



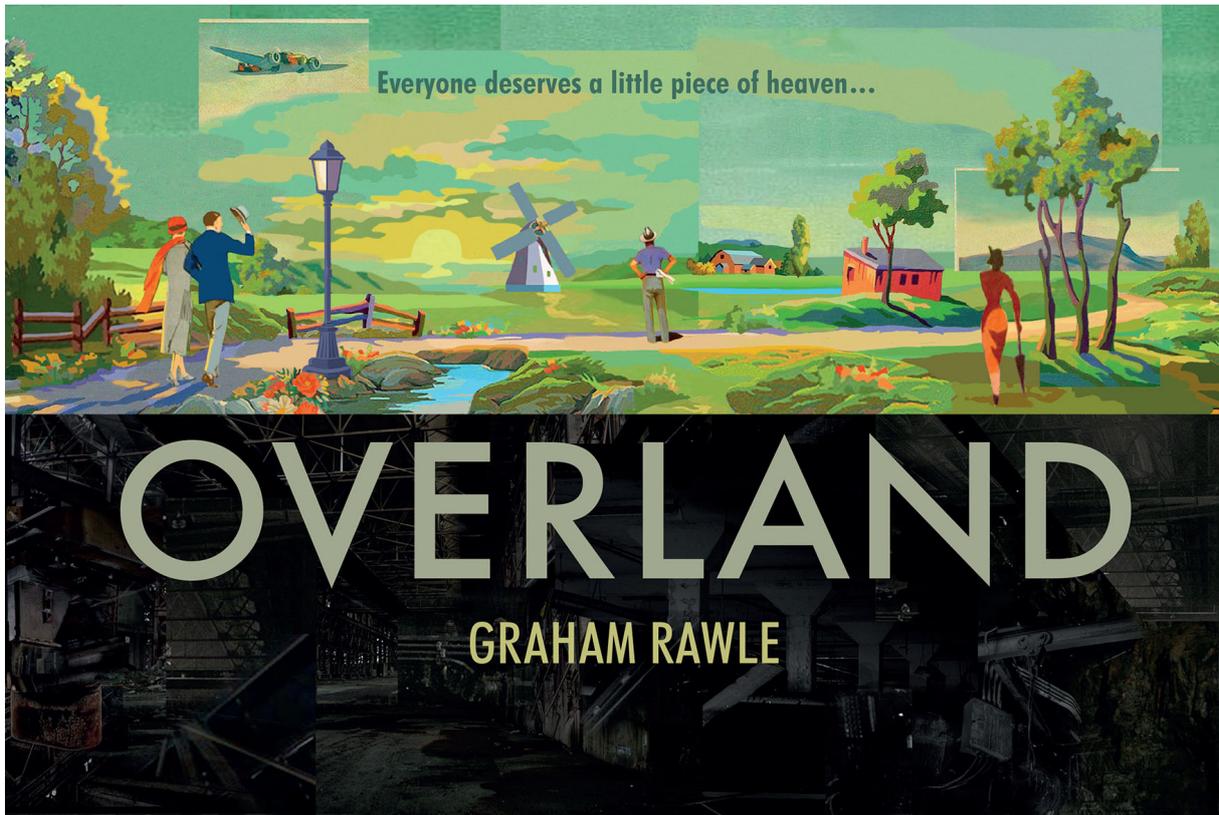
University of Brighton

GRAHAM RAWLE

OVERLAND

An experimental work of multimodal fiction in
book form

RESEARCH OUTPUT



Overland
(above)
Front cover of the novel showing the rotated, landscape format and a first visual reference to the structure of the story, in which the narrative settings are graphically placed above and below a central horizontal line. Upon opening, the book's binding gutter forms this line.

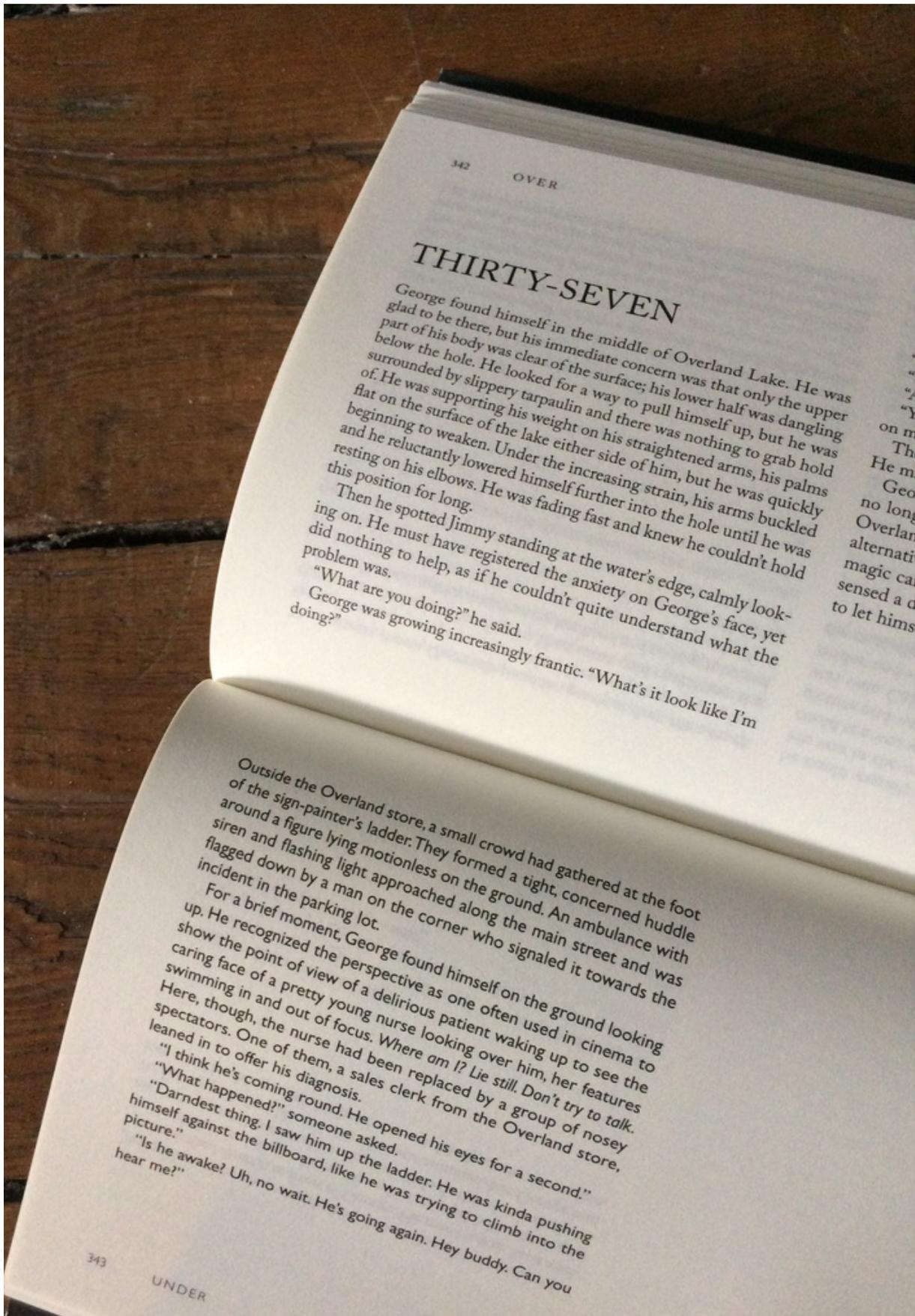
(overleaf)
Photograph of open book showing physical formatting and an example of unevenly distributed text where less - or in some pages, nothing - is happening in one of the settings.

Graham Rawle's *Overland* is a work of experimental multimodal literary fiction published in 2018. The artefact develops insight into the relationship between graphic and textual communication, the traditions and reader expectations of book formatting, and the ways in which graphic symbolism and the physical book contributes to reader experience in text-only narratives.

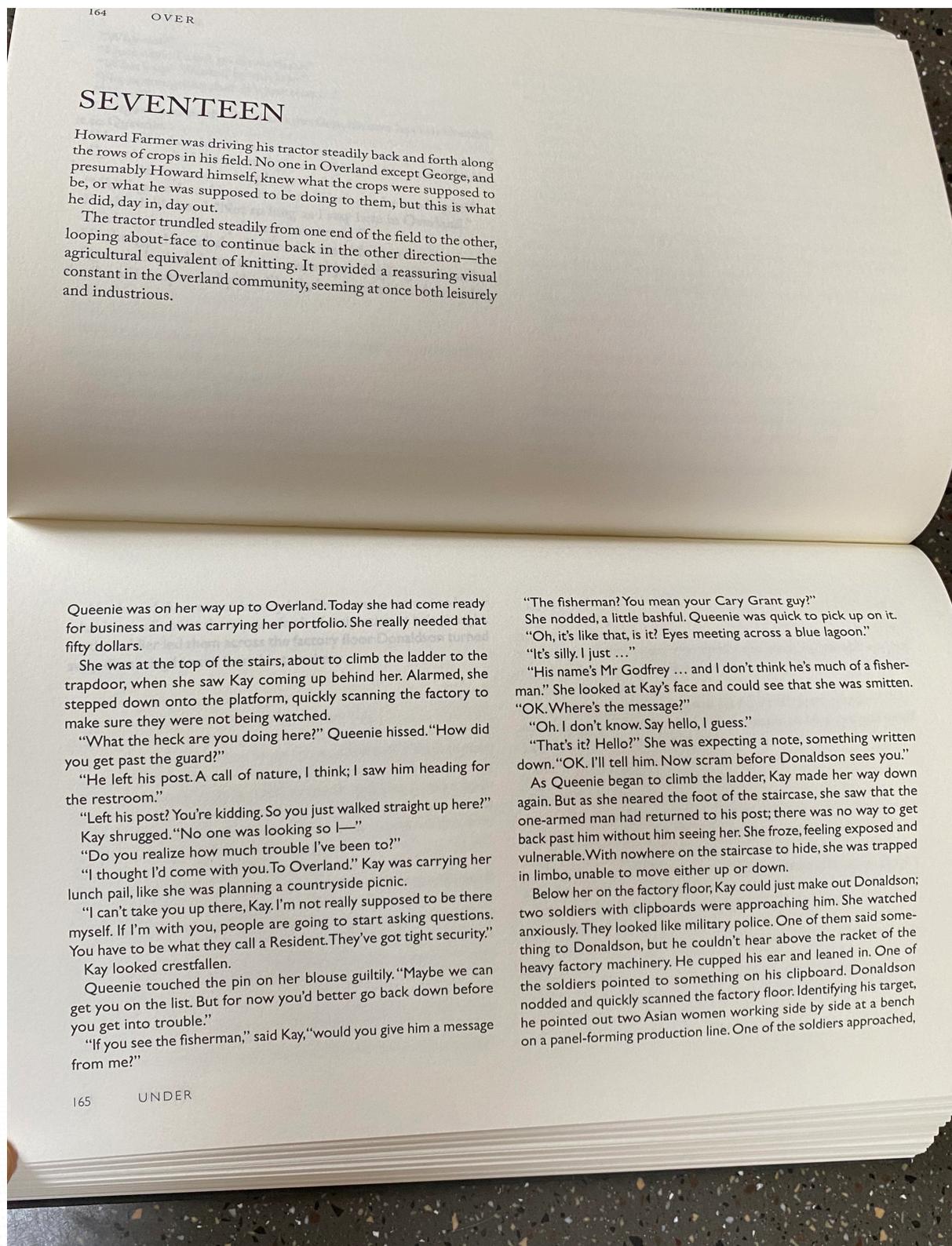
Rawle developed little-known historic information relating to Burbank, California, during World War Two, creating a book that uses symbolism and graphic references to tell its story. Investigating how readers engage visually with text-only narratives, Rawle challenged graphic conventions in fiction publishing by using the book form and the page design as a critical narrative element. *Overland* requires readers to turn pages upwards rather than across, developing parallel narratives on the separated top and bottom halves of the open book. It furthers Rawle's established practice as a storyteller who extends the understanding of narrative design, visuality, cognition and the participatory role of the reader.

Overland was published by Chatto and Windus (Penguin Random House, London) 22 March 2018. (384 pages. 220x150x22mm).

Overland



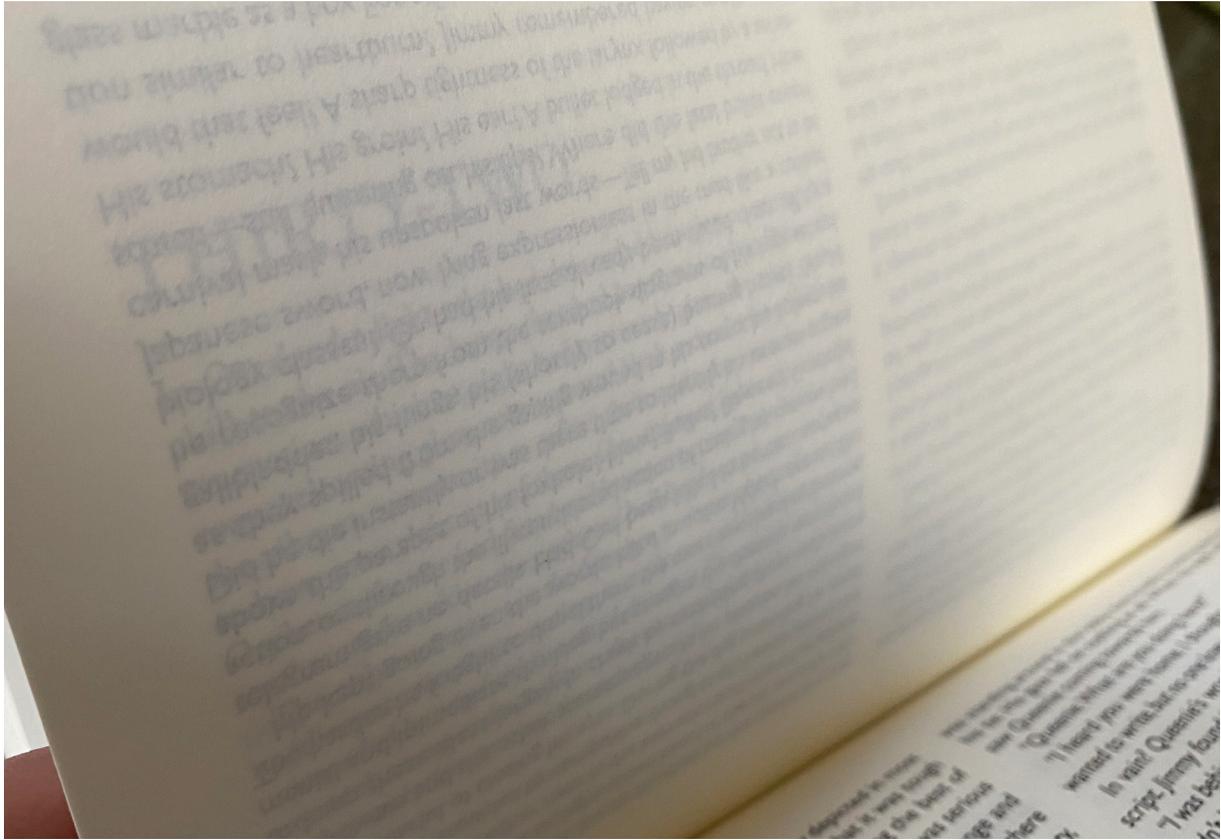
Overland



Photograph of reader experience, pages 164 and 165

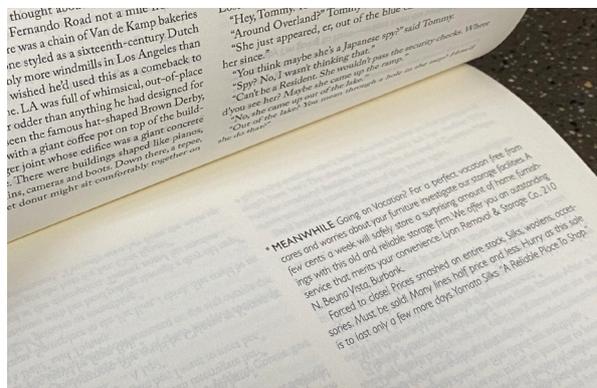
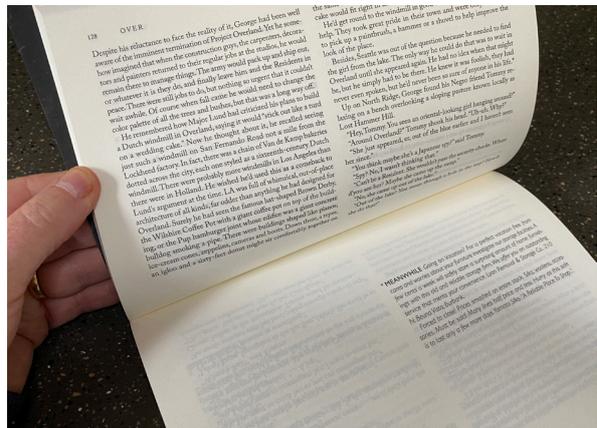
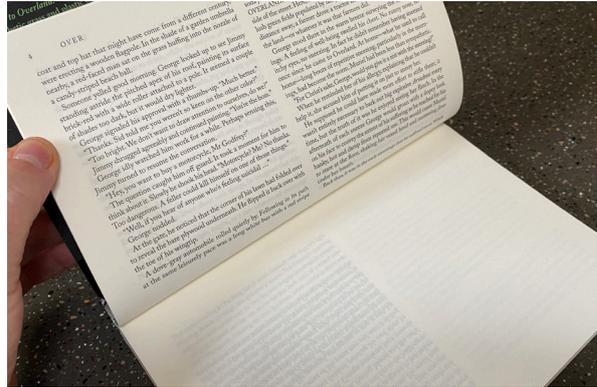
The parallel narratives are set respectively overground (top) and underground (bottom) in 1940s California. The story’s locations are emphasised in the layout: the narrative of each one systematically occupying its half of the divided horizontal, two column, page structure.

Overland



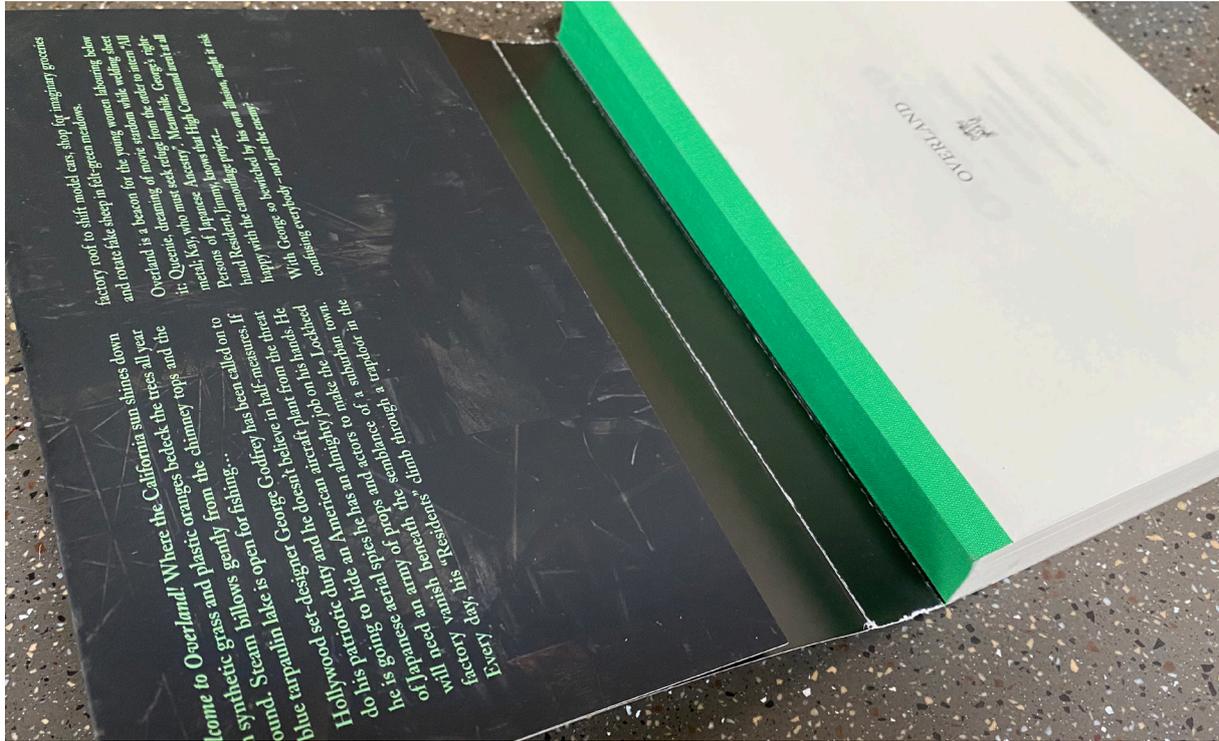
Photograph of reader experience of internal page 292
Showing how the selection of exceptionally thin paper allows the trace of previously read pages to leave their shadows on the blank 'over' page. In this example, the chapter heading 'Thirty Two' is still visible from page 290 through the now reversed 'under' text shadowed from page 291

Overland



Photographs of reader experience
 Showing examples from initial opening, the meaningfully blank pages in the novel and a 'meanwhile' element offering news from outside the primary narrative

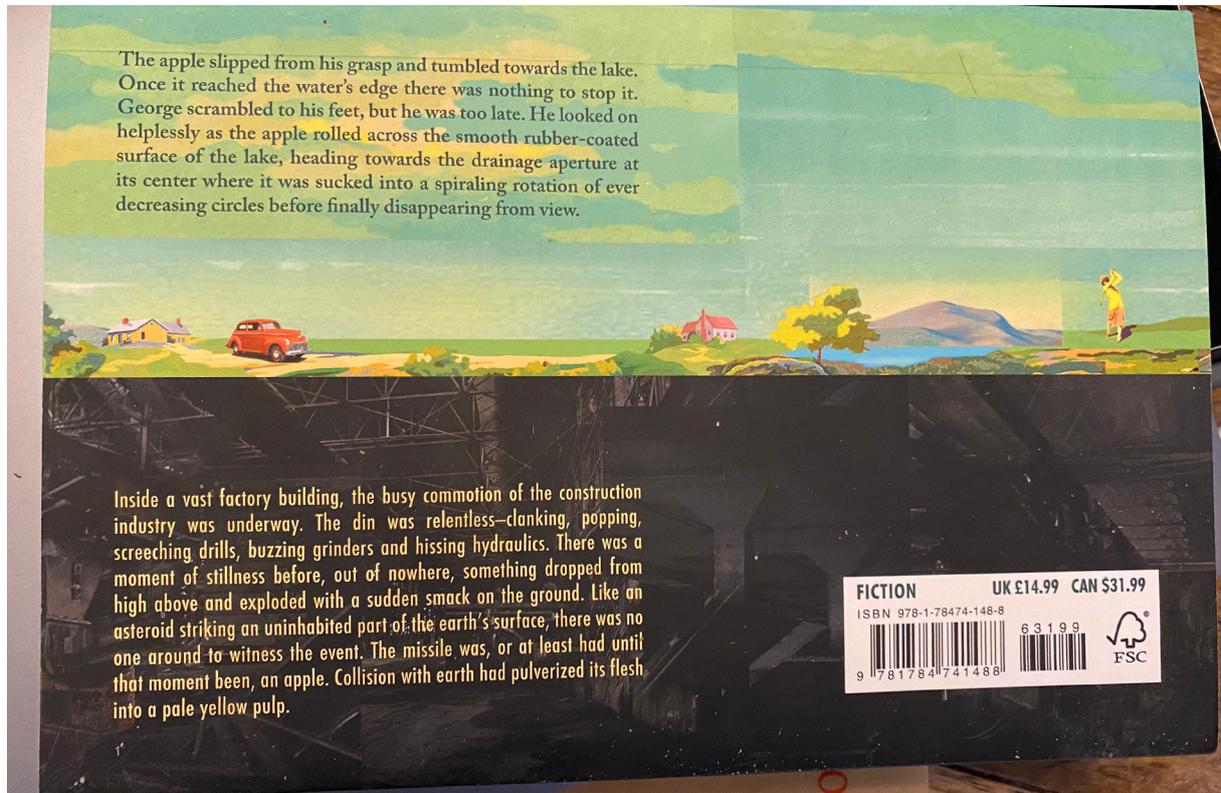
Overland



Photographs of reader experience

Showing (above) the required binding and jacket design to allow the page turn mechanism to operate efficiently and (left), pages employing spartan print on 'over' and 'under' sections together with the characteristic ghost text from the pages to either side

Overland



Photograph of back cover

Showing use of colour versions of the fonts inside the book and background pictures extended from the front cover, illustrating the ersatz fabricated world 'over' and the aircraft factory structure and machinery in monochrome 'under'.

The text makes characteristic use of American vocabulary and spelling and narrates how a falling apple is witnessed first above and then below ground, when it is sucked through the ventilator shaft in the false lake, demonstrating the methods through which the story will be told.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS



The Lockheed aircraft factory, Burbank, California, camouflaged beneath fake rolling hills, c. 1942
Image used to illustrate article in *The Express* (Sheridan, 2018), exploring the true story behind the *Overland* novel's premise

In *Overland*, Rawle examines the interface between graphic and lexical understanding, investigating ways in which readers take meaning from metatextual cues and physical experiences of reading.

He builds upon previous research in which pictorial representations informed textual understanding. These included unconventional use of illustrations and visual additions, and 'found text' that replicated cuttings from magazines and newspapers (*The Amateur Photographer*, 1998; *Woman's World*, 2005). Rawle also builds upon work with parallel narratives (*The Card*, 2012), asking new questions of reading and text.

In *Overland* (2018), Rawle specifically asked:

1. What does the design of unconventional physical experiences of reading reveal about authorial production and audience reception of stories?
2. When working with parallel narratives in a novel, what meaning is added through textual arrangement and metatextual graphic and design cues?
3. Where do the boundaries of the conventions of illustrated and graphic novels lie when applied to largely textual narration?

RESEARCH CONTEXT



***Overland* extends understanding of how graphic and textual practices can develop new reading experiences and understanding of narrative. The story and literary themes are integral with the book design and research examined the interdependency of these aspects.**

It is set in Burbank, California, in 1942, and based on the little-known true story of how the US Army commissioned Hollywood set designers and builders to secretly fabricate an entire ersatz town on top of the Lockheed Aircraft plant, blending it into the surrounding suburban landscape as a way to camouflage it from potential Japanese aerial attack.



Although it is a work of fiction, the story is set squarely against the political, social and cultural history, exploring subjects pertinent to the story, such as the United States government's banishment of all Japanese-American civilians to internment camps and the role of women working in munitions factories.



Rawle's experiment challenges a number of conventions in the publishing of long-form stories as novels. Conventions have long prescribed the accepted book form for literary fiction and this has rarely been subverted, even when inappropriate for the content. In 2009 'Flipback' books were launched in the Netherlands. The books open from top to bottom, use sideways printed text but are issued more as a convenient additional format rather than a creative and meaningful feature. *Overland* uses the horizontal format as an integral narrative device, using parallel and simultaneous stories to play out above and below the book's spine.

(top and middle)
**Lockhead factory, Burbank,
California**

Photographed before and after
the camouflage process, c.1942

(bottom)
**Boeing aircraft factory, Seattle,
Washington**

The same technique of
camouflage through ersatz town-
building here applied to the
Boeing aircraft factory, creating
the fake town 'Wonderland'

The narrative significance of the design was discussed in *The Bookseller* (Arter, 2018), '...[B]ecause of its structure, it's literally more of a page-turner than most books, because when the narrative is in *Overland*, the Underland pages are left blank, and vice versa. As the story progresses and their delineation becomes increasingly imperilled, this structure breaks down beautifully, with concrete poetry-esque joins forming between the two worlds.'

Rawle's approach to visual storytelling is widely discussed in works by key academic thinkers in multimodal literature (Drag, 2019; Keskinen, 2016; Hallet, 2018; Maziarczyk, 2013; Bray, Gibbons and McHale, 2012; Vivera, 2015; Brillenburg Wurth, 2011; Gibbons, 2010) where it is contextualised in relation to other leading creators of multimodal fiction.

RESEARCH PROCESS

***Overland* develops and extends Rawle's research into multimodal fiction. It follows earlier experimental novels *Diary of An Amateur Photographer* (1998), *Woman's World* (2005) and *The Card* (2012). These each explored discrete aspects of graphic textual representation and the affect of metatextual visual elements in novels, whilst also providing a growing knowledge base by which to contextualise further experiments.**

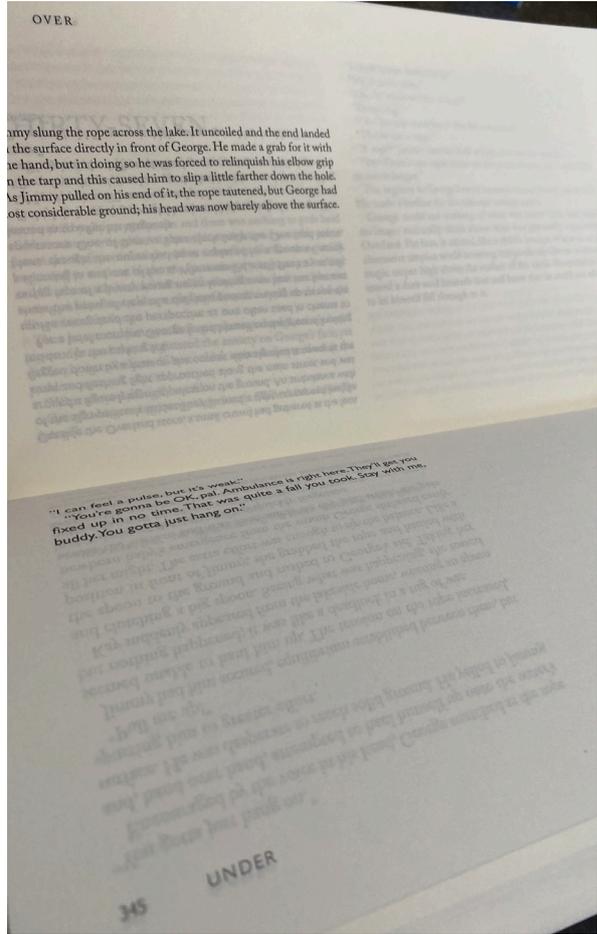
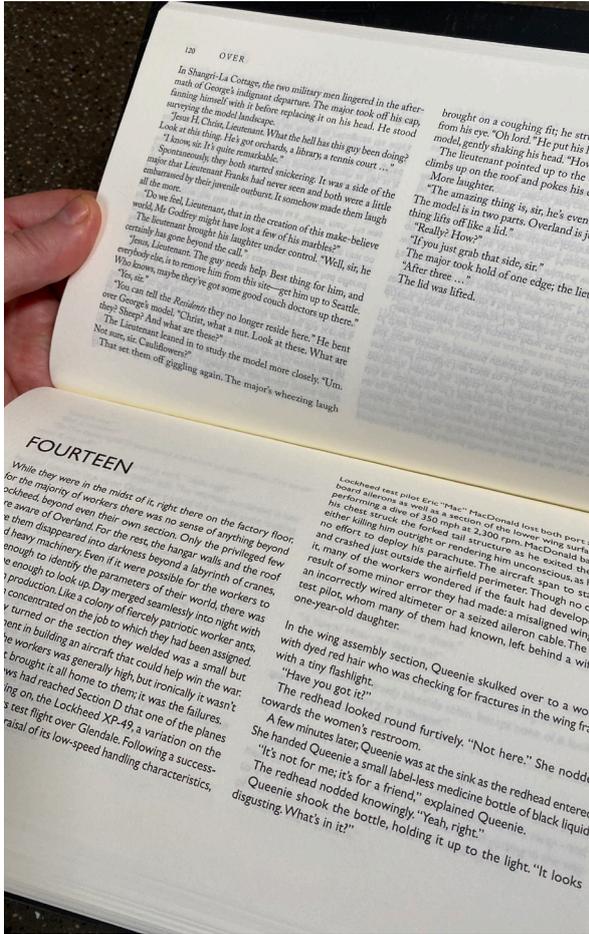
As both author and book-designer, Rawle's research is an iterative process, through which the story is inseparable from the many modes of signification: the words that are chosen and how they are placed, viewed and experienced. He worked with the premise he discovered in the historical information about Burbank, California, considering how thematic material that emerged from that premise would be delivered and enhanced through the reader's visual and physical experience with the printed book. This included an understanding of 1940s camouflage theory, the operations of the Lockheed factory and the social-historical factors in the setting. He recognised the correlation between techniques used in US Army industrial camouflage and 1940s Hollywood set design, and used this to develop a central literary theme, drawing on the era's strategic importance of blurring the boundaries between the real and the fake. At the same time, Rawle drew on literary traditions for the metaphorical representations of heaven and hell in the worlds above and below ground. The research considered how these features of an evolving narrative might be communicated through the graphic and physical design of the book.

Rawle designed the book to physically and visually represent an 'over' and 'under', establishing the non-traditional horizontal page gutter as a graphic demarcation line between the two territories. This heightened the relationship between the two parallel narratives in the over- and underground settings. Rawle distinguished them further with alternating type faces, serif Caslon above, and Gill Sans below. There are several further experimental devices in *Overland*, for example, a series of 'meanwhile' footnotes that are deployed intermittently to offer parallel narrative asides from the dormant world, acting as a reminder that the 'other' story could start up again at any time.

Draft one of the *Overland* manuscript was begun in 2012 and underwent a further ten complete rewritten drafts before its 2018 publication to ensure that the balance of the narrative and the spatial positioning of the story and its four central characters was properly explored. Through experiment and redrafting, Rawle evolved important dramatic irony for the story, balancing the spatial and textual clues, and perfected the horizontal structure, so that when characters migrated between the two spaces, both physically and spiritually, they seemed to carry their stories with them. He explored how either of the narrative threads, over or under, can be put temporarily 'on hold' through a combination of text position and blank space. The research considered how characters caught in the overlapping liminal spaces between *Overland* and its underworld might have their emotional torment portrayed graphically and spatially.

Rawle reflects constantly on the audience reception from earlier work. Discoveries made about readers' willingness to engage with visual and multimodal devices in *The Card* (2012), particularly around the necessary balance between text and format, helped to inform the design of *Overland*. He tests imaginative additions for their place in the overall sense of the novel and the requirements of successful storytelling.

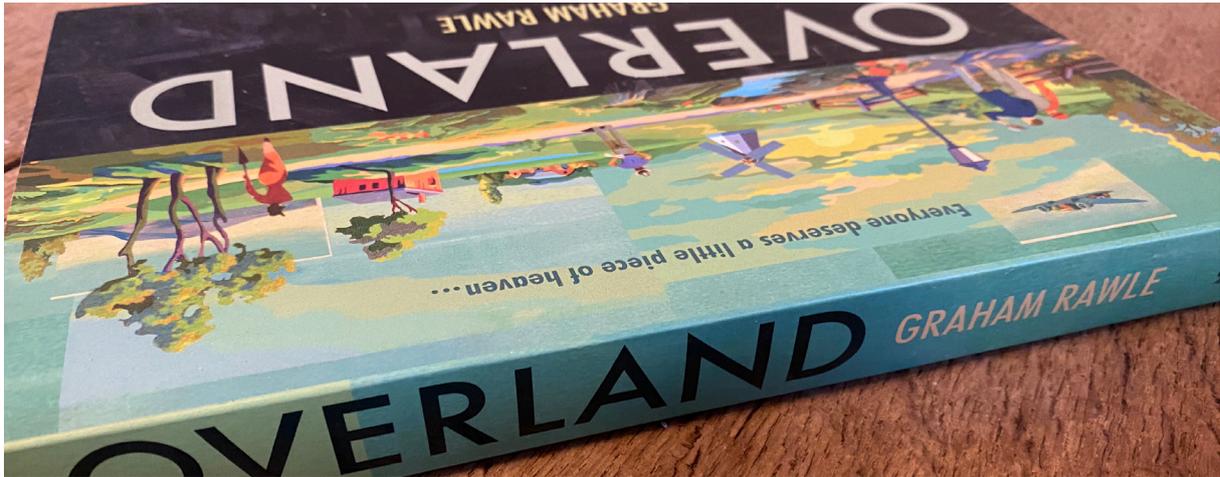
Overland



Photographs of reader experience

Showing contrast of text density that matches the narrative pace or relative importance of the statements in each section. Also the way in which Rawle uses shadow from print on the reverse sides and following pages give an anticipatory sense of the text density to follow the page turn.

RESEARCH INSIGHTS



Overland
Photograph of physical copy showing spine and cover design

Rawle's process took *Overland* from an original premise through six years of iterative development, testing the effectiveness of his method of multimodal fiction in the delivery of meaning through narrative.

The requirement to design a suitable format for the story necessitated a rethinking of the relationship between the text and the layout of a novel. Through experiments that fused textual meaning with metatextual features, Rawle discovered new ways of delivering dramatic irony and mystery, particularly as parallel narratives were delivered, for example, putting one narrative on hold or offering parallel narrative asides from the dormant world. The power of sparse or blank pages, of 'meanwhile' footnotes, and of reading downwards, towards the underworld, were concepts imaginatively begun and tested, firstly as an author across the dynamic of the fictional whole, and later on with the readership. Readers and critics attest to the success of an experimental form which allows glimpses of material that have been placed away from the sentences that are being read.

Rawle experimented with new conceptions in narrative design and the ways audiences might engage with reading. He exposed and reconfigured the codes and conventions of literary fiction design, by considering the book form and page layout as integral to the story's structure. The relationship between the two interwoven strands of the novel was created using these techniques, testing the value that is added to a multi-narrative novel through visual communication.

The insights were brought to discussions on how a drama could make use of new conventions tested in *Overland*. Considering an adaptation with producers David Parfitt and Jean Doumanian, the work would use a combination of the screen (above) and stage (below), so that each of the parallel worlds is described through a different medium (theatre and film) and their intertwining stories are played out simultaneously, one above the other, in a theatrical setting.

DISSEMINATION



Rawle presenting on multimodal fiction

***Overland* was published as literary fiction by Chatto and Windus (Penguin Random House, London) 22 March 2018, 384 pages, soft cover, ISBN-13: 9781784741488.**

It was edited by Penguin Random House in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/111/1112494/overland/9781784741488.html>

Lectures and research discussion workshops

Pre- and post-publication lectures (both public and academic) given on the *Overland* project in context with other multimodal works include: United World College of South East Asia, Singapore; Laurence Sterne Trust and York St John University; School of Visual Arts, New York, USA; University of Lublin, Poland; University of Wrocław, Poland; Port Eliot Literary Festival, Cornwall; Camberwell College of Arts, London; Norwich University of the Arts; Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland; University of Jyväskylä, Finland; Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) London; UCA Research, Whitechapel Gallery, London; Teesside University; Cardiff School of Art & Design; University of Lincoln; University of the Creative Arts (Maidstone/ Epsom/ Farnham); University of Hertfordshire; Solent University, Southampton; Manchester Metropolitan University; Cambridge School of Visual & Performing Arts; University of the West of England, Bristol; Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge; Falmouth University, Arvon Foundation, Devon.

Selected press reviews and editorial features

Arter, D. (2018) 'Above and beyond.' *The Bookseller* 9 March. <https://www.thebookseller.com/insight/above-and-beyond-747321>

Brooks, Z. (2018) 'Overland by Graham Rawle review - the illusion of home.' *The Guardian*, 4 April 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/apr/04/overland-by-graham-rawle-review-the-illusion-of-home>

Kelly, S. (2018) 'In sheep's clothing.' *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 July.

Maxwell, D. (2018) 'Review: Overland by Graham Rawle - when art gets crafty', *The Times*, 17 March. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/saturday-review/review-overland-by-graham-rawle-when-art-gets-crafty-qrlrxmkt>

Sheridan, P. (2018) 'How the US military made a wartime factory DISAPPEAR: "This secret utopia existed"' *The Express*, 5 March 2018. <https://www.express.co.uk/life-style/life/927319/World-War-Two-US-military-made-wartime-factory-disappear-Los-Angeles>

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- Vivera, T.M. (2015) 'Cut-Up Voices in Graham Rawle's *Woman's World*.' *IUP Journal of English Studies*, 10 (2). Hyderabad, India.

(overleaf)
Overland

Orientated image of front cover

Overland

