

RENÈE HELÈNA BROWNE

Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival

Commissioned for the *Propositions* branch of the 16th BFMAF, Renèe Helène Browne's *Daddy's Boy* (2020) describes the lines of influence and inheritance that tether father to son, body to place, desire to reality.

The film is formed of three intersecting parts: a body is watched, another is built, and the life of a third is narrated. At their family farm in Donegal, Browne's father goes about his day with the ease of a man at home in his world. His body – middle-aged, well-worn, comfortable – is held within an intimate portrait, moving in its mundanity. He sips tea, operates machinery, his chest rises and falls in even breath. Unextraordinary, he is the model of a man. Browne's voice overlaps, intercedes these scenes and – calm, measured – describes the violence that structures the life of Jurassic Park's T-Rex. At once actual and false, living and man-made, documented and invented, the female dinosaur takes shape in the book's imaginary as a monster – *suspicious, untrustworthy and unclear*. Here, T-Rex becomes a way to describe a body at odds with a world built around, not for it. Browne weaves this narrative with their own: describes a shifting image of their body, their attempts at hiding, playing, 'being real'. Both father and 'monster' are looked up

at, and to. And, between descriptions of unruly bodies and images of an ever-familiar father, are close-up shots of hands – Browne’s? – which mould, childlike, marla (plasticine) into a form at first unknown.

What can be done with bodies is mostly left unseen, if not unsaid. Like T-Rex, met only half-way through the story, the artist’s body is unclear, only partially visible if at all, throughout the film. We are left to guess; perhaps this foot is theirs, this hand that strokes a donkey, this one that makes with marla. Only their father’s body is visible, solid, whole. Set up to assume his is the legible, ‘real’ and so the desirable body, desire shifts as the film goes on. We are told that *monsters morph, change tactics, and speak in multiple registers, that they signify other ways of being in the world.* We see that marla is used not simply to shape, to play, but to build a kind of ‘monster’. A body emerges – full – unlike that which we see elsewhere: colourful, malleable and shaped in human hands. A claw, a leg, a metal pole, alive. What is real comes unstuck. Daddy’s boy is a son not born but constructed and there’s no such thing as ‘being whole’.

Still, until the almost final shots, both lens and voice remain even, steady, sure. Even as they describe the grip of patrilineal lines and expectations, describe the desire for monstrosity, its alterity, Browne’s narration remains careful – calm in a way that resembles the body of their father. Until, finally, we learn that T-rex escapes. So too does the narrator. Their otherwise composed

voice deteriorates, deepens, slows – mechanically – and tells us what they want: *to be rebuilt every day...unreliable in my surfaces and caught in my own scams.* A red screen replaces the father. With the final subtitles, we are left behind, the artist’s voice now indecipherable: *I want to be defined only through the recognition of another, and forever roam underneath in deceit.* Browne has built themselves an exit and, impossible or not, another body. Neither a breakdown nor a loss of control, this is a choice: a ‘monstrous’ way out of the composure, the apparent ease, that the lines, the father, the film, otherwise maintain.

—Kiah Endelman Music



He had his thumb urged upon her own and/ as well as her rest - taken and pressed to the arch of her body – a dell – the small valley - her slight hollowed frame that held (much) sound in this, here; her home.

Had applied himself to her and cupping the cold of the vase, clear, cut, holding its shape and his own hand, here where his warmth (had been) pressed, hard, he was leaving a print that would soon be wiped with a cloth. As, and in the museum, his position afforded him this.

And leaving her marked, or leaving her, shadowed, he covers her face for what is to come – dulling her gaze as this part he disrupts holds Proserpine/ Persephone - *whichever way he knew her* - before she came to be.

With his thumb, presses on and tried to take her (in his) hand. He wants to gather those/ her posies before they fall, before she falls as she is posed here in pre-vision,

The – just before. And she's falling now – in his sight and in mine and I cannot unlearn that this (site) is her myth made multiple.

That, that body cut in and suspended, dropping/ losing/ yes, loosing her flowers about her is hers (as I have known it). Yes, letting them loose as, and a moment later, she will be lost herself to another's grasp- though (and once, again,) not by choice and neither chance.

This is (as it was) in the moment before: before with his arms outstretched and tethered to horses, with his sparse drawn chariot I cannot believe – he stole her away.

And (looking away) she is drawn, under and spun, out, on a wheel. As we imagine she falls to the floor or the water - below the line of the lake, the vase, this image and (finally) into his arms, hers is expression of action caught, in transition and with her pulling features *at the threshold of the baroque*.

Crystal, reduced to a sheet as thin, brilliant, as glass – though it was not – and where his finger had lain, her body made by way of forcing an eloquent line on a hard material. Of scores relaying lights through planes and muscles pulled taught into sharper turns than truthfully is natural – all at once and in-stable elegance, in a style at odds with his own

He takes his thumb from/ and thinks to return to the words of a friend, to conclusions drawn in – or is it from? - the moment before a struggle.

Though- to these words - it is not so much that hers are *remains of a movement that has already taken place*¹ as those of one enacting-

He thought of his application as but a minor imposition and, (those of) his chief concerns considered were often and outwardly deemed to be minor. His was an interest in detail and, in Vienna, all the while, it was taught to be immediate – right and, hands on, it was his to be custodian of such objects as this.

Yes, and this is how he had her faced. Or at least, had stopped her here, his hand (now gloved and after his indiscretion) skimming the rim to turn it this and that to place it right to catch the moment (best) – some fewer scratches here and some more narrative.

She had let her flowers slip from her grasp; and, in a manner, this is the crux.

In a step, back, he catches a glance as she stands ahead of his own on a stand of her own of velvet and dark backed, ready – he steadies: his gaze, his hand and the camera.²

¹Roeske, Thomas. "Traces of Psychology: The Art Historical Writings of Ernst Kris." *American Imago*, vol. 58 no. 1, 2001, pp. 463-477. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/aim.2001.0003

²Ernst Kris, *Meister und Meisterwerke der Steinschneidekunst*, Vienna 1929, 501. Available at: http://iconographic.warburg.sas.ac.uk/vpc/VPC_search/record.php?record=21348