

Kirsty Hendry

Profile

She learns that character has always been writing with a specific location in the body. She reads: In the mid-14th century character was used to denote a symbol marked or branded on the body. On livestock these symbols had once performed incantations, spells cast for prosperity - protecting the animals from harm. Character is possessive, a symbol that designates ownership, origin, and relationship. Character is the labour of making subjects - marking, sorting, organising, differentiating.

Later, she is asked for her age, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, marital status - whether she has any dependents, whether she considers herself to have a disability. She answers irreverently in spite of the value that will be assigned and extracted from each answer. She wonders what will become of this aggregate of a person that she has just circulated into the world. She wonders if they'll be well-received, if she answered correctly, she feels as though there are right and wrong answers. She is asked her profession, her salary, and whether she can provide the details of someone who can corroborate her story. She is asked for a biography.

While not writing her biography she reads that establishing a brand is about consistency, reputation, meeting preconceived expectations. She wonders why she is never asked to provide an autobiography given the prevailing convention that everyone writes their own 'biography' anyway. She reads that repeated uses of "I" and "Me" sound arrogant and unprofessional. She switches to writing in the guise of 3rd person to legitimise the account, to assume some authoritative position of removal from her own life. In this guise she is an unspecified entity, an uninvolved person - her existence requires no explanation or development. As she writes, she thinks that perhaps it's even more reductive to think of this life writing as autobiography - a dutiful artefact. She states the facts - she was born, she lives and works. She is defined by a list of projects, activities, endeavours - how she feels about them are of little importance - that they happened is enough. She describes herself variously as artist, writer, curator, administrator, manager, in the hope that at least one of these

adjectives will assuage any feelings of limitation or inadequacy conjured by the others. She is a temporary custodian of anything. She is a series of adjustments, adaptations, compromises. Her character, an amalgamation of (selected) projects that speak more to the frugality of stockpiling than the ostentatious display of accumulated wealth.

Not writing her autobiography on the 29th of October she reads her horoscope and learns that she'll make money from speculative ideas. Her skills are generally inexplicable and poorly defined, yet you notice the author still seems to have a particularly strong investment in her in spite of this. She is aware that you may have your suspicions, that she is just a transparent medium for the projected ideals of others. A mouthpiece. She is reminded of a gift she received from her Mother, who emphatically teased that it "summed her up perfectly". The gift was a ceramic mug decorated with the qualities associated with her Zodiac sign - generous, ambitious, proud, vain, clever, loyal, determined, bossy, pushy, courageous, expressive, friendly, smug, energetic, warm-hearted, noble, creative, cheerful, blunt, dramatic, lofty. She is unsure which adjectives she should take as compliments and which she should understand as criticism. Her reaction was as her mother had predicted.

She thinks that conforming to type is like a form of forecast - a conjectured estimate of future course. Certain behaviours, reactions are anticipated, expected, desired of her. Life writing unfolds as a script that she performs with the most mundane virtuosity.

Sometime ago she worked as a waitress in a luxury hotel in the west-end of a big city. At the interview she was told that she was to treat every guest as if she was welcoming them into her home. Every shift was a performance - she was expected to be over familiar, accommodating, warm but above all unfazed, composed, unflappable. It was later revealed to her that in the beginning she had been subject to a series of tests to put her under pressure, to determine where her breaking point would be - they wanted to test her resolve, judge her strength of character. As light entertainment to accompany their meals affluent customers, D-list celebrities, minor royalty enjoyed asking her what she *really* did and where she was *really* from. The men she worked with told her she "wasn't like the other girls." It never felt like a compliment though, though she expects it was never really intended as such. She left each

shift feeling unsure whether she was performing poorly or a little too well.

On Saturday night she watched a powerful man on TV defend the actions of another powerful man on TV. All he would say on the matter is that the man is not his work. The statement preemptively foreclosed any discussion - a tediously recursive rebuttal. The credits roll. She wonders how an industry that relies on the professional mobilisation of personality, character, profile can offer such an impossible excuse. In a global economy that necessitates the labour of people performing themselves, their most essential cognitive and affective capacities, how can the privilege of extracting oneself from one's actions even be conceivable, let alone be seen as exoneration. She thinks how often one becomes defined by a specific form of labour, or at least some relationship to it - work becomes a score to be performed. She thinks how this constrains some to the most insipid of stereotypes and affords others the most despicable entitlements. Professional disobedience tolerated as markers of their authenticity.

She returns to her reading. She learns of a stock character from Italian theatre, the Zanni. In Italian the name translates to mean someone whose identity is not of any importance, who only exists to service the other characters. A poor, itinerant worker, Zanni are defined exclusively by their relationship to their work. They are a succession of activities - they are their actions. The more she writes the more she hears accusations of passivity - things simply happen to her. Writing herself is seen as a lack of imagination, an absence of original thought. To write herself reads as a pollution of her agency rather than demonstrations of it. She was never meant to be a character. Description demands exhaustion. She writes herself through limited options, conventions, templates, where the information required has already been determined, decided. The inference is that she is already known or that knowing her is of little consequence. She spends an incredible amount of energy defining herself - the processural nature of writing endows duration with the sensation of momentum, of accumulation, getting somewhere but ultimately failing to reach a specific destination, or conclusion.