

This Tongue Is Not My Own: *Dogtooth*, Phobia and the Paternal Metaphor

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.
—Philip Larkin

zombie, *n.* “a small yellow flower”

Yorgos Lanthimos' *Dogtooth* (2009) exists in the shadow of certain real life cases and, as a film about a dictatorial Greek patriarch, is open to readings of political allegory; aesthetically, it is a post-Haneke minimal-realist piece, of fixed shots and cramped framing, and it employs an amalgam of professional and non-professional actors; it is also a reflection on the transgressive and liberating possibilities of the cinema itself; but what is most interesting about the film, *from a Lacanian perspective*, is what it suggests about language and family structure. And so, through concepts such as phobia and the paternal metaphor, as well as alienation and the uncanny – as they are theorized by Lacanian psychoanalysis – this chapter will explore the constitution of the Subject, in and through language, in *Dogtooth* to reveal – in a properly psychoanalytic manner – what the “pathological” instance here can tell us about the general condition.

Home/School/Garden/Prison

The film depicts the home-schooling ideal pursued to its logical (and absurd) conclusion, showing the lives of three apparently adult children who have never left the walled garden of their isolated house, and who receive all their care and guidance from their very literally “stay-at-home-mother” and middle-management father. The family's only contact with the outside world is the father's colleague, Christina, a security guard whom he pays to satisfy the sexual needs of the son.

I will begin with the way that *Dogtooth* places great emphasis on signifiers and meaning, showing the latter to originate with the paternal regime. An evening at the dinner table in *Dogtooth* presents a fairly common family situation, in which a child has picked up a word she does not know or understand, and innocently asks a parent what it means. Sometimes the situation is benign – such as a scene where the son asks his mother what a “zombie” is (a word he has picked up from Christina) – and sometimes it is not; here, the elder daughter gleaned a term from a hardcore porn video that the parents had apparently forgotten to tidy away: she asks, “Mom, what’s a pussy?”.¹ One might expect either great embarrassment in such a situation, or a frank discussion about sexual swear words, but certainly not for the mother to define the word as a “big light” and to use it in an exemplar sentence: “The pussy is switched off, the room plunges into darkness”. The same also happens for “zombie”, which she defines as a “small yellow flower”. It soon becomes clear that while this family might deal in recognized *signifiers*, its Symbolic order depends – at times – on *radically different signifieds*.

And this is not just a case of the sort of lazy lies that parents tell when they are caught off guard or are too exhausted to explain the truth, for this *reactive* re-signification is also joined by a *proactive* dictation of signifieds through the children’s home-schooling regime. The film begins with a cassette tape playing and a voice intoning,

Today the new words are the following:

Sea... motorway... excursion... and carbine.

A sea is a leather armchair with wooden arms like the one we have in the living room.

For example: Don’t stand on your feet, sit on the *sea* to have a quiet chat with me.

A *motorway* is a very strong wind.

¹ This is how the Verve Pictures Region B Blu-ray translates the Greek “*mouni*”, but it can also be “cunt”: use of the latter would add a stronger, more subversive edge to this respectable, family dinner scene.

Excursion is a very resistant material used to construct floors.

For example: The chandelier fell violently onto the floor but no damage was caused to it because it is made of 100% *excursion*.

Carbine. A *carbine* is a beautiful white bird.

And so it goes on: in another dinner sequence, the younger daughter asks her mother to "Please pass her the *telephone*" and is handed the salt shaker; and in a discussion with Christina about oral sex, the elder daughter refers to Christina's genitals as her "*keyboard*". So what is happening here? How is the family organisation in *Dogtooth* to be understood?

Method and Madness

In his short text on the film, Mark Fisher suggests that this parental language control is a Dadaist manipulation that 'does violence to the consensually accepted meanings of words,' and that the father himself is 'Papa Dada': a parody of authority figures.² I do not disagree with Fisher on this point; indeed, there is even something Buñuelian about *Dogtooth*'s critique of conservative, petit-bourgeois family life, recalling in particular the wonderful toilet-dinner scene in *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974), which offers a model of inversion that resonates with Lanthimos' own subversive bent. However, this reading functions at an extra-textual level; Fisher's approach is concerned with situating *Dogtooth* in a broader social context. Whereas I want to examine the film in terms of its own interior logic because this approach, I argue, yields a much more fundamental understanding of both *Dogtooth* and, potentially, the broader context in which a critic such as Fisher is invested.

Indeed, the text of *Dogtooth* constitutes a closed loop at several different levels. For instance, the enclosing logic of the family – which I will explore in detail below – extends to the formal qualities of the film. While Fisher notes a dissonance between form and content

² Mark Fisher, 'Dogtooth: The Family Syndrome', *Film Quarterly* 64/4 (2011), 27 & 23.

(true vis-à-vis tone, where formal sobriety contrasts with contentual surreality), in terms of *Dogtooth*'s thematic preoccupations with enclosure there is significant synergy between what is depicted and how.³ Consider, for example, the use of sound: while there are instances of sound (especially voice and music) in the film that would technically be considered non-diegetic in the sense that the source does not reside in the shot (or the wider space that shot implies) *all* such sounds can be traced back to a diegetic source: the piano notes over the title sequence are played by the son one evening; the words of the mother dictating new vocabulary come from a cassette recording played by the children; the music sounding as the children play blindfolded hide-and-seek is the song the parents listen to on headphones as they have perfunctory sex. The sound design of the film thus allows for no space – no frame of reference – outside of its own text. As Ipek A. Celik recognizes, the omnipresence of the parents' voices 'makes the film itself take the role of the cassette player, the film becoming part of the homemade media that further encloses the narrative, accelerates the entrapment.'⁴ And this *huis clos* also seems to extend to the psychic lives of the children: when Christina asks the son to describe his dreams, he recounts a mundane incident where his mother falls into the pool, his inner world becoming just another home movie played on continuous loop in his mind.

Similarly, Fisher argues that there is a temptation (which should be resisted) to read the film allegorically: the temptation is certainly strong – the Regime of the Colonels, Fritzl, EU borders, etc. – and like an allegorical text, the film makes no explicit references to broader political, social or historical realities. However, what I want to focus on here is the way in which *Dogtooth* therefore displays again a closed logic. Its only frame of reference is the diegesis itself (i.e. the film-world) and the influence of other films (i.e. the cinema itself).

³ Fisher, 'Dogtooth', 23.

⁴ Ipek A. Celik, 'Family as Internal Border in *Dogtooth*', in Raita Merivirta et al., ed., *Frontiers of Screen History: Imagining European Borders in Cinema, 1945–2010* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 226.

This can be seen at the diegetic level through Christina's rental videos and their disruptive power (i.e. it is only "more film" that can upset the familial eco-system). It is also repeated at a contextual level: *Dogtooth*'s main points of "external reference" are other films (e.g. Haneke, Buñuel), making it a properly postmodern text, where the infamous Derridean misquotation, "there is nothing outside the text", becomes a restatement of *Dogtooth*'s closed framework.

As I have made clear, my methodology will be first to focus on the function of *language* within the film. In contrast to Eugenie Brinkema, who claims that the critical impulse to identify the particular linguistic organisation of the family is based on the assumption that, 'words are the innocent, neutral names of things so long as they are the names of *our* things in our familiar extra-diegetic analytical world', I proceed from an acknowledgement that in neither the diegetic nor non-diegetic world is language in this way referential, and that the family in *Dogtooth* is not simply using "wrong words" but participating in fundamental symbolic structures.⁵ Words in the film need not be Benjaminian "allegories" but simply Saussurean signs, in the way that they emphasize the arbitrary rather than necessary relation between signifier and signified: if a "carbine" can be a bird as well as the gun that shoots it, it can indeed produce *any* potential signification, and any sound can be related to any concept.⁶ But the lexicon in *Dogtooth* is not just, in Brinkema's terms, "devoted to deviation", permutation and variation; it obeys a more specific principle that *can* be identified without reducing the film to a knowable whole or otherwise impoverishing it.⁷ My interpretive gesture is not to "set right" the "quarrel" between objects and things in the film – simply because it does not accord with recognisable meanings – but to approach the

⁵ Eugenie Brinkema, 'e.g., Dogtooth', *World Picture* 7 (2012), 2.

<http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_7/PDFs/Brinkema.pdf> accessed 12 December 2014.

⁶ Ibid., 2–3.

⁷ In fact, Brinkema's own formulation – that *Dogtooth* is a 'sine-film' whose governing principle is variation – is just another such "explanatory logic", albeit with a slightly more vague reference point (ibid., 5 & 8).

particular logic involved here, as psychoanalysis would approach the Subject: at the level of the symptom.⁸ And “symptom” here is not to be understood as some pathological deviation from the norm, but in the properly Lacanian sense of *sinthome*: the particular organisation that constitutes one individually and uniquely.

Psychosis, Perversion, Neurosis

How, then, can my Lacanian approach aid our understanding of the film? There is certainly a lot to consider in *Dogtooth*: the parents consistently lie to their children about the outside world, they encourage incest between them, and the father meets resistance to his regime with sadistic violence. The children are clearly disturbed by their upbringing: the two sisters attack their brother with a knife and a hammer, and the younger daughter spends the afternoon with her dolls, screaming as she dismembers them with scissors. But my aim is not to diagnose the characters in *Dogtooth*, nor to search for causes: the film offers none.⁹ Like Bressonian models, the family are stripped of psychology. They are not even afforded proper names; they are referred to throughout as “Dad”, “Mum”, “Son” or “Brother”, “Daughter” or “Sister”. The effect, I want to suggest, is to reduce the members of the family to *symbolic terms in an Oedipal equation*, in the same way that Lacan – reading Freud’s appropriation of Oedipus – rendered the terms of *his* family drama into the Symbolic, as metaphors for the constitution of the Subject. Similarly, I suggest that what is at stake in *Dogtooth* is not psychology but *structure*.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁹ Indeed, Lanthimos himself declares: ‘What I’m more interested in is what happens *because* this group exists and how it affects people, how it changes them [...]. I find it much richer to not deal with the why’ (Joshua Chaplinsky, ‘An Interview With The Director Of ALPS and DOGTOOTH’, *Twitchfilm.com* <<http://twitchfilm.com/2012/07/yorgos-lanthimos-is-not-a-prude-an-interview-with-the-director-of-alps-and-dogtooth.html>> accessed 12 December 2014).

¹⁰ This is further supported by Lanthimos, when he states: ‘I like it when the characters revolt against structure’ (ibid.). Lacanian “structuralism” is equally invested in those points at which such structures fail, or fall into contradiction.

The question of *what structure* is, then, the crucial one. Perhaps one of Lacan's three clinical structures (psychosis perversion, neurosis)? Not psychosis. The family demonstrates a functioning Symbolic order, which would be *foreclosed* for a psychotic structure. It is, however, clearly an *alternative* formation of the Symbolic to the one we might recognize in that, for example, it accommodates *incest*. The order identified by Lévi-Strauss and Lacan is one founded on the principle of the *prohibition* of incest. It takes the form of impossibility in relation to the social structure: not in the sense that it *cannot* happen – as actual cases testify – but in the sense that it is *structurally impossible* to accommodate (and the Lacanian Real can be associated with such moments when “the impossible happens”). *Dogtooth* presents such an instance when the impossible *does* happen. Could this family structure be related, then, to *perversion*? Not in some reductive, moralist sense in which sexual practices perceived as non-normative are labelled “perverse”, but in the sense I noted above of establishing an *alternative Symbolic formation*. Once more, no. Perverse structure is articulated around a mechanism of *disavowal* that is not suggested here.¹¹ The father is neither delusional nor holds mutually sustaining, yet conflicting, ideas: as his cursing of Christina suggests – “I hope your kids have bad influences and develop bad personalities. I wish this with all my heart” – he is fully invested in his symbolic reality.

This leaves neurosis but again, clearly, this film presents a structure that would not be identified as “neurotic” because, while Lacanian psychoanalysis is *not* a normative practice, it does, nonetheless, recognize a “typical” condition that is associated with neurotic structure: and *Dogtooth*'s incestuous order is, in some respects, clearly far from such a condition. It is here, therefore, that the concepts of *phobia* and the *paternal metaphor* are instructive. Each of Lacan's clinical structures is in effect a modality of what he calls the paternal metaphor: the

¹¹ Fisher concurs here, arguing that the father is neither the perverse Lacanian *jouisseur*, nor a psychotic divorced from any sense of consensual reality (*Dogtooth*, 23).

process by which the Subject is constituted in and through language. Lacan's reading of the Oedipus complex through the structure of metaphor presents an instance whereby one signifier substituted for another signifier, which produces a signification.¹² Lacan's version of the Oedipus complex presents the desire of the mother as an abyssal question for the Subject: the unknown signified, *x*. In the resolution of the complex, the name of the father intervenes, naming and thereby replacing the desire of the mother for the Subject: hence it has the structure of a metaphor. The signification produced by the paternal metaphor, this formula suggests, is a "phallic signification" that constitutes the Other – which is to say the Symbolic in relation to the Subject – as a One, a meaningful whole. To be clear, this is a question of an exchange of signifiers for the Subject: signifiers that represent the unknown world and the wider Symbolic order, which can be, *but are not necessarily*, represented the by the mother and father.

And this is in fact a structure that we see repeated in in *Dogtooth*, where the children appeal to their parents with an unknown signifier, which is then granted a signification. It is unclear to what extent the mother is a willing participant in the father's regime in *Dogtooth*, and to what extent she is a victim of it: we see her conspiring with the father but also weeping in his absence. She is, however, a mouthpiece for this order in that it is she who voices the (re)definitions of signifiers on tape and at the dinner table. This condition is recognized by Markos Zafiropoulos when he suggests that, for Lacan, 'the mother precedes the father in the castration complex and that she has a role in promoting the law.'¹³ For the neurotic, this would be the role of the "symbolic mother", the one who introduces the child to the signifiers of the world and their signifieds, and the simultaneous proximity and distance between this

¹² See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2007), 464–465.

¹³ Markos Zafiropoulos, *Lacan and Lévi-Strauss: The Return to Freud (1951-1957)* (London: Karnac, 2010), 184.

ideal and the specific paternal regime in *Dogtooth* – where children turn to their mothers for such definitions, but get very different answers – is thus the starting point for my analysis.

Phobia

The paternal metaphor provides structure for the Subject, and its different permutations produce, for example, neurosis, psychosis, or perversion. The latter two are associated with something going awry in the paternal metaphor, and arise as a result of the Subject's attempts to provide her or his own solution, with the construction of, for instance, a delusion or a fetish. This is where *phobia* comes in. Lacan states that phobia,

is another way of solving the difficult problem introduced by the relation of the child and the mother [...] in order for there to be three terms in the triangle, there must be a closed space, an organisation of the symbolic world, that is called the father. Well, phobia is of that order [...]. At a particularly critical moment, when no other way is open for solving the problem, phobia constitutes a call to rescue, a call for a singular symbolic element.¹⁴

He suggests that phobia arises as a means of dealing with the anxiety that is felt when the name of the father does not sufficiently establish a symbolic structure for the Subject; it transforms this anxiety into the fear of a specific object. However, apropos of Freud's case study of Little Hans, Lacan insists that, instead of fixating on the *object* of phobia – which is to say the horse – it is necessary to consider the *function* which it performs for the Subject.¹⁵ This is as a *stand in* for name of the father: for Little Hans, for example, the signifier "horse" provided an organising logic for his subjective experience. Lacan states that the phobic formula is 'the equivalent of the paternal metaphor.'¹⁶ It provides a determining principle for

¹⁴ Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre IV: La relation d'objet*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 380.

the Symbolic order: allowing a (phobic) structure of signification and thus permitting the Subject to engage with language and society in his or her own particular way.

At this point, I hope, the connection to *Dogtooth* starts to become apparent. To be clear, diagnosis is not my aim: I am not claiming, for example, that the father is a phobic and this is because his subjective position is determined by an “imaginary substitute for symbolic castration”; instead I am trying to identify a *structure of phobia* – as theorized by Lacan – that regulates the family relations. The phobic logic of *Dogtooth* is that – to quote the father – the outside is full of “dangers that lurk” and that, “If you stay inside, you are protected”. The paternal regime in *Dogtooth* thus seeks to establish a *closed order*, which – to recall the above quotation concerning the closed space of the symbolic world – is in fact the function of the name of the father, or its equivalent in phobia: Lacan states that, for Hans, the horse ‘restructure[s] the world, by marking all its limits very profoundly.’¹⁷ Similarly then, is the family’s world in *Dogtooth* enclosed by the father’s phobic logic.

This is constituted literally by the high fences that encircle the garden (and indeed by the closed loop of the film-text itself, as I described above), but it also functions at the level of the Symbolic, through the regulation of signifiers. Certain things occupy the position of a phobic object for the family: most notably a domestic cat that strays into the garden and meets an unfortunate end at the hands of the son, the creature being declared by the father “the most dangerous animal there is”. It is, however, *signifiers themselves* that seem to constitute the greatest threat for this phobic order. Contact with signifiers of and from the outside is strictly controlled by the father: any unregulated signifier that could enter the home constitutes a phobic object. When he buys branded goods such as bottled water, he strips the items of their labels before returning home. Instead of watching the television or listening to the radio, family entertainment is provided by the repeated viewing of home movies – to the

¹⁷ Ibid., 307.

extent that the younger daughter can mouth the words of each video precisely, as one might when watching a cherished film or programme – and by messages of encouragement and discipline sung by “grandpa” and translated into the familial idiom by the father.

Indeed, to recall my description of “phallic signification” above, I could now say that such instances in the film present a form of analogously structured, *phobic signification*: as I noted, the film repeats a process a number of times whereby the children are confronted with an unknown x that is then given a signification by the parents. The vocabulary lessons are the most sustained instance of this parental regime; however, a striking example of this phobic-phallic signification is that moment when the father plays a record for the children. The audience (and I presume the parents) recognize it as Frank Sinatra’s rendition of ‘Fly Me to the Moon’. For the children of *Dogtooth*, it is another unknown x , for which the father provides a running translation: where Sinatra croons about playing among the stars, the signification presented by the father is that their “grandfather” implores them to be good and to love each other. This is another instance where we see the clear distance between the Symbolic order as it functions in this family, and the commonly recognized (neurotic) order that constitutes everyday, shared reality. Where a neurotic structure could, for example, involve the father translating Sinatra’s lyrics from English into Greek, the phobic logic of *Dogtooth* also entails their radical resignification into the closed terms of the familial frame of reference. Moreover, when a foreign signifier *does* intrude, such as “zombie”, it is rendered harmless by its parental definition. The family life is thus structured by an alternative, *phobic* Symbolic order that is determined by a closed logic and a strictly regulated relation between signifier and signified.

The Mythic Function

In *Seminar IV*, Lacan makes references to phobias involving dogs and it might be easy to make a great deal of this connection; however, this would not allow my analysis to go beyond an imaginary realm of *semblance*, when what I aim for is an understanding of *symbolic structure*. In fact, the “dog” in *Dogtooth* pertains to the *mythic function* in phobia: it is part of the organising logic of the family, but is *not* the phobic object as such. Following Lévi-Strauss – who suggested that myths were a society’s way of reformulating some central contradiction or impossibility in order to allow that society to cohere – Lacan refers to the ‘individual myth’ that allows the Subject to function. It is, he suggests, not identical to the Lévi-Straussian mythology, but it serves the same function: a ‘solution in a situation that is closed and at an impasse, as it is for little Hans between his father and his mother.’¹⁸ Phobia is then, as Darian Leader notes, an essentially mythical activity: as evidenced, for example, by the stories that Little Hans constructs – about horses, trams or other children – in order to deal with the world around him.¹⁹

The family in *Dogtooth* clearly has its own phobic mythology. It is articulated around the central idea of the safety afforded by the family home (and concomitantly, the impossibility of leaving it), and has two most notable features: the missing son and the eponymous dogtooth. Over dinner, the father drills his children on the finer points of this mythology, which insists that they will only be ready to deal with the dangers of the outside world when their canine tooth has fallen out and, even then, that the only safe way to venture out is by driving the car: a skill which cannot be learnt until the canine has grown back again. Of course, now that they have shed their milk teeth, this is not something that will naturally occur (as is implied by the myth) so the children are trapped forever in a parentally-determined state of immaturity. Thus the phobic structure is maintained by what Lacan calls

¹⁸ Lacan, *Séminaire IV*, 330.

¹⁹ Darian Leader, ‘Lacan’s myths’, in Jean-Michel Rabaté, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 41.

the 'symbolic creations' of mythology.²⁰ Such a construction is of the same order as the proactive definition of signifiers I observed above, and similarly is there a *reactive* formation of the family mythology that responds to the exigencies of daily life.

Although the film is, characteristically, never clear on the matter, it is possible to infer – particularly from the children's words and actions – that the missing son is, in fact, a really existing sibling who has managed to slip the bonds of parental oppression and reach the outside world.²¹ The father sees the grisly incident with the cat as a "good opportunity" to contain the missing son's escape through a further elaboration of the phobic mythology. Before returning home, he stops at the roadside to shred his clothes and smear himself with fake blood. He greets the family with the news, "Your brother is dead", before explaining that he was attacked by another cat, which has killed the departed sibling. In one moment – through another mythical, "symbolic creation" – the father has closed off any connection to the outside world suggested by the escaped brother's life away from the family, by insisting upon his son's lack of preparedness for that world; *and* he has succeeded in turning the family back in on itself once more by establishing the figure of the cat as an imminent threat preventing them from even leaving the house. The phobic structure thus persists – its closed Symbolic order is regulated – due to the family mythology.

However, the paternal regime in *Dogtooth* cannot be maintained indefinitely. I have already begun to note the bleeding of foreign signifiers into this phobic order. For instance, the family telephone – which is hidden in a cupboard in the parents' room – constitutes a sort of linguistic umbilicus, carrying speech back and forth, to the outside world. The elder daughter spies on her mother talking softly to the father down the phone, in a transmuted version of the primal scene (although the daughter rationalizes this – in a manner concordant

²⁰ Lacan, *Écrits*, 432.

²¹ The son, for instance, compares his ability to clean the family car to that of his brother's and notes that he rarely forgets the air freshener: something that his missing sibling was wont to do.

with the speculative logic of childhood sexual theories – as mother “talking to herself”). The daughter’s curiosity compels to her to sneak into the bedroom and mimic her mother, turning the rotary dialler and holding the handset to her ear but she is terrified when a voice answers, quickly slamming down the receiver and returning the phone to its cupboard. The most significant outside influence, however, is Christina: a stranger to the family, who does not ask too many questions, is happy to take money in exchange for sex with the son and will engage the daughters in banal conversation. Nonetheless, she seems to have a sense of mischief, *if not that of exploitation or abuse*, about her: for instance, as I have already noted, she introduces the word “zombie” to the son as she describes a dream she had about him and his father. More important, however, is the relationship Christina develops with the elder daughter. After yet another tryst in the son’s room (in which he has refused her request for oral sex), Christina wanders into the daughter’s room and asks if, in exchange for a headband she likes, the daughter would “come closer and lick for a while”, pointing to her crotch. Human anatomy having no sexual signification for the daughter, she duly obliges thus beginning the chain of events that unravels the paternal regime.

Castle Doctrine

Here it is worth taking a brief detour through a film seemingly closely related to *Dogtooth* in order to draw out important differences that will allow us to return to Christina and help us better to appreciate the specificity of Lanthimos’ film. As Celik reports, following *Dogtooth*’s release, some critics drew comparisons between it and Arturo Ripstein’s *The Castle of Purity* (1973), even accusing Lanthimos of having plagiarized Ripstein.²² There are, indeed, some striking parallels between the two: they share a similar premise (a family kept prisoner in their large home by a controlling, even paranoid, father) and there are moments in Ripstein’s

²² Celik, ‘Family’, 232n1.

film that seem to find an almost direct correlate in *Dogtooth*, such as the children's exercise drills and blindfold games, as well as the exegesis on Nostradamus provided by Ripstein's father character, Gabriel Lima, which has a strange echo in the commentary on Sinatra provided by Lanthimos'.²³ These are, however, but superficial similarities that bring the two films into seeming proximity only in order to highlight the fundamental aesthetic and philosophical differences between them.

The *Castle* is full of books that the children are encouraged to read and – unlike *Dogtooth* – it is clear that they have knowledge of the outside world. Their mother talks to them about life beyond the house and when asked, “What are bulls like?”, she replies, “They are animals with horns”, rather than offering an “alternative” definition, such as *Dogtooth*'s monstrous felines. In this house, the elder daughter can declare, “I want to see the ocean”, understanding from her mother that it is a beautiful body of water (rather than a leather armchair), even if her brother also reaffirms to her that “going out is bad”. If, in my Lacanian analysis of *Dogtooth*, I am suggesting that the paternal order presents an alternate mode of relating to the Symbolic, where the phobic object serves as a stand-in for a “faulty” or “lacking” father-function, then the paternal regime in *The Castle of Purity* presents a different proposition. Lima's home-schooling curriculum relies not on proverbs and mythology, but on constant reference to *le nom du père*. He appeals to various names-of-the-father, through the maxims of Goethe, Chesterton and others: these “extraordinary men” serving as authority figures, endowing the household with (phallic) signification – which is to say, bestowing meaning on its everyday reality – in a typically neurotic (i.e. “normal”) manner. Rather than the phobic order established in *Dogtooth*, Lima's regime is something closer to the Lacanian

²³ For Lanthimos' part, he claims not to have seen this film before making his own (Chaplinsky, *Twitchfilm.com*).

“discourse of the hysteric”, continually interrogating the “master” for answers – to produce knowledge – particularly relating to questions of sex.²⁴

And it is in these questions of sex that I will suggest we can find the most significant difference between the logics of the two films. Lima appears to be driven by an acute sexual jealousy and rather Catholic horror of the flesh (fixating on the female sex in particular). He chastises his wife for her own sexuality – “You were always surrounded by men. You think about them all the time” – sliding into a more general misogyny as he declares, “Women are to blame for everything!” and “No wonder there’s never been purity here!”. He is disgusted by the corporeal and the bestial, which he finds in both the human and the rat: “By reproducing they pass on their horror and their filth”. And this baroque psychologization is, moreover, matched by the film’s baroque mise-en-scène and performance styles: the febrile atmosphere in the *Castle* – embodied in the manic fussing of Claudio Brook’s paterfamilias, echoed in the expressionistic angles of the house’s dilapidated architecture, and culminating with the fire and foam of a police raid – is in stark contrast to Lanthimos’ muted characterisations and cool cinematic style.

Lima builds the “castle of purity” to save his family from the world’s corruption. However, it has the opposite effect: sibling incest in this family comes about as an unintended consequence of enclosure, rather than a function of maintaining it. Lima is terrified that the burgeoning sexuality of his eldest daughter will lead to ruin, and it is – of course – his interdiction of their relationship that spurs brother and sister to consummate their mutual desire. Conversely, sexuality in *Dogtooth* lacks this sense of corruption and, I would suggest, female sexuality specifically functions mostly as an absence or a blind spot for the household.²⁵ Within the paternal logic, it is only the son’s needs that are catered for by the

²⁴ See Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007), 93.

²⁵ Cf. Fisher, ‘Dogtooth’, 25.

women presented to him. There is no correlating sense that either daughter is moved by sexual desire, or that willing partners should similarly be provided. Instead, this dimension is introduced by Christina.

There is, as in Ripstein's film, a degree of unintended consequence in the father's relation to female sexuality; however, the precise formulations differ between that instance and *Dogtooth*. It is Lima's constant fixation with the feminine that leads to the "destruction" of his home, its corruption through incest; whereas, it is the father's complete *disregard* for female sexuality that leads to crisis in *Dogtooth*. Christina's dissatisfaction with her passionless trysts in the son's bedroom takes her into the elder daughter's in search of orgasm, and the trinkets she exchanges for oral sex are what begin to expand the elder daughter's horizons.²⁶

Les Vidéos volées

This exploitation culminates in a threat of blackmail by the daughter if Christina will not give her the rental videos sitting in her handbag. It becomes evident that these videos are *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) and *Rocky IV* (Sylvester Stallone, 1985), as the elder daughter, like many children, proceeds to act out scenes from the movies in her own imaginative play. Foreign signifiers begin to flood her subjectivity as she enacts shark attacks and boxing matches, and recites dialogue about "Mr Balboa" and "Mr Creed". She is – to use a pleasingly ambiguous formulation from Lacan – *in the videos' possession*: as Lacan explains of the characters in 'The Purloined Letter', '[b]y coming into the letter's possession [...] its meaning possesses them.'²⁷ Similarly is the daughter "possessed" by the signifiers of the Hollywood cinema – these *purloined videos* – to which she has been exposed. This takes on

²⁶ In this sense, Lima's misogynist paranoia can be taken to its logical conclusion: the father in *Dogtooth* would have done well to heed Lima's warnings and beware the corrupting influence of women.

²⁷ Lacan, *Écrits*, 21.

an almost literal quality in a subsequent sequence where the sisters perform a dance for the family's entertainment: after her younger sibling has grown bored of their awkward manoeuvres and retired to the dining table, the elder daughter appears to be overcome by the spirit of Jennifer Beals in *Flashdance* (Adrian Lyne, 1983) as she performs a frantic rendition of Alex's audition dance, until her mother angrily stops her. The film thus seems to insist on the fact that the effect of the Symbolic is to introduce the cause into the individual: that the Subject is not its own cause but rather, as Lacan insists, 'his [or her] cause is the signifier.'²⁸ The elder daughter is thus shaped by the cinema (in the same way that Lacan suggests the Minister is determined by the inscription on the letter): she is moved by those moving images, her frantic movements motivated by cinematic motion.

This condition in *Dogtooth* begins to suggest a fundamentally *structuralist* constitution of the Subject: a general thesis which can be summarized in terms of Lacan's notion of the 'instance of the letter in the unconscious' understood as the *agency* of the letter *over* the Subject. The Symbolic order exists both logically and chronologically before the Subject. It is the symbolic chain that 'has been unfolding since the beginning of time;' it precedes a person's birth and remains after his or her death.²⁹ One is born into a world of language and as a child one must choose to submit to the Other, to accept language that is not "one's own", in order to become a Subject. This is the process enacted by the *paternal metaphor*, and which Lacan later describes as the 'vel' of alienation where there is in fact no "either/or" because the choice is a forced one, comparable to the demand, "Your money or your life!"³⁰ One *must* choose to part with one's money, to submit to the Other, otherwise one will have no life, no subjectivity. This alienation is the institution of the Symbolic order

²⁸ Ibid., 708.

²⁹ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1988), 283.

³⁰ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques Alain-Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1998), 209–212.

and the assignation of a place for the Subject in the symbolic chain. The signifier thus comes to stand *over* the Subject, the Subject becoming but the reflection of the signifier. For Lacan, this is related to 'the form of his proper name:' an alien signifier which exists before one's birth but comes to be inextricably linked to one's subjectivity, so much so that it will come to stand in for the Subject, who will "fade" underneath it.³¹ Moreover, as Žižek notes, this process can be related to the logic of interpellation; the moment of "the letter arriving at its destination" being the moment the Subject is called into being by the signifier.³² The proper name bestows a symbolic mandate upon the Subject situating her or him in the structure of the chain of signifiers.

Strikingly, *Dogtooth* dramatizes this very process. Following her acculturation by the Hollywood blockbuster, the elder daughter announces to her uncomprehending sister, "I want you to call me Bruce". Her declaration precipitates the following exchange:

YOUNGER SISTER: What is Bruce?

BRUCE: A name. Every time you say Bruce, I'll turn.

YOUNGER SISTER: I want a name like that too.

BRUCE: Take your pick. You can have any name you like.

YOUNGER SISTER: I want you to call me "back".

BRUCE: You can't be called that. We call our back "back".

YOUNGER SISTER: Bruce!

[Bruce turns towards her]

Here, then, have the two girls come to the same conclusion as Althusser and Lacan regarding the interpellating power of the Symbolic order, and they act out this process as a child's game. The elder daughter – now "Bruce" – feels a new sense of agency instilled in her by this

³¹ Lacan, *Écrits*, 414.

³² Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan In Hollywood and Out*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2001), 10 & 25.

signifier, and her behaviour becomes, by the familial standard, more and more outlandish. In response, the father redoubles his efforts to maintain the phobic order: having discovered the illicit videos, he beats both his daughter and Christina, with whose services he dispenses, and he decides that the needs of his son should now be met by the daughters, thereby at last turning the family back in on itself in the most profound manner possible.

Bruce, in her Unbearable Splendour

The phobic order, however, cannot contain the agency of these purloined letters that now insist upon and through the daughter. This can be seen in a change in Bruce's attitude towards the family: she adopts what Žižek would call a position of "over-orthodoxy" with regards to its mythology, which is to say that she begins to take the paternal regime more seriously than it is prepared to take itself.³³ Her father's proverbs are constructed in the knowledge that they cannot come to pass and so operate at a certain "distance" from themselves: they are built upon a constitutive impossibility. Bruce's new stance denies such distance and thus assumes this "impossible" position: she decides that, if her dogtooth is not going to come out of its own accord (and yet, she somehow feels "ready" to face the outside world), then – perhaps inspired by those jabs and hooks that Rocky endured – she must "help" it out by means of a few sharp blows to the mouth with a dumb-bell. She spits her broken teeth into the sink, smiles a gory smile at herself in the mirror, and then walks out of the house, across the garden, and climbs inside the boot of the family car.

At this moment, Bruce begins to resemble those other famous women of Hellenic tragedy: particularly Antigone but also, as I will suggest, Medea. In its shift, therefore, to focus on Bruce, I would argue that *Dogtooth* performs a fully Lacanian transition in its relation to tragedy, which is to say that in its movement from father to daughter – or, as I will

³³ Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997): 77.

elaborate, from Oedipus to Antigone – the film makes the same shift that Lacan announces in *Seminar VII*, where he adopts Sophocles' tragic heroine as the model for psychoanalytic ethics. Where *Oedipus Tyrannus* had perhaps become the tyranny of Oedipus in psychoanalytic orthodoxy, Lacan installed Antigone as its new paradigm; equally, it is only by adopting the position of Antigone that Bruce is able to resist the tyranny of her paternal (i.e. oedipal) metaphor and, to recall Lanthimos' own description of both *Dogtooth* and *Alps* (2011), revolt against this structure.

Bruce's gesture should thus be considered a fully Lacanian *Act*, which – as Žižek suggests – touches upon an impossible Real. He explains, 'an act accomplishes what, within a given symbolic universe, appears to be impossible.'³⁴ Having had the "impossible position" of incest imposed upon her by her brother, Bruce now moves to adopt her *own* impossibility – losing her dogtooth – which brings her into proximity with the Real: a point of failure within the Symbolic. As Žižek notes, 'an act disturbs the symbolic field into which it intervenes not out of nowhere, but precisely from the standpoint of this inherent impossibility [...] of a given constellation.'³⁵ Thus Bruce's action intervenes at the point of the *dogtooth*. Lacan's primary example of such an Act is Antigone: who, as we know, defied Creon in order to bury her brother and was entombed with him as punishment, where she hanged herself. She was prepared to go to the very end for her cause and thus serves as a paradigm of not 'having given ground relative to one's desire.'³⁶ And once we see Bruce in her paternally-prescribed tomb – recall that her father insisted the car boot was the only way to leave the garden – the echoes of Antigone continue to resonate across these hollow chambers. While Creon is not Antigone's father but her proposed father-in-law and king, both unruly daughters

³⁴ Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), 121.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁶ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques Alain-Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1998), 319.

defy the lawmaker of their “walled cities”; and as with Antigone and Polynices, there is a clear affinity between Bruce and her absent and rebellious brother, both of whom seek a life beyond the walls.

Antigone’s defiant Act is manifestly suicidal: she knows that she will be punished and kills herself in her brother’s tomb. In this way, it resonates with Lacan’s other classical example of the Act, in Medea. In the slaughter of her children, Lacan recognises that Medea destroyed ‘what she had that was “most precious”,’ not only to Jason – the ostensible target of her fury – but also, of course, to herself: making it an act of violence not simply against her husband but also, crucially, *herself*.³⁷ This is a vital aspect of the properly Lacanian Act, where – as Žižek explains – ‘the subject makes the “crazy”, impossible choice of, in a way, striking at himself, at what is most precious to himself,’ or indeed, *herself*.³⁸ Again, this is rendered literal by Bruce. In order to take up her impossible position, she violently strikes against herself: dislodging, discarding and thus destroying her precious dogtooth. (And therefore, contrary to Brinkema’s claim that Bruce’s ‘freeing, auto-affective violence’ is a ‘newly defined form’ presented by the film, a psychoanalytic perspective shows that it is in fact *a very old form of violence*: as old, indeed, as *Antigone* and *Medea*.)³⁹ Returning to Žižek, then, I would add that Bruce ‘changes the coordinates of the situation [...] cutting [herself] loose from the precious object through whose possession [the Other] kept [her] in check.’⁴⁰ Her father’s hold over her – figuratively, *by the teeth* – is relinquished as she sheds her canine.

In each of these cases does this “strike against the self” put the Subject *outside* of a symbolic space: Antigone is excommunicated by the society of Thebes; Medea makes all communication impossible by destroying the foundations of her family. The same is also true for Bruce. In smashing out her dogtooth she too places herself outside the paternal regime;

³⁷ Lacan, *Écrits*, 640.

³⁸ Žižek, *Contingency*, 122.

³⁹ Brinkema, ‘e.g.’, 14.

⁴⁰ Žižek, *Contingency*, 122.

her own self-destructive Act is required to break out of this closed order. The blows she lands on herself are thus blows against the social order: as she bashes her tooth out, she effectively excommunicates herself from the house, puts herself outside of its Law and thus achieves a sort of freedom. In particular, like Antigone, she dies a *symbolic* death and upon leaving the bathroom (the scene of this "crime" against the paternal regime) she walks, like Antigone, calmly, determinedly towards her tomb: thus entering the Lacanian domain 'between two deaths,' symbolic and actual.⁴¹

Schrödinger's Dog

On discovering her absence, the family search frantically for their elder daughter but cannot find her. The film ends with the father driving to work the next day, and concludes with a shot of his car, parked outside his office. The final frames: a fixed medium shot of the car boot, Bruce presumably still inside. Lacan notes that, as with Bruce here, the audience does not know for certain what happens to Antigone: she is buried alive in a cave, a living tomb, and her suicide (along with Haemon's) is reported by the Messenger. In neither case are we shown what occurs; instead we are left with, in Lacan's words, 'dramatic destinies that are all on the boundary between life and death, the boundary of the still living corpse.'⁴² There is, particularly in Bruce's case, therefore an indeterminacy or undecidedness to her state: in a position between her symbolic and actual deaths, both alive and dead at the same time.

Lanthimos himself suggests that the ending functions as a sort of cinematic Rorschach Test: 'it tells you whether you are a pessimistic or an optimistic person, what you think happened to the girl in the trunk. Some say, oh, she got away and she's fine, but others say she got caught and sent back to the house. Or she died.'⁴³ The closed boot thus introduces a

⁴¹ Lacan, *Seminar VII*, 270–277.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 268.

⁴³ Chaplinsky, *Twitchfilm.com*.

dimension of the virtual into Bruce's fate. Given the amount of blood she may be losing, the boot could simply contain her corpse or she may indeed be waiting to spring out: opening the boot would collapse these possibilities into an actual outcome. Thus, keeping the boot closed maintains the film's open form, thereby allowing the text to sustain both the optimistic and pessimistic readings of its narrative simultaneously.

This Lanthimos also relates to the ending of *Alps*, where we might be happy that the gymnast finally got to dance to a pop song, or we might see this as a hollow triumph given what she has endured. Thus both the gymnast's and Bruce's struggles – especially via Antigone – raise the question of *sovereignty*. The effect of a Lacanian Act is both self-erasing and self-creating. The 'radical gesture of striking at oneself' is, Žižek suggests, 'constitutive of subjectivity as such' because, 'only such a "self-destructive" act could clear the terrain for a new beginning.'⁴⁴ Like Antigone, Bruce's Act is an action against the sovereignty of the father-king, and a statement instead of her *own* sovereignty. And where – as Judith Butler notes – Antigone must stake this claim against the sovereign in the language *of* the sovereign, Bruce's appeal is to the a discourse beyond her father's phobic regime.⁴⁵ She claims her "new beginning", her new subjectivity, in the wider Symbolic order. But what kind of "sovereignty" does this entail?

Dogtooth's is an "open" ending, as I have suggested, in the sense that we are given no clear indication as to what might happen next but, I would add, *at the film's end* it is important to note that she is in fact *trapped*. This is, then, not some grand liberation into the Beyond. As the "interpellation" sequence suggests, the elder daughter has succeeded in escaping the phobic structure of the family home only to be caught – as "Bruce" – in the net of being that is the *wider Symbolic order*. In order to become a Subject, she must submit to

⁴⁴ Žižek, *Contingency*, 122–123.

⁴⁵ Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 28.

the “vel of alienation”. Like *Dogtooth*, psychoanalysis is both optimistic and pessimistic on this point: we are indeed formed by language, by the past, and so on, but we also have the ability to determine to which histories, to which signifiers we relate.

In taking a name, “Bruce” ostensibly takes control of her own destiny, but this name does not belong to her: it belongs to the Symbolic order, which insists, ‘[y]ou believe are taking action when I am the one making you stir.’⁴⁶ Just as, where we see the gymnast finally get her song in *Alps*, we must also recognise, as Alex Lykidis does, that the routine she dances remains the same: her movements are determined by her coach regardless of which music she might choose.⁴⁷ And where Lykidis sees in *Attenberg* Marina taking ownership of her name, rather than the infantilised “Marinaki”, as an instance of the heroine finally claiming subjectivity, I could also offer the inverse.⁴⁸ Like Bruce, she takes her name but we could also say that *the name takes her*: she is similarly “hailed” by her father, marking her (proper) entry into the Symbolic order. These are but “letters”, purloined from the Other: the significations of another’s discourse. Lacanian theory – like *Dogtooth* – shows the Subject to be positioned by the Symbolic order, determined by the signifying chain that traverses it. The signifier grants the Subject the status as a relation *between signifiers*, which is why Lacan defines the signifier as ‘something that represents a subject for another signifier.’⁴⁹ The Subject is therefore an *effect* of language but not *reducible* to language either.

Dogtongue

I began this chapter with a discussion of the paternal metaphor as it introduces the structure of the Subject: a process dependent upon the name of the father, which Lacan insists ‘is the

⁴⁶ Lacan, *Écrits*, 29.

⁴⁷ Alex Lykidis, ‘Crisis of sovereignty in recent Greek cinema’ *Journal of Greek Media and Culture* 1/1 (2015), 17.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁹ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 207.

essential mediating element of the symbolic world and its structuration' and is therefore 'essential to all articulation of human language.'⁵⁰ It produces "phallic signification", which should be understood simply as meaningful and coherent discourse. The intervention of the father thus provides a point of reference: Lacan suggests that 'the name of the father has the function of signifying the whole signifying system, of authorising its existence.'⁵¹ It establishes a set of symbolic coordinates for the child by conferring signification upon unknown signifiers. The name of the father is the primary support of the Symbolic order, and its paternal metaphor regulates that order to provide what Bruce Fink describes as 'a compass reading on the basis of which to adopt an orientation.'⁵² *Dogtooth* demonstrates what happens when this compass is "broken" but, importantly, the film presents phobia as *equivalent* to the paternal metaphor, phobic signification *as* phallic signification: the outcomes may be different *but the structure remains fundamentally the same*.

The film's phobic order is, as I have suggested, regulated by a sharp distinction between inside and out, and, where necessary, a transformation of the latter into the former. Fisher has correctly identified the logic that permits the enclosure of the family's world, which he presents as: 'the outside (the ocean ["sea"]) is always converted into the inside (a leather armchair)' so that meaning becomes fixed in the paternal idiom.⁵³ However, psychoanalysis permits this observation to be carried much further, through the concept of the *uncanny*. Commenting on the semantic blurring in German of "*heimlich*" and "*unheimlich*", Freud noted that meaning here 'develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite.'⁵⁴ That which is "homely" is intimate, and what is intimate is

⁵⁰ Lacan, *Séminaire IV*, 364.

⁵¹ Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre V: Les formations de l'inconscient*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 240.

⁵² Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995), 55.

⁵³ Fisher, 'Dogtooth', 27.

⁵⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny (1919)', in James Strachey, ed. and trans., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII (London: Hogarth, 1955), 226.

hidden and thus secret, and what is secret is in turn threatening and therefore “un-homely”. The phobic regime in *Dogtooth* operates according to an inverse of this logic: that which is *unheimlich* is consistently rendered *heimlich* by its parental signification. This is reified in the aeroplane game that the parents play with their children: in order to make sense of the tiny white objects that fly over the garden, the parents will, occasionally, drop a toy aeroplane onto the lawn for a child to find. Thus the aeroplane is no longer a giant object, far away and taking other people to other places; rather, it becomes a small object, very close and existing purely as a toy for its lucky recipient. The familial order thus attempts to tame the outside, rendering it in terms of the inside through the phobic (re)signifying process.

The effect of the film as a whole, however, is indeed properly *uncanny*. Lacan renders the Freudian uncanny with the neologism, ‘extimacy,’ which emphasizes the feeling of “exterior intimacy” that the notion of the uncanny evokes.⁵⁵ The extimate can thus be understood as the position of the Symbolic order in relation to the Subject; it is the decentred-centre of the Subject, what Jacques-Alain Miller calls the ‘intimate that is radically Other.’⁵⁶ What *Dogtooth* achieves is to make language strange again: in particular through the dizzying effect of hearing (or seeing) language operate in a familiar but not wholly comprehensible way: both proximate and distant at the same time, *extimate*.⁵⁷ The film does this by emphasising at every point that the words in the mouths of the children originate with the Other; more generally, by insisting – in concert with Lacan – that language, the means by which the Subject expresses the most intimate details of her or his inner life, comes from the outside, from *another place*: the transindividual structure of the Symbolic order.

⁵⁵ Lacan, *Seminar VII*, 139.

⁵⁶ Jacques-Alain Miller, ‘Extimité’, in Mark Bracher et al., ed., *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society* (New York: New York UP, 1994), 77.

⁵⁷ To a non-Greek-speaking audience the effect is perhaps diminished by the mediation of subtitles; it would only be upon *hearing* the phobic language of the film that *Dogtooth*’s uncanny effect is really felt. The closest subtitled film comes to this, for Anglophones, is when the father “narrates” ‘Fly Me to the Moon’.

Dogtooth thus reveals only the finest of distinctions – or indeed, lack of distinction – between the “pathological” and the general conditions in this instance. In escaping the phobic order, in becoming “Bruce”, the elder daughter has no choice but to submit once again to the *discourse of the Other*, to the quotidian bonds of human language: as both this film and Lacanian theory make clear, the interpellation of the Subject by the Symbolic order is *the submission of the Subject to that order*. Even if she does succeed in escaping to the outside world – however maladapted to it she might be – Bruce must, in this sense, continue to speak *with a tongue that is not her own*.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Here I am irresistibly reminded of the scene in Athina Rachel Tsangari's *Attenberg* (2010) where Bella attempts to teach Marina how to kiss by thrusting her tongue into her friend's mouth. And when Bella asks, "How does my tongue feel?", Marina tells her, "Like a slug". This fundamental *strangeness* with which Marina feels a *tongue which is not her own*, evokes something of the experience in *Dogtooth*; however, here it is the uncanny experience of one's *own* "tongue" as foreign – the feeling of “*the Other's tongue in my mouth*” – that is significant, particularly for the way that it resonates with Miller's description of extimacy, where “the intimate is Other – like a foreign body, a parasite” (‘Extimité’, 76).

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