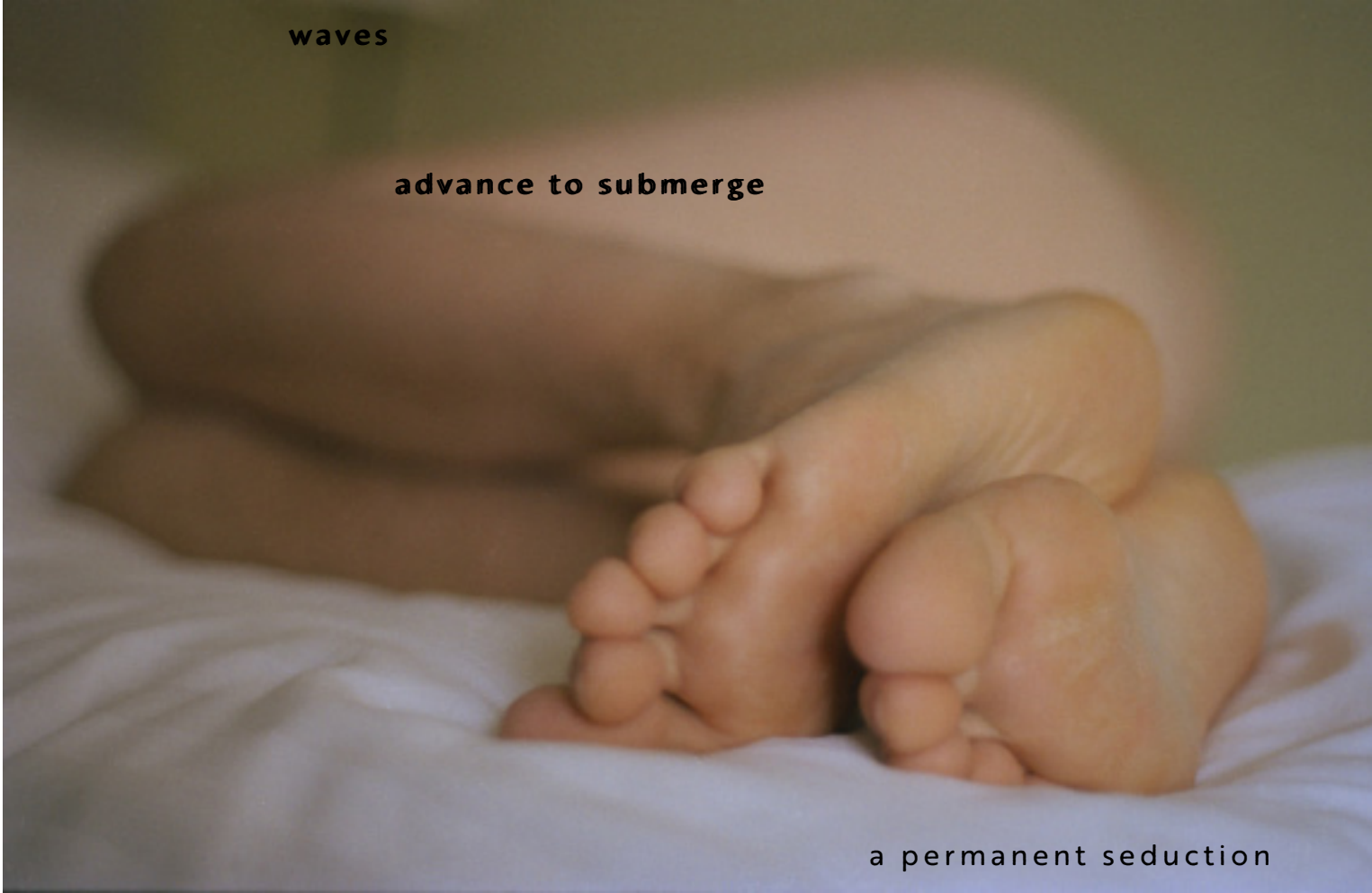
black

waves

advance to submerge

a permanent seduction

subjugating her













enveloped
with
warm air



BROWN PAPER

BROWN PAPER





PART
3

After a few weeks he texted saying there was a no pressure open offer of coffee. I replied with a vague yes that would be nice maybe next week, with little intention of making it happen. Then the following week he left a voicemail on my phone saying he'd like to see me and that he goes for a walk every day and maybe I could go with him? He said the good thing about walks are that if you want to you can just walk away. The next week on the Thursday night I watched that new Sofia Coppola film with Bill Murray. He played a useless, **womanising** dad of a daughter in her 30's who was convinced her husband was having an affair. The dad took it upon himself to help her find out and would turn up at her flat springing plans to go out on some adventure in his soft top car to spy on the husband. There was a scene where he took her out to a Manhattan restaurant on her birthday and got her an expensive gift. I felt sad that my dad hasn't done that, although I was also very glad that my dad was nothing like him;

**the good thing about walks
are that if you want to you
can just walk away."**

sleazy, sexist, privileged. At the end of the film it turned out her husband wasn't having an affair but had just been working hard to get them the life they always wanted (a dubious ending in itself, one which totally negated her legitimate concerns about her husband's working hours and overly intimate relationship with his, stereotypically attractive, female work colleague). The finale was a domestic gathering; the scene oozing nauseating **unbreakable** family love. I imagine it was supposed to be 'feel-good' but it left me feeling miserable and the next morning, with nothing on my agenda, I texted him saying yeah a walk would be nice. How about this morning?
I met him in the park. He had his dog with him, the family dog they had shipped over from the States, and I was thankful for the dog as it meant I had something to look at that wasn't him. Considering I hadn't seen him for a year and a half and so much had happened both between us and since then, it was curious to me that I **froze** up when I saw him. I was not warm towards him, not happy to see him, in fact I shut down. I was

emotionless, no physical contact, no eye contact and definitely no sexual chemistry. He mirrored this reaction, as he always did. I wore my least favourite outfit, something I never would have done previously. This was **unconscious**. He wore smart shoes with his jeans self-consciously turned up.
We ended up having coffee, I paid as he waited outside with the dog. Coffee turned into a longer walk which turned into lunch. I paid for mine as he walked over to another stall to buy exactly the same thing for himself. He said he didn't fancy eating outside in the cold and did I fancy going back to his to eat.
This turned into him giving me a back massage with a massage gun he had left on the table. He got phone calls and I left, saying he could come over to mine in a bit if he wanted to. He did. At my breakfast bar he started talking about serious things, like how he was worried about his eldest daughters and how he was planning to be there for him and that he wasn't going anywhere. He looked at me implying I was included in this statement, although maybe I made that up. I asked for a hug and he said he was about to ask for the same thing. We hugged close

and long. Holding each other **tight** and not letting go. I walked away and sat back down at the breakfast bar and then stood up again and walked in circles around the room not saying anything. He followed me and we hugged again. He started looking for my mouth with his and we kissed. I wasn't sure about this as his hands strayed onto my hip and under my clothes. As he felt my skin he said 'it is you'. And we laughed and walked to the bedroom where he **fucked** me until it hurt and I asked him to stop for a minute. Which to be honest seemed like an inconvenience to him at the time. His face was contorted as he fucked me hard again. I noticed he seemed so far away from me at the same time as feeling him come deep inside me. I can't remember what happened after that apart from that we went back to his to feed the dog and as it got late he said do you want to go home and I said not really and he said let's go to bed then. But I didn't feel particularly wanted. We had sex again and the dog jumped on the bed. Afterwards we talked about him missing his mum and his general hopes and dreams – each of us in no way including the other in our fantasy plans. I said I'd like to live in New York, he said maybe you will. He said he just wants to get his own place

which will probably be South East after me saying I want to go North. After he talked and I listened he turned over and went to sleep as I lay there wide awake and anxious. It was 2am when I decided to get dressed. I left a note saying I couldn't sleep and walked home in the dark silent streets noticing a man dodge me by walking into the bushes of someone's driveway as I passed him by. I felt nervous. Anxious I was going to get home safely, but it was only 5 minutes I told myself.

The next day he called. Asked if I was OK. I said yes with an uncertain upward lilt at the end of my answer. He said "yeah?" and I said "I don't know... maybe" and he said 'I think we're thinking the same thing let's talk later.'" And got off the phone as quickly as he could. He rang later (longer than was comfortable for later) and said we probably shouldn't have done that, we just rushed in and skipped a stage. I said did he want to come round and talk about it, he was surprised, asked if I really wanted to do that, I said yes, and he said Ok fine as though I'd just asked him to go and get milk in the pouring rain. He came over with his dog. The

dog ate my cat food and he didn't stop him. Just laughed and said "The dog ate all your cat food". My cat ran under the bed. He came in and sat on the other sofa. He said so it got a bit weird. We skipped a stage. He said he was about to say nice things about me but we skipped that. I said we'd had all night to say nice things but didn't. I said I didn't think he really wanted to know how much he'd hurt me. He said it was better if he left. I said

what do you want? He said he didn't want anything. I said You aren't offering me anything. He said no I'm not offering you anything. And I said so what did

you think this was? What about you saying that you always thought we could be something? He looked at his dog, hoping for it to do something that would divert our attention but he didn't, he just sat there meekly looking up at him. He huffed and looked away like a child. I said, well, what did you think this was?

He said he thought we could just be friends. And that yesterday we were just two people enjoying the moment. He didn't realise it was anything else. I said you can't do that to me.

what did you
think this was?"

You can do that to a stranger but not to me, after everything. He huffed again, looking at his dog despairingly. I said you know I've always loved you. He said I didn't realise that you still did. I thought this was different. In that case I think I should leave. I will not contact you again. I care enough about you not to do that. And he practically ran out of the flat yanking his dog's lead to follow him. I didn't get up to see him out. Didn't say goodbye. I moved over to my laptop and started working on the presentation he'd interrupted as he shut the door behind him.

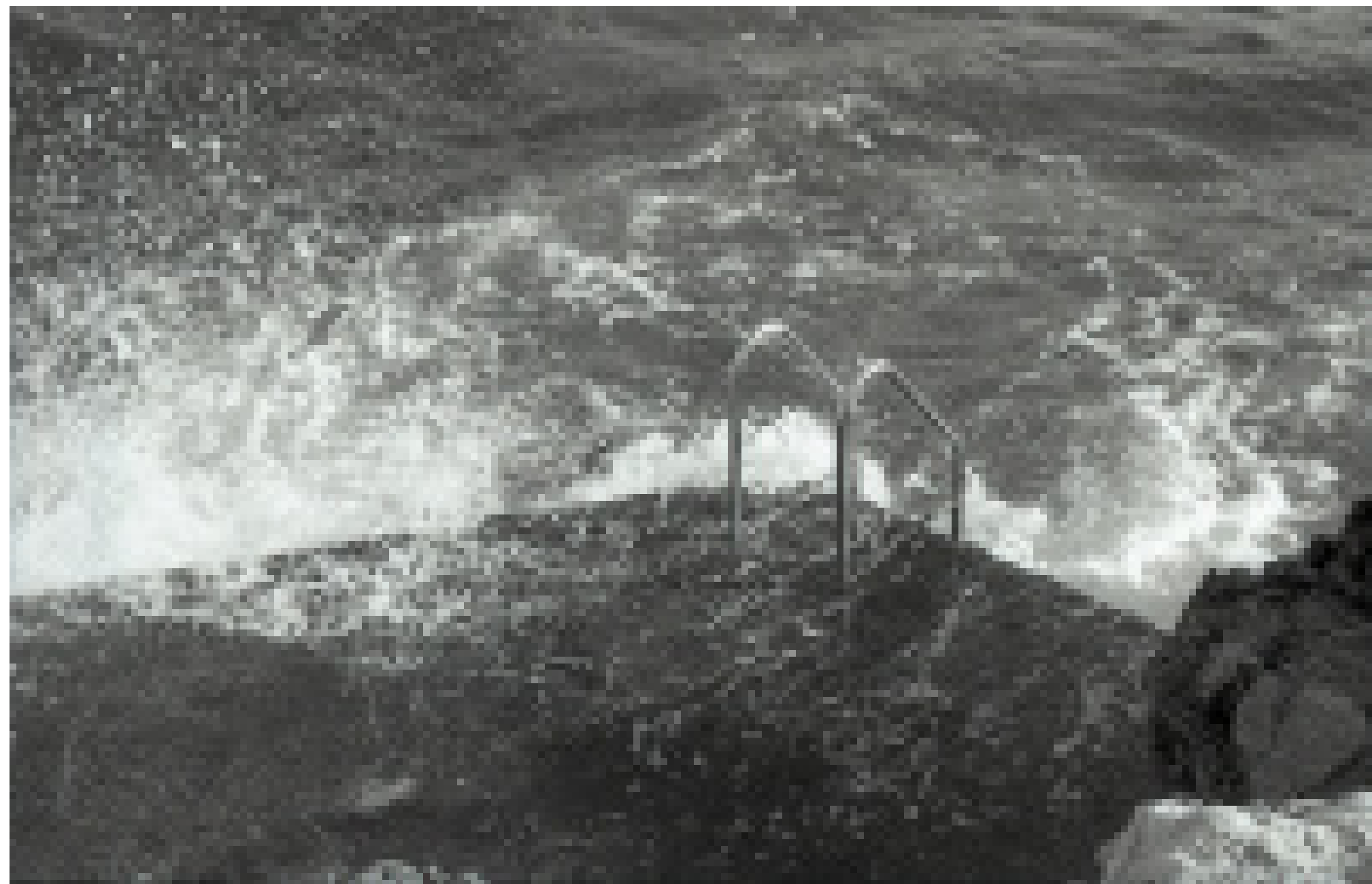
I noticed he had worn my favourite black sweatshirt for the occasion.



gentle speeches
trembling with
rage







like voice, an angry
a childlike voice, an angry
derisive laugh



seraphic harps

azure sky

flaming wings

carrying her away

in their arms

a love above all other loves

pleasure

ecstatic transports

incursions of grace

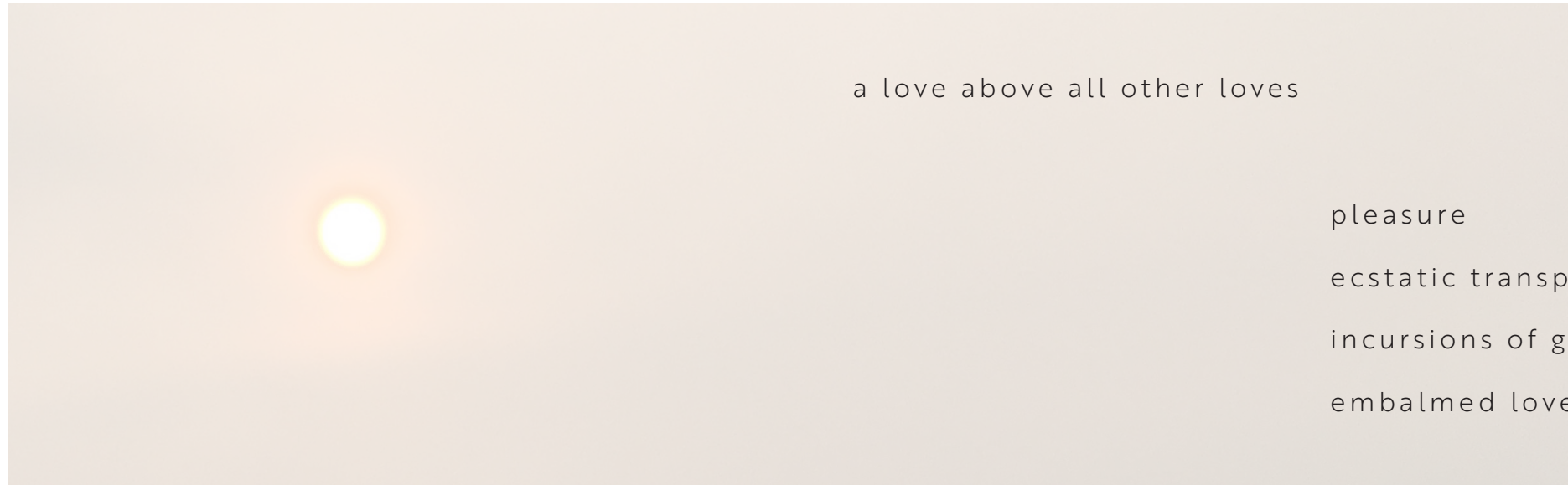
embalmed love

tears of a heart wounded by life

faster

larger

into his hands





suspected love

pulsating there

near her

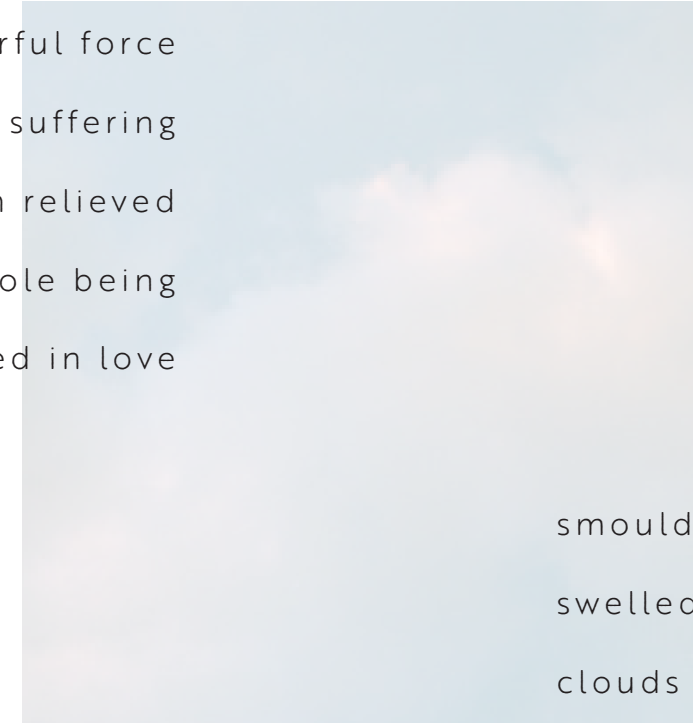
a powerful force

rid her of all suffering

her flesh relieved

her whole being

dissolved in love



smouldering incense

swelled out softly

clouds

rays

dazzling halos

her head fell back



