

# On Page and Screen: Adaptations of Literature in Recent Film

Session 2: The Outrun

Welcome!



## An epigraph for this week: Kazuo Ishiguro on adaptation

I lean toward the film version moving the story on – not being a faithful translation the way a foreign language edition of a book might be. I know many novelists who'd be annoyed to hear me say this ... The thing is, I watch many, many films and when an adaptation of a well-known book doesn't work, 95% of the time it's because the film-makers have been too reverential to the source.

It might sound like modesty when I encourage film adaptations to 'move on' the story. But actually it's a form of egomania. I have aspirations for my stories to be like those of, say, Homer. Or to become like certain fairytales and myths, moving through the centuries and varying cultures, adapting and growing to speak to different audiences. My novels are themselves made up of materials I've inherited, imbibed and remoulded. When something goes from book to film **it's a campfire opportunity**: it's when the story should grow and evolve.

Kazuo Ishiguro, quoted in Xan Brooks, "I had a chance to pass my Mum's story on": Kazuo Ishiguro on Growing Up in Shadow of the Nagasaki Bomb, *Guardian* (12 May, 2025)



# Outline: topics on which we might touch

1. Memoir, life writing and film: Amy and Rona
2. Nature writing
3. Book and film: reactions
4. Geography 1: the edge
5. Geography 2: being in between
6. Selkies: becoming other
7. Tremors: elusive connections
8. Imagery: other examples
9. Conclusion: personal geology







# Memoir, life writing and film: Amy and Rona

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## Part 1



# On renaming Amy as Rona



Saoirse Ronan on The Late Show (RTE 1)

We [Nora Fingscheidt and I] decided to name the main character Rona rather than Amy. This gave me some psychological distance and Rona became 'she' in our conversations rather than 'I.'

I began to see Rona as a collaboration between me, Nora and Saoirse: a new entity.

**Amy Liptrot, 'My Real Life as an Alcoholic, Played Out on the Big Screen' (*Guardian*, Sept 2024)**

# On fiction as a means of unlocking further dimensions of reality

We created new fictional moments to solve a central problem of this adaptation: how to make visual what in the book is internal? How to show the healing power of nature? There's a moment where Rona removes her headphones and lets the sounds of her natural surroundings come in. There's a scene where, hit by cravings, she runs off a ferry before it departs. Neither of these things actually happened to me but the emotions and decisions they convey did.

The film's method settled between fact and fiction, between documentary and drama. Nora used some real people: farmers, islanders and actors who had been through rehab, who workshopped scenes with a loose script. The results are fresh and authentic.

**Amy Liptrot, 'My Real Life as an Alcoholic'**



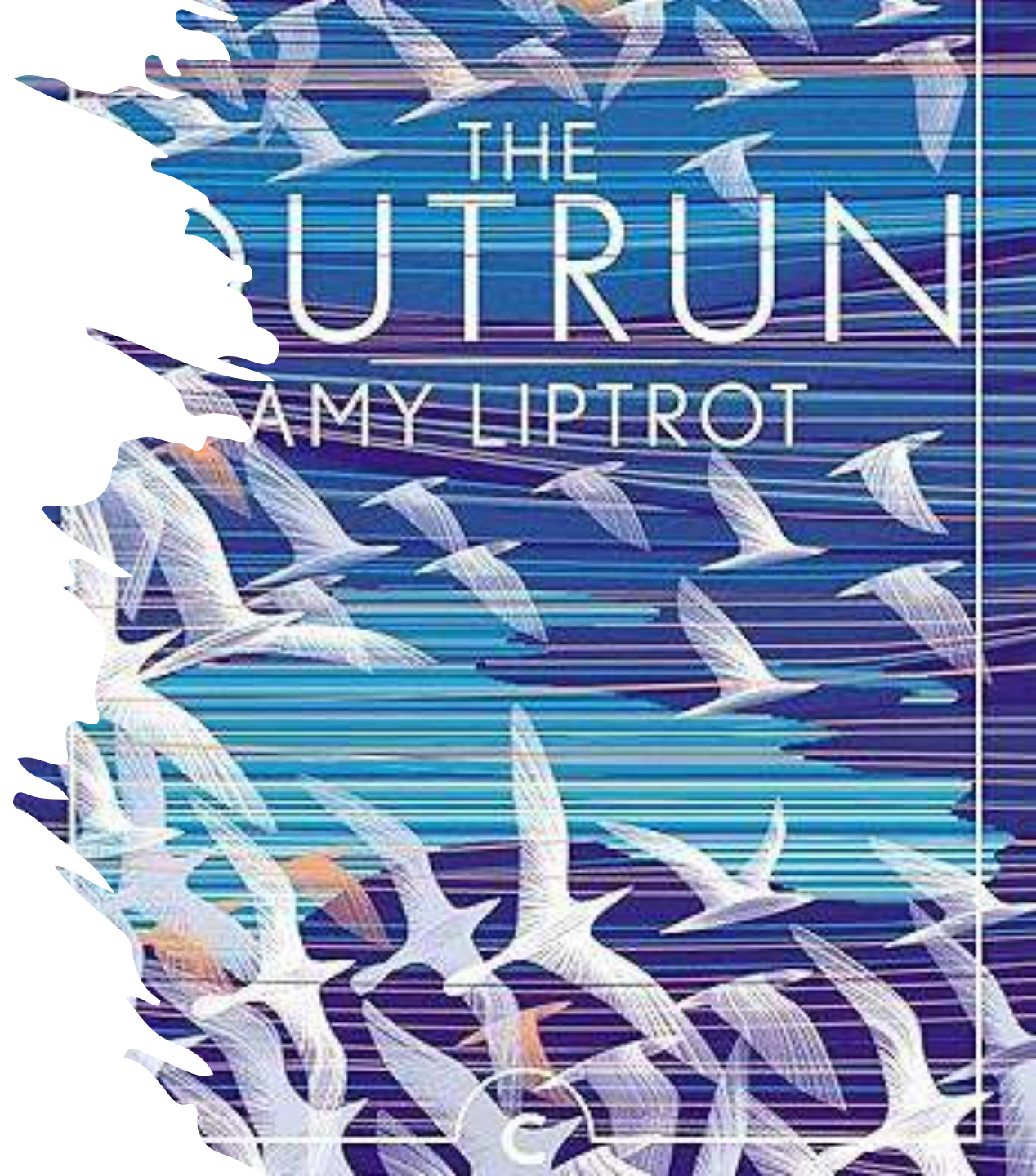


## On memory and identity

Having the story of your life adapted for cinema is, of course, a rare experience but some of the effects it has had on me are, I began to see, amplifications and accelerations of more common processes of memory and sense of identity. Time and retelling bring distortions and realisations.

I start to get confused and feel scenes from the film, more present and vivid than my memories, are actually things that happened. I don't recall the face of the doctor who referred me to rehab 12 years ago, but I can clearly picture the actor playing the part. Did I run off the ferry like that? The film starts to replace the real events in my memory.

**Amy Liptrot, 'My Real Life as an Alcoholic'**





# Nature writing

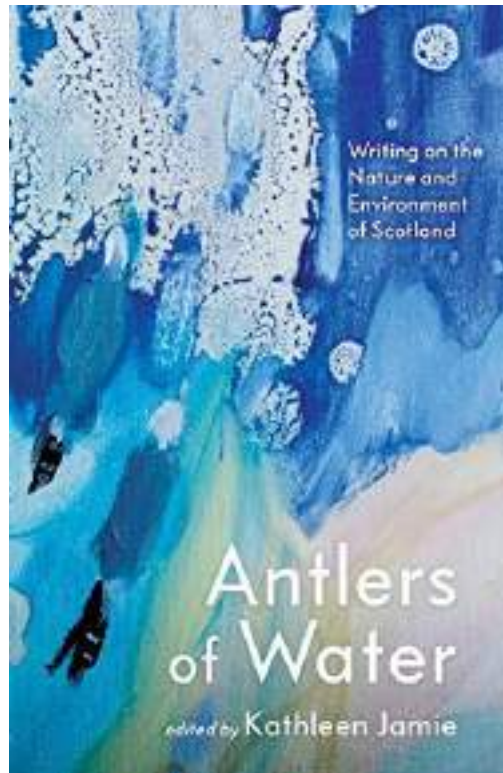
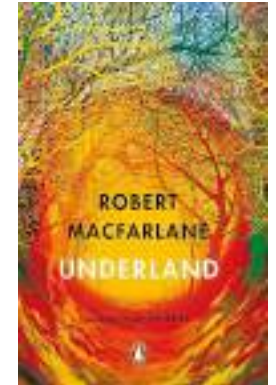
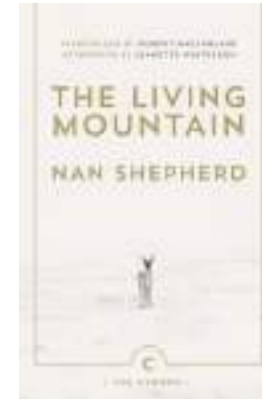
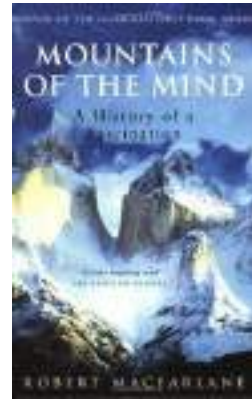
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## Part 2



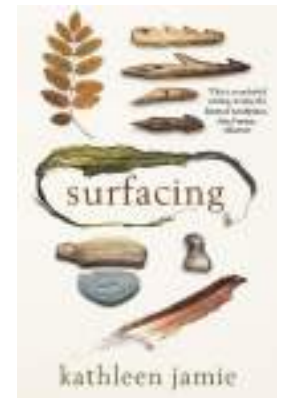


# Contemporary nature writing



Out of our noticing comes our art and our writing. For me, this noticing and caring, this attention, this writing from within personal circumstances, whether about an insect or a mountain, amounts to a political act. In a time of ecological crisis, I would argue that simply insisting on our right to pay heed to natural landscapes and other non-human lifeforms amounts to an act of resistance to the forces of destruction.

**Kathleen Jamie, intro. to *Antlers of Water***





# Book and film: reactions

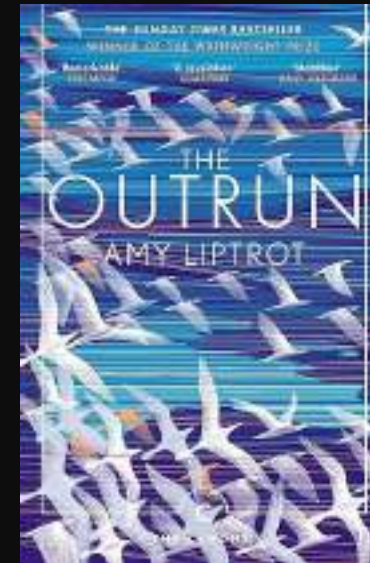
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Part 3

# What did you think of this week's book and film?

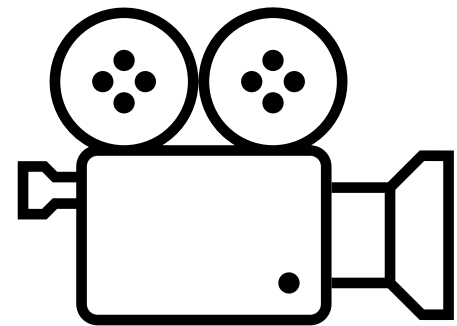
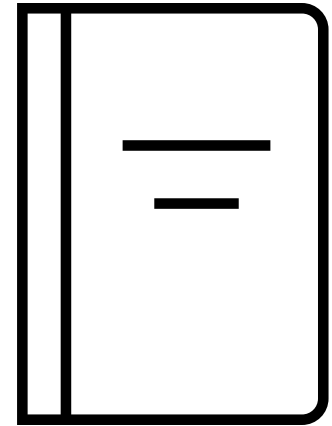
- What interested you about the book and/or film?
- What did the film do differently to the book?
- What is gained in the translation from book to film and what is lost?
- What, for you, were the main issues in the book/film?
- What do you think of the artistic choices made by Amy Liptrot and Nora Fingscheidt?
- Were there any moments in book or film that struck you as particularly interesting?



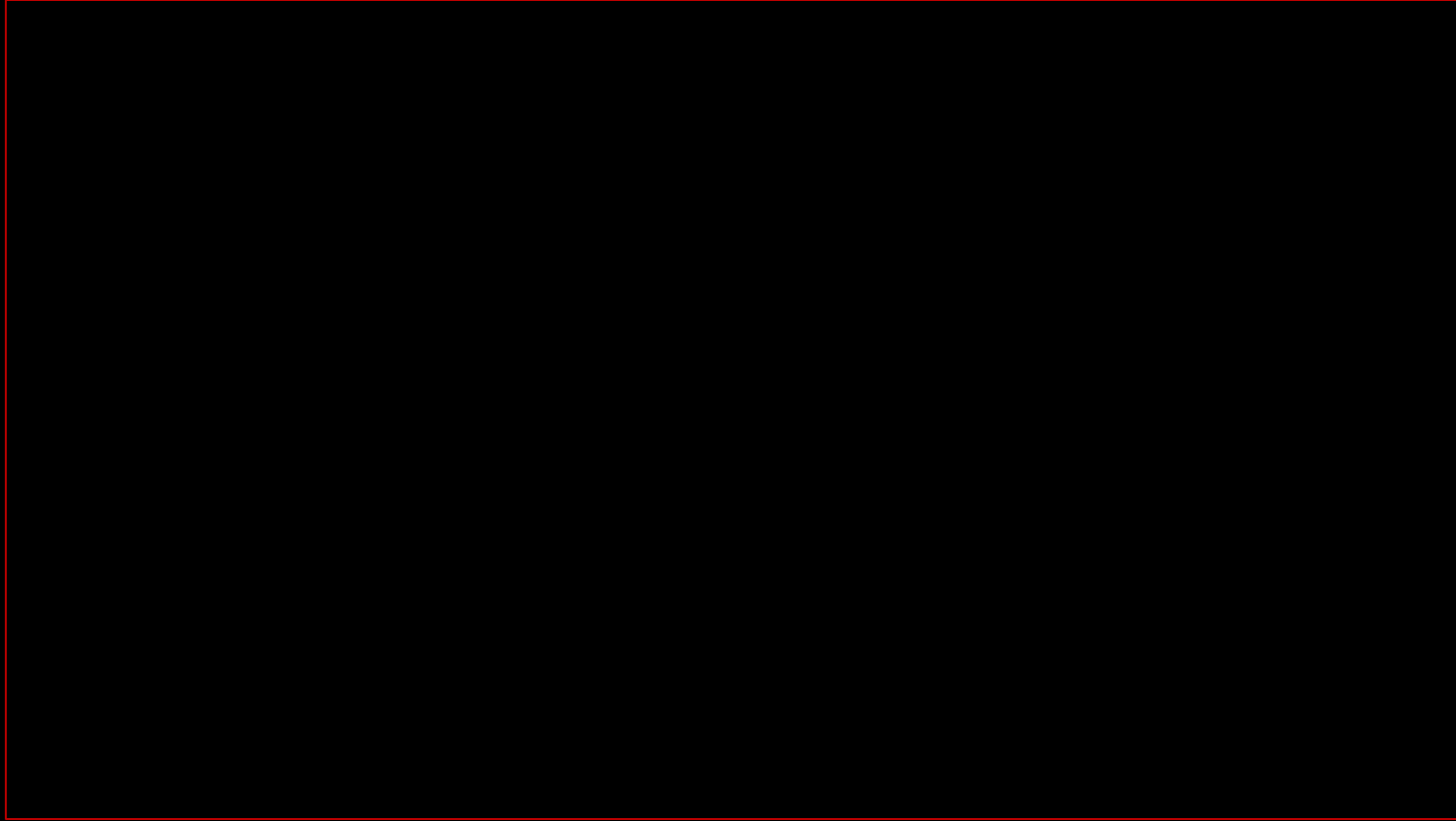


## A few of the differences between book and film

- Amy Liptrot becomes Rona
- Liptrot has a brother; Rona is an only child
- In London, Liptrot works a series of temping jobs, but Rona is a postgraduate student
- Hearing and seeing the corncrake comes at the end of film, as Rona leaves Papay; hearing and seeing corncrakes comes earlier in the book
- Callum (a recovering alcoholic on Papay) is invented for the film (but plays a similar role to Dee in the book?)
- Some elements (e.g. the trip to Fair Isle; mythology about Triduana) are omitted from the film
- The compass is lost forever in the book, but found again in the film
- Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera! - numerous other inventions, omissions and transformations putting film and book into dialogue with one another.



# Opening scenes





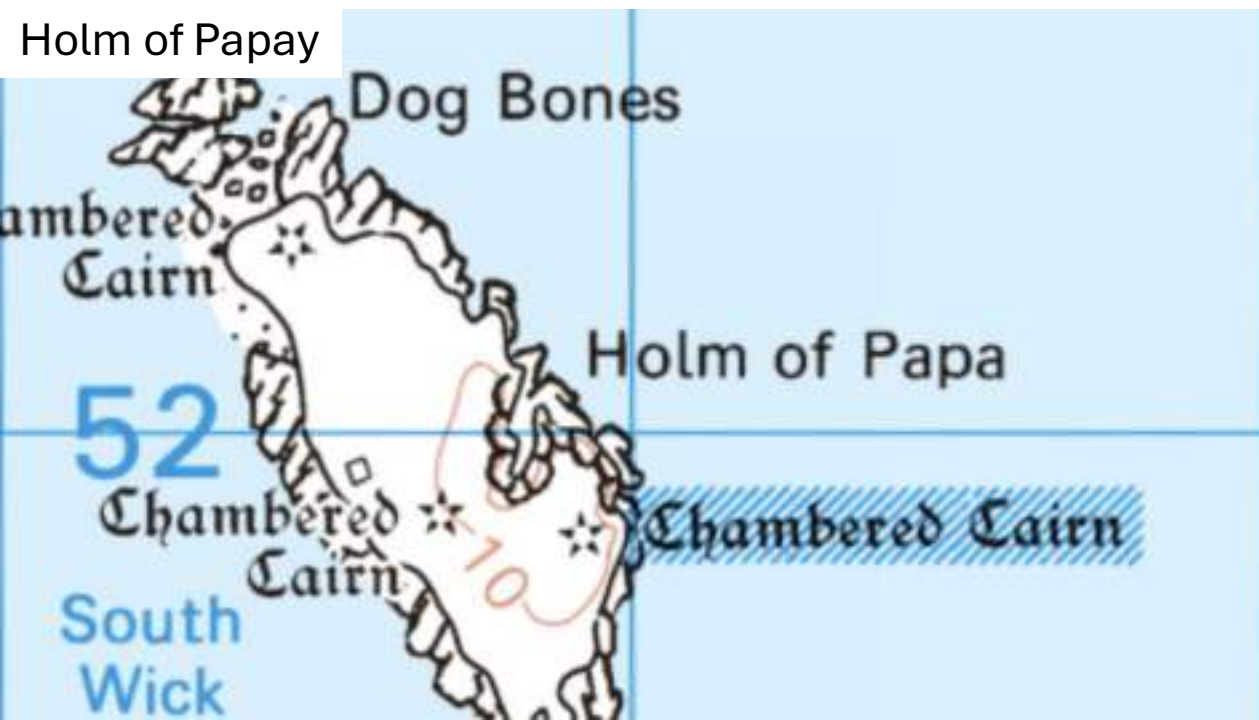
# Geography 1: the edge

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Part 4





## The edge

**Britain** is an island off Europe, **Orkney** is an island off Britain, **Westray** is an island off Orkney, **Papay** is an island off Westray and the **Holm of Papay** is at yet another remove. It is where to go when life on Papay gets too hectic.  
p. 201



## The edge

I was a physically brave and foolhardy child. I climbed up stone dykes and onto shed roofs. I threw my body from high rafters onto hay or wool bags below. Later I plunged myself into parties – alcohol, drugs, relationships, sex – wanting to taste the extremes, not worrying about the consequences, always seeking sensation and raging against those who warned me away from the **edge**. My life was rough and windy and tangled. **[p. 20]**



# Geography 2: being in between

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Part 5





**p. 18**

**p. 279**



# London as an island

London is an island within the rest of the UK,  
defined and separate.

**p. 148**

When I left Orkney on the ferry it was foggy;  
arriving on mainland Britain was like emerging into  
another realm. I'd crossed a boundary not just of  
sea but also of imagination. Because I came from  
an island, London was the fantasy and London  
Fields was my Hether Blether. I became  
accustomed to an unsustainable enchanted  
lifestyle of summer days in the park with beautiful  
people and intoxicated nights at parties. I didn't  
expect the spell to be broken and I didn't want to  
find my way back through the mist to home.

**p. 33**





# Dislocation

When first I left Orkney, my friend Sean gave me a compass. I used to wear it round my neck at parties, and when people asked about it, I would tell them it was so I could find my way home. Wherever I was, north was always home. I left the compass somewhere one night. Then I was totally lost.

**p. 167**

When I was in the south it was easiest for me to say that I was 'Scottish' or 'come from Orkney' but that was not what I would say to a real Orcadian. Although I was born in Orkney and lived there until I was eighteen, I don't have an Orcadian accent and my family is from England.

**p. 18**







# Selkies: becoming other

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Part 4





My friend Anne from the RSPB comes out to Papay from the Mainland to show me how to snorkel. At a rocky area of North Wick Bay, we put on wetsuits, neoprene boots, gloves and hoods, flippers and snorkel masks, and **slip into the water, like less-elegant seals.**

...

It doesn't take long for this world to become my new reality. The swaying seaweed is reflected on the underside of the water's surface which has formed my new sky. ... When I do stand up, I feel invincible in the wetsuit, able to walk through nettle patches and wade across lochs. Back home, **I peel it off like a selkie's skin.**

pp.255-57

# Seals and selkies





# Tremors: elusive connections

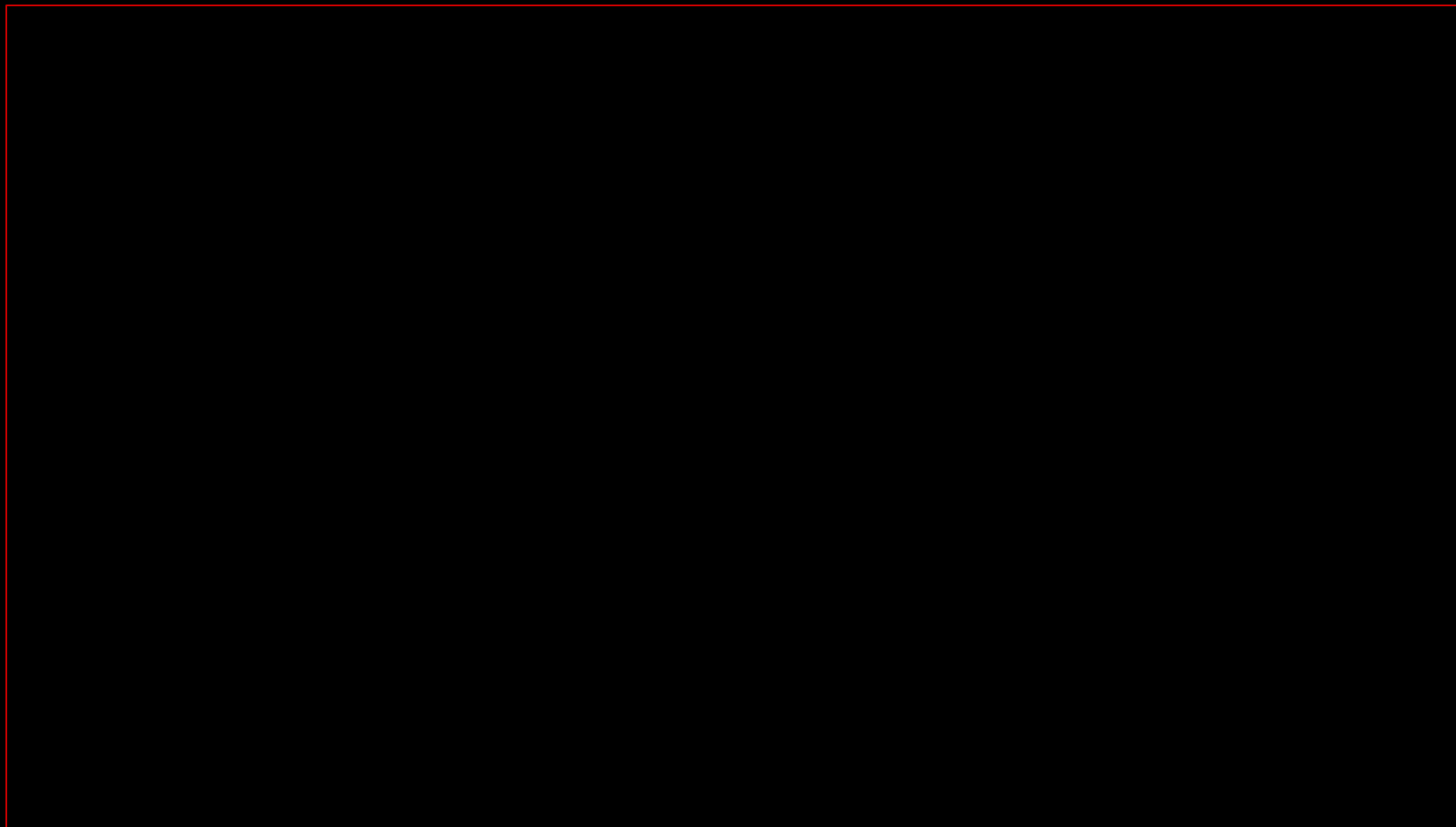
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Part 5





# Tremors: trailer for The Outrun





Ripples were set off the day I was born, and although I moved far away, the seizures I began to experience as my drinking escalated **felt as if the tremors** had caught up with me too.

**pp. 13-14**



The theory [in AA] says I lived – and continue to live – with two things: the obsession and the craving. The obsession shows itself in the desire to drink, which pulses through me unexpectedly, **like the tremors** at the farm, **an almost imperceptible rumbling that is always there**, threatening me for the rest of my life. I need to stay vigilant and not have the first drink that triggers the craving – my inability to stop. If I let one trickle through, I'll be flooded very quickly.

**p. 67**



The first time he saw me I was climbing on top of a phone box. We were outside a gig held in an empty shop on Kingsland Road ... and I noticed a boyish American with mischievous eyes. Later, I sat on the pavement and told passers-by I was going to the beach. I could **feel the tremors**.

p. 35



Months passed: a winter, a disastrous trip to Orkney, where I spent time in a police cell, another under-employed summer. I couldn't believe the sadness had gone on for so long. The searing panic was something beyond me and I ignored all rules and safety measures to follow it, a slave to the habit of pain. Eyes always brimming with tears, I had fortnight-long headaches, bad dreams I couldn't wake from. I had gone beyond and didn't know how to get back. I saw the pattern from the curtains of my farmhouse bedroom. I could **feel the tremors**, and the wind of memory was flowing through me too fast to hang on.

p. 59





# Imagery: other examples

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Part 6



# Waves

[Dad] was fifteen when he was first diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and schizophrenic tendencies. Since then, periodically, he has ups and downs of varying amplitude. Our family life was rocked by the **waves** of life at its extremes, by the cycles of manic depression. [p. 12]

The rumblings of mental illness under my life were amplified by the presence of my mother's extreme religion and by the landscape I was born into, the continual, perceptible crashing of the sea at the edges. I read about the 'shoaling process' – how **waves** increase in height, then break as they reach shallower water near the shore. Energy never expires. The energy of **waves**, carried across the ocean, changes into noise and heat and vibrations that are absorbed into the land and passed through the generations. [p. 13]



# Wind

The **wind** in Orkney is almost constant. At the farm, the westerly **gales** are the worst, bringing the sea with them, and tonnes of rock can be moved overnight, the map altered in the morning.

Easterlies can be the most beautiful – when the **wind** blows towards the tide and skims a glittering canopy of spray from the top of the waves, catching the sun. The old croft houses are squat and firm, like many Orcadian people, built to survive the strongest **gales**. That sturdy balance has not been bred into me: I am tall and gangly. [p. 5]

Once, when I was about eleven, Dad was so ill that he went round the farmhouse smashing all the windows one by one. The **wind** flew through the rooms, whisking my schoolwork from my desk. [p. 13]



## Book

On the wall of the treatment centre, among the peers' work from the art-therapy classes ... there was a felt-tip drawing of a dog with its tail on fire. I used to look at it during the interminable group therapy sessions. It spoke to me somehow.

...

A bonfire is a type of controlled chaos.

pp. 243-46



## Fire



## Film

**[Rona:]** I actually had a dream the other night that all of my hair was on fire.

**[Norwegian artist:]** Okay, sounds quite scary.

**[Rona:]** Yeah, kind of amazing though. My hair was just flames, running around.



# Flotsam and jetsam

I've washed up on this island again, nine months sober, worn down and scrubbed clean, like a pebble.

**p. 88**

When I first came back to Orkney I felt like the strandings of jellyfish, laid out on the rocks for all to see. I was washed up: no longer buoyant, battered and storm-tossed.

I think of the things I have lost: my compass, stolen laptop, two shoes – one in the canal, one out of the door of a moving car – my boyfriend. But I also think of the things I have found from the sea: the fishing boat, the seal, the 'ambergris'. These things were worn out and washed-up but they were not always useless. They had tales to tell.

...

Today something catches my eye in the tangles. **I pick up a tiny – it would fit in a matchbox – headless, handless, footless porcelain figurine.**

**pp. 265-66**





## Corncrakes (and other island life)

[T]he corncrakes are struggling against death and somehow it is as if my fate becomes intertwined with that of the bird. I'm trying to cling to a normal life and stay sober. They are clinging to existence.

**p. 132**





# Conclusion: personal geology

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Part 9



# Personal geology

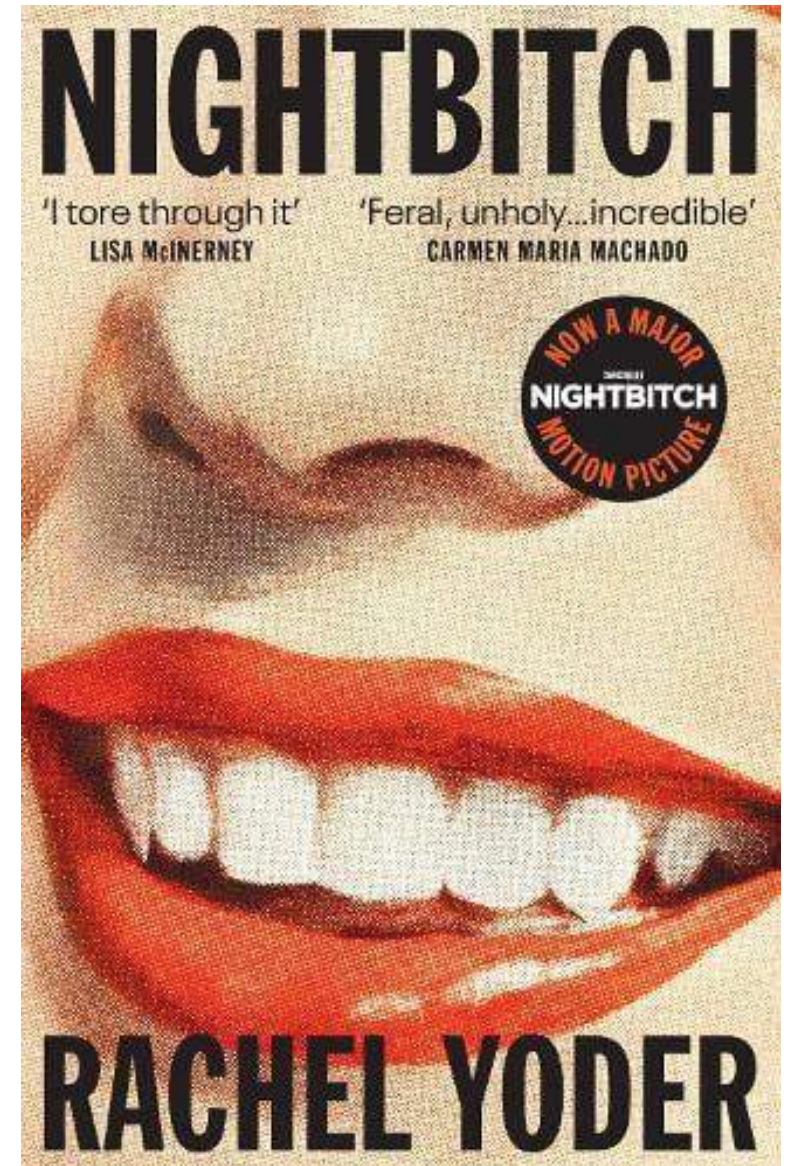


Next time:  
another story of  
transformations ...

‘I think I’m turning into a dog she said to her husband when he arrived home after a week away for work.’

‘She curled her fingers against the driveway, showed her teeth. Her eyes lit with fire, and she could feel the hair on her head growing, her mane expanding into a monstrous spectacle.’

Rachel Yoder, *Nightbitch*  
(2021; London: Vintage, 2022),  
p. 3, p. 74.



NB: our next class is in  
**two** weeks' time (30 May)