

What Difference Does Writing Make?

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The Mongrel

By Anna Cooter

Running, panting, I search for my target — a playground, a board room, a lawn bowls tournament all await me. I am, of course, *man's best friend*, a source of companionship, yet do not forget my potential for pain — a conflict between friend and foe. In any country, at any time, I roam the streets barking, howling, searching.

My black coat and dark eyes are symbols not noticed by many. Often I am mistaken, a labrador or a jaguar? I can be as passive as the family labrador, yet at times as calculating as a jaguar. Black was once symbolic of the plague; my plague is not as obvious or instantaneous.

Possibly it is their tiredness that lures me to my prey, the doubting human. Or perhaps hereditary causes, as one generation to the next my collar leads me. Then again, hepatitis, steroids and alcohol also satisfy my appetite, they act as my colleagues. Together we grab the human, rob them of neurotransmitters¹ and I, I stay with them. They (the victims, the humans) cannot see me, they feel me. I don't go away, I have no kennel, my home is their conscious mind.

I have no instructions. I do not adhere to 'heel', 'come', 'sit' — any longer. I am the chaser, not the chased. My purpose is not to bring the newspaper, but rather I bring a collection of emotions, a shadow of tension. Unlike the newspaper or tennis ball, my delivery to my *master* is not physical; it's a physiological disease and cannot be thrown

¹ Neurotransmitters are chemicals which transmit information to the brain. A shortage of neurotransmitters impairs brain communication.

away like the favoured tennis ball. More and more people receive my delivery, even my recipients do not acknowledge my presence nor purpose. This causes the problem to escalate; suicide, murder being outcomes.

My hunger is for serotonin,² not old bones, I devour these morsels with pleasure. My presence is varied depending on circumstances; maybe I choose to be exogenous³ or perhaps endogenous.⁴ Either way I exist, in your sleep or as your shadow. Depending on my appetite my strength can vary, some (humans) are more difficult to engulf than others.

Age does not kill me, it inspires me, the weaker the better. Yet some drugs can deter me. I guess they are like an allergy — they prevent me from striking or delving any further. I don't exist for the gain of seeing depravity; I exist everywhere because I do. The reason is unknown, I serve a purpose, I come and very rarely I leave.

Sadistic, no I am not. Rather I am a means of bringing confronting issues; I am the pot-hole they seem to fall into.

The seasons are also my allies, we make *Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)*.⁵ The lack of sunlight, the limited joy — I strike, my attack begins. This is not a ferocious attack, they never are, my method is slow — pounce when it's unexpected. Just like the rain and thunder other conditions favour me, always death and even birth. It's harrowing to have to visit a new mother, 'post-natal' they call it. That's the most difficult, after three days my claws begin to extend and they sink in — it creeps along slowly and finally it robs the maternal happiness.

Obesity, anorexia — all extremes I encounter. By no means am I a minority, by no means do I only attract the extremes. Every day, anyone can see me, pat me, and beckon me. I am always waiting, hidden in the depths. Your call of despondency summons me, I run and this time I will attack. My purpose is needed, maybe it was a car crash or simply a minor injury?

² The neurotransmitters in the brain.

³ Resulting from an external cause, for example; death, separation, loss of job, disaster.

⁴ Resulting from no obvious external cause ie from within the person.

⁵ Seasonal affective disorder occurs in the winter when daylight hours are short.

My relative, a cousin, is fear. We work together; we come from the same family so we understand each other. Working as a team we both represent and provide a little of the other. When one is busy the other stands in. I can easily create fear, a growl, a scratch — so many possibilities. In disguise my yelp can act as a cry of desperation, but underneath I continue to search, prey always awaits.

Many professors wish to trace my family tree, my pedigree. My presence and reasons for it are baffling. From my perspective one must not look for me, but rather the person I chase, the problem does not lie with me. Their problem merely attracts me. If you want to protect yourself against me do not hunt me, no pound will have me, I cannot be chained or contained. Search your friends and advisors, even children, as they have the problem, not me.

A former master, Sir Winston Churchill, named me 'his black dog'. I was not an enemy in war nor a Russian socialist, rather I was his dark companion, *man's best friend* — his black dog. But I am a mongrel of a *mate*.



Anna Cooter wrote this essay in 2005 when she was in Year 12 at Walford Anglican School for Girls, Hyde Park, South Australia.