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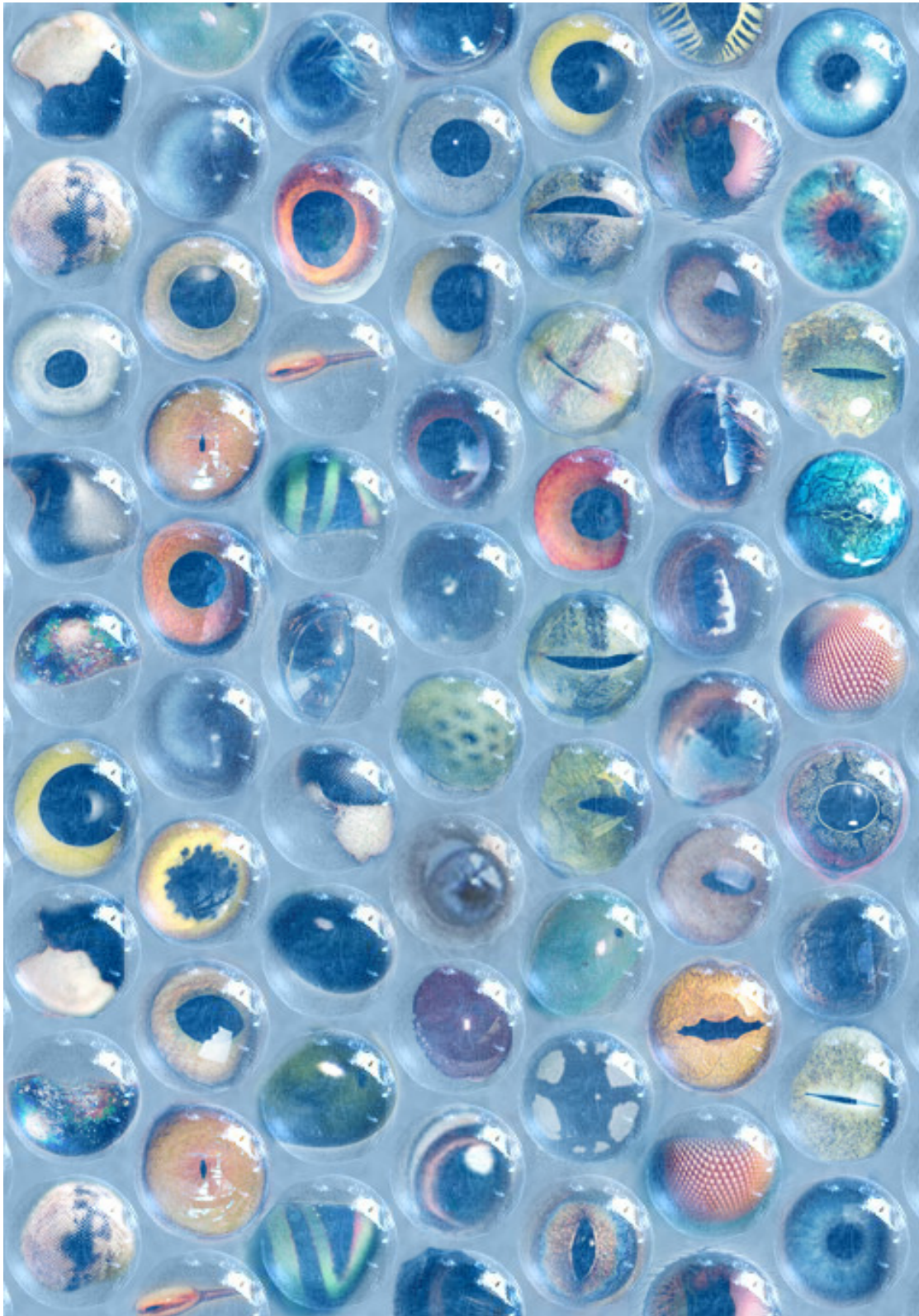
School of English

**‘Plastic’ Perspectives
Ecocriticism, Epigenetics and Magic Real Metamorphoses
in the fiction of
Suniti Namjoshi, Githa Hariharan and Salman Rushdie**

Hilary Elaine Perkins

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
February 2017

Plastic Perspectives



Georgia Perkins

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES: ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
Doctor of Philosophy

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In current research across the humanities and science, there is a burgeoning interest in ‘plasticity,’ epigenesis and ecocriticism. This project brings ideas from these fields together, and asks how they may be expanded and illuminated by metamorphoses articulated in Magic Real fiction. Thus, I argue that Magic Real literature has a significant role in disseminating contemporary bio-scientific ideas. My methodology consists of applying Catherine Malabou’s theory of plasticity to literature, arguing that ‘plastic readings’ evoke more complex and ecologically generative models of metamorphosis. As such, they subvert the merely ‘flexible’ or often vaunted general ‘interconnectedness’ of life. Philosopher of Biology John Dupré highlights the centrality of process to biological science, refuting the existence of discrete and unique individuals, and arguing that ecosystems are far more synergetic than a relatively simple interrelatedness suggests. Indeed, his theory of ‘promiscuous individualism’ repudiates the existence of discrete individuals, and ‘promiscuous realism’¹ renounces inflexible species categories. The removal of such rigid classifications enable varied and

¹ John Dupré, *Processes of Life, Essays in the Philosophy of Biology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

limitless ‘plastic perspectives’ as evident in Magic Real fiction, and affectively convey more authentic, intensely ‘felt’ and shared responses to the environment. Thus, this thesis indicates ways in which a fusion of Magic Real literature and biological science, may productively contribute to ecocriticism. Furthermore, metaphors of skin describe the inclusiveness and ‘literal’ physicality of biological transformation in visceral and fantastic ways, connecting literature with science, and broadening the field of ecocriticism through approaches that challenge the centrality of the human self.

Ecocriticism, defined by Cheryll Glotfelty in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, as ‘the relationship between literature and the environment,’² has previously largely involved a partial focus on ‘human’ environments, totemic species and the scientific or ‘factual’ genres of non-fiction and Western documentary. This thesis addresses these prejudices through the analysis of the work of two lesser known Postcolonial writers Suniti Namjoshi and Githa Hariharan. Their Magic Real literature addresses out-dated hierarchies of nation, gender, species and genre by elucidating metamorphoses of domestic or ‘lesser’ creatures, rather than the charismatic-megafauna more usually the subject of fiction and often employed by environmental conservation campaigns.

² Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. Introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), p.xviii.

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Hilary Elaine Perkins, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my original research.

**‘Plastic’ Perspectives
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in the fiction of
Suniti Namjoshi, Githa Hariharan and Salman Rushdie**

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INTRODUCTION

Metamorphosis, Becoming, Plasticity

**As the pliant wax
Is stamped with new designs, and is no longer
What once it was, but changes form, and still
Is pliant wax, so do I teach that spirit
Is evermore the same, though passing always
To ever changing bodies.³**

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book XV

The dynamism of ‘ever changing’ bodies, and significantly the cross-species transformations, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, effectively illustrate John Dupré’s theories in three ways: continual change as the foundation of biological process, the impossibility of discrete identities, and an essential environmental interrelatedness beyond traditional hierarchical assumptions. Ovid’s ancient text further offers another potentially constructive model for post-genomic theory in proposing that the pliancy of wax involves a change of form while essentially remaining the same. At first glance, this appears analogous to Catherine Malabou’s theory of plasticity. However, Malabou’s term is perhaps more generative since by her definition, ‘plasticity’ retains traces of the past, whereas, in becoming fluid, wax abandons previous form. Thus, I argue that in evading notions of linearity and ultimately attainable evolutionary outcome central to Neo-Darwinian theory, the term ‘plasticity’ more effectively relates complex post-genomic theories of evolution.

As Marina Warner states in *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds* (2002), the infinite number of permutations and intricate links of ‘ever-

³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), Book XV, ‘The Teachings of Pythagoras,’ p.370.

changing bodies’⁴ in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* evidence an ‘extraordinary fertility, vitality, and invention’ and thus creatively encompass ‘the whole wheeling universe itself.’ I argue that it is therefore surprising that these intensely generative ‘shape-shifting’ bodies have very rarely been employed in ecological or environmental models. Warner claims that this is because Ovid’s cross-species transformations are radical ‘by the standard of working taxonomy today’ and, indeed, such transformations might appear troubling from a traditional anthropocentric position. Yet, I suggest that it is precisely because of their extraordinary nature that such transformations effectively describe the ecological richness of ‘plastic perspectives’ central to this thesis.

Forms do not only take on different forms; the whole of nature evolves through the creative power of shape-shifting and this transmigration of souls...Through the whole intricate scoring of the poem run hundreds of stories of ever-changing bodies: to notate and number them resembles one of those fairy-tale tasks, such as sifting peas and lentils. By the standard of working taxonomy today, the classes of forms that exist are porous, and morph into one another: animal, vegetable, mineral fuse and meld; higher and lower – rocks, trees, every variety of beast and fowl as well as human beings – are transformed one into the other.⁵

Thus, Warner describes Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as portraying the whole of ‘creation dynamically moving to a cyclical rhythm of generation, emergence, decay and re-emergence.’⁶ As such, *Metamorphoses* effectively illustrates a more dynamic and cyclical post-genomic ontology since it subverts Neo-Darwinist theories of linear genetic determinism, natural selection, and rigid species categories. Indeed, Warner critiques the Darwinian ‘linear concept of progress through a series of shed skins...towards an ultimate perfected outcome,’ arguing that it ‘comes under pressure from the empirical

⁴ Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; repr.2007), p.1.

⁵ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p.3.

⁶ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p.1.

observation of insects.’ Yet, her statements that identity pre-exists or is ‘manifest’ in the egg or embryo, and that each stage of transformation ‘expresses the full creature under another shape’ which is ‘precisely manifest in the larva, nymph and cocoon,’⁷ are contrastingly deterministic and outdated in their sense of inevitability. I contend that the plasticity and ‘strangeness’ of Magic Real metamorphoses effectively disrupt such predictability.

In addition, Warner states that both Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (8AD) and Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (1915)⁸ are instances of literature which represent crucial changes, where ‘both writers take us into the process of transformation so closely that even while they concentrate on its physical effects on the victim’s body, the reader experiences the change viscerally, from the inside, as it were.’⁹ I similarly maintain that the inclusive, hugely varied and intensely ‘felt’ metamorphoses in Magic Real literature effectively relay diverse responses to cultural and physical environments. It is precisely because of their phantasmagorical nature, that Magic Real metaphors are able to convincingly communicate reactions to the social, cultural and physical environment ‘from the inside,’ as intensely ‘felt’ pain, or pleasure. ‘Skin,’ as the largest sense organ of bodies, and the interface between the ‘outside’ and ‘inside,’ is where the ‘felt’ is most significant and where this essential exchange occurs. Everything, whether organic or inorganic, animate or inanimate must necessarily have an interface with the environment – a ‘skin’ of sorts – whether it be a weathered face or a weathered cliff. I explore the physical and sensual properties of skin as ‘plastic’ as meaningful in

⁷ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, pp.23-24.

⁸ Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis* (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff, 1915).

⁹ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p.113.

reconnecting and transmitting such experience, potentially re-establishing what Cheryll Glotfelty terms ‘the interconnections between nature and culture...between the human and the non-human.’¹⁰ Thus, in this respect, skin plasticity may elucidate ‘ultimate unity’ in productive ways.

In scientific terms, metamorphosis occurs as gradual process, whereas traditional fictional metamorphoses usually involve instantaneous transformations. Such rapid metamorphoses, as those in Ovid, have been employed in fiction for hundreds of years, and are often couched in terms of an immediate assumption of another form or ‘skin,’ either as a means of escape, or as a punishment from the gods. In more recent times, the term metamorphosis has often been supplanted in philosophy and academic literature by the ubiquitous term ‘becoming.’ Rosi Braidotti argues that ‘becoming’ is important in a twenty first century characterised by ‘accelerating change,’ where the consequent challenge is to envision ‘figuration [as] a living map;’ to reconsider identity and the process of ‘becoming’ as dynamic, porous and inclusive - a ‘radical immanence’¹¹ or ‘nomadic subjectivity.’¹² Therefore, in ways similar to Dupré, Braidotti emphasises the importance of the process of ‘differing’ but not in ‘difference’ *per se*,¹³ underscoring the centrality of the processual rather than the notion of a finite form or identity. Correspondingly, Elizabeth Grosz’s theory of ‘volatile bodies’¹⁴ stresses the importance of continual transformation and a

¹⁰ Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm eds. Introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), p.xix.

¹¹ Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphosis, Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p.5.

¹² Braidotti, *Metamorphosis*, p.3.

¹³ Braidotti, *Metamorphosis*, p.2.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies, Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994).

liberating ‘anti-essentialist decentering of identity.’¹⁵ Yet, whilst ‘becoming’ and ‘volatile bodies’ might gesture towards radical reconsiderations of identity and evolution, they nevertheless remain centred on form and subjectivity. Significantly, in her later work *Becoming Undone* (2011), Grosz places more emphasis on the centrality of ‘undoing’ rather than on a ‘completed’ identifiable ‘body,’ arguing that what something ‘becomes’ is ‘less clear and less interesting than the movement itself,’¹⁶ but although the concept of ‘undoing’ might gesture towards the notion of a more evolutionary authentic ‘disorder,’ the use of the term ‘becoming’ remains problematic with Neo-Darwinist connotations of finality.

In *Biosocial Becomings, Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology* (2013), Tim Ingold argues for a significant reassessment of Neo-Darwinian science in what he terms as an ‘evolutionary equivalent of the general theory of relativity that would allow our human trajectories of growth and becoming – including those of becoming knowledgeable – to be re-woven into the fabric of organic life.’ Ingold’s ‘re-thinking’¹⁷ involves a re-evaluation of organic life, and employs the analogy of ‘becoming’ as a ‘hempen rope,’ the entwined strands of which indicate the intrinsic connection between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ form. This attempt to visualise material structure in metaphorical terms aids an understanding of the intricacy and complexity of ‘becoming’ over scale and time, from individual molecules to the multiple strands of the rope, as well as the rope as a whole. Yet, the image is troublesome since the very physicality and strength of the rope also implies a finality and notion of

¹⁵ Braidotti, *Metamorphosis*, p.21.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone, Darwinian Reflections of Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p.5.

¹⁷ Tim Ingold, *Biosocial Becomings, Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology*, Tim Ingold and Gisli Pálsson eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.9-10.

‘solid’ completeness. In contrast, the ‘in-between’ moments of ‘plasticity,’ described by Malabou are, as she states, ‘not subordinated to a finalism’¹⁸ and, as such, address out-dated notions of linear determinism and the concept of finite form. In this respect, I argue that the ‘plasticity’ of Magic Real metamorphoses, where traces of the past remain within the developing form, describes the more complex processes of transformation - beyond a relatively ‘simple’ becoming. Thus, the theory of ‘plasticity’ may offer an alternative, a more radical ‘re-thinking,’ since it’s very definition involves a to-ing and fro-ing, a newness, but also a retention of history.

Gisli Palsson argues that the ‘neo-Darwinian legacy, after all, turns out to be an uncomfortable intellectual straitjacket,’ which is incapable of describing the complexity of life. What she calls the ‘noisiness’ and ‘plasticity’ of ‘biosocial assemblies with a plurality of speakers and voices,’ involves more than ‘a neat back-and-forth over-to-you dialogue modelled on early telephone conversations.’¹⁹

A truly vigorous take on human life and human variation must integrate the social and the biological, the individual and the collective, ontogeny and phylogeny, organism and context, being and becoming.

Whilst highlighting the necessity for a ‘vigorous take’ on evolution, Palsson unfortunately also remains focused on humanity, ‘being’ and ‘becoming.’ I argue that Magic Real metaphors effectively convey much more than ‘human life,’ flexibility or polymorphism in a multiplicity of continually transforming plastic perspectives. This level of complexity has proved difficulty for humanity to grasp. Indeed, the relaying of such abstract

¹⁸ Catherine Malabou, ‘Whither Materialism? Althusser/Darwin,’ Chapter 2, *Plastic Materialities, Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou*, eds. Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), p.52.

¹⁹ Gisli Palsson, ‘Retrospect’, *Biosocial Becomings, Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology*, p.242.

concepts through metaphor has always been an essential aspect of human understanding. As George Lakoff states: ‘as soon as we try to spell out what constitutes thinking, perceiving and so on, metaphor enters.’²⁰ Northrop Frye made similar claims for the importance of metaphor fifty three years ago in *The Educated Imagination* (1964), stating that the motive and use of metaphor was fundamental to human understanding and that it’s employment illustrated ‘a desire to associate, and finally identify the human mind with what goes on outside it, because only the genuine joy you have is in those rare moments when you feel that although we may know in part...we are also a part of what we know.’²¹ Yet, despite these claims, and as well as more recent acknowledgements by academics such as Clare Hanson in ‘Beyond the Gene - epigenetic science in 21st century culture,’ that metaphor may relate such conceptual shifts to public understanding,²² the adoption of metaphor in post-genomic theory unfortunately remains limited. As Clare Hanson states:

The move from genetics to epigenetics entails move away from the uni-directional, temporal model of causation inherent in talk of genetic coding, towards a spatial model in which, as Fox Keller puts it in *The Mirage of a Space Between Nature and Culture* (2010), factors in human development are understood to involve ‘causal influences that extend upward, downward, and sideways’. The new thinking on genetic metaphors provokes many questions. How might literary expertise in handling metaphor, modelling, and narrativisation contribute to better public understanding of these models and metaphors? Could the epistemological issues involved be further illuminated by literary practice and theory?²³

In *Making Sense of Life* (2003), Evelyn Fox-Keller also discusses the use of metaphor in scientific discourse, noting that dominant theories of biology and ecology have previously focused on fact as ‘literal’ and based on essential

²⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh, The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p.266.

²¹ Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (USA: Indiana University Press, 1964), p.33.

²² Clare Hanson, ‘Beyond the Gene - epigenetic science in 21st century culture’, <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/readwatchlisten/features/beyondthegene> (Accessed 20/01/13).

²³ Clare Hanson, ‘Beyond the Gene: Metaphors.’ <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/beyondthegene/about/metaphors.page>. (Accessed 20/01/2013).

truths about the ‘real world.’ She considers that although this trend has largely been eliminated it is, to some extent, unfortunately still evident.

Most philosophers, and even many scientists, have long since abandoned the traditional view of scientific language as, ideally at least, literal and univocal, uniquely corresponding to the entities and processes that make up the real world. But the spectre this tradition cast on the use of metaphors and other linguistic tropes in science dies hard, and the conviction persists among some that when language is not literal it is therefore less than literal – at best, that metaphoric language offers a provisionally useful heuristic to be dispensed with as soon as possible, and at worst (as both Hobbes and Locke believed), a merely ornamental or downright deceptive instruction that ought not to be admitted in proper scientific discourse.²⁴

Fox-Keller notes that in the 1950’s, Max Black²⁵ posited that ‘referential imprecision can have a positive function in scientific work.’²⁶ Consequently, she notes the centrality of Mary Hesse²⁷ in developing this theory and claims that, significantly, ‘where Black’s arguments presuppose a background of literal meanings, Hesse argues (along with Hans-Georg Gadamer) that metaphor is in fact primary to literal meaning.’²⁸ Indeed, Fox-Keller argues that ‘the imprecision and flexibility of figurative language is indispensable’²⁹ since scientific research is ‘typically directed at the elucidation of entities and processes about which no clear understanding exists,’ and involves an ‘ongoing and provisional activity, a groping in the dark.’

²⁴ Evelyn Fox-Keller, *Making Sense of Life* (Harvard: Harvard University Press: 2003), pp.117-118.

²⁵ Max Black, *Models and Metaphor: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962).

²⁶ Fox-Keller, *Making Sense of Life*, p.119.

²⁷ A selection of works amongst many ranging from 1950 to 2007: Mary Hesse, *Science and the Human Imagination: Aspects of the History and Logic of Physical Science* (London: SCM Press, 1954), "A New Look at Scientific Explanation", *Review of Metaphysics*, 17: 1 (September 1963), "Models and Analogies" in W. H. Newton-Smith (ed.), *A Companion to Philosophy of Science* (Blackwell: Oxford 1999), <http://www.collodel.org/hesse/#e1948>.

²⁸ Fox-Keller, *Making Sense of Life*, p.119.

²⁹ Fox-Keller, *Making Sense of Life*, p.118.

Scientists must find ways of talking about what they do not know – about that which they as yet have only glimpses, guesses, speculations...they need to invent words, expressions, forms of speech that can indicate or point to phenomena for which they have no literal descriptors...Such metaphoric utterances can be scientifically productive just because they open up new perspectives on phenomena that are still obscure and ill-defined and about which clarification is achieved only through a process of groping – in other words, on the kinds of phenomena that scientists take as the objects of their investigations.³⁰

Despite the perceived opposition between science and literature, the use of metaphor in crafting ‘new perspectives’ are, as Fox-Keller states, invaluable to scientific investigation. Indeed, their apparent distance is significant since, as when considering the effectiveness of a metaphor, Fox-Keller argues that: ‘the very uncertainty we are left to feel about the proximity between its referents’³¹ is central to whether it can be judged ‘good’ or not. Thus, I posit that the very strangeness of Magic Real metaphors defines them as ‘good’ in these terms. Most significantly, metaphors of skin, as interface with the environment, and as the largest sense organ of both the human and the ‘more-than-human’ body, are able to negotiate the space between the scientific and the imaginary. Metamorphoses of skin have long been employed in ancient literature and offer effective representations of ‘becoming’ as discussed in recent epigenetic discourse. Although concentrated on human brains and neuronal synapses, Malabou’s theory of plasticity is hugely valuable in explicating processes of bodily transformation as more complex than merely flexible and elastic. I argue that plasticity can be employed beyond theories of consciousness and the human brain, thus contributing to a radical and inclusive ontological theory. As such, I claim that plastic perspectives and plastic readings of the Magic Real, tender a more resourceful approach than

³⁰ Fox-Keller, *Making Sense of Life*, pp.118-119.

³¹ Fox-Keller, *Making Sense of Life*, p.146. She also notes the ‘plasticity of the notion of feedback’ and the ‘plastic use’ of mathematical models. p.121.

has previously been employed in the fields of ecocriticism and evolutionary biology.

In terms of genre, traditional texts more overtly connected to ‘Nature’ have frequently evidenced, and have been used to evidence, a Western bias in ecocriticism, an enduring anthropocentrism, and a lingering reductive vision of ‘Nature’ as either pastoral and pristine wilderness or conversely as ‘red in tooth and claw.’³² I argue that, as such, they are inadequate means by which to illustrate and discuss contemporary philosophies involving human and ‘more than human’ existence in complex worldwide evolving environments, and that the Magic Real is particularly suited to this challenge.

In Chapter One, I analyse key literary concepts of the Magic Real and ecocriticism, undertaking a detailed literature review and highlighting ways in which these seemingly diverse topics may be brought together in order to inform scientific theory. I then introduce key literary authors: Suniti Namjoshi and Githa Hariharan lesser well-known Magic Real writers who, like the creatures they write about, are often dismissed as minor players. Their use of mundane species, other than those traditionally employed in ecocriticism, and their connection with the wider environment, communicate affective responses which illuminate contemporary ecocritical perspectives. I consider the contrast between them as well as the ways that their work, in ecocritical terms, productively subverts dominant hierarchies of species, author and genre. Perhaps ‘fantastic’ metamorphoses involving ‘lesser’ animals might initially appear paradoxical, but their foregrounding effectively signals a world-view at odds with dominant theories of Neo-

³² Alfred Lord Tennyson, ‘In Memoriam,’ Canto Lvi, (London: Edward Moxon, 1850, repr; London: Penguin, 1991), p.166.

Darwinism and all its ideological consequences. In contrast to Rushdie's metamorphoses that are 'loud, stenchy, hideous, grotesque, inhuman, powerful,'³³ Namjoshi and Hariharan's extensive descriptions of animals, though often incongruous, are generally affirming. Thus, this thesis focuses on non-dominant authors and species through the lens of the Magic Real. It is not solely concerned with Postcolonial readings and a re-evaluation of women writers from South Asia, but attempts a wider recuperation of the Magic Real as part of an important reassessment of ecocriticism. Magic Real transformations across species describe the possibility of an infinite variety of 'plastic perspectives' beyond the traditionally dominant that, I argue, are central to a rethinking of ecology and environmental science.

I then discuss key thinkers in my methodology and indicate ways that 'plastic readings' of literary metamorphoses inform and broaden ecocritical perspectives. Dupré's theories explicate the science and essentially processual nature of life previously lacking in abstract theories of 'becoming.' In addition, the sense of an elemental interconnectedness undermines species hierarchies. However, this theory is not without associated problems. This chapter discusses the controversy surrounding the term 'hybridity,' detailing ways that the theory of plasticity, in retaining history, addresses this challenge by avoiding a great averaging out. The end of Chapter One discusses ways in which 'plastic readings' might broaden ecocriticism beyond dominant discourse.

Chapter Two involves a discussion of Salman Rushdie's twentieth century canonical Magic Real text, *The Satanic Verses* which contains

³³ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Vintage, 1998; repr. 2006), pp.288-289.

instances of both ‘explosive’ (epigenetic) and gradual transformations.

Rushdie evokes the theories of Lamarck and Darwin, as well as the notion of the pliability of wax used by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*. Whilst I acknowledge the dynamism of Rushdie’s style, I suggest that his metamorphoses might more obviously conform to Neo-Darwinian theory and are ultimately less powerful and radical than those of Ovid, Namjoshi and Hariharan.

Chapter Three largely concentrates on Namjoshi’s animal metamorphoses as following ancient tradition, but as offering radical ways in which to re-think dominant hierarchies that are detrimental to a balanced ecology. I relate Namjoshi’s transforming characters and multiple perspectives to the Dupré’s theories of ‘promiscuous individualism’ and ‘promiscuous realism.’³⁴ I suggest that the rapidity of Namjoshi’s transformations describe the relative speed of evolutionary epigenesis, as what Malabou describes as the *plastique* – an explosion of change. Her often comedic style contrasts with the more harrowing metaphors employed by Hariharan.

Chapter Four focuses on Hariharan and the ways in which her transformations and metaphors of skin effectively and affectively relay pleasure and pain. As I discuss above, the power of metaphor is in the ability to explicate the physical in more relatable ways than scientific discourse. Hariharan’s metamorphoses are often more gradual and couched in quasi-scientific terms associated with the emergence from cocoons, or the peeling or sloughing of skins. Her descriptions linger on the physicality and pain of more gradual transformations, vividly relaying abstract concepts of rawness and vulnerability. The more gradual ‘plastic’ processes of wounding and

³⁴ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.8.

healing, often described as excruciating, arrive at a ‘newness’ that necessarily retain the past as scars.

The ambition of this thesis is threefold: firstly, by reading Namjoshi and Hariharan alongside Rushdie, I identify ways in which their work more profoundly describes post-genomic evolutionary theory. As such, I hope to retrieve them from relative obscurity by recognising the significance of their use of metamorphoses concerning non-totemic animals and insects. By so doing, I broaden ecocriticism beyond dominant ideologies of anthropocentrism, a focus on charismatic-megafauna and canonical Western documentary texts. Secondly, as well as demonstrating the dynamic potential of Magic Real engagements with more marginal entities, I argue that metaphors of skin enrich ecological and environmental discourse by relaying ‘felt’ experience in sweating, sensual, gratifying and torturous ways. Finally, by viewing literature and the intellectual history of metamorphosis as a bodily environmental crisis through ‘plastic readings’ and ‘plastic perspectives,’ I evoke the complexity of relationships between the literary and philosophical.

CHAPTER ONE

**All things are always changing,
But nothing dies. The spirit comes and goes,
Is housed wherever it wills, shifts residence
From beasts to men, from men to beasts, but always
It keeps on living.³⁵**

³⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p.370.

Key Literary Concepts: The Magic Real and Ecocriticism

This project brings ideas from these two seemingly disparate arenas together, and asks how they may be expanded and illuminated by a consideration of literary metamorphoses. In stressing the potential of Magic Real texts in the emerging fields of ecocriticism and evolutionary biology, this thesis broadens the field of investigation beyond Latin America and canonical authors. The Magic Real offers new and surprising descriptions of the visceral and the ‘real’ within the traditional frameworks of well-known ‘fantastic’ narratives, describing the complexity of human, and significantly ‘more-than-human’ existence, in contemporary evolving environments.

1.1 The Magic Real

In an essay titled ‘Magic Realism in the Weimar Republic,’³⁶ Iris Guenther states that ‘gaps and conjecture abound’ when considering how the ‘German pictorial term Magic Realism [was] appropriated by literary critics and writers,’ but notes that Magic Realism appeared in German literary criticism with increasing frequency after 1948, becoming ‘an established term, with varying definitions,’³⁷ and eventually emerged in Italy, France, Belgium and the Netherlands at various times in the early twentieth century. Guenther states that the spread of the term ‘Magic Real’ to Latin America occurred as a result of the cultural migration of Europeans fleeing the threat of the Third Reich,³⁸ and that ‘[c]onjecture aside, it is in Latin America that the concept was primarily seized by literary criticism and was, through translation and literary appropriation, transformed.’³⁹

Guenther notes that in 1914, the German artist Ludwig Meidner declared that the indistinct wistful style of Impressionist painting in the 1870’s and 1880’s could not adequately portray an increasingly antagonistic human existence. Meidner asserted that Impressionists who had previously concentrated on colour, spontaneity and the play of light should now ‘return to painting the magnificent and the dramatic inherent in tumultuous city streets, train stations, factories and nights in the big city’—representing both the dramatic and the mundane as a response to what was increasingly considered to be the overly emotional intensity of Expressionism, as well as

³⁶ Iris Guenther, reprinted in ‘Magic Realism in the Weimar Republic’, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, eds. *Magical Realism, Theory, History, Community* (USA: Duke University Press, 1995), p.37.

³⁷ Guenther, ‘Magic Realism in the Weimar Republic’, p.59.

³⁸ She notes from Herbert A. Straus (1983) that over a fifth of the 500,000 exiles that left Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia between 1933-1941 settled in Central and South Asia, p.61.

³⁹ Guenther, ‘Magic Realism in the Weimar Republic’, p.61.

the complexity of an increasingly technological world which had also suffered the devastation of World War One. In *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus, Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei* (1925)⁴⁰ the art critic and photographer Franz Roh first coined the term Magic Realism to describe the ‘new objectivity’ of the German *neue Sachlichkeit* painters of the Weimar Republic who sought to fuse the fantastic with the everyday, what was termed *Unheimlichkeit* (uncanniness) within the quotidian phenomenal world. Franz Roh claimed that ‘[h]umanity seems destined to oscillate forever between devotion to the world of dreams and adherence to the world of reality,’ and sixty years later, Rushdie similarly identified fantasy and the ‘commingling of the improbable and the mundane’⁴¹ as central to Magic Real literature.

The suppleness and adaptability of the Magic Real, beyond the ‘traditional mimetic mode’ of Western realism,⁴² enables an effective representation of the processes of evolutionary plasticity in the burgeoning fields of epigenetics, evolutionary biology and ecocriticism. Wendy B. Faris’s brief definition of the Magic Real as a genre which combines ‘realism and the fantastic’ attempts to clarify the complexity of what is a variously defined and often contentious term that, on initial consideration, seems to contain an intrinsic paradox when viewed from a traditional rationalist perspective. In a

⁴⁰ Franz Roh, *Nach-expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1925), excerpt in ‘Magical Realism: Post Expressionism’, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, eds. *Magical Realism, Theory, History, Community*, (USA: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 17.

⁴¹ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children* (London: Picador, 1982), p.9.

⁴² Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism, Theory, History, Community*, p.3. ‘An essential difference, then, between realism and magical realism involves the intentionality implicit in the conventions of the two modes. Several essays in our collection suggest that realism intends its version of the world as a singular version, as an objective (hence universal) representation of natural and social realities – in short, that realism functions ideologically and hegemonically. Magical realism also functions ideologically but, according to these essays, less hegemonically, for its program is not centralizing but eccentric: it creates space for interactions of diversity.’

chapter entitled ‘Scheherazade’s Children,’ from a collection of essays jointly edited with Lois Parkinson Zamora, Faris details what she considers as the primary characteristics of Magic Real fiction that are strikingly redolent of Roh’s ‘new objectivity’ of Post Expressionism. Faris declares an ‘irreducible element’⁴³ of magic as fundamental and essentially involving ‘something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as we know them,’ which exists alongside a detailed and often sensual description of the phenomenal world. The focus on sensuality is clearly significant in terms of my discussion involving the trope of skin as prevalent in Magic Real fiction. Faris describes the necessary disorientation of the reader through an experience of ‘the uncanny and disconcerting’ when traversing fluid boundaries across worlds, cultures, fact, fiction and life and death, ultimately arriving at a questioning of received ideas about ‘time, space and identity.’⁴⁴

In the introduction to *Magic(al) Realism* (2004), Maggie Ann Bowers discusses the reception of the genre, stating that since the 1980’s, the variously termed ‘magic realism,’ ‘magical realism’ and ‘marvellous realism’ has become both ‘highly fashionable and highly derided.’ Bowers states that Magical Realism has flourished since the 1980’s as ‘an important component of postmodernism’ and argues that the realist tone of the narrative ‘when presenting magical happenings’ as well as its oxymoronic designation, indicates an essentially ‘disruptive narrative mode’ with the potential to ‘break[s] down the distinction between the usually opposing terms of the magical and the realist.’ Furthermore, she notes the frequent criticism of the Magic Real as trivial, clichéd and exoticised escapist mode.

⁴³ Faris, using Young and Hollaman’s term, *Magical Realism, Theory, History*, p.167.

⁴⁴ Faris, *Magical Realism, Theory, History, Community*, pp. 167-175.

The objection that many critics raise against magical realism is that it is a very popular fictional form among western readers who are not familiar with the world which it depicts. This highlights several concerns: is it popular because it offers an exotic notion of life in the Third World; it is popular because it provides a means of escaping reality; it is popular because, according to critics such as Brennan and Connell, it can reinforce colonial thinking? These critics assume that a western educated readership has been schooled in colonialist thinking (whether directly or indirectly, consciously or subconsciously), and in the thinking of the Enlightenment.⁴⁵

Despite identifying additional criticisms aimed at the Magic Real, including its formless imprecision and the ‘nostalgia and whimsy,’⁴⁶ of its foremost proponent, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Bowers concurs with Faris in recognising the potential of the Magic Real to disrupt dominant discourse, and stating that far from being problematic, the intrinsic contradictory elements of the genre have ‘made and sustained the usefulness and popularity of the concept[s]’⁴⁷ rather than hindered or degraded them. Jesús Benito, Ana Ma Manazanas and Begoña Simal identify the potential of the Magic Real of environmental criticism in offering instants of ‘extended realism,’⁴⁸ in similar ways to Dupré’s notion of promiscuous individualism and promiscuous realism, where perspectives are broadened and notions of alterity are erased. Benito states:

Nonrealistic modes such as magical realism have much to offer to practitioners of environmental criticism, in so much as its extended realism can help to question and deconstruct assumed, normative conventions such as “human versus nonhuman,” “nature versus culture” (in much the same way that gender and race divides are often placed *sous rature*⁴⁹ in magical realist texts). Magical realist narratives can also facilitate the perception of less visible connections between material practices (late capitalism, globalization, social injustice), spiritual/ethical concerns (lack of ecocritical awareness and/or activism), and the slow but relentless destruction of the earth/environment.

⁴⁵ Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*, (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.126.

⁴⁶ Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*, p.41.

⁴⁷ Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*, p.1.

⁴⁸ Jesús Benito, Ana Ma Manazanas and Begoña Simal, *Uncertain Mirrors, Magical Realisms in US Ethnic Literatures* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp.197-198.

⁴⁹ Martin Heidegger’s term meaning ‘under erasure,’ used extensively by Jacques Derrida to signify words that do not wholly express the concept that they represent.

Despite the popularity of authors such as Salman Rushdie, Italo Calvino, Günter Grass and Angela Carter, Magic Real fiction largely continues to be seen as the province of Latin American authors such as Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier and Gabriel García Márquez. In a paper given at the MLA in New York in 1954, 'On the Marvellous Real in America,' Alejo Carpentier makes vast claims for the genre asserting that 'the entire history of America [is] a chronicle of the marvellous real'⁵⁰ and is 'the heritage of all America.'⁵¹ Carpentier coined the term '*lo real maravilloso americano*' to describe what he considered to be the 'presence and vitality' of American Magical Realism in contrast to the decadence and affectation of European Surrealism,⁵² and the 'tiresome pretension' of European Literature, despite a shared foundation of basic 'truths.'

Whilst Patrick D. Murphy espouses the broadening of perspective, genre and research in ecocriticism, he too assumes that the Magic Real is solely a Latin American genre and thus the literature of American 'margins.'⁵³ Not acknowledging the popularity and canonisation of writers such as Salman Rushdie, and the significance of South Asian authors generally, is a remarkable oversight. Indeed, as Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller note, the potential for less canonical 'indigenous ontologies that figure the body in ways distinctive from Western assumptions may be useful sites to

⁵⁰ Alejo Carpentier, 'On the Marvelous Real in America' (1949), translated by Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism, Theory, History, Community* p.88. Part of the original essay prefaced Carpentier's first novel: *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*, 1949), Zamora and Faris translate an expanded version here originally published in a collection of Carpentier's essays: *Tientos y diferencias* (*Approaches and Distinctions*, 1967).

⁵¹ Alejo Carpentier, 'On the Marvelous Real in America', Zamora and Faris, p.87.

⁵² Alejo Carpentier, 'On the Marvelous Real in America', Zamora and Faris, p.75.

⁵³ Patrick D. Murphy, *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p.63.

consider the plastic potential'⁵⁴ since they are frequently focused on more dynamic models. According to the philosophy of Advaita (meaning 'non-dual' in Sanskrit) a being who is truly liberated has fully realised their infinite link with Brahman. The Hindu concept of Brahman (the 'Supreme Being' which means to grow or swell in Sanskrit) is defined as 'a state of silent being' and a 'dynamic becoming.'⁵⁵ Indeed, other related philosophies such as pantheism, animism and Samsara all have, at their core, the essentially connected, collective and processual⁵⁶ and, as such, may designate much of what we understand by ecology. The belief in the transmigration of souls (including the crossing of species boundaries), and Ayurveda where the body is viewed as an interconnected 'ecosystem' at the level of individual cells, predate Darwin by thousands of years and have closer links to his concept of complex interrelatedness than has been previously recognised and enabled by current scholarly discourse in both the sciences and the humanities. This suggests an unfortunate closure of thought foundational to a dynamic ecological discourse. To consign ancient philosophies to merely being outdated and mysterious primitive wisdom, privileges the empirical over the mystical, science over myth.

In *Hindu Theology and Biology, The Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Contemporary Theory* (2012), Jonathan B. Edelman states that 'with the advent of even more robust science-religion dialogue over the past forty years, many scholars and scientists now wish to examine non-Western

⁵⁴ Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller, in the introduction to *Plastic Materialities, Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou* (Cornwall: Duke University Press, 2015), p.22.

⁵⁵ Eliot Deutsch, 'Brahman,' Bina Gupta and J.N. Mohanty eds., *Philosophical Questions, East and West* (Maryland, USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2000) p.36.

⁵⁶ Pantheism and animism are sometimes confused. Animists emphasise the uniqueness of individual souls, whilst pantheism considers that everything is united in sharing the same spirit or soul.

thought in relation to the sciences to seek fresh perspectives on contemporary problems.⁵⁷ Edelmann states that a study of the *Bhāgavata* necessarily involves a move away from ‘the empirical and phenomenon-based observation to a perception of the subtle and transcendent; the study of nature is seen as a step on the path of devotion.’⁵⁸ As such, this perspective may prove highly significant for environmental science. Yet, Edelmann notes that previous attempts to link Hinduism with science, such as Fritjof Capra’s highly popular text *Tao of Physics* (1975), have been ‘sensationalist rather than scholarly.’

Capra’s view that Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism can all be reduced to more or less the same ‘mystical’ view is highly contentious; even within Hinduism one finds a variety of views.⁵⁹

Whilst striving to avoid such pit-falls, this project considers ways in which Magic Real fiction of lesser known authors from other locations have a central significance in opening up different perspectives, enabling and developing research already occurring under the rubrics of both ecocriticism and epigenetics. As both are emerging fields it seems especially appropriate to consider metamorphosis in these terms, whilst also still acknowledging ancient and traditional literary influences. I highlight ways in which the Magic Real, a popular, yet often considered less ‘serious’ genre, may be recuperated offering new atmospheres and possibilities for reading and being in the world. Thus, I generate a new rubric – in a sense an ‘anti-rubric’ rubric that is able to move away from the overly-categorical.

⁵⁷ Jonathan B. Edelmann, *Hindu Theology and Biology, The Bhāgavata Purāna and Contemporary Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.1.

⁵⁸ Edelmann, *Hindu Theology and Biology, The Bhāgavata Purāna and Contemporary Theory*, p.5.

⁵⁹ Edelmann, *Hindu Theology and Biology, The Bhāgavata Purāna and Contemporary Theory*, p.7.

In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), under a chapter subheaded: 'Writing wrongs,' about the rise of postcolonial studies in the 1980's and 1990's, Graham Huggan contends that traditional literature concerned with nature has 'clearly lagged behind' recent 'revolutions' in literary debate⁶⁰ because of an outmoded 'emphasis on plot, character and psychological states... focused on individuals or groups of humans, or at least anthropomorphised animals.' Far from lagging behind, Magic Real literature has long been describing such complex relationships in a globalising world, expressing myriad relationships between material practices and ideas at the interfaces between nature and culture, animal and human. Huggan and Tiffin argue that in English studies 'and postcolonial studies more particularly,' there is an 'urgent' need to 'resituate the species boundary and environmental concerns at the centre of their enquiries.'⁶¹ Surprisingly, despite indicating the 'centrality of the imagination and more specifically, imaginative literature to the task of postcolonial ecocriticism,'⁶² they only briefly consider the Magic Real. Indeed, it is only in the second edition of *Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Literature, Animals, Environment* (2015) that they cursorily mention the Magic Real and ways in which the genre offers 'imaginative possibilities of deep time.'⁶³ Despite Huggan's work on South Africa and Asia, there appears to be very little engagement in postcolonial literature outside the 'mainstream' of what they term as the

⁶⁰ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Literature of Animals and the Environment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010; repr. 2015), p.17.

⁶¹ Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Literature of Animals and the Environment* (2010), pp.6-7. In *When Dreams Travel*, Hariharan connects entities such as the city, the Shah's palace and the night to organic, animate beings as they similarly shed skins.

⁶² Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Literature of Animals and the Environment* (2010), p.12.

⁶³ Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Literature of Animals and the Environment* (2015), p.83.

‘most visible postcolonial writer-activists.’⁶⁴ He states that ‘ecocriticism, at present, is a predominantly white movement, arguably lacking the institutional support-base to engage fully with multicultural and cross-cultural concerns.’⁶⁵ Yet he neglects to question why those postcolonial writer-activists may have been more visible,⁶⁶ or to acknowledge less ‘visible’ Magic Real literature as that central to this thesis.

In *Postcolonial Ecologies, Literatures of the Environment* (2011) DeLoughrey and Handley describe the potential of fiction as ‘poetic’ and ‘world-making;’ asserting that it is a mode by which ‘the human relationship to the more-than-human world and to a buried past must be reached for and conceived even if this nationalist recovery risks being romantic.’⁶⁷ This risk may have previously been considered as too contentious and may explain, in part, the neglect of the Magic Real in ecocriticism and evolutionary biology. Yet, Rosemary Jackson makes parallel claims surrounding the importance of the imaginary stating that, far from being a trivial and merely escapist pursuit, fantasy ‘trace[s] the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent.’⁶⁸ Yet despite these several assertions, the importance of Magic Real literature has largely remained un-investigated in this context. I argue that the Magic Real transgresses boundaries other than those in the postcolonial since, as Faris and Zamora state:

⁶⁴ Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Literature of Animals and the Environment* (2010), p.19.

⁶⁵ Graham Huggan, ‘Greening’ Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives,’ *Modern Fiction Studies*, 50.3 (2004), p.701-33, quoted in Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies, Literatures of the Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.22.

⁶⁶ Perhaps the lucrative Western market.

⁶⁷ DeLoughrey and Handley, eds., *Postcolonial Ecologies, Literatures of the Environment*, p.5.

⁶⁸ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy, The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Methuen & Co, 1981; repr. Routledge 1995).

....magic realism is a mode suited to exploring – and transgressing – boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic. Magical realism often facilitates the fusion or coexistence of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction. The propensity of magical realist texts to admit a plurality of worlds means that they often situate themselves on liminal territory between or among these worlds – in phenomenal and spiritual regions where transformation, metamorphosis, dissolution are common, where magic is a branch of naturalism, or pragmatism.⁶⁹

In researching the potential of the Magic Real and the ‘plurality of worlds’ where ‘magic is a branch of naturalism, or pragmatism,’ I address the non-fiction prejudice in ecocriticism. Patrick D. Murphy argues that a reductive view of what may be considered as worthy of inclusion in the ecocritical debate has ‘impeded appreciation of representations of nonhuman nature and human-nonhuman ecosystemic interaction in literary works that do not stylistically conform to canonical expectations.’⁷⁰ Significantly, in terms of this thesis, he suggests, that animals may ‘see’ as much - if not more - than humans do.

Since there is far more visible to other entities than the naked human eye can see, why should people imagine that current conceptions of genre, current lists of exemplary texts, current course titles, or current ways of organising academic fields of study are accurate or even adequate to the range of literary phenomena being produced around the world that might be treated as nature-oriented literature.⁷¹

In *Uncertain Mirrors, Magical Realisms in US Ethnic Literatures*, (2009) Jesús Benito identifies that very few Magic Real texts have been considered from an ecocritical perspective. Benito states that ‘little (if any) research [has been] devoted to exploring the precise interconnections between ecocritical writings and magic realist motifs’ and that ‘no one to date has added the ethnic inflection to the aforementioned alliance of magical realism and

⁶⁹ Faris and Zamora, *Magical Realism, Theory, History, Community*, pp.5-6.

⁷⁰ Patrick D. Murphy, *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp.62-63.

⁷¹ Murphy, *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature*, p.63.

environmental criticism.⁷² He discusses what he terms as the nightmarish restriction of a ‘traditional realistic corset,’ or a ‘realist cocoon,’ which may only be dispelled when ameliorated by what he describes as the ‘suppleness inherent in magical realist texts’ which ‘facilitate[s] a questioning of deeply rooted assumptions that could hardly be achieved from a world reflecting mimetic platform.’⁷³ Thus, in Magic Real fiction, rather than a merely two dimensional perspective, which cannot adequately represent the ‘suppleness’ and complexity of contemporary human and ‘more-than-human life,’ the ‘unreal’ grounds the ‘real’ in a three-dimensional representation.

This thesis pursues the implicit invitations in the work of Handley, DeLoughrey and Benito to examine the interface between Magic Realism and ecocriticism more fully, exploring the political, intellectual and aesthetic potentials and limitations as well as a previous ‘excessive attention’ to non-fiction and to humans, addressing what ecocriticism has so far seemingly failed to challenge. A detailed turn to metamorphoses across the human/animal interface in Magic Real literature sophisticates the field of ecocriticism and offers alternative metaphors to describe epigenetic phenomena. In so doing, I critique theories of evolutionary biology and other dominant discourses of anthropomorphism that these fields are already enacting.

⁷² Benito et al, *Uncertain Mirrors, Magical Realisms in US Ethnic Literatures*, pp.195-196.

⁷³ Benito et al, *Uncertain Mirrors, Magical Realisms in US Ethnic Literatures*, p.199.

1.2 Ecocriticism

Although Ecology may be treated as a science, its greater and overriding wisdom is universal... That wisdom can be approached mathematically, chemically, or it can be danced or told as a myth.⁷⁴

Ecology is defined by Chapman and Reiss as involving ‘the study of organisms in relation to the surroundings in which they live;’ an environment that is constantly changing and which is ‘made up of many different components, including other living organisms and their effects, and purely physical features such as the climate and soil type.’⁷⁵ In *The Subversive Science, Essays Toward an Ecology of Man* (1969), Paul Shepard designates the complexity of ecology, noting that its parameters and subject matter are boundless and ‘fluid’: ‘organisms, earth, air, and sea.’⁷⁶ He claims that this mutability enables ‘a kind of vision across boundaries’ of rigid dominant discourse traditionally bound in Descartes’ ‘cogito,’ the ‘isolated sack[s]’ of post Enlightenment philosophy at the basis of western dualism. As such, Shepard argues that ecology cannot be classified as a traditional scientific discipline. He argues that it must involve a balance between humans, animals and plants in an ‘exploration and openness across an inner boundary- an ego boundary- and appreciative understanding the animal in ourselves which our heritage of Platonism, Christian morbidity, duality, and mechanism have long held repellent and degrading.’⁷⁷ Shepard states that such a balanced holistic ecology, although having been ‘part of philosophy

⁷⁴ Paul Shepard, ‘Ecology and Man-A Viewpoint’, Introduction to *The Subversive Science, Essays Toward an Ecology of Man*, eds. Paul Shepard and Daniel McKinley (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), pp.4-5.

⁷⁵ J.L. Chapman and M.J. Reiss, *Ecology, Principles and Applications*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; repr. 1999), p.2.

⁷⁶ Shepard, ‘Ecology and Man-A Viewpoint’, p.1.

⁷⁷ Shepard, ‘Ecology and Man-A Viewpoint’, pp.2-3.

and art for thousands of years,’ ‘badly needs attention and revival’⁷⁸ and argues that a reconsideration of the old ‘counter-currents’ of philosophy will enable a ‘long view of human life and nature as they form a mesh’⁷⁹ or pattern going beyond the conceptual bounds of other humane studies.’⁸⁰ This involves a progression beyond the western emphasis on ‘self’ as an ‘arrangement of organs, feelings and thoughts – a “me” – surrounded by a hard body boundary: skin, clothes and insular habits,’⁸¹ towards ‘a centre of organisation, constantly drawing on and influencing the surroundings, whose skin and behaviour are soft zones contacting the world instead of excluding it.’ Interestingly, many Postcolonialists are now seeking a new framework within ecocriticism since, as Huggan states, they interconnect in terms of social justice and transformations.⁸² Neil Evernden⁸³ concurs that this complex ‘long view’ represents the ‘really subversive element in Ecology;’ the inter-relatedness and mutability of both organisms and environments. Indeed, Evernden states that a bounded ecology is fruitless and ‘as about as subversive as the Chamber of Commerce.’ Similarly, a ‘bounded’ notion of ecocriticism has parallel complications.

The term ecocriticism was first coined in 1978 in ‘Literature and Ecology, An Experiment in Ecocriticism’⁸⁴ by William Rueckert, an adherent of Kenneth Burke’s earlier theory of Ecological Holism. Burke’s observation

⁷⁸ Shepard, ‘Ecology and Man-A Viewpoint’, p.1.

⁷⁹ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010), p.30. Significantly, ‘mesh’ is the term that Timothy Morton employs as more productive than a 2D ‘web.’ See footnote 276.

⁸⁰ Shepard notes the branch of sociology called Human Ecology, but identifies its limitations, claiming it is concerned ‘mostly about urban geography,’ p.1.

⁸¹ Shepard, ‘Ecology and Man-A Viewpoint’, p.2.

⁸² Huggan, ‘Greening’ Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives’.

⁸³ Neil Evernden, ‘Beyond Ecology, Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy,’ Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, (Athens, Georgia and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), p.93.

⁸⁴ William Rueckert, ‘Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism’, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, pp.105-123.

from 1937, founded on Darwin's theory of the interconnectedness of species, outlined the importance of ecological balance that formed the basis of the first Law of Ecology where 'everything is connected to everything else.'⁸⁵ Burke states that 'considerations of balance count for more than consideration of one tracked purposiveness.'⁸⁶ Rueckert similarly proposed an experiment in 'balance,' a fusion of Science and the Humanities through the application of ecology to literature: 'perhaps that old pair of antagonists, science and poetry, can be persuaded to lie down together and be generative after all.'⁸⁷ He considers that the creative process of literature as culminating in the 'stored energy' of poems and that the 'transformation' of energy into 'a set of coherent meanings'⁸⁸ would be facilitated by brilliant teachers - or what he termed the 'best ecologists of the classroom.'⁸⁹ Rueckert noted the potential for an interdisciplinary approach since the humanities and science both involve 'active, alive and generative'⁹⁰ processes - 'like the gene-pool, like the best ecosystems,'⁹¹ claiming that 'the concept of the interactive field was operative in nature, ecology and poetry long before it ever appeared in criticism.'⁹² Glotfelty states that other disciplines in the humanities, such as history, law, philosophy, sociology and religion have 'been 'greening' since the 1970's,' but argues that literary academics have been guilty of largely ignoring the environmental crisis, arguing that if one were to survey major literary publications of the late twentieth century, 'you would quickly discern

⁸⁵ Rueckert quotes Barry Commoner, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism', *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.108.

⁸⁶ Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Towards History*, (1937) quoted by Robert Weiss, Oregon State University in 'The Journal of the Kenneth Burke Society,' <http://www.kbjournal.org.wess2>, (Accessed 5/8/12).

⁸⁷ Rueckert, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism', *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.107.

⁸⁸ Rueckert, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism', p.110.

⁸⁹ Rueckert, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism', p.111.

⁹⁰ Rueckert, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism', p.110.

⁹¹ Rueckert, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism', p.116.

⁹² Rueckert, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism', p.110.

that race, class and gender were the hot topics of the last twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress.'⁹³ This is possibly true and clearly needs addressing.

Despite Glotfelty's assertion that the roots of literary environmental debate have their origins in England as early as Gilbert White's *A Natural History of Selbourne* (1789), it was not until 1990 that she was appointed to the first academic post in Literature and the Environment,⁹⁴ and not until 1996 that the first collection edited by Glotfelty entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology* was published. Glotfelty states that the field consequently developed in America 'through Henry Thoreau, John Burroughs, John Muir, Mary Austin, Aldo Leopold, Rachael Carson, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez, Terry Tempest Williams, and many others.'⁹⁵ Lawrence Buell similarly argues the importance of America in ecocritical studies, stating that its antecedents go back to American settler-culture literature in the 1920's, or as far back as Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* from 1836.⁹⁶ Yet, the founding text of environmental literary studies in the West is often held to be Carson's popular and provocative *Silent Spring* (1962) which reached the *New York Times* bestseller list at the time of its initial publication. It received an 'honourable mention' in *Human Events* (2005) list of the ten 'Most Harmful Books'⁹⁷ of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries alongside such famous and infamous texts such as Darwin's *The*

⁹³ Glotfelty, *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.xvi.

⁹⁴ At the University of Nevada.

⁹⁵ Glotfelty, *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.xxiii.

⁹⁶ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism, Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p.13.

⁹⁷ A weekly conservative American magazine. Rachael Carson has inspired both veneration of a quasi-religious nature whilst simultaneously arousing powerful criticism from some critics, organisations and the chemical industry who claim that she was wrong about the dangers of DDT and is therefore responsible for the needless death of millions from malaria.

Origin of Species, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In *Postcolonial Ecologies*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley state that they do not question the importance of Carson's *Silent Spring*, but highlight the restrictions and biases of previous ecocriticism largely focussed on American literature.

We do want to call attention to an implicit production of a singular American ecocritical genealogy that, like all histories, might be reconfigured in broader more rhizomatic terms. A founding narrative of modern environmental ethics could just as well include Mahatma Gandhi, whose early to mid-twentieth-century publications about the necessity of local sovereignty, limited consumption, equality for all sentient life, compassion, ecological sustainability and satyagraha were an inspiration to many.⁹⁸

It is ironic that in the face of what environmentalists perceive as inevitable global catastrophe, a great deal of ecocriticism remains largely 'parochial,' constructed predominantly by American and European critics around the traditional western canon. The word 'ecology' was first coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1869 from the Greek words *oikos* meaning home and *logos* meaning understanding. Ironically, some basic misapprehensions surrounding ecocritical theory could be said to arise from an insular attachment to 'home' – a subjective 'backyard' perspective rather than a consideration of the whole planet.

Lawrence Buell and Patrick Murphy, considered as the founding ecocritics in America, identified the partiality in the over-concentration on documentary and non-fiction texts about 'Nature,' and charismatic mega-fauna in the 'natural world' in preference to domestic species or vermin in urban landscapes.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ DeLoughrey and Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literature of the Environment*, p.15. Gandhi had been greatly influenced by Swami Vivekananda and the *Advaita Vedanta*.

⁹⁹ Indeed, some of the most successful ecosystems exist in what might be considered the most 'unnatural' places – for instance, vermin in a restaurant or hotel kitchen!

Simon C. Estok similarly notes that although ecocriticism is committed to ‘making connections,’ it has been guilty of a ‘slightly narrow, Americanist focus and a strong partiality for texts about nature and the natural.’¹⁰⁰ He argues that it is crucial that we see ‘the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study.’ Yet, this is also problematic since it is not entirely clear what he means by ‘the natural world’ - what is ‘natural’? and - of whose ‘world’ does he speak? From this standpoint, ‘nature’ is seemingly considered as an idealised utopia; an ‘untouched’ wilderness. Ecosystems evolve in polluted areas as well as wildernesses. In fact, there are very few genuinely pristine landscapes over the globe and much of what is termed ‘natural’ will have changed over time due to multifarious influences such as climatic conditions, erosion, deposition, changing river courses, sea levels, and historical farming practice over millennia. In addition, Estok argues that ‘there is too much jargon polluting the world of theory’ but nevertheless invents his own term - ‘ecophobia’ –claiming the necessity to adopt ‘some kind of terminology and theorization’ in order to prevent ecocriticism from ‘becoming just an empty buzzword,’ although he too is guilty of using words such as nature, natural and the environment in general and ambiguous ways.

In ‘What is Ecocriticism,’¹⁰¹ published by *The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment* in 1994, Stephanie Sarver questions whether ecocriticism is viable or necessary as a distinct field since she argues that *ecocriticism* [my emphasis] is merely a redundant corollary to *Environmental*

¹⁰⁰ Simon C. Estok, ‘A Report Card on Ecocriticism’, *AUMLA: The Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 96 (Nov. 2001): pp. 220-38, <http://www.asle.org/site/resources/ecocritical-library/intro/reportcard/> (Accessed 3/8/2012).

¹⁰¹ Stephanie Sarver, ‘What is Ecocriticism,’ *The Association for the Study of Literature & Environment*, 1994, http://www.asle.org/site/resources/ecocritical_library/intro/defining/sarver/ (Accessed 11/08/2012).

theory. She claims that it ‘suggests a new kind of critical theory,’ a ‘new buzz-word’ that merely muddies the waters of environmentalism. Whilst it is true that both ecology and ecocriticism push for a non-hierarchical vision as a constant matter of principle, Cheryll Glotfelty comments on the significance of the repeated conflation of the prefix’s ‘eco’ and ‘enviro.’¹⁰² She states that, by definition, ecology necessarily examines the non-hierarchical interconnectedness of both organic and inorganic organisms with their environments, whereas the use of the term *enviro* is essentially ‘anthropocentric and dualistic, implying that we humans are at the center, surrounded by everything that is not us, the environment.’ Glotfelty states that ecocriticism must have as its subject ‘the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature’ and must seek to ‘negotiate between the human and the non-human.’¹⁰³ Yet, she concedes that the collection of essays in *The Ecocriticism Reader* ‘focuses on ecocritical work in the United States’ and hopes that ‘the next collection may well be an international one, for environmental problems are now global in scale and their solutions will require worldwide collaboration.’¹⁰⁴ Despite the promising title of the publication following the first international Ecocriticism Conference in Turkey in November 2009, *The Future of Ecocriticism, New Horizons*, (2011), much of the content remains focused on American or European canonical literature: Melville, Henry Rider Haggard, Byron, Primo Levi and

¹⁰² Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.xx.

¹⁰³ Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.xix.

¹⁰⁴ Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.xxv. Glotfelty notes a ‘promising first step’ in *The Culture of Nature: Approaches to the Study of Literature and the Environment*, edited by Scott Slovic and Ken-ichi Noda in Kyoto in 1995 but there does not appear to have been the progress that she predicted.

Italo Calvin, and in spite of Turkey's proximity to Asia, there is only one essay specifically on an Asian author – Wang Wei.¹⁰⁵ In 'Greening Postcolonialism' (2004), Graham Huggan concurs with Glotfelty's assertion that ecocriticism is 'predominantly a white movement,'¹⁰⁶ and argues that it lacks 'the institutional support-base to engage fully with multicultural and cross-cultural concerns.'¹⁰⁷ Huggan attempts to address this disparity, but in concentrating on what he terms as 'the two most visible postcolonial writer activists in the field, Arundhati Roy and Ken Saro-Wiwa,'¹⁰⁸ he unfortunately persists in the partiality he describes – not considering to whom they may be 'more visible.' It is probable that Roy and Saro-Wiwa are more visible to western critics and a potentially lucrative Western market because of the patronage of Western publishers.¹⁰⁹ In addition, whilst arguing against European and American hegocentrism, Huggan and Tiffin nevertheless continue to foreground and frequently cite 'western writers,'¹¹⁰ 'western constitutions of the human,'¹¹¹ 'western ideologies of development,'¹¹² a difficult pit-fall to avoid amongst the relative plethora of western references, but which unconsciously persists in what they term as the 'western dualistic thinking that continues to structure human attitudes to the environment.' There is an obvious difficulty attendant on Western critics in researching authors and philosophers who write in a language unknown to them, and who

¹⁰⁵ Oppermann, Serpil, Ufuk Özda, Nevin Özkan and Scott Slovic eds., *The Future of Ecocriticism: New Horizons* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

¹⁰⁶ Cheryll Glotfelty, *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.xxv.

¹⁰⁷ Graham Huggan, "'Greening' Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives', p.22.

¹⁰⁸ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Criticism, Literature, Animals, Environment*, (2010), p.19.

¹⁰⁹ Books by these authors have appeared on the GCSE and A Level English Literature syllabus, surely an indication of their acceptance into the Western canon. Githa Hariharan is largely unknown despite having won the Commonwealth Prize for Literature in 1991 for her first novel.

¹¹⁰ Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Criticism, Literature, Animals, Environment*, (2010), p.16.

¹¹¹ Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Criticism, Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), p.18.

¹¹² Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Criticism, Literature, Animals, Environment* ,(2010), p.19.

do not publish in English translation because both will plainly be less
'visible' to a western market.

In 1983, Gillian Beer identified Darwinian studies as proving a 'highly productive seam at the critical coalface'¹¹³ of evolutionary biology and literary criticism. *Darwin's Plots, Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, has been reprinted several times. Much current evolutionary biology continues to privilege iconic 'gurus' of western science and philosophy over what is seen as a 'primitive Third World'¹¹⁴ philosophy often discounted as 'lore' because of its more apparent relation to ancient religion and mysticism rather than empirical science. In *Philosophical Questions, East and West* (2000),¹¹⁵ Bina Gupta and J.N. Mohanty concur that despite being one of the most ancient intellectual traditions in human culture, Eastern philosophy is not viewed as significant by many Western philosophers who 'have remained isolationists,' and who consider ancient Greece and Europe as the foremost influences on modern philosophy. Gupta and Mohanty declare that a globalizing world requires 'a conversation of humankind, and not merely a conversation of the West,' and this must surely be true.

Significantly, Buell describes Thoreau's style in *Walden* (1854),¹¹⁶ as illustrating a 'post-Emersonian mysticism,'¹¹⁷ which is not evident in his later writing. Whilst noting Thoreau's subversive prescience, Buell's

¹¹³ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots, Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3rd Edition 2009, p.xxv.

¹¹⁴ Note my reference to Joseph Carroll in the conclusion.

¹¹⁵ Bina Gupta and J.N. Mohanty eds., *Philosophical Questions, East and West* p.xv. They note the similarity of Greek and Sanskrit languages.

¹¹⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854; repr. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).

¹¹⁷ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, (2005), p.43. Lawrence Buell states that Thoreau's 'melting sandbank,' is the 'equivalent of the image of the entangled bank which ends Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*,' essentially describing the 'denial of species fixity.'

comment on his ‘mysticism’ illustrates the way in which, despite arguing for more ecocritical research into imaginative literature, Buell seems almost to apologise for its seemingly irrational and unscientific style. Yet, he also notes the potential for a ‘plasticity of being’ which effectively eliminates species categories.

Thoreau doubtless knew that his passage would sound eccentric, even perverse. It’s a striking fortuity that he anticipates here the one thing about the normative subdiscipline of ecology that Neil Evernden identifies as conceivably “subversive, if taken literally” – “a plasticity of being which can be disconcerting to orderly minds.” For example, mitochondria in the cells of the human body are “quite as independent as the chloroplasts in plants... We cannot exist without them, and yet they may not strictly be ‘us.’” So are we colonies or organisms, or what?¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Lawrence Buell, quoting Evernden in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), p.43.

Key Literary Authors

Suniti Namjoshi and Githa Hariharan craft diverse metamorphoses using what Scholtmeijer terms the ‘camera eye’ technique found in Judy Grahn’s novel *Mundane’s World* (1988). There is a tradition of literature that values such small species perspectives; a reconsideration of prevailing voice, of relative physical and time scales, subverting conventional species hierarchies based on dominant ‘literary systems that exploit animals.’¹¹⁹ As the word ‘mundane’ indicates, this world is not voiced by exotic or ‘heroic’ characters, but by organisms such as bees, ants, flies, snakes, trees and weeds which, although essential to a balanced ecosystem, are normally considered as commonplace and therefore unimportant. Scholtmeijer argues that Grahn’s varied perspectives from such ‘lesser’ organisms lure the reader into what she calls a disorientating ‘mazy world of animals’ where ‘beetles, ants and a fly are significant.’ Charlotte Zoë Walker’s ‘Letting in the Sky: An Ecofeminist Reading of Virginia Woolf’s Short Fiction,’ similarly claims that the use of multiple and shifting perspectives across ‘minor’ animal species such as moths and snails enables a conversation ‘with nature and ourselves at the microscopic level, and also across great distances, as through the most powerful of telescopes, with the most highly polished of mirrors. A starry sky may be seated at the table next to a snail, a parrot next to a thunderstorm, a member of parliament next to a wild pig ... To put the matter more seriously, I believe Woolf’s work is saturated with a consciousness that expresses poetically what Rachael Carson argues scientifically in *Silent Spring* and elsewhere, that all life is interrelated, is ‘a vast web of life, all of which needs

¹¹⁹ Scholtmeijer, ‘The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women’s Fiction,’ Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan eds. Introduction to *Animals and Women, Feminist Theoretical Explorations* p.253.

to be taken into account.’¹²⁰ Such varying perspectives, from a member of parliament to a wild pig, destabilise what John Parham terms ‘certain comfortable notions of human subjectivity or certain access to knowledge about the world.’ As Parham claims, this is achieved through a series of ‘[d]izzying changes of perspective from the microscopic to the cosmic, from the eye of a snail to that of a human or a dog, signal[ling] a radical critique of such positivistic notions as human exceptionalism, objective distance from ‘nature,’ or any epistemological certainty.’¹²¹ In creating such dizzying perspectives, significantly involving ‘minor’ species, Namjoshi and Hariharan effectively subvert dominant theories of anthropomorphism and evolutionary biology. Namjoshi and Hariharan’s varied and unusual perspectives, fundamentally involve us in a reassessment of our relationship with the natural world; one that is far more complex than we assume; and much more intricate than a mere web of connections.

¹²⁰ Charlotte Zoë Walker, in John Parham, ed. *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2002), p.172.

¹²¹ Parham, *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, p.7.

1.3 Suniti Namjoshi

Born in Mumbai to a wealthy Maharashtrian family in 1941, Suniti Namjoshi was educated in an innovative American boarding school in Poona, founded by the philosopher J. Krishnamurthi. From 1964, she worked for the Indian Administrative Service, and then studied for an M.A. in business administration in Missouri. In 1969, she completed a PhD on Ezra Pound at McGill University in Canada, subsequently teaching at the University of Toronto. Her verse, composed from the early 1960s, became more overtly political after a period when, during a sabbatical in London and Cambridge in 1977-8, she met the poet and activist Christine Donald. After her return to Canada, and her 'coming out' as lesbian, she became more openly involved with feminist politics, and developed a women's studies course at Toronto University. She was also involved with The Centre for Women's Studies at Exeter University until, as a result of a recommendation from the Senate, it was closed on the 30th September 1999.¹²² In London, in 1984, she met the Australian author Gillian Handscombe, and in 1987 they moved to Devon, where they still live.

Namjoshi is a poet, fabulist and novelist whose varied body of work, published from 1967 to 2014,¹²³ includes feminist, subversive and often

¹²² Suniti Namjoshi, *Sycorax, New Fables and Poem*, (India: Penguin Books, 2006), p.111. She chronicles the reasons for the demise of the Centre in 'The Monkey and the Crocodiles Once Again,' as a patronising decision taken by the establishment: 'Look here, little one, we're not interested in death. We're interested in change. We want you to become just like ourselves.'

¹²³ Suniti Namjoshi, *Poems*, (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1967).

Suniti Namjoshi, *Cyclone in Pakistan*. (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1971).

Suniti Namjoshi, *More Poems*. (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1971).

Suniti Namjoshi, *The Jackass and the Lady* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1980).

Suniti Namjoshi, *Feminist Fables* (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1981).

Suniti Namjoshi, *The Authentic Lie*, (Canada: Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1982).

Suniti Namjoshi, *From the Bedside Book of Nightmares*, (Canada: Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1984).

Suniti Namjoshi, *The Conversations of Cow*. (London: Women's Press, 1985).

Suniti Namjoshi, *Flesh and Paper*, with Gillian Handscombe (Seaton, UK: Jezebel Tapes and Books, 1986).

Suniti Namjoshi, *The Blue Donkey Fables*. (London: Women's Press, 1988).

humorous revisions of culturally diverse myths and fables such as *The Arabian Nights*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Ramayana*, as well as classical western myths such as those involving Proteus and Philomel.¹²⁴ She has also written a series of children's books about Aditi, an Indian, dragon-slaying princess which subvert gender stereotypes. Her work, largely classified as feminist, enjoyed a flurry of interest in the West around the time of her inclusion in a feminist gender and lesbian collection *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women* (1986) edited by the doyenne of fairy-tale revisions, Angela Carter. Mostly still categorised as a lesbian feminist, she has not attracted a wider readership in the West and is now largely out of print in Great Britain, Canada and America.

In an interview with Namjoshi: 'Feminism, One of her Voices,' in *The Hindu* on Sunday February 20th 2000, Kausalya Santhanam indicates from the title that Namjoshi's themes are more extensive than previously identified. Indeed, in this article, Namjoshi argues that her use of fable,

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- Suniti Namjoshi, *The Mothers of Maya Diip*, (London: The Women's Press, 1989).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Because of India*, (London: Onlywomen Press, 1989).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Aditi and the One-Eyed Monkey*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Saint Suniti and the Dragon: And Other Fables* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1994).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Building Babel* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1996).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2000).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Aditi and the Marine Sage* (Chennai: Tulika, 2004).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Aditi and the Techno Sage* (Chennai: Tulika, 2005).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Sycorax, New Fables and Poem*, (India: Penguin Books, 2006).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Aditi and Her Friends Take on the Vesuvian Giant* (Chennai, India: Tulika Publishers, 2007).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Aditi and Her Friends Meet Grendel* (Chennai, India: Tulika Publishers, 2007).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Aditi and Her Friends Help the Budapest Changeling* (Chennai, India: Tulika Publishers, 2007).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Aditi and Her Friends in Search of Shemeek* (Chennai, India: Tulika Publishers, 2008).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Gardy in the City of Lions* (Chennai, India: Tulika Publishers, 2009).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Siril and The Spaceflower* (Chennai, India: Tulika Publishers, 2009).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Monkeyji and the Word Eater* (Chennai, India: Tulika Publishers, 2009).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Beautiful and the Cyberspace Runaway* (Chennai, India: Tulika Publishers, 2009).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Blue and Other Stories*. (art work Nilima Sheikh). (Chennai, India: Tulika Publishers, 2012; North Melbourne: Spinifex, 2012).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Suki*. (Delhi: Penguin India, 2012; North Melbourne: Spinifex, 2013).
 Suniti Namjoshi, *Little i*. (Chennai, India: Tulika Publishers, 2014).
¹²⁴ Philomel is the infamous 'voiceless' woman from Greek mythology. She is raped by Tereus who consequently rips out her tongue so that she cannot betray his crime.

which she considers an essentially didactic genre, is ‘able to answer questions’ concerning issues such as ‘racism, gender stereotyping and attitudes towards exploitation of the planet.’¹²⁵ Therefore, this thesis argues for a different and more expansive reading of Namjoshi’s fables and poems; that the multiplicity of perspectives she crafts broaden her work beyond her established reputation for working on gender and therefore more effectively engages with diversity. In this respect, it strikingly relates to sustainable ecologies and is therefore a valuable addition to ecocriticism. It is in these terms that I re-read and analyse her work alongside critics such as Annanya Dasgupta,¹²⁶ who argue that Namjoshi’s philosophy involves a series of ‘radical regroupings’ beyond gender, where ‘[t]he basis of the group shifts from biology to a kinship of shared perception.’

Although very popular in ‘the subaltern underbelly of the book business in Delhi,’¹²⁷ Dasgupta also argues that Namjoshi’s comparative lack of popularity and critical recognition is due precisely to this complexity, arguing that her syntheses of culture, gender, species and genre can be disorientating and ‘disconcerting even to those who have known the literary effrontery of Kamala Das’s verse.’ Dasgupta states:

Unlike Salman Rushdie, whose near pyro-technic style has inspired much stylistic virtuosity in writers since *Midnight’s Children*, Namjoshi’s style, although ingenious, did not dazzle the literary scene and has not collected a band of imitators. Namjoshi seems to occupy a solitary space, neither following from nor followed by recently canonized literary traditions.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Namjoshi interview with Kausalya Santhanam in *The Hindu*, Sunday February 20th 2000, <http://www.thehindu.com/2000/02/20/stories/1320129u.htm>, (Accessed 11/1/2012).

¹²⁶ Anannya Dasgupta, ‘Do I remove my Skin, Interrogating Identity in Suniti Namjoshi’s Fables’, *Queering India, Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society*, ed. Ruth Vanita (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p.100.

¹²⁷ Anannya Dasgupta, ‘Do I remove my Skin, Interrogating Identity in Suniti Namjoshi’s Fables’, p.101.

¹²⁸ Anannya Dasgupta, ‘Do I remove my Skin, Interrogating Identity in Suniti Namjoshi’s Fables’, p.102.

Dasgupta's claim that Namjoshi 'seems to occupy a solitary space, neither following from nor followed by recently canonized literary traditions,' might also explain her relative lack of popularity. I argue that this 'solitary space,' might imply exceptionality as well isolation and, in the case of Namjoshi's style, has its precedence in the canonical Modernist literary tradition. Indeed, Namjoshi's perplexing method and her use of intense allusion is reminiscent of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* (1934),¹²⁹ which she researched for her PhD. This seminal Modernist work, which R.P. Blackmur acknowledged as having 'a general sense of continuity – not unity,'¹³⁰ is notoriously obscure, requiring that the reader have knowledge of Pound's entire experience and breadth of references in order to fully understand it. In *Make it New, The Rise of Modernism* (1935),¹³¹ Pound describes his approach as innovative, involving the reinvention and reformation of past cultures into a 'new' tradition. As Louis Menand noted in the *New Yorker* in 1998:

The "It" in "Make It New" is the Old—what is valuable in the culture of the past. A great deal of Pound's poetry therefore takes the form of translation, imitation, allusion, and quotation. He is trying to breathe life into a line of artistic and intellectual accomplishment, but it is a line of his own invention.¹³²

¹²⁹ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1925). Namjoshi researched *The Cantos* for her PhD, and quotes it on p.175 of *Building Babel*.

¹³⁰ R.P. Blackmur, *The Double Agent: Essays in Craft and Elucidation* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1962), p.67. This could be applied to Dupré's theory of the processual.

¹³¹ Ezra Pound, *Make it New, The Rise of Modernism* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1935).

¹³² Louis Menand, 'The Pound Error, The Elusive master of Allusion' June 9, 2008. http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2008/06/09/080609crbo_books_menand#ixzz1sIeK3oIy (Accessed 17th April 2011) 'a "tradition" that includes, among others, John Adams, Confucius, Flaubert, the Provençal troubadours, and Benito Mussolini. Not, prima facie, a canon. This means that to understand what Pound is doing you often need to have read the same writers, studied the same languages, and learned the same history that Pound read, studied, and learned (or rely on the commentary of a person who has). This is especially the case with the work on which he spent fifty-four years and staked his reputation, "The Cantos of Ezra Pound"— "a chryselephantine poem of immeasurable length," as he once described it. So it is very easy for the average underprepared reader to get Pound wrong, and he desperately did not want to be misunderstood. Opacity and ambiguity can be deliberate effects in modernist writing: sometimes the text goes dark, reference becomes uncertain, language aspires to the condition of music. In Pound's case, though, any obscurity is unintentional. Clarity is the essence of his aesthetic. He sometimes had to struggle against his own technique to achieve it.' Therefore, what is 'new' must also intrinsically contain elements of the past describing an essential plasticity.

In an interview with Olga Kenyon, Namjoshi claims that, like Pound, she similarly uses old styles and genres ‘to say what is new, if I can, but I want to do it beautifully, with all the resources I can find.’¹³³ This is evident in her novel *Building Babel* (1996) where, like Pound’s collection of one hundred and twenty pieces, there is no identifiable unifying structure or definitive ending. Both texts are primarily concerned with cultural, political and economic power structures; comprised of both prose and poetry, and fuse both ancient Western and Indian mythological references. It is possible that, as has been evident in the case of Pound’s text, such complexity may have proven problematic to some, but I argue that Namjoshi’s density of style, in problematizing boundaries and hierarchies, is significant for the very reasons that it is labelled as disorientating.

The worrying of overly simplistic concepts such as universalism and essentialism is facilitated at ‘crossroads’ or points of interchange where a notion of fixed location or identity is never reached. This dynamic positioning subverts dominant hierarchies and enables what Namjoshi terms as a ‘way forward’¹³⁴ for the twenty first century. In an interview in 1998, Namjoshi reflects on the intensely constructive nature of cultural exchange: ‘By now my attitude is that all these places are mine for they have given me something and I have tried to give them something in return.’¹³⁵ These exchanges and their associated ‘tales of metamorphosis’ are, as Warner states, facilitated in ‘spaces (temporal, geographical, and mental) that were

¹³³ Suniti Namjoshi in Olga Kenyon, *The Writer’s Imagination*, (Bradford: University of Bradford Print Unit, 1992), p. 115.

¹³⁴ Suniti Namjoshi and Gillian Handscombe, ‘And There’s You and Me My Sweet Duality’, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vol. 24, No. 3/4, (2001) p 401.

¹³⁵ Coomi S. Vevaina, ‘An Interview with Suniti Namjoshi’, *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 29.1(1998), pp.200-201.

crossroads, cross-cultural zones, points of interchange on the intricate connective tissue of communications between cultures.’¹³⁶ Thus, Namjoshi’s metamorphoses describe individual and collective biological, cultural and environmental interchange across ‘intricate connective tissue.’¹³⁷ Skin and its processes illustrate life as a ‘crossroads’ - the location of interchange between individuals and the environment.

Harveen S. Mann argues that in creating ‘crossroads,’ Namjoshi transgresses and subverts both Eastern and Western traditions inhabits a ‘third space.’ Whilst noting that this may explain Namjoshi’s relative isolation and erasure from academic debate, he also identifies it’s potential to challenge allegations of essentialism and universalism.

Failing – here construed as positive – to achieve any idealised sense of belonging to one (essentialized) culture, nation, or group. Or, conversely, to arrive at (an even more problematic) “universal” Namjoshi occupies instead a “third space,” an interstitial location between nations and cultures, as theorized by Homi Bhabha.¹³⁸

Indeed, Mann suggests that this interstitial location ‘unsettles much on both sides,’ and it is precisely because Namjoshi ‘crosses or erases borders – national, cultural, gender and narratological,’ that she effectively ‘subverts both the male-centred humanism of the West and the androcentric hegemonic erotic ethos of India.’

These broader readings work against the hostile critical reception Namjoshi has received, from critics such as A.N. Dwivedi, who argue that ‘cross-cultural contact’ is deleterious since it expunges any sense of cultural specificity. Ironically, Dwivedi’s resentment of what he considers a betrayal

¹³⁶ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p.17.

¹³⁷ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p.17.

¹³⁸ Harveen S. Mann, ‘Diasporic, Lesbian Feminism and the Textual Politics of Transnationality’, *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 30, No. 1/2, Borders (Spring, 1997), p.98.

of India, seems to stem from an essentialist vision of the East as romantic, scenic and curative, and his critique displays the partial 'androcentric hegemonic' perspective that Namjoshi's work seeks to subvert.

Namjoshi's content is hardly ever valid from the Indian viewpoint. Those who seek for 'Indianness' in her verse will be disappointed. In this case, she is the opposite of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, of Kamala Das and Monika Varma. Very often she goes to the West for her poems, forgetting the variegated, picturesque landscape of India and her healthy, healing air. And when she becomes aware of her motherland, it is almost always to discover her disfigured face of twisted image. The India of her poetry is the India of poverty and pettiness, of old age and lost lustre... Obviously, there is nothing wrong in having cross-cultural contact, but the balance should not tilt in favour of foreign things. And this is precisely what we find in Namjoshi.¹³⁹

In Namjoshi's view, the relative lack of reception outside India is precisely because some Western audiences do not understand her use of irony and satire.¹⁴⁰ 'I find I am better understood in England than in Canada – Because I come from a very old culture where there's a far greater appreciation of irony...even the humour is more accessible to the English than to the Canadians....'¹⁴¹ Namjoshi's satirical humour is related to the Hindu concept of Leela, the serious but playful nature of the divine consciousness, may have been misunderstood as childish in the West, or perhaps singularly inappropriate to relaying potentially catastrophic environmental anxieties. Yet, as Joseph Meeker argues in 'The Comic Mode,' biological evolution generally 'shows all the flexibility of comic drama, and little of the monolithic passion peculiar to tragedy.'

¹³⁹ A.N. Dwivedi, *Papers on Indian Writing in English, Volume 1: Poetry* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1991; repr. 2001), pp.219-220.

¹⁴⁰ Olga Kenyon, *The Writer's Imagination, Interviews with Major International Women Novelists* (Bradford: University of Bradford Print, 1992), p.111.

¹⁴¹ Olga Kenyon, *The Writer's Imagination, Interviews with Major International Women Novelists*, pp.111-114.

Productive and stable ecosystems are those which minimize destructive aggression, encourage maximum diversity, and seek to establish equilibrium among their participants – which is essentially what happens in literary comedy. Biological evolution itself shows all the flexibility of comic drama, and little of the monolithic passion peculiar to tragedy.¹⁴²

In that they both seek ultimate harmony, literary comedy may have a more direct association with viable ecosystems, and in being more directly related to the ‘flexibility’ of comic drama, biological evolution may well be best described through such means. Thus, as Meeker claims, the use of humour may be crucially effective in broadening ecocritical research and, as such, I argue that Namjoshi’s satirical style offers a radical intervention into ecocritical debate.

Although Namjoshi employs metaphors of skin, this frequently involves the donning of other skins in instant and relatively painless transformations as those frequently found in Ovid. In ‘The Lion Skin’ from Namjoshi’s *The Blue Donkey Fables*, this interchange is expressed as a complete adoption of another skin. The protagonist asks: ‘Do I remove my skin?’ and is encouraged to do so by her lover, who ultimately flays her, saying ‘You be me, and I’ll be you.’¹⁴³ In contrast, Hariharan’s metamorphoses are not as rapid or comedic, but more sensual, raw and agonizing. Although her work widens ecocritical debate it does so in remarkably different ways to Namjoshi since it authentically conveys the often slow and torturous processes of transformation at the level of skin.

¹⁴² Joseph W. Meeker, ‘The Comic Mode,’ Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens, Georgia and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), p.160.

¹⁴³ Suniti Namjoshi, ‘The Lion Skin’ *The Blue Donkey Fables* (London: Women’s Press Ltd, 1988), p.33.

1.4 Githa Hariharan

Githa Hariharan was born to a Tamil Brahmin family in Coimbatore, India in 1954. Her early education was classic but relatively liberal, and she later achieved an undergraduate degree from Bombay University. She was then awarded an M.A. in communication from Fairfield University, Connecticut, and afterwards she briefly worked as a scriptwriter in New York. From 1979, for a period of ten years, she worked for publishing companies in India before becoming a professional writer, publishing a variety of work including novels and short stories as well as political essays and articles.¹⁴⁴

Her first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1993), engages with the ways women negotiate patriarchal tradition and modernity in India.

Although the novel won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1993, Hariharan has not subsequently achieved the worldwide recognition that this debut might have presaged.

Her other work includes an edited collection: *A Southern Harvest* (1993), English translations of short stories originally written in India's four main languages: Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil. In the same year, she published a collection of short stories about death and loss in male dominated contemporary India called *The Art of Dying* (1993). More recently she has written *In Times of Siege* (2003) a novel about a History university lecturer

¹⁴⁴ Githa Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992).
Githa Hariharan, 'The Remains of the Feast.' In *Other Words: New Writing by Indian Women*, ed. Urvashi Butalia and Rita Menon (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1992).
Githa Hariharan, *The Art of Dying* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1993).
Githa Hariharan, ed., *A Southern Harvest* (New Delhi: Katha, 1993).
Githa Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (New Delhi: Viking, 1994).
Githa Hariharan, ed., *Sorry. Best Friend!* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1997).
Githa Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* (New Delhi: Picador, 1999).
Githa Hariharan, *In Times of Siege* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003).
Githa Hariharan, *The Winning Team* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2004).
Githa Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2009).
Githa Hariharan, *Almost Home: Cities and Other Places* (India: Restless Books, 2014).

challenged by prejudice and religious fundamentalism, and *The Winning Team* (2004) a children's story about an unemployed storyteller who finds an audience in a 'winning team' of friends whom, following the tradition of fables, also populate the stories. *Fugitive Histories* (2009) traces the life of Mala who, after the death of her husband, is confronted by ghosts from her childhood, and attempts to rationalise the uncertainty of the present with what she believed were the certainties of the past.

In 2014, she edited *India To Palestine Essays in Solidarity* containing contributions from authors such as Aijaz Ahmad, Meena Alexander, Sunaina Maira, Nivedita Menon and Ritu Menon, addressing the complexity of the relationship between India and Palestine. *Almost Home: Cities and Other Places* (2014), inspired by Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972), is a series of essays that, as Coetzee writes: 'bespeak a thoroughly cosmopolitan sensibility, Githa Hariharan not only takes us on illuminating tours through cities rich in history, but gives a voice to urban people from all over the world—Kashmir, Palestine, Delhi—trying to live with basic human dignity under circumstances of dire repression or crushing poverty.'¹⁴⁵ Indeed, this vision is particularly significant since, as Hariharan states: 'the prevailing view of people and places—and their multiple voices—has been a western version. How does this view change when it is located in India, and when the stories are complicated by several cultures, languages, traditions and political debates?'¹⁴⁶ In *Almost Home*, places and people are intertwined in complex lyrical prose that crosses time and space, fact and legend thus, as is the case with Namjoshi, unsettle dominant notions of identity.

¹⁴⁵ J.M. Coetzee review of *Almost Home*, <http://githahariharan.com/?p=323> (Accessed 14/02/2017).

¹⁴⁶ Githa Hariharan, on *Almost Home*, <http://githahariharan.com/?p=323> (Accessed 14/02/2017).

I have lived all my life in a city, but if someone asked me, quite simply, “So which city are you from?” I wouldn’t be able to answer. Or I would have too many answers...Or I could say: Anycity, composite city of visible cities, remembered cities, imagined cities.¹⁴⁷

Latterly, Hariharan has been more involved with political projects and regularly posts articles on her web page. In her most recent posting, titled ‘Excluding the People,’ Hariharan identifies the nationalist ‘fear’ provoked by claims of diversity, and states that ‘cultural practice does not recognise borders.’¹⁴⁸

Consider the project of shrinking culture by drawing borders within India. There’s a fear lurking in the strident accusation of “anti-national” that so much of our cultural work, and so many of our cultural events, are now charged with. It’s the fear of what happened last year. The powerful chorus of voices raised by writers, artists, performers, academics and scientists across caste, gender, community, language and region, insisted that Indian culture is a living system of multiple voices, multiple narratives and counter-narratives.

In this respect she, like Namjoshi, acknowledges a range of cultural influences, often involving nostalgic visions of the past, but unlike Namjoshi and Rushdie, it may be significant in that she still lives in India.¹⁴⁹

Despite this range of influences, Hariharan’s work, like Namjoshi’s, has largely been identified as feminist. Meenakshi Bharat argues that ‘the gender message’ always comes up for discussion in Hariharan’s novels since they ‘enlarge[s] the space of people’s, especially women’s lives.’¹⁵⁰ Indeed, politically speaking, Hariharan has been very concerned with gender inequalities and in 1995 successfully challenged the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act that decreed that only fathers could be considered legal

¹⁴⁷ *Kirkus Reviews* on *Almost Home*, <http://githahariharan.com/?p=323> (Accessed 14/02/2017).

¹⁴⁸ http://githahariharan.com/?page_id=165 (Accessed 31st October 2016).

¹⁴⁹ The debate about Indo-Anglian writing in these terms, of the necessity (or not) of continued proximity to their ‘roots’ in order to remain authentic, and whether it is wrong to write in English, rages on. In my view, this is limiting and would, after all, have negative implications for my decision to write on these authors, and indeed for western Postcolonialists generally.

¹⁵⁰ Meenakshi Bharat, in Jaina C. Sanga, ed., *South Asian Novelists in English, An A-to-Z Guide* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003), p.111.

guardians, and that children could not take their mother's names. Although feminist readings of Namjoshi and Hariharan are undoubtedly important and illuminating, there is very little criticism on their work that engages with other issues. Yet, Hariharan argues that her work does not contain a 'feminist blueprint',¹⁵¹ and I concur that it is more extensive than this might suggest. Describing metamorphoses at the level of skin processes, of lowly and less traditionally venerated animals, confronts dominant hierarchies, offering, what Hariharan calls a 'myriad challenging narratives of an inclusive culture.'¹⁵²

In her paper 'Outcaste Power: Ritual Displacement and Virile Maternity in Indian Women Writers,' Meena Alexander claims that a 'vision of the body' as skin, in terms of the retrieval and reconstruction of identity, is central in Indian women's writing. Alexander states that: 'Indian women writers have had to confront the iconic presentation of the feminine, fracture and reform it' in order to reverse ritual displacement of women's bodies in hierarchical societies.

And really it is the skin of things as they are, or as they have been made, that one needs to talk about: the social constructions whether of a hierarchical society in which woman is ritually displaced, or the humiliations of a colonial order, that raised to self-consciousness, paradoxically free one to speak. For at stake is a vision of the body, and language, post-colonial language, not merely as clothing but as skin, as vulnerable, quivering sensitivity to being in an often oppressive world.¹⁵³

Alexander highlights the importance of skin as being something much more than merely 'clothing' the body, but her analysis is reductive in

¹⁵¹ Githa Hariharan, in Jaina C. Sanga, ed., *South Asian Novelists in English*, p.113.

¹⁵² Githa Hariharan, 'When Bodies Speak', first published in *World Literature Today*, Puterbaugh Essay Series, March 2017. http://githahariharan.com/?page_id=165, (Accessed 1/4/17).

¹⁵³ Meena Alexander, 'Outcaste Power: Ritual Displacement and Virile Maternity in Indian Women Writers,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 18, 1989, p.367. This is similar to the way in which Namjoshi refers to 'Feminist Fractures' and 'ways forward' in 'And There's You and Me, My Sweet Duality.' However, Namjoshi also includes Western women such as Handscombe.

persisting in a longstanding preoccupation with a mere reversal of hierarchies; the *volte-face* of critical stereotypes found in previous revisions of myth, fable and fairy tale. Alexander's vision of the female body and skin in an irredeemably 'oppressive world,' as fragmented and fractured, unfortunately suggests an intrinsic 'female' weakness, and does not recognise the infinite dimensions of skin, beyond what she identifies as a 'vulnerable, quivering sensitivity.' As the site of complex and constant revision, skin forms what Hariharan describes as a 'fantastic canvas'¹⁵⁴ upon which diverse narratives are written and interweaved. Metaphors of skin relay the complexity of diverse responses to a variety of physical and cultural stimuli. Skin is vulnerable yet enduring, undergoing changes associated with time (aging), culture (tattoos, caste marks, brandings, piercings), biology (cytokinesis, shedding, sloughing, wounding and healing) as well as other physical effects of environment. Thus, Hariharan effectively expresses multiple changing narratives beyond the conventionally dominant, 'untying' not only women's tongues potentially giving voice to an entire ecological system – both animate and inanimate.¹⁵⁵ Whilst *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) is involved with the collective 'survival modes'¹⁵⁶ of women, shared identities in the later novels complicate the narrative beyond a feminist blueprint. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994) and *When Dreams Travel* (1999) contain various human, animal and insect bodies haunted by 'ghosts' of the past.

¹⁵⁴ Githa Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.40.

¹⁵⁵ I discuss this in Chapter Four. Hariharan describes the palace as having several 'species of skin' in *When Dreams Travel*, p.67.

¹⁵⁶ Githa Hariharan in an interview with Antonia Navarro-Tejero, *Gender and Caste in the Anglophone-Indian Novels of Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan, Feminist Issues in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, p.45.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi, returning to an arranged marriage in India after a period in America, has to negotiate the conflicting pulls of tradition and modernity. Devi is named for the powerful Hindu goddess from the Puranic tradition, her vulnerability effectively indicating the enormous difference between myth and reality of women's lives.

Hariharan's second novel, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* moves away from a central woman's perspective and depicts the struggle of a retired schoolmaster similarly negotiating the 'ghosts' of his past. The novel centres on Vasu's relationship with Mani, a deaf-mute pupil. When teaching Mani, Vasu rejects the *Golden Reader*, the prescribed text of conventional education, instead indicating the importance of myth and legend by relating tales based on those in the *Jataka* and the *Panchatantra*. *When Dreams Travel* (1999), is a re-telling of the myth of Scheherazade from *The One Thousand and One Nights*, but rather than entirely told from the perspective of Shahrzad, as in the original tales, Hariharan also employs male narrators such as Shahryar, his brother Zaman and the Wazir. Other female narrators include Shahrzad's previously silent sister Duniyazad, the servant Dilshad, and the slave Satyasama. The novel is a 'travelling tale'¹⁵⁷ traversing time, space, gender and species and, as a review in *Outlook* states, is involved with 'crossing boundaries, merging traditions, blending myth, legend.' It is 'a tale both fantastical and poignantly close to the skin... a story that is told with such surefooted style and panache that it lights up forgotten corners of the reader's mind.'¹⁵⁸ This skilled and elegant style involves a lyrical fluidity perhaps related to Hariharan's training in Carnatic music and jazz. Her

¹⁵⁷ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.25.

¹⁵⁸ Review of *When Dreams Travel*, from *Outlook*, <http://githahariharan.com/?p=323> (Accessed 14/02/2017).

highly sensual and intricate prose is, like music, both mathematically composed and yet highly poetic.¹⁵⁹ Her first novel, and *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), and *When Dreams Travel* (1999) all contain many instances of cross-species metamorphoses which are described in similarly a melodious style.

My voice is a medley. Plurality engages me and I want to hear many voices – focusing on a variety of issues. Fiction is a gift; it's home.¹⁶⁰

Hariharan's writing style emulates the intrinsic sensuality and 'plasticity' of skin; its vulnerability and strength. In his review of *When Dreams Travel* (1999) in *The Independent*, Aamer Hussein highlights the sinuous and pliant textures of Hariharan's 'tellings and retellings [are] in turn, rich supple, sensuous and cerebral.'¹⁶¹ This entrancing and disorientating labyrinthine style holds what Hariharan describes as 'the resonance of a dream,'¹⁶² but it also describes an essential dynamism in 'an endless chain of refractions of the same story,'¹⁶³ an overlapping, symbiotic and evolving narrative.

This thesis values this highly readable combination of precision and sensuality that, I argue, is able to relay complex scientific evolutionary and environmental philosophy in more tangible ways. The structure and narrative of *When Dreams Travel* is intricate and described by Hariharan as 'a bit like Chinese boxes - you keep making smaller and smaller boxes and even that

¹⁵⁹ I discuss this in more detail with respect to the structure of *When Dreams Travel* in Chapter Four.

¹⁶⁰ Githa Hariharan, interview with Sangeetha Devi Dundoo 27/1/14 <http://www.thehindu.com/books/books-authors/my-voice-is-a-medley/article5623104.ece> (Accessed 20/2/17).

¹⁶¹ Aamer Hussein in *The Independent*, Friday 18th June 1999, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books-new-spin-on-old-yarn-1100984.html>, (Accessed 8/12/12).

¹⁶² Githa Hariharan, interview with Urvashi Butalia in Outlook India Feb 1 1999, www.outlookindia.com, (Accessed 2/11/11).

¹⁶³ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.117.

does not lead you to the heart of things.’¹⁶⁴ The image of boxes might initially suggest clarity and orderliness, a literary device that frames the narratives, yet in not leading to the ‘heart of things’ Hariharan suggests a sleight of hand, an obfuscation that complicates.

Similarly, the mathematical precision of the term ‘one thousand’ is conventionally associated with the indeterminacy of infinity. Thus, in *When Dreams Travel*, and in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Hariharan’s use of this number suggests the potential of infinite perspectives in both precise and immeasurable ways. In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, ‘the thousand eyes of the Great Serpent Kundalini’ represent such boundlessness as a plethora of refracted stories, or ‘plastic perspectives’ – similar to that of the compound eye of a fly. The shattering of ‘Old Man Mirror’ in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, results in a ‘skilfully cut diamond’ made of ‘a hundred intricate facets.’ Rather than symbolising destruction and ‘bad luck,’ the shattering of the mirror is constructive in ecological terms since each of the ‘mirror-bits’ threw back a different kind of reflection, so that it was often difficult to understand Diamond; to see him whole, to sum him up in a few words.’¹⁶⁵ Vasu states that these multi-faceted perspectives form an infinite ‘web that links and transfigures each line of experience, every point, into one of learning.’¹⁶⁶ These metaphors of infinity and diversity, although often couched in dream-like language, successfully relay the ‘science’ of life as process in more accessible terms. In this respect, literary metamorphoses effectively broaden ecocriticism in highly valuable ways, recognizing the

¹⁶⁴ Githa Hariharan, interview with Antonia Navarro-Tejero. *Gender and Caste in the Anglophone-Indian Novels of Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan, Feminist Issues in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, p.46.

¹⁶⁵ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.244.

¹⁶⁶ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.26.

interrelationships of individuals and environments as kaleidoscopic rather than linear.

As Paul Shepard argued in 1969, the ‘web’ of life is ‘too meagre and simple for the reality. A web is flat and finished and has the mortal frailty of the individual spider. Although elastic it has insufficient depth.’¹⁶⁷ Shepard argues the necessity for a more byzantine ‘long view of human life and nature as they form a mesh or pattern going beyond the conceptual bounds of other humane studies.’ Timothy Morton has also more recently suggested using the term ‘mesh’¹⁶⁸ as a more effective way of relaying the ‘infinite connections and infinitesimal differences’¹⁶⁹ of all living and non-living entities. Thus, the adoption of this term is long apposite. Both Hariharan and Namjoshi’s writing form a ‘mesh,’ one ‘whole and well rounded’ story,¹⁷⁰ composed of a medley of varied transforming bodies, narratives and perspectives. As Morton states:

All life forms are the mesh, and so are all the dead ones, as are their habitats, which are also made up of living and nonliving beings. We know even more now about how life forms have shaped Earth (think of oil, of oxygen—the first climate change cataclysm). We drive around using crushed dinosaur parts. Iron is mostly a by-product of bacterial metabolism. So is oxygen. Mountains can be made of shells and fossilized bacteria. Death and the mesh go together in another sense, too, because natural selection implies extinction.¹⁷¹

The intrinsic connection of the mesh and death is suggestive of Samsara and thus can be more directly linked to Eastern philosophy. In rejecting Western models of species hierarchies and describing metamorphoses of ‘lesser’ animals, Namjoshi and Hariharan’s writing evidence and broaden the ‘mesh’

¹⁶⁷ Shepard, *The Subversive Science*, p.1. Shepard notes the branch of sociology called Human Ecology, but identifies its limitations, claiming it is concerned ‘mostly about urban geography.’

¹⁶⁸ Significantly, Paul Shepard used this term in 1969, *The Subversive Science*, p.1.

¹⁶⁹ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010), p.30.

¹⁷⁰ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.vii.

¹⁷¹ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p.29.

by relaying ‘more-than-human’ responses to changing physical and cultural environments. Namjoshi’s animal characters are often humorous and ironic caricatures of what Daston and Mitman term ‘hyperhumanized’¹⁷² and anthropomorphic individuals; those that we may more readily recognise: ‘the fox is cunning, the lion is brave, the dog is loyal.’¹⁷³ In contrast, Hariharan’s metamorphoses involve creatures that may be termed as ‘hypohumanized,’ those often considered repellent, such as maggots and flies. The metamorphoses of such creatures not traditionally considered as powerful, appealing, beautiful or significant, crucially destabilise long-standing anthropocentric species hierarchies. Thus, Magic Real evocations of ‘lesser’ animals offer powerful means by which they may be resituated as what Dupré calls ‘creatures as strange and complex as ourselves.’¹⁷⁴

Metamorphoses in Namjoshi’s work largely follow the spontaneity of Ovid’s style, but I argue that, although following an ancient tradition, such transformations are analogous to the extemporaneous and rapid responses described in the emerging field of epigenetics. The different ways that Namjoshi and Hariharan use the Magic Real genre allows the philosophy of science to be understood in a more comprehensive way. Namjoshi’s style is more akin to Ovid’s metamorphoses, but effectively describes the relative rapidity of developing evolutionary theory. Her use of often ironic humour also has a foundation in ancient literature: *Aesop’s Fables* and the *Panchatantra*. Hariharan’s style involves more slow and agonised descriptions that effectively relay the pain of transformation. Thus, a

¹⁷² Lorraine Daston and Greg Mitman, *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p.9.

¹⁷³ I discuss the use of anthropomorphism in Chapter Three.

¹⁷⁴ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.17.

combination of the two authors and styles, the modes of comedy and pain, explicate highly abstract ideas in philosophical science.

Key Thinkers and Methodology:

I now focus on key thinkers that offer the theory behind what I term as the essentially processual, ‘plastic readings’ of skin and cross-species metaphors evident in the Magic Real. I argue that plastic readings of metamorphoses in Magic Real fiction relay an understanding of the essential complexity of ecology and the environment as theorised by philosophers of science such as Dupré and Malabou. The lens of an eye can be considered as ‘plastic’ since it changes form, whilst still remaining the same, thinning to focus on distant objects and thickening to see close up. This thesis brings the philosophy of science and literature together through an ecocritical lens inflected by postcolonial ‘plastic perspectives.’

1.5 John Dupré

John Dupré, Professor of Philosophy of Science at the University of Exeter, has also been the Director of the ESRC Centre for Genomics in Society (Egenis) since 2002. As an exponent of Developmental Systems Theory, Dupré recognises that ‘the always branching, never merging, tree of traditional phylogeny is not enough’¹⁷⁵ since it cannot describe the complexity of evolution, the extensive cooperation between collective and disparate communities or more recent radical evolutionary philosophies involving epigenetics.

From the countless processes taking place at the level of molecular biology, through the processes of ontogeny that span the various scales of different life-cycles, to the sometimes aeon-scaled processes of evolution, biology is about change. In fact, living things sustain themselves only by constantly changing. It is arguable that our thinking is for deep reasons anchored to conceptions of objects describable in static terms; certainly many biological concepts are described in such static terms. But such concepts can only capture frozen time slices through the more fundamentally processual biological reality. And this points to an obvious reason why our choice of such concepts may be seriously underdetermined by the reality that they purport to capture, and may thus be different according to the purposes for which the concepts are wrought.¹⁷⁶

In *The Constituents Of Life* (2007), a revision of his Spinoza Lectures delivered at the University of Amsterdam in May and June 2006, Dupré refers to Spinoza’s philosophy regarding the underlying unity of ‘the things that are the matter of biology; organisms, the systems, organs, cells and molecules to be found within them, and the larger systems, such as species or

¹⁷⁵ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.149.

¹⁷⁶ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.8.

ecosystems which they, in turn, compose.’¹⁷⁷ Spinoza’s theories of the body as a creative process can be aligned with ‘non-duality’ and the Eastern philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, which translates as ‘non-dual.’ This asserts the non-existence of boundaries between individual souls and that of ultimate reality, identified as Brahman. Thus, there are two important issues here, a combination of processual philosophy and a holistic biology that significantly involves much more than human predominance. A focus on the human brain and ‘self’ is too limiting since notions of discrete identity are clearly problematic in terms of generative ecosystems. Indeed, as Dupré states: ‘about 90 per cent of the cells that make up the human body belong to microbial symbionts and, owing to their great diversity, they contribute something like 99 per cent of the genes in the human body.’¹⁷⁸ Thus, his ‘multispecific interactionist perspective’ identifies the intricacy of life and its abundance. As Dupré notes, there are 10 to the power of 10 prokaryote cells and as many as 8.3×10 to the power of 6 species in one gram of ‘ordinary soil.’¹⁷⁹

Taking an appropriately microbe-centred view of life, I argue, poses problems for the traditional view of the biological individual; it largely undermines standard ideas about species and the Tree of Life; and it threatens many traditional ideas about evolution and evolutionary relations between kinds of organisms.¹⁸⁰

Dupré’s theories based on Developmental Systems Theory erase notions of hierarchical linear evolution, discrete identities and species boundaries: ‘biological entities are dynamic and diverse collaborations and so boundaries

¹⁷⁷ John Dupré, *The Constituents of Life* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 2007), p.11.

¹⁷⁸ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.125.

¹⁷⁹ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.165. A prokaryote is a single-celled organism that lacks a membrane-bound nucleus (karyon), mitochondria, or any other membrane-bound organelles.

¹⁸⁰ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.4.

are flexible and unfixed.¹⁸¹ In Dupré's terms, promiscuous individualism, describes the impossibility of 'unique organisms,' while promiscuous realism is a parallel theory at the level of species.¹⁸² The overlapping and interacting life-cycles of Dupré's 'promiscuous realism,'¹⁸³ disrupt notions of boundary and involve complex, interconnected and continuous evolutionary processes at the level of cells, individual organisms and complex interspecies interactions. This move away from personal uniqueness and clearly delineated species describes a vital plasticity and permeability central to an understanding of the way in which ecosystems work. As such, Magic Real metaphors are able to describe the pluralistic perspective of Dupré's theory of 'promiscuous individualism,'¹⁸⁴ 'promiscuous realism' and the 'metaorganism,'¹⁸⁵ where cells, organisms and ecosystems are in continual flux.

A commitment to life as exclusively cellular and monogenomically organismal would mean that the origins of life must involve a single leap from fully non-living to fully living... our thesis of multi-modal, interconnected and overlapping life processes suggests a more continuous vision of evolutionary history.¹⁸⁶

Dupré highlights that survival and evolution at all levels of existence is 'about change,' not certainty. Rather than processes of life occurring as ordered and linear, they are interweaving processes over different time scales and dimensions – the microscopic and macroscopic, and involving individual cells, entities, societies and ecosystems. As he asserts, 'the genome, as much

¹⁸¹ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.225.

¹⁸² Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.8.

¹⁸³ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.7. 'There are real distinctions in nature, but there is no unique set of distinctions, different classifications, serving different purposes, may overlap and cross-classify. This is the doctrine I first referred to thirty years ago as promiscuous realism.'

¹⁸⁴ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.8.

¹⁸⁵ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.201.

¹⁸⁶ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.228.

as the organism, is a process rather than a static thing.’¹⁸⁷ The process of ‘lateral gene transfer’¹⁸⁸ signifies that evolutionary characteristics may be sourced from any part of the biosphere and, in these terms, the potential for developmental plasticity is infinite. In this respect, Dupré argues that Developmental Systems Theory is far more productive than the relative rigidity of Neo-Darwinism. Indeed, he argues that, rather than being solely based on natural selection and competition, collective and individual evolution depends on a ‘continuum of collaborativity’¹⁸⁹ rather than conflict.¹⁹⁰ Dupré identifies a pluralistic perspective, evidencing the ‘omnipresence of symbiosis,’¹⁹¹ rather than the concentration on conflict and competition in traditional evolutionary biology.

Here I make for the first time the argument that the omnipresence of symbiosis should be seen as undermining the project of dividing living systems unequivocally into unique organisms, a conclusion I refer to in later chapters as ‘promiscuous individualism’, in parallel with my doctrine of promiscuous realism about species.¹⁹²

Indeed, Dupré claims that the rigidity of the notion of discrete identities and species categories ‘encapsulate[s] what is wrong with a common and naïve understanding of genetic inheritance, and equally important, of the evolutionary theories built upon that understanding.’¹⁹³

...our concepts and patterns of thought struggle with the profoundly processual nature of living things. From the countless processes taking place at the level of molecular biology, through the processes of ontogeny that span the various scales of different life cycles, to the sometimes aeon-scaled processes of evolution, biology is about change. In fact, living things sustain themselves only by constantly changing. It is arguable that our thinking is for deep reasons anchored to conceptions of objects describable in static

¹⁸⁷ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.3.

¹⁸⁸ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.148.

¹⁸⁹ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.228.

¹⁹⁰ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.126. Dupré argues that the importance of collaboration has been ‘greatly underestimated.’

¹⁹¹ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.8.

¹⁹² Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.8.

¹⁹³ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.2.

terms; certainly many biological concepts are described in such static terms.¹⁹⁴

Whilst not wishing to ‘deny Darwin’s greatness as a scientist,’ Dupré argues that traditionally accepted theories of evolution largely continue to be considered as ‘scriptural authority’ and receive ‘excessive reverence’¹⁹⁵ in some quarters. Indeed, he notes that any ‘dissent’ from Darwin’s theory is often seen, especially in the United States, as ‘ammunition’ for Creationists.¹⁹⁶

Since the end of the Human Genome Project, it has become clear that identity involves much more than the mapping and ‘certainty’ of DNA profiles. Yet, as Dupré states, both public and scientific discourse continue to reflect a preoccupation with the gene, natural selection and the driving force of survival through opposition and contest, even though modern research and the rapidly developing fields of genomics and microbiology inform and complicate our growing understanding of evolution. Grosz argues that the central question, regarding the ‘relation between life and matter,’ is a ‘Darwinian’ question. A question possible only after Darwin’s revolution, which assumes the emergence of life as ‘some kind of perhaps peculiar or perhaps common chemical and material arrangements.’ She discusses both Deleuze and Henri Bergson in similarly vague terms as ‘indirectly explor[ing] the concept of life, tracing its outer edges without

¹⁹⁴ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.8.

¹⁹⁵ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p. 143.

¹⁹⁶ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.148. This remains controversial in some western creationist opinion despite phylogenetic research in evolutionary biology evidencing human relatedness to animals. In February 2009, a Gallup Poll reported that only 39 per cent of Americans "believe in the theory of evolution," a quarter say they do not believe in the theory, and another 36 per cent don't have an opinion either way. Richard Dawkins: <http://richard.net/articles/644650-why-do-so-many-have-trouble-believing-in-evolution>, (Accessed 20/1/13).

plunging into its psychological or biological depths directly.’¹⁹⁷ Grosz states that Deleuze’s describes this as a ‘contained dynamism,’ and ‘an impersonal force’ which spans the organic and the inorganic across a ‘porous boundary,’ involving a ‘complex fold of the chemical and physical that reveals something not given within them. Something new, an emergence, the ordered force of invention.’¹⁹⁸ Although this seems to offer much, it glosses over the science of transformation; the notion of ‘newness’, and ‘order’ refers back to outdated Neo-Darwinist theory. In focusing more fully on the science of biological processes central to cells, and by considering super-organisms, and ‘more than human life,’¹⁹⁹ Dupré abandons traditional linear, mechanistic models of identity and evolutionary theory that place humans at the pinnacle of existence. In considering the nature of continual metamorphoses across animate/inanimate, human/animal and sentient/non-sentient boundaries it is possible to address what Dupré describes as the problem of prevailing ‘standard thinking’ which is ‘based on quite restricted and even covertly normative conceptions of what life is.’²⁰⁰ What Dupré terms as the ‘nested processes’²⁰¹ central to cells, super-organisms, human life and ‘more than human life’ are, I assert, reflected in the complex structures, narratives and characterization of the Magic Real. Close readings of Magic Real metamorphoses evoke these complex, interconnected and continuous evolutionary processes at the level of cells, individual organisms and complex interspecies interactions and effectively describe abstract

¹⁹⁷ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, p.29.

¹⁹⁸ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, p.27.

¹⁹⁹ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.11. Dupré notes the lack of research on microbes in previous evolutionary biology: ‘It is estimated that if extracellular plant material is excluded, microbes make up more than half the living mass on Earth.’

²⁰⁰ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.209.

²⁰¹ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.8.

processes as more tangible. Thus, fiction not only reinforces existing theories of evolutionary processes, but expands them in many more subtle and overt ways.

The highly protective yet vulnerable ‘skin’ is the ‘boundary’ between self and environment that often seemingly delineates individual identity and uniqueness. At one end of the scale, as Dupré notes, larger biological systems such as ecosystems not considered as having skin are therefore ‘seldom classified as living entities in their own rights.’²⁰² At the other extreme, organisms disregarded as ‘lesser’ forms of life, have also not reached this classification. His theory of the ‘metaorganism’²⁰³ describes an intense plasticity which, brought into conversation with literature, interrogates ideas of alterity and mechanistic theory that regularly circulate in literary theory and historiography. The difference in ‘iteration,’ but the similarity of process, effectively defines the ambiguity and ‘in-betweenness’ of developmental plasticity – the dynamism and centrality of ‘differing’ rather than difference.

A final crucial point about metaorganisms is that they are paradigmatically dynamic entities and therefore very clear illustrations of the ultimate necessity of a process-oriented approach to biological investigation. None of the entities that constitute organisms, or which organisms constitute, are static. Genomes, cells and ecosystems are in constant interactive flux: subtly different in every iteration, but similar enough to constitute a distinctive process. The greatest significance of this point is perhaps that its appreciation will prevent us from taking too literally mechanistic models of biological processes.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.223.

²⁰³ Work undertaken by Dupré with microbiologist Maureen A. O’Malley, ‘A metaorganism is the community of interacting biological entities that is indicated by a metagenome. A variety of high throughput and other techniques are used to understand the role metaorganismal interactions play in host physiology and local and global biogeochemistry.’ <http://www.maureenomalley.org/downloads/OMalley-EncSysBio-Metaorganism.pdf> (Accessed 16/9/16).

²⁰⁴ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.201.

In focusing on the centrality of biological processes, Dupré highlights the importance of change, and the significance of symbiosis rather than the conflict and competition central to natural selection and Neo-Darwinism. As Dupré states:

[T]he paradigmatic living thing contains parts of many distinct biological lineages in more or less cooperative relations. Excessive focus on evolutionary theory, we argue, has led to the assumption that a living individual must be part of a lineage, an evolving sequence of ancestors and descendants. But to function properly such segments of lineage almost invariably need to be in complex relations with parts of other lineages (as humans are with their many bacterial symbionts). We don't want to insist that all these relations are cooperative in the sense of conferring net benefits to all parties. Rather, we suggest a broader concept of collaboration that can include the various kinds of symbiosis (mutualism, commensalism, parasitism) that connect the various more or less obligate members of complex systems characteristic of living things.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.13.

1.6 Catherine Malabou

Catherine Malabou is Professor of Modern European Philosophy at Kingston University, Surrey. The theory of ‘plasticity’ is developed from her doctoral thesis, *The Future of Hegel, Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* (1996), which looked to the ‘future of Hegel’ - a ‘renewal’ in the double meaning of a future ‘of’ his philosophy and the future ‘within’ his philosophy.²⁰⁶ In these terms, Malabou describes ‘Hegel’s idea of plasticity’ as involving ‘three areas of meaning are mutually implicated. In each case that double connotation of the adjective ‘plastic’ reappears: a capacity to receive form and a capacity to produce form.’

...Plasticity directly contradicts rigidity. It is its exact antonym. In ordinary speech, it designates suppleness, a faculty for adaption, the ability to evolve. According to its etymology – from the *plassein*, to mold – the word *plasticity* has two basic senses: it means at once the capacity to *receive* form (clay is called “plastic,” for example) and the capacity to *give form* (as in the plastic arts or plastic surgery).²⁰⁷

I suggest that plasticity, alongside the metaorganism, promiscuous individualism and promiscuous realism, may potentially connect imaginative

²⁰⁶ Catherine Malabou, *L’Avenir de Hegel: plasticité, temporalité, dialectique*, (Paris: J. Vrin, 1996; repr. *The Future of Hegel, Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, Oxford: Routledge, 2005; repr. 2009), p.193.

²⁰⁷ Catherine Malabou, *Que Faire de Notre Cerveau?* (Paris: Bayard, 2004; repr. *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* trans. by Sebastian Rand, USA: Fordham University Press, 2008), p.5.

literature with science through theoretically describing processes of metamorphosis. More exactly, rather than an assumption of complete and alternative form, plasticity offers a ‘newness’ that is, at the same time, not entirely ‘new.’ Thus, in retaining a trace of the past it maintains a sense of history lacking in some ontological theory. Rather than the spontaneous donning of an alternative identity evident in Ovid, or a more gradual process of ‘becoming,’ plasticity occurs over all timescales. It can be gradual in the ways it describes the giving and receiving of form, and also ‘explosive’ as in *plastique*. Thus, this thesis considers ‘plastic readings’ of Magic Real metamorphoses as more effectively evoking the range of perspectives, across differing time scales, necessary to a balanced ecological standpoint, and what Dupré describes as ‘the processes of life.’

Plasticity is, as Malabou defines, ‘understood as the fluidity of structures on the one hand and the selection of viable, durable forms likely to constitute a legacy or lineage on the other allows for much more than polymorphism, elasticity or flexibility.’²⁰⁸ Indeed, Malabou argues that the ‘plastic condition’ is ‘the motor of evolution’ and designates the ‘ontological transformability, the migratory and metamorphic mutability of all that is.’²⁰⁹ She states that a material is plastic ‘if it cannot return to its initial form after undergoing a deformation.’²¹⁰ In this sense it is opposed to mere elasticity since it ‘retains an imprint and therefore resists endless polymorphism.’ Plasticity, in these terms, ‘designates solidity as much as suppleness,

²⁰⁸ Malabou, ‘Whither Materialism? Althusser/Darwin,’ Chapter 2, *Plastic Materialities, Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou*, p.51

²⁰⁹ Catherine Malabou, *The Heidegger Change, On the Fantastic in Philosophy*, (Paris: L. Scheer, 2004); repr. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2011), trans. Peter Skafish, p.3.

²¹⁰ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.15.

designates the definitive character of the imprint, of configuration, or of modification.'

This thesis investigates the solidity and suppleness of skin and its ability to 'give' form beyond delineating discrete or superficial identity. Processes of skin associated with aging, healing, wounding and scarring also 'give' and 'receive' form in multifaceted creative and destructive ways. Malabou discusses the processes of healing and cellular renewal in terms of 'synaptic plasticity,' but it is possible to apply this plasticity to cells other than those in the human brain.

The idea of cellular renewal, repair and resourcefulness as auxiliaries of synaptic plasticity brings to light the power of *healing* – treatment, scarring, compensation, regeneration and the capacity of the brain to build natural prostheses.²¹¹

Skin is a 'plastic,' permeable and protective interface, and as the site of renewal and loss, effectively describes healing and wounding. I argue the plasticity of skin links organic and inorganic entities with their environments. It records and responds to the trauma of change, loss and the sensitivity of revitalisation across ecosystems in far more complex ways than those governed by mere proximity or the much-vaunted interconnectedness of species. Indeed, attempts at expressing the essential interconnectedness of life have been intrinsically flawed in that the categorization of individual species essentially involves differentiation. The placing of categories into different 'rooms' does not remove the 'doors' and the identification of a liminal or 'third space' only offers up an alternative grouping within another 'space,' however loosely defined in terms of boundary. In contrast, what Malabou terms as the 'space of the symbolic' that, she argues, connects 'bare

²¹¹ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.27.

life' to the biological body, avoids the limitations of such finality. Magic Real metaphors describe this dynamic plasticity, a 'space' that connects the imaginary with the literal. Metaphors of skin and its processes, as interface with the environment, describe felt responses to both biological and environmental stimuli. The ambiguity of the inherent properties of skin as both protective and permeable, as shed, sloughed, healed, diseased, scarred and wounded, can therefore be considered as both biological and symbolic, literal and imaginative, sacrificeable and sacred. Malabou states:

Life, in modernity, appears precisely as both sacred and sacrificeable. This explains Agamben's famous book title *Homo Sacer*. "Sacer" designates something that is neither in nor out and both in and out at the same time. This is the status of "bare life": something that is nowhere, neither within nor outside the community. That is, both sacred and offered to murder...bare life never coincides with biological life. Again: "Bare life inhabits the biological body of each living being." The space that separates bare life from the biological body can only be the space of the symbolic.²¹²

Despite their frequently bizarre nature, Magic Real metaphors of skin are 'literal' in that they effectively evoke the 'felt' that separates 'bare life' from 'biological life,'²¹³ expressing the pain and/or pleasure of transformations.

Skin, as the largest organ of the senses, is the logical site of this literality.

Such perpetual and diverse transformations occur at the level of skin, thus occupying 'the space of the symbolic.' By such means, skin connects animal and human, animate and inanimate, organic and non-organic and using skin as metaphor, the humanities with science. The 'space of the symbolic' is described by the dynamic tension of plasticity, and what Malabou terms key 'in-between' moments. Thus, metaphors of skin describe the inclusiveness

²¹² Catherine Malabou, 'Will Sovereignty Ever Be Deconstructed?' *Plastic Materialities, Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the work of Catherine Malabou*, Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller, eds. (Cornwall: Duke University Press, 2015), p.41.

²¹³ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995). Although Agamben's articulation of 'bare life' has been widely discussed and remains hugely controversial, a lengthy engagement with this does not seem appropriate here.

and ‘literal’ physicality of biological transformation in fantastic ways. As the interface between inner and outer worlds, skin mitigates against the challenging concept of a divided destiny between notions of mind and body, ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ animal and human.

Malabou resituates Hegel’s use of the term ‘plasticity’ as indicating the organic tension formed through exposure to the environment as experience, accident and trauma. Such transformative tension is created at interfaces with the environment, where the ‘receiving’ or ‘giving’ of form is variously creative and destructive and is effectively described by incessant and infinite metamorphoses in Magic Real fiction. The processual nature of life is significant since, as Ian James states in *The New French Philosophy*, ‘absolute knowledge itself cannot be the end or final term of the Hegelian system’²¹⁴ since it would necessarily signal the end of the dialectical process.

...this is not simply an endlessly negative dialectic since the overall emphasis is not on the instance of negation, on its disruptive or interruptive force, but rather on *formation*, on the emergence of infinitely malleable and formable form.²¹⁵

Malabou’s theory of plasticity is hugely valuable when re-thinking outdated theories of becoming. In many ways, she can be considered as more innovative than Dupré because she contemplates the rift between the natural and the conceptual.

Thus, with plasticity we are dealing with a concept that is not contradictory but graduated, because the very plasticity of its meaning situates it at the extremes off a formal necessity (the irreversible character of formation: determination) and a remobilization of form (the capability to form oneself otherwise, to displace, even to nullify determination: freedom). It is this complex, this synthesis, this semantic wealth, that we ought to keep in mind throughout our analysis.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Ian James, ‘Catherine Malabou: The Destiny of Form’, *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p.89.

²¹⁵ James, ‘Catherine Malabou: The Destiny of Form’, p.83.

²¹⁶ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.17.

This semantic wealth does indeed evidence an essential complexity, but her focus on the plasticity of human brains, whilst ground-breaking, is problematic in that it impedes a consideration of the wider ecosystems. She argues that recent scientific discoveries concerning the activity and ‘plasticity’ of the *human*²¹⁷ nervous system ‘presents reflection with what is doubtless a completely new conception of transformation,’²¹⁸ but she claims that because of a basic human lack of self-knowledge; the ‘impasse on the topic of the brain’ which, she argues, is ‘with few exceptions, total’²¹⁹ one is left with the feeling that ‘nothing is transformed.’

In this sense, we are still foreign to ourselves, at the threshold of this “new world,” which we fail to realize makes up our very intimacy itself. “We” have no idea who “we” are, no idea what is “inside” us.²²⁰

The idea of an identifiable ‘self,’ and notions of an ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ are largely western preoccupations, and are not commensurate with an authentic ecological perspective. To place the question of who ‘we’ are above everything is clearly a partial assessment. Whilst it is accurate to say that we are not fully aware of the ‘plasticity’ of our brains, it is equally true that we are not aware of the plethora of biological processes that occur ‘inside us,’ as well as on and around our bodies. The question of what is ‘inside us’ posited by Malabou involves more than human brain activity. It involves a multitude of processes, cells and bacteria, not considered as sentient, of which we are similarly unaware, but which are nonetheless imperative to survival. In addition, it is difficult to ascertain what constitutes the ‘inside’ of the human

²¹⁷ My emphasis.

²¹⁸ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.11.

²¹⁹ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.2. Here Malabou refers to the work of Jean-Pierre Changeux, *Neuronal Man: The Biology of the Mind*, trans Laurence Garey (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p.xiv.

²²⁰ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.3.

body since if one uses the presence of epithelial cells to designate the boundary between inside and outside, the human gut, since it is lined with epithelium is, strictly speaking, outside the human body. Thus, Malabou's concentration on the 'inside,' the centrality of personal identity and human consciousness, the setting up and continuation of dual oppositions, seems to contradict her desire 'not to replicate the caricature of the world.'²²¹ In *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* Malabou focuses on the complexity and plasticity of the 'networks and flows' of human neurons.²²²

What do we find in the human brain? Billions of neurons (around twenty billion in humans) connected in a network of innumerable links, the synapses. "The human brain," says Changeux, 'makes one think of a gigantic assembly of tens of billions of interlacing neuronal 'spider's webs' in which myriads of electrical impulses flash by, relayed from time to time by a rich array of chemical signals." These "spider's webs," neuronal connections also called "arborizations," are constituted progressively over the course of an individual's development. We use the term *plasticity* precisely to characterize this neuronal genesis.²²³

Spider's webs are normally two-dimensional and, as such, cannot adequately describe the complexity of ecosystems. Indeed, Jablonka and Lamb's 'fourth dimension,'²²⁴ although initially seeming to be pertinent to my research in broadening perspective, is also an overly schematic division that conceals what I sought to evidence: perpetual and fundamental process. Thus, I argue that the theory of plasticity has far-reaching potential, but it is unfortunate that in focusing solely on human brains, Malabou seems to unconsciously re-instate traditional, anthropocentric notions of 'being' in the world that are, at best, non-productive and, at worst, are intensely destructive. Marc Jeannerod's view that a 'new freedom' associated with Malabou's theory of

²²¹ Malabou *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.78.

²²² Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.10.

²²³ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.18. Malabou quotes Jean-Pierre Changeux, *Neuronal Man: The Biology of the Mind*, trans. Laurence Garey, (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

²²⁴ Eva Jablonka and Marion J. Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions, Genetic, Epigenetic, Behavioural and Symbolic Variation in the History of Life* (Cambridge Mass and London: MIT Press, 2006).

brain plasticity will result in the ability to ‘[impose] our own organization on the world rather than submitting to the influences of a milieu’²²⁵ would, no doubt, be challenged by many ecological and environmental scientists who seek to address the deleterious ways in which humanity has assumed dominance and ‘organized’ the world so far. As well as damaging, Dupré states that such notions of hierarchy are illusory since bacteria have proven the most successful and dominant form of life on earth.

The picture of microbes as something primitive and distinct from ‘higher’ organisms that have evolved in more recent times is confused. Higher organisms did not evolve as separate from pre-existing microbes, but as parts of complex symbiotic systems that always included microbes, usually in vast numbers.²²⁶

Bhandar and Goldberg-Hiller highlight the fact that Malabou is concerned with the ‘transformation that inheres in the bios and the biological’ but it is difficult to identify where the biosphere plays a major part in the ‘plasticity’ of the human brain other than as something ‘outside’ of it, stimuli which acts upon it, but which will eventually be ‘organized’ and ordered by it.²²⁷ In the introduction to *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, Jeannerod states that the ‘thesis of a supple, adaptable, plastic organ permits the political emancipation of the brain, the transition from a “soviet” to a “liberal” brain.’²²⁸ The analogy of the ‘emancipation’ of the brain as a result of the transition from ‘soviet’ to ‘liberal’ is flawed and judgemental. The word ‘soviet’ is derived from the Russian meaning an assembly or council, harmony and concord, and negative political assumptions aside, could clearly relate more of a generative prospect for the future than Jeannerod suggests in

²²⁵ Marc Jeannerod in the introduction to Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.xiv.

²²⁶ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.4.

²²⁷ Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller, eds. *Plastic Materialities, Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the work of Catherine Malabou* (Cornwall: Duke University Press, 2015), p.3.

²²⁸ Jeannerod in the introduction to Malabou *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.xiii-xiv.

his perhaps politically biased view. In claiming that ‘Humans in the Middle Ages, the Industrial Revolution, and the liberal revolution all have had the same brain, with the same capacities for learning and adaption,’ is too narrow since it clearly focuses on the historical Western European environment of the Middle Ages, and the Western Industrial Revolution. Malabou’s work is undoubtedly ground-breaking in terms of human consciousness and cerebral plasticity, and has hugely significant implications beyond the human. Yet, questions of evolution and free will, what Jeannerod states is the ‘problem’ for the future, are far greater than positing the question of how ‘an individual brain can respond to the challenges of its social environment.’ The ‘problem’ is surely one that must take into account the world and all it contains.

Malabou explicates her theory of ‘plasticity’ to epigenetics and the process of biological transformation in what she terms as a ‘genetically free field,’²²⁹ but *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* is not directly concerned with epigenetic processes - the interplay of environmental factors involved in radical transformation, but concentrates on ways in which humans sculpt their brains in response to these factors – ‘The sculptor gradually begins to improvise.’²³⁰ Humans seemingly remain in control of their destiny as privileged species. Thus, it appears that the underlying premise in this text perpetuates the Cartesian philosophical tradition, privileging mind over body and humans over every other living organism. Malabou asserts that ‘*What Should We Do with Our Brain?* is a question for everyone,’ yet she focuses on a partial human perspective, not considering wider environments and other entities. Despite her assertions that ‘we live in a reticular society’ and

²²⁹ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.7.

²³⁰ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.20.

that ‘we have understood that to survive today means to be connected to a network,’²³¹ her theory seemingly remains firmly tethered to traditional philosophy that runs contrary to more recent, inclusive and generative post-organismic evolutionary theory. In arguing that we should, as humans, become conscious of our brain’s plasticity: ‘Humans make their own brain, but they do not know they are doing so,’²³² the non-human is seemingly disregarded. In not being considered as ‘conscious’ at the level of humanity, the task for the non-human is doubly impossible since the ‘less than human,’ by this definition, seemingly lacks awareness of a developing brain that will, anyway, never be considered as sentient. In the introduction, Jeannerod identifies ways in which Malabou describes a disconnection between the individual and the ‘network’ as resulting in ‘illnesses of social connection, such as depression, and neurodegenerative illnesses, such as Alzheimer’s dementia.’²³³ Despite the recognition of the obvious importance of individual trauma, a disconnection from the wider ‘network’ cannot be aided by retrenching hierarchical thinking.

In arguing that the plasticity of the brain is an effective ‘physiological metaphor’²³⁴ which enables the alignment of living organisms and their ‘representation of society’ with a model of capitalism, Malabou both refines and limits the image. Capitalism is a human tenet involving the social order, and is clearly not overtly concerned with the natural order, thus Malabou uses a human physiological metaphor to represent society but seemingly only meaning human society. If plasticity is truly meant to describe the

²³¹ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.10.

²³² Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.8.

²³³ Marc Jeannerod in the Foreword to Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p. xiii.

²³⁴ Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* p.10.

‘mouldable,’ mutable and transformative, it cannot assume distinct species boundaries.

In ‘Insects, War, Plastic Life,’ Chapter 8 of *Plastic Materialities*, (2015),²³⁵ Renisa Mawani seeks to develop Malabou’s theory of ‘plasticity’ beyond human brains by addressing a ‘wider imperative to revisit the human/nonhuman distinctions that have repeatedly been unravelled and yet continue to persist with tenacity in critical theory.’²³⁶ Mawani notes how discussions of ‘life itself’ remain anthropocentric but states that her notion of plasticity ‘runs through, between, and across human and non-human divides.’²³⁷ She considers the study of ‘plastic’ insects as a way in which rigid species fixity may be addressed and specifically focuses on insect ability to ‘change, mutate and explode form,’²³⁸ but in considering their ‘materiality,’ she largely focuses on ways in which insects are manipulated as tools to aid human existence. Thus, while proclaiming insects as ‘essential to the futurity of human life and death,’²³⁹ she considers future ways that insects may supply a source of protein for burgeoning human populations, and they might be used as potential weapons in wars against eco and bioterrorism. Truly plastic perspectives must involve more than a partial human view and the focus on human uses for more-than-human life.

In *Walden*, Thoreau uses the term ‘plastic’²⁴⁰ to describe the complexity of a mud-bank that, as Lawrence Buell notes, represents the ‘refusal to separate natural order from social order and the resort to the device of minute

²³⁵ Renisa Mawani, ‘Insects, War, Plastic Life’, Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller, eds. *Plastic Materialities, Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the work of Catherine Malabou*, p.159.

²³⁶ Mawani, ‘Insects, War, Plastic Life’, p.160.

²³⁷ Mawani, ‘Insects, War, Plastic Life’, p.160.

²³⁸ Mawani, ‘Insects, War, Plastic Life’, p.161.

²³⁹ Mawani, ‘Insects, War, Plastic Life’, p.167.

²⁴⁰ Thoreau, *Walden*, p.141.

observation to create a heaped-up tangle of imagery that defies the protocols of realism.²⁴¹ Mawani discusses Roland Barthes' definition of 'plastic' as 'a shaped substance: whatever its final shape, plastic keeps a flocculent appearance, something opaque, creamy and curdled, something powerless ever to achieve the triumphant smoothness of Nature.'²⁴² Mawani argues that although Malabou echoes Barthes' dystopian concerns she considers the environmental future as less catastrophic, and that whilst she draws attention to the multiplicity, circulation and consumption of plastic she also highlights 'the malleability and transformability of plastic – not as an artificial substance – but as "a new mode of being of form" and a new mode of conceptualizing "this mode of being itself."²⁴³ Thus, the term 'plastic' resists static definition as an 'in-between' process that whilst taking on new shapes, also retains traces of what it was.

The plasticity of metamorphoses as set out by philosophical texts enables modes of thinking that allow the reading of literary fiction as something more felt and rich than the abstractions of literary scholarship. Plastic readings of metaphors of skin are a means by which to re-think and make 'felt' the connections between the human and the more-than-human; between physical and cultural environments. Thus, 'being' and 'ways of being' in the world connect the burgeoning rubrics of ecocriticism and epigenetics, effectively linking humans and the more-than-human in terms of biological process and complex responses.

²⁴¹ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism, Criticism, Environmental Crisis and the Literary Imagination*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p.43.

²⁴² Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (1957) quoted by Mawani in 'Insects, War, Plastic Life,' Bhandar and Goldberg-Hiller, p. 158.

²⁴³ Mawani, 'Insects, War, Plastic Life', pp.159-160.

1.7 Hybridity vs Plasticity

There is an obvious difficulty associated with the connotations of a reductive hybridity when positing the theory of an essential inter-relatedness of individuals or species. As Evernden states, it is this essential inter-relatedness which has proven controversial.

...the genuinely radical nature of that proposition is not generally perceived, even, I think, by ecologists. To the western mind, *inter-related* implies a causal connectedness. Things are inter-related if a change in one affects the other. So to say that all things are inter-related simply implies that if we wish to develop our “resources,” we must find some technological means to defuse the interaction. The solution to pollution is dilution. But what is actually involved is a genuine *intermingling* of parts of the ecosystem. There are no discrete entities.²⁴⁴

As Rushdie identifies, the controversy surrounding *The Satanic Verses* was, in part, due to the belief that ‘intermingling’ with other cultures results in a negative homogeneity associated with notions of what Rushdie calls ‘mongrelisation’ and ‘hotchpotch,’ although he uses them in an ironic sense.

I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*. It is a great possibility that mass migration gives the world, [...] It is a love-song to our mongrel selves.²⁴⁵

Initially a biological term that implied the mixture of two separate species, ‘hybridity’ was used by Darwin in 1837 to describe the results of experiments involving the cross-fertilization of plants, but it is often now considered contentious because of its association with racist discourse. In ‘Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired’:

²⁴⁴ Evernden, ‘Beyond Ecology, Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy’, p.93.

²⁴⁵ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands, Essays and Criticisms, 1981-91* (Great Britain: Granta, 1991), p.394.

Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, ' Josie Gill discusses Homi Bhabha's theory²⁴⁶ where 'Hybridity represents that ambivalent "turn" of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification – a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority.'²⁴⁷ Bhabha claims that 'the hybrid strategy' is 'a space of negotiation' which is 'neither assimilation nor collaboration' but in which hybrid agencies 'deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community . . . that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole.' This has long been considered as an important, if controversial model, but I argue that the persistence in a distinction between an 'outside' and 'inside' is problematic and remains subject to hierarchical distinctions.

In Hariharan's *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, Vasu's fable of 'The Mascot of Melting Pot,' illustrates disastrous syntheses where, during a temporary phase of relative harmony, a 'hybrid mix' is created in the strangely shaped, and ironically named, the 'Blessed One'.

Striped like a zebra's, and each stripe, like a distinct flag, reminded them of what they used to be. One stripe was a strip of tiger skin; the next was a strip of elephant hide; and so on. The effect was a patchwork of flags, except that this body of flags breathed, fed and slept.²⁴⁸

When 'the forest' returns to ruthless predatory 'jungle,' and the mascot, not able to differentiate between species, can no longer definitively 'tell them who he was' the other creatures turn on him and tear his skin.²⁴⁹ A 'frozen'

²⁴⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.162.

²⁴⁷ Josie Gill, 'Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired': Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, ' *Textual Practice*, Vol. 29, No.3, 479-498, 27/4/15, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2015.1020096> <http://tandfonline.com/loi/rtp20>, (Accessed 27/7/15), p.483 quoting Homi K.Bhabha, 'Culture's In-Between', in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), p.54, 58.

²⁴⁸ Githa Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1994), p.79.

²⁴⁹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.81.

notion of a ‘hybrid mix’ is suggestive of a deadening homogeneity in a ‘melting pot’ of culture or, as eminent evolutionary geneticist, Professor Richard Fowler, has claimed, ‘a great averaging out.’²⁵⁰ In these terms, hybrid mixes can be ecologically catastrophic. In the chapter titled ‘The Sting in the Scorpion’s Tale,’ from *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, the predatory Scorpion and his followers, are threatened by the harmony, diversity and vitality of varied colours and insects. The irony of the title indicates that rather than harmony, they seek the ‘perpetual darkness’ of a deadly stagnancy, which eventually annihilates Heart Forest and its inhabitants.

They saw the river choked with wings, stings, mutilated meat. The water no longer flowed; it was a stagnant pool of rust-coloured blood; a big spreading stain of rotting bodies...What did Scorpion and his followers want? They claimed the astonishing variety of insects in Heart Forest was unnatural, that the different colours of their new glow hurt their eyes; that the forest had lived in perpetual darkness in its golden age a million years ago.²⁵¹

‘Hybridity’ is challenging in its suggestion of ‘completed’ form and, as Rosi Braidotti claims, hybrids ‘tend to become frozen in spatial, metaphorical modes of representation which itemize them as ‘problems.’’ As such, she argues that we need to seek ways to ‘provide illustrations for new figurations, for alternative representations and locations for the kind of hybrid mix we are in the process of becoming.’²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Prof. Richard Fowler, an Evolutionary Geneticist at University College London, in an interview for BBC Radio Four, ‘In our own Image, Evolving Humanity,’ August 23rd 2011.

²⁵¹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, pp.246-247. Similarly, in *When Dreams Travel*, p.171, the Wazir has a grotesque dream about swimming in a lake of dismembered female body parts.

²⁵² Braidotti, *Metamorphosis*, p.2.

1.8 Towards Plastic Readings and Plastic Perspectives

The ‘mixing’ of creatures in ‘The fable of ‘Heart Forest’²⁵³ may initially appear an over-simplistic representation of a ‘Rainbow Nation.’ The infinitely ‘rich, multitudinous range of colours’ in the ‘living, breathing, growing ocean of heads and wings,’ form a ‘tapestry,’ where ‘new shades were being born under their very eyes,’ but significantly, they are ‘colours without a name, colours alive and growing.’²⁵⁴ Hariharan’s imagery involving the perpetual sharing, shedding and renewal of skin effectively avoids negative connotations of a ‘hybrid mix.’²⁵⁵ These images of skin as process, rather than an over-simplistic ‘patchwork of flags’ describe ‘new’ colours; ‘metaorganisms’²⁵⁶ are powerfully productive in ecological terms since they describe an indeterminacy and an ability to elude simplistic classification.

In the end, if metagenomic perspectives give us a richer understanding of what microbes are and what they do than traditional conceptions of the organism, then this must be taken as strong evidence that this perspective captures a way in which living material is genuinely organised. An implication of this conclusion is that we must also ethic traditional neo-Darwinian conceptions of cooperation and competition.²⁵⁷

The diversity of the metaorganism is suggested in the seductive ‘fragment and illusion of the discordant raga,’²⁵⁸ played by Devi’s lover in *The*

²⁵³ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.244.

²⁵⁴ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.245.

²⁵⁵ I argue that Namjoshi’s work may sometimes unconsciously re-entrench a negative sense of hybridity in the relatively simple mixture of two opposites – as in ‘And There’s You and Me My Sweet Duality.’ Chapter Three, footnote 390.

²⁵⁶ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.12.

²⁵⁷ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.12.

²⁵⁸ Githa Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1992; repr. London, New York, New Delhi: Viking, 1993), p.87.

Thousand Faces of Night, the ‘Unfinished Fable’²⁵⁹ in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, and the circle without beginning or end²⁶⁰ in *When Dreams Travel*. Hariharan’s ‘swiftly changing pictures’ and ‘fantastic shapes’ are dynamic in ecological terms, both individually empowering as well as offering refuge in unifying disparity as part of the ‘spacious belly of a crowd ... amid the soft chanting that enveloped like a membrane ... the relief of losing myself.’²⁶¹ This image relates to Malabou’s theory of plasticity where the formless, fluid belly is encased within a porous membrane. Malabou states that ‘plasticity’ is not merely a philosophical theory but that ‘plastic readings’ form a means by which philosophical texts can be interpreted.²⁶² ‘Plastic readings’ deconstruct metamorphoses identifying the space ‘in-between’ the ‘bare life’ and ‘the symbolic’ challenging theories of evolution and development as genetically determined, definitive linear processes, as well as conveying intensely ‘felt’ and shared responses to the environment.

The Hegelian idea of *plastic reading* confers on the notion of ‘to see (what is) coming’ its real meaning. ‘To see (what is) coming’ denotes at once the visibility and the invisibility of whatever comes. The future is not the absolutely invisible...nor is the future the absolutely visible, an object clearly and absolutely foreseen. It frustrates any anticipation by its precipitation, its power to surprise. ‘To see (what is) coming’ thus means to see without seeing – a wait without a waiting – a future which is neither present to the gaze or hidden from it. Now isn’t the situation of ‘in-between’ *par excellence* the situation of reading?²⁶³

‘Plastic’ readings of extraordinary and multiple perspectives in Magic Real fiction, elucidate manifold familiar, intimate, strange and disorientating new perspectives from the level of individual cells, super-organisms, human life

²⁵⁹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.249.

²⁶⁰ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.276.

²⁶¹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.156.

²⁶² James, *The New French Philosophy*, p.84.

²⁶³ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel, Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.184.

and of what Dupré terms ‘more-than-human’ life.²⁶⁴ Perpetual and overlapping metamorphoses describe Dupré’s ‘promiscuous realism,’²⁶⁵ or a ‘multispecific interactionist perspective’²⁶⁶ akin to what Malabou calls an ‘interspecies dialogue.’ Such a plethora of ‘plastic perspectives’ and ‘plastic readings’ challenge traditional hegemonic representations of biology and ecology by addressing anthropocentric hierarchies, resituating literature as integral to an ontological understanding of complex ecosystems.

When we claim that the human is now behind us, that we are entering the posthuman age, that we are opening the ‘interspecies dialogue,’ or that we cannot believe in cosmopolitanism for want of a universal concept of humanity, are we doing something other than trying to reconstitute, purify, re-elaborate a new essence of man?... If we want deconstruction to break the loop of the ends of man, of this endless repetition of the two ends, we have to find the middle term between two apparently opposite strategies which in fact amount to the same.²⁶⁷

Plasticity, considered as ‘infinitely malleable and formable form,’ is just such a ‘middle term,’ and is at the foundation of what Malabou terms a metamorphosing ‘new materialism.’ Yet, the notion of a ‘posthuman age,’ is retrograde and continues to speak to a linear notion of evolution. Instances of metamorphoses across species in Magic Real fiction describe the more dynamic tension created by [the] pure ‘possibility’ of ‘plasticity.’²⁶⁸ The space of dynamic tension, between being and becoming, establishes a vital connection across species, and indeed the animate with the inanimate,²⁶⁹ identifying commonalities and ‘shared’ responses to the physical and cultural

²⁶⁴ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.11. Dupré notes the lack of research on microbes in evolutionary biology: ‘It is estimated that if extracellular plant material is excluded, microbes make up more than half the living mass on Earth.’

²⁶⁵ John Dupré, *The Disorder of Things: Metaphysical Foundations of the Disunity of Science* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.36.

²⁶⁶ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.165.

²⁶⁷ Catherine Malabou, ‘Will Sovereignty Ever Be Deconstructed?’ in *Plastic Materialities, Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the work of Catherine Malabou*, p.65.

²⁶⁸ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel, Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.193.

²⁶⁹ Inanimate entities are also considered as having skin in Githa Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel* (London: Picador, 1999), p.67.

environment. Magic Real metamorphoses enable such perspectives from the deconstructed space between the social and the biological, the experiential and the phenomenological – the ‘middle-term’ expressed in the intense physicality of sensual responses to the environment. In *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, Malabou identifies this as a generative ‘organic tension.’

If there can be transition from nature to thought, this is because the nature of thought contradicts itself. Thus the transition from a purely biological entity take place in the struggle of the one against the other, producing the truth of their relation. Thought is therefore nothing but nature, but a negated nature, marked by its own difference from itself. The world is not the calm prolonging of the biological. The mental is not the wise appendix of the neuronal. And the brain is not the natural ideal of globalized economic, political, and social organization; it is the locus of the organic tension that is the basis of our history and our critical activity.²⁷⁰

Literary metamorphoses of skins affectively describe intense physicality in torturous, sweating and emotion-filled ways and can bring the intensely ‘felt’ to scientific discourse. Malabou argues that plasticity has merely been ‘glimpsed’ in ‘fantasy literature’ because, in not being considered as ‘connected to reality,’ fantasy literature has largely been ignored. In *Processes of Life*, Dupré states that science is traditionally considered as having more obvious relevance to the ‘physical world,’ but as Dupré argues this gives us ‘little guidance’ on anything other than empirical phenomena.

Ontologically, I claim, sciences need have nothing in common beyond an antipathy to the supernatural. There is nothing of interest to science beyond the physical world; but being part of the physical world gives us little guidance about how we can most successfully investigate a range of phenomena.²⁷¹

As James writes: ‘Being presents itself to thought not in the clarity and exactitude of concepts or conceptual determination, but rather in the

²⁷⁰ Malabou, *What Should we do with our Brain?* p.81.

²⁷¹ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.5.

plasticity of images and phantasms.²⁷² From the subtitle of *Le Change Heidegger: du fantastique en Philosophie* (2004), it is clear that Malabou places the ‘fantastic’ as highly important, and she argues that terms evident throughout Heidegger’s work: *Wandeln* (changes), *Wandlungen* (transformations) and *Verwandlungen* (metamorphoses), exhibit transformability through close relations and ‘syntactic mutability.’²⁷³ Thus, this enables their ‘*empowerment (Ermächtigung)*’ as ‘three linked notions that, although omnipresent in his texts, seem to sleep in them on account of the conceptual penumbra that holds them together...the triad of change.’²⁷⁴

As such, everything is ‘fed’ into the Heidegger ‘machine.’

The Heidegger change is a machine that accomplishes changes (*Wandeln*), (*Wandlungen*), and metamorphoses (*Verwandlungen*). It operates in thought as a converter (*Wandler*), as an instrument of variable structure that can function as a retort transforming cast iron into steel, as a gristmill that turns groats into flour, and as a converter of tension – both analog to digital and digital to analog – and of monetary value.

The Heidegger change carries out conversions of ontological, symbolic, and existential regimes: the mutation of metaphysics, the metamorphosis of man, the metamorphosis of God, the change of language, the transformation of the gaze, and even the molting of Heidegger himself.²⁷⁵

Significantly, Malabou refers to the evolution of Heideggerian thought, the re-evaluation of his theory in her text, as a ‘molting’ of ‘himself,’ thus describing a positive renewal rather than loss. Skin is an inclusive and generative cross-species physiological metaphor. Sensual responses of individual and collective skins to environmental stimuli can potentially be described in more physical, traumatic and subtle ways than effects on the individual human brain. In her later work, *Ontology of the Accident* (2009),

²⁷² James, *The New French Philosophy*, p.93.

²⁷³ Catherine Malabou, *The Heidegger Change, On the Fantastic in Philosophy* (Paris: L. Scheer, 2004; repr. trans. by Peter Skafish, New York: University of New York Press, 2011), p.3.

²⁷⁴ Malabou, *The Heidegger Change*, pp.1-2.

²⁷⁵ Malabou, *The Heidegger Change*, p.1.

Malabou notes Spinoza's achievement in according 'a fundamental role to the body' as well as 'inscrib[ing] biological phenomena.'²⁷⁶

The importance of biological facts in the Spinoza system cannot be overemphasized. Seen through the light of modern biology, the system is conditioned by the presence of life, the presence of a natural tendency to preserve that life; the fact that the preservation of life depends on the equilibrium of life functions and consequently on life regulation; the fact that the status of life regulation is expressed in the form of affects – joy, sorrow – and its modulated appetites, emotions and the precariousness of the life condition can be known and appreciated by the human individual due to the construction of self, consciousness, and knowledge-based reason.²⁷⁷

Metamorphoses and mutable biological processes involving skins are effectively articulated through more tangible physiological metaphors.

Malabou identifies this previously neglected pathological plasticity, and frequently notes both the 'marks and wrinkles' of inscribed experience, describing the skins' ability to remain 'as smooth as a peach whilst concealing a reserve of dynamite.'

In the usual order of things, lives run their course like rivers. The changes and metamorphoses of a life due to vagaries and difficulties, or simply the natural unfolding of circumstance, appear as the marks and wrinkles of a continuous, almost logical, process of fulfilment that leads ultimately to death. In time, one eventually becomes who one is; one becomes only who one is. Bodily and psychic transformations do nothing but reinforce the permanence of identity, caricaturing or fixing it, but never contradicting it. They never disrupt identity...

This gradual existential and biological incline, which can only ever transform the subject into itself, does not, however, obviate the powers of plasticity of this same identity that houses itself beneath an apparently smooth surface like a reserve of dynamite hidden under the peachy skin of being for death. As a result of serious trauma, or sometimes for no reason at all, the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room.²⁷⁸

The torturous splitting of the 'path,' describes the creation of a 'new being' - 'that comes into the world for a second time, out of a deep cut that opens in a

²⁷⁶ Catherine Malabou, *Ontologie de l'accident* (France: Éditions Léo Scheer, 2009, repr: in English as *Ontology of the Accident*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p.20. As I state in the introduction, biological science has largely been absent in theories of 'becoming.'

²⁷⁷ Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1999), p.41 quoted by Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, pp.20-21.

²⁷⁸ Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, p.1.

biography.²⁷⁹ Malabou describes such identities as evidencing ‘destructive plasticity’ where: ‘We must all recognise that we might, one day, become someone else, an absolute other, someone who will never be reconciled with themselves again.’²⁸⁰ This is effectively illustrated in the ‘composite figure of many faces and voices’²⁸¹ in the ‘myriad manifestations and multiple histories’²⁸² that Namjoshi and Hariharan create, where the unity of shared skins, engaged in perpetual evolution and resilient syntheses crucial to survival, augment individual ‘deficiencies.’²⁸³ Indeed, in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994) the eponymous elderly, retired schoolmaster says that to ‘travel alone is to confront the culpability of flesh, the angry red organ it encases, a mushy, overripe fruit. A plum, the thin skin splitting open.’²⁸⁴ The physicality and rawness in this image of the body as an ‘angry red organ’ implies the vulnerability and devastation of solitary existence. Thus, as Dupré claims, symbiosis and collaboration are more authentic means by which survival is pursued and are powerfully evoked in literary metamorphoses.

I contend that Dupré’s promiscuous individualism and promiscuous realism, and Malabou’s plasticity, when applied to literature, successfully provide new figurations that avoid dualities and negative connotations of

²⁷⁹ Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, p.2.

²⁸⁰ Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, pp 2-3.

²⁸¹ Interview with Githa Hariharan, Antonia Navarro-Tejero, *Gender and Caste in the Anglophone-Indian Novels of Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan, Feminist Issues in Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), p.45.

²⁸² Suniti Namjoshi, *Building Babel* (Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press, 1996), p.24.

²⁸³ Githa Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.108. Ironically, Vasu’s doctor tells him that it is his mind which is the source of his ‘illness’ – not his body, Yet Vasu seeks to heal Mani’s mind. ‘Perhaps some of us will learn to hate what these bonds make of us: deficient creatures with bound arms or amputated feet.’

²⁸⁴ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.89. The imagery associated with splitting skins is ambiguous; sometimes devastatingly destructive and sometimes life-saving.

hybridity – as a ‘melting pot’ or averaging out. Rather, they relay the possibility of a seething, whirling multiplicity.

Chapter Two involves a discussion of Rushdie and *The Satanic Verses*, as canonical Magic Real author and text. I discuss the metamorphoses that he employs as significant to evolutionary theory, where the explosion of the aircraft at the beginning is redolent of the ‘big bang.’ Transformations in response to ‘extreme environmental conditions,’ and Rushdie’s frequent allusions to Lamarck are indicative of epigenetics, but in terms of the inevitability of the fall, and the predominance of humanity, his writing may exhibit more Neo-Darwinist tendencies than the radical ‘plasticity’ of Namjoshi and Hariharan’s writing.

CHAPTER TWO
Twentieth Century Iconic Literary Metamorphosis
Salman Rushdie: *The Satanic Verses*

**‘The heavens and all below them, earth and her creatures,
All change, and we, part of creation, also
Must suffer change.’²⁸⁵**

²⁸⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p.379.

Salman Rushdie was born in Mumbai in 1947, to a wealthy and liberal Muslim family. He was initially educated at an English mission school in Mumbai before leaving India to attend the elite Rugby School in England. Here, he was bullied because of his 'foreignness,' and it was only after some considerable persuasion from his parents that he finally agreed to stay and attend Cambridge University. His first novel, *Grimus*, published in 1975, received few plaudits and it was not until 1981 that he achieved his first highly acclaimed novel, *Midnight's Children*, winning the Booker Prize in that year, and the 'Booker of Bookers' prize in 1993. Thus, *Midnight's Children* is still lauded as a highly important work and, as Michael Reder states, is 'usually viewed as a critical watershed in Indian writing in English.'²⁸⁶ Rushdie's next novel, *Shame* was published in 1983, and was also widely predicted as the likely winner of the Booker prize that year. In fact, it failed to do so, although it did win the French Prix de Meilleur Livre Etranger for Postmodernist Fiction. *The Satanic Verses*, published in 1988, prompted the now infamous violent reaction, culminating in a fatwa issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini for Rushdie's execution. Yet, the novel was also highly acclaimed; in *The Times Literary Supplement* of September 1988, Robert Irwin argues that *The Satanic Verses* is 'one of the best novels ever written.'²⁸⁷ From whichever standpoint, condemnation or praise, one cannot deny that *The Satanic Verses* illustrates the power of fiction. As Rushdie notes in the *Third World Book Review* of 1984:

²⁸⁶ Michael Reder, ed. Jaina C. Sanga, *South Asian Novelists in English: An A-to-Z Guide* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2003), p.232.

²⁸⁷ Robert Irwin, 'Original Parables,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 September 1988, p.1067. Quoted in, Jaina C. Sanga, *South Asian Novelists in English: An A-to-Z Guide* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2003), p.232.

The speaking of suppressed truths is one of the great possibilities of the novel, and it is perhaps the main reason why the novel becomes the most dangerous of art forms in all countries where people, governments, are trying to distort the truth. The novel requires no stage, no film crew, no gallery to hang in. It can be made by one person in a room and read, secretly if necessary, by another individual in another room. This makes written words the hardest messages to ban. In my own writing, I have tried to bring things out from under various carpets, and I suppose that I may go on doing so.²⁸⁸

In “‘Under Extreme Environmental Pressure Characteristics were Acquired’: Epigenetics, Race and Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*,”²⁸⁹ Josie Gill discusses the import of literature and the role it ‘might play in post-genomic biology as it moves toward a complex, non-deterministic conception of the gene.’²⁹⁰ This thesis explores ways in which ‘the dynamic relationship between the imaginary and the real’²⁹¹ in Magic Real literature effectively relays the complexities of scientific theory, and argues that subversive transformations in Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* offers a literary critical methodology through which to read debates on plasticity, promiscuous realism and promiscuous individualism.

Rushdie’s fantastical imaginings demonstrate that the imagined must be acknowledged, accounted for, and ultimately accepted as part of ‘the real’ in a science which itself was not long ago considered ‘magical’. Put differently, Rushdie’s novel demonstrates that the imagined – fiction – is capable not only of exploring but of informing a scientific reality which is constantly changing and incorporating what was previously unreal.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Salman Rushdie ‘A Dangerous Art Form,’ interviews with Salman Rushdie, *Third World Book Review* F. 1 (1984), quoted in, Jaina C. Sanga, *South Asian Novelists in English: An A-to-Z Guide* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2003), p.228.

²⁸⁹ Josie Gill, ‘Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired’: Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*,’ *Textual Practice*, Vol. 29, No.3, 479-498, 27/4/15, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2015.1020096> <http://tandfonline.com/loi/rtp20>, (Accessed 27/7/15).

²⁹⁰ Gill, ‘Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired’: Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*,’ p.479.

²⁹¹ Gill, ‘Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired’: Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*,’ p.493.

²⁹² Gill, ‘Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired’: Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*,’ p.494.

Since the end of the Human Genome Project in 2000, the burgeoning field of epigenetics has been defining a new scientific reality. As Rushdie states in

The Satanic Verses:

And evolution theory had come a long way since Darwin. It was now being argued that major changes in species happened not in the stumbling, hit-and-miss manner first envisaged, but in great radical leaps. The history of life was not the bumbling progress – the very English middle-class progress – Victorian thought had wanted it to be, but violent, a thing of dramatic, cumulative transformations: in the old formulation, more revolution than evolution.²⁹³

Epigenetics, the study of alterations in gene function and expression that do not involve changes in DNA sequence has significantly developed evolutionary theory. What Rushdie calls the ‘power of description’²⁹⁴ essentially relays the complexity of post-genomic evolutionary theory.

In highlighting the importance of environment over genetic determinism, epigenetic processes describe these ‘great radical leaps.’ As Maurizio Meloni states ‘epigenetics has opened the doors to a broader, extended view of heredity by which information is transferred from one generation to the next by many interacting inheritance systems’ in more ‘flexible and rapid way[s] to environmental cues.’²⁹⁵ Indeed, epigenetic mutations are now known to be heritable, and thus hugely complicate what Rushdie terms the ‘bumbling progress’ of traditional evolutionary theory based on natural selection.

Gill argues that there are four key ways in which epigenetics challenges traditional genetic science. Firstly, a relatively ordered and ‘linear’ genetic

²⁹³ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.418.

²⁹⁴ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.168.

²⁹⁵ Maurizio Meloni, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 21 May 2014, p.3. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4033168/pdf/fnhum-08-00309.pdf> (Accessed 15/12/15), Referring to the research by E. Jablonka and M. Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005). Jablonka and Lamb’s ‘fourth dimension,’ although initially seeming to be pertinent to my research, is an overly schematic division and conceals what I sought to evidence: the perpetual and fundamental interconnectivity of what Dupré terms the ‘metaorganism.’

determinism based on natural selection is a far too reductive theory to explain the complexities of evolution.

The more familiar linear model of development and inheritance in which genes are fixed for life and passed on unchanged has thus been fundamentally challenged by the newly revealed complexity of gene and environment interaction. The study of epigenetic mechanisms reveals that the human body's genetic structures can change and change back, that the body is in a dynamic relationship with its environment, that culture can become embodied.²⁹⁶

Secondly, the assumption that genes cannot be modified is blatantly inaccurate since epigenetics has revealed that genes, most significantly in terms of this thesis are, as she states, 'plastic.'²⁹⁷ Meloni similarly emphasises the connections between epigenetics and the environment, where epigenetic changes constitute the 'intermediate process' of developmental plasticity.²⁹⁸

In evolutionary terms, epigenetic changes, far from being a biological anomaly, are fundamental for developmental plasticity, the 'intermediate process' by which a 'fixed genome' can respond in a dynamic way to the solicitations of a changing environment, and produce different phenotypes from a single genome.²⁹⁹

Thirdly, that the role of the environment in evolution is far more crucial than once thought. Gill identifies the rapid response to the 'extreme environmental pressure'³⁰⁰ of the aircraft explosion at the beginning of *The Satanic Verses* as epigenetic. Finally, the environment can have enduring and heritable effects on genes. Gill states that: 'transgenerational responses identified by recent epigenetic studies have led some to conclude that

²⁹⁶ Gill, "'Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired": Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*', p.486.

²⁹⁷ Gill, "'Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired": Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*', p.481.

²⁹⁸ Meloni, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, p.1. Meloni argues for the centrality of epigenetics as 'a genuine potential to reformulate the ossified biology/society debate.'

²⁹⁹ Meloni, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, p.2.

³⁰⁰ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, pp.288-289.

Lamarck was, in fact, partially right.’³⁰¹ Gill states that epigenetics ‘offers a salient reassessment of the assumptions which continue to govern dominant scientific and sociological thinking about the meaning of race.’³⁰² She states that *The Satanic Verses* imagines ‘the way experiences of racism become biologically embodied,’ and, in invoking Lamarck’s evolutionary theory, as ‘epigenetics historical predecessor,’ the novel describes the ‘acquisition of characteristics through migration and the subsequent exposure to the racist environment of England.’³⁰³ Gill explores Rushdie’s representation of bodies as porous and as acquiring characteristics from the wider environment, ‘offer[ing] a mode of comprehending the epigenetic effects of racism as the imagined or fictional (racist belief in the inferiority of other races) made real (in apparently ‘racial’ biological characteristics).’³⁰⁴ I contend that the ‘plasticity’ of skin, as both protective and porous interface offers re-evaluations beyond the vital discourses of race and the postcolonial, and involving the more-than-human.

At the beginning of *The Satanic Verses*, Chamcha and Gibreel are thrown from the wreckage of an aircraft in an ironic interpretation of the ‘big bang.’³⁰⁵ They are ‘condemned’ to an endless but ‘also ending’ fall, but they are ironically not aware of when it began, highlighting the difficulty of authentic perceptions of evolutionary processes over massive time-scales.³⁰⁶

³⁰¹ Gill, “‘Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired’: Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*”, p.491.

³⁰² Gill, “‘Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired’: Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*”, p.488.

³⁰³ Gill, “‘Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired’: Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*”, p.481.

³⁰⁴ Gill, “‘Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired’: Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*”, p.488.

³⁰⁵ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.4.

³⁰⁶ The human perspective, in terms of the minute amount of time we have been extant on the earth, has obvious limitations.

The surety of the 'will of choice,'³⁰⁷ and human agency is similarly illusory. Transformations do not follow a Neo-Darwinian ordered linear process; a movement towards a relatively traceable and identifiable 'hybridity' and the finality and 'newness' of an 'ultimate perfected outcome.'³⁰⁸ They occur as processual, random accidents³⁰⁹ in the 'most insecure and transitory of zones, illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic.'

For whatever reason, the two men, Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha, condemned to this endless but also ending angelicdevilish fall, did not become aware of the moment at which the processes of their transmutation began.

Mutation?

Yessir, but not random. Up there in air-space, in that soft imperceptible field which had been made possible by the century and which, thereafter made the century possible, becoming one of its defining locations, the place of movement and of war, the planet-shrinker and power-vacuum, most insecure and transitory of zones, illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic, - because when you throw everything up in the air anything becomes possible – wayupthere at any rate, changes took place in delirious actors that would have gladdened the heart of old Mr Lamarck: under extreme environmental pressure, characteristics were acquired.³¹⁰

In evoking Lamarck, Rushdie re-situates the importance of non-genetic inheritance. What Lamarck termed as 'soft inheritance' partially defines epigenetics. In the first lines of *The Satanic Verses*, 'To be born again...first you have to die'³¹¹ foreshadows the telling of Rekha Merchant's suicidal leap, with her children, from Mount Everest prompted by what Gibreel notes as 'the rebirth bug.' Yet, Rekha's 'single leap,' ends in death rather than the robust re-birth and fluid transformations, or 'cartwheels' that Gibreel and Chamcha perform.

³⁰⁷ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, pp.288-289.

³⁰⁸ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses and Other Worlds*, pp.35-36.

³⁰⁹ Paradoxically, it is possible to consider the notion of randomness, as the underlying driver of natural selection, as ordered in some sense as its very haphazardness seemingly has a 'purpose' or final goal.

³¹⁰ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.5.

³¹¹ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.3.

...The force of their collision sent them tumbling end over end, performing their germinate cartwheels all the way down and along the hole that went to Wonderland; while pushing their way out of the white came a succession of cloud forms, ceaselessly metamorphosing, gods into bulls, women into spiders, men into wolves. Hybrid cloud-creatures pressed in upon them, gigantic flowers with human breasts dangling from fleshy stalks, winged cats, centaurs, and Chamcha in his semi-consciousness was seized by the notion that he, too, had acquired the quality of cloudiness, becoming metamorphic, hybrid, as if he were growing into the person whose head nestled now between his legs and whose legs were wrapped around his long, patrician neck.³¹²

Despite holding each other's legs in an ironic image of the double helix of DNA, whilst tumbling from the sky, Gibreel and Chamcha's fall does not describe the determinism of Neo-Darwinian theory since the cartwheels they perform complicate the process of evolution. Rushdie's evocations of Ovid and Lucretius, Darwin and Lamarck, effectively satirise the inflexibility of Neo-Darwinism embodied in the character of the creationist Eugene Dumsday in *The Satanic Verses*, and speak to more radical theories of evolution. Indeed, Sufyan notes the rigidity of Darwin's followers in comparison to Darwin's more liberal view of Lamarck.

...even great Charles accepted the notion of mutation in extremis, to ensure survival of species; so what if his followers – always more Darwinian than man himself! – repudiated, posthumously, such Lamarckian heresy, insisting on natural selection and nothing but...³¹³

Yet, significantly, although Gibreel and Chamcha's 'germinate cartwheels' complicate the general movement downwards there is still an obvious sense of inevitability: of a 'final impact.' This, and his use of 'story-telling animals' may evidence, as Gill states, elements of Neo-Darwinism in Rushdie's writing.

³¹² Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, pp.6-7.

³¹³ Rushdie, Sufyan in *The Satanic Verses*, p.251.

Stressing the innateness and universality of storytelling through a Darwinian framework in which we are all ‘story-telling animals’, Rushdie appears to align himself with the evolutionary explanations of literature to be found in sociobiology and the Literary Darwinist movement. In this context, it might seem unlikely that Rushdie’s writing could engage with the fluidity and non-deterministic findings of epigenetics – the opposite of the deterministic world-view which characterises neo-Darwinian approaches to biology and literature.³¹⁴

Although Rushdie’s description of Gibreel and Chamcha’s fall remains essentially linear in the fact that they ultimately ‘land,’ I contest the assumption that ‘story-telling animals’ necessarily inhabit a ‘Darwinian framework’ since, as I discuss elsewhere, they may also effectively disrupt such agendas. Namjoshi and Hariharan’s ‘storytelling animals’ are not contained within a Darwinian hierarchical framework, but evidence the ‘plastic’ vitality of promiscuous individualism and promiscuous realism. As the Angel Gabriel and the Devil, involved in transformations beyond recognisably human form and time scales, Gibreel and Chamcha signify the intimacy and variance of generative ecosystems: ‘A being going through life can become so other to himself as to be *another*, discrete, severed from history.’³¹⁵ However, in Gibreel’s desire to remain ‘joined to and arising from his past’ signifies inheritance and natural selection, whilst Saladin’s relative spontaneity reflects the more rapid process of epigenesis. Both are intimately related but contribute to ‘fundamentally different types of self.’

³¹⁴ Gill, ““Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired”: Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*”, p.490.

³¹⁵ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, pp.288-289

Well, then, - Are we coming closer to it? Should we even say that these two are fundamentally different *types* of self? Might we not agree that Gibreel, for all his stage-name and performances; and in spite of born-again slogans, new beginnings, metamorphoses; - has wished to remain, to a large degree, *continuous* – that is, joined to and arising from his past; - that he chose neither near-fatal illness nor transmuting fall; that, in point of fact, he fears the altered states in which his dreams leak into, and overwhelm his waking self, making him that angelic Gibreel he has no desire to be; - so that he is still a self which, for our present purposes, we may describe as ‘true’...whereas Saladin Chamcha is a creature of *selected* discontinuities, *willing* re-invention, his *preferred* revolt against history being what makes him, in our chosen idiom, ‘false.’³¹⁶

Connection and continuity is reflected through the length of these sentences, whilst the ‘spur-of-the-moment’ transformations are described through the use of hyphens. Thus, the writing style evokes continuity and change, as well as the intimacy and variance required to avoid sterile homogeneity. However, identifying the ‘falseness’ of Saladin’s ‘revolt’ as opposed to the ‘trueness’ of Gibreel’s continuity might reflect a prejudice towards traditional evolutionary theory.

In *The Satanic Verses*, Sufyan quotes from Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* that claims that change brings death to the previous self. In a more consolatory tone he states that he believes in Ovid’s ‘diametrically opposed view where like ‘yielding wax’³¹⁷ that, when heated to seal documents ‘is stamped with new designs And changes shape and seems not still the same, Yet is indeed the same, even to our souls [...] your soul my good poor dear sir, is the same. Only in its migration it has adopted the presently varying form.’

³¹⁶ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.427.

³¹⁷ I discuss Ovid’s use of the term wax as significant when applying the theory of plasticity to metamorphoses in the conclusion.

This is pretty cold comfort,' Chamcha managed a trace of his old dryness. 'Either I accept Lucretius and conclude that some demonic and irreversible mutation is taking place in my inmost depths, or I go with Ovid and concede that everything now emerging is no more than a manifestation of what was already there.'³¹⁸

Sufyan stops short of describing transformation using the metaphor of a river bursting its banks, of 'break[ing] out of its limitations' or 'disregard[ing] its own rules' as he claims it is 'too free.'³¹⁹ Plasticity describes such a radical 'breaking out,' releasing transformation from the limitations of traditional evolutionary theory.

Gibreel and Chamcha's sudden nightmarish 'explosion' of change effectively describes Malabou's model of the *plastique* (as in plastic explosive) and is emblematic of the ambiguous 'certainty of uncertainty,' of 'endless but also unending' transformation, as epigenetic responses to 'extreme environmental pressure.'³²⁰ Rushdie writes that this would have 'gladdened the heart of old Mr Lamarck' whose theories of 'soft' adaptations were, for so long, derided in evolutionary theory.

Not choice, but – at best – process, and, at worst, shocking, total change. Newness: he had sought a different kind, but this was what he got.'³²¹

Transformation as a 'single leap,' as described by Ovid, is akin to the rapidity of epigenetic mutations rather than the relatively lengthy process of natural selection. Thus, 'the mutation in extremis,'³²² the sudden impact of the aircraft explosion in *The Satanic Verses* describes what Malabou terms the *plastique*.

³¹⁸ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.277.

³¹⁹ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.277.

³²⁰ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.5.

³²¹ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, pp.288-289.

³²² What Salman Rushdie terms as 'mutation in extremis.' *The Satanic Verses*, p.251.

We should not forget that *plastique*, from which we get the words *plastiquage* and *plastiquer*, is an explosive substance made of nitroglycerine and nitrocellulose, capable of causing violent explosions. We thus note that plasticity is situated between two extremes: on the one side the sensible image of taking form (sculpture or plastic objects), and on the other side that of the annihilation of all form (explosion).³²³

Such ‘explosive’ metamorphoses bring about a sudden change of identity and, in fiction and fable, normally occur as a means by which to flee danger, often as in donning another ‘skin.’³²⁴ Yet, Dupré states that evolution does not merely involve a succession of ‘single leap[s];’ but comprises continuous ‘in between’ moments of metamorphosis – what Meloni describes as the intermediate process of developmental plasticity.³²⁵

Robert Irwin argues that Rushdie ‘created a fictional universe whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.’³²⁶ As such, it is the essential mutability and the disruption of perceived boundaries of location, memory, the ‘real’ and the ‘unreal,’ the destabilisation of species classification and genre that defines this novel as relaying the ‘disorder’ of generative ecosystems. Yet, Sufyan’s need to console Chamcha about his metamorphosis into a goat involves the ‘[q]uestion of mutability of the essence of the self’ involving animal/human hierarchies, which has ‘long been subject of profound debate.’³²⁷ Dupré’s theory of promiscuous realism addresses this rupture. The conflation of both Gibreel and Chamcha’s names, and their ‘sloughed off selves,’³²⁸ in their independent yet also dual and morphing identities, evidence their promiscuous individualism. Rushdie

³²³ Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain*, p.5.

³²⁴ I discuss the ways in which a mere donning of another skin is problematic; possibly suggesting a more reductive dualism or hybridity in Chapter One.

³²⁵ Meloni, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, p.78.

³²⁶ Robert Irwin, ‘Original Parables,’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 September 1988, p.1067. Quoted in, Jaina C. Sanga, *South Asian Novelists in English: An A-to-Z Guide*, p.232.

³²⁷ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.276.

³²⁸ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.4.

states that there is no discernible boundary between them but ‘a fluidity, an indistinctness, at the edges of them.’³²⁹ As such, they represent the two extremes of conventional morality in their ‘angelicdevilish fall.’

Chamcha’s occupation as an actor specifically defines his ability to adapt in ‘secular reincarnations.’³³⁰ ‘For such an actor (for any actor, maybe, even for Chamcha but most of all for him) to have a bee in his bonnet about *avatars*, like much-metamorphosed Vishnu, was not so very surprising.’ He is fascinated with Ovidian characters and consciously adopts other ‘skins’ or identities: ‘To get his mind off the subject of love and desire, he studied, becoming an omnivorous autodidact, devouring the metamorphic myths of Greece and Rome, the avatars of Jupiter, the boy who became a flower, the spider-woman, Circe.’

Multiple Magic Real transformations in *The Satanic Verses* effectively convey multiple abstract and physical responses to cultural, social and political environments. *The Times* reviewed it as: ‘A novel of metamorphoses, hauntings, memories, hallucinations, revelations, advertising jingles, and jokes. Rushdie has the power of description, and we succumb.’³³¹ Yet, although some scholars have previously identified the importance of literature to science, Gill identifies that ‘few, undoubtedly wary of the historically fraught relations between the disciplines, have suggested that literature might offer models and approaches which science might look toward.’³³² Gill notes that neuroscientist Henry Perowne, in Ian

³²⁹ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.8.

³³⁰ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.17.

³³¹ *The Times* newspaper quoted on <http://www.salmanrushdie.com/the-satanic-verses/>, (Accessed 15/12/16).

³³² Gill, “‘Under Extreme Environmental Pressure, Characteristics were Acquired’: Epigenetics, Race and Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*”, p.480. I similarly note this conflict in the sections on the Magic Real and Ecocriticism.

McEwan's novel *Saturday* (2005), claims that 'the actual, not the magical, should be the challenge and that Magic Real fiction is a merely childish and 'irksome confection.'³³³

What were these authors of reputation doing—grown men and women of the twentieth century—granting supernatural powers to their characters? He never made it all the way through a single one of those irksome confections. And written for adults, not children. In more than one, heroes and heroines were born with, or sprouted wings . . . Others were granted a magical sense of smell, or tumbled unharmed out of high-flying aircraft.³³⁴

Gill argues that the magical and the actual are not as easily separated as Perowne imagines and seeks a more 'holistic approach' involving the humanities and social sciences.

The bizarre stranger that Chamcha is suddenly aware of after the explosion is an avatar of himself, fragilely cocooned and yet securely incarcerated in his strange and yet familiar body. The excoriating pain associated with his transformation is graphically portrayed through the description of the peeling away of lumps of skin that have become fastened to the shards of glass that encase him. This is not what David Abram romantically describes in *The Spell of the Sensuous* as an ordered and painless negotiation in response to the environment merely 'spiced with danger,' and articulated in 'gesture and whistle and sigh,'³³⁵ but excruciatingly slow torture accompanied by animalistic shrieks.

³³³ Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (London: Vintage, 2006), p.67.

³³⁴ McEwan, *Saturday*, p.67.

³³⁵ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p.ix. See my Chapter Three.

He had fallen into a torpid sleep, high above the desert sands of the Persian Gulf, and been visited in a dream by a bizarre stranger, a man with a glass skin, who rapped his knuckles mournfully against the thin, brittle membrane covering his entire body and begged Saladin to help him, to release him from the prison of his skin. Chamcha picked up a stone and began to batter at the glass. At once a latticework of blood oozed up through the cracked surface of the stranger's body, and when Chamcha tried to pick off the broken shards the other began to scream, because chunks of his flesh were coming away with the glass.³³⁶

Glass, as fragile but imprisoning second skin, effectively relays a sense of intense vulnerability and suffering. 'Glass Bertha,' an inmate of the hospital that Gibreel and Saladin are incarcerated in, has her skin turned to glass by the guards: 'And the bastards smashed it up for her. Now she can't even walk to the toilet.' In begging to be released, her screams bring Chamcha's 'worst dream to life,'³³⁷ referring back to his vision during the fall. When Gibreel and Saladin finally land in the snowy landscape of England, and Gibreel dances around as the result of the 'delirious, dislocating effects of his recent fall,' Saladin is described as similarly 'cased in a fine skin of ice, smooth as glass, like a bad dream come true.' He is possessed 'by the nightmare-fear of cracking, of seeing his blood bubbling up from the ice-breaks, of his flesh coming away with the shards.'³³⁸ Such images bring the physicality of wounding to life in intensely tangible ways.

In an ironic inversion of the charismatic metamorphoses into Ovidian gods and goddesses with which he is fascinated, the posters of Gibreel's face and the cardboard effigies of his body represent his mortality and the vulnerability of his skin. Whilst initially offering powerfully tangible representations of his identity, these images are temporary and slowly age and decay. Similarly, on the cinema screen, although his image is 'writ

³³⁶ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, pp. 33-34.

³³⁷ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.169.

³³⁸ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.131.

large,' the skin begins to 'putrefy, blister and bleach' representing erosion, aging and death.

After he departed, the ubiquitous images of his face began to rot. On the gigantic, luridly coloured hoardings from which he had watched over the populace, his lazy eyelids started flaking and crumbling, drooping further and further until his irises looked like two moons sliced by clouds, or by the soft knives of his long lashes. Finally the eyelids fell off, giving a wild, bulging look to his painted eyes. Outside the picture palaces of Bombay, mammoth cardboard effigies of Gibreel were seen to decay and list. Dangling limply on their sustaining scaffolds, they lost arms, withered, snapped at the neck... Even on the silver screen itself, high above his worshippers in the dark, that supposedly immortal physiognomy began to putrefy, blister and bleach...³³⁹

In his visions of London, Gibreel believes that he is able to see the condition of people's souls: 'when you looked through an angel's eyes you saw essences instead of surfaces, you saw the decay of the soul blistering and bubbling on the skins of people in the street, you saw the generosity of certain spirits resting on their shoulders in the form of birds.'³⁴⁰

As he roamed the metamorphosed city he saw bat-winged imps on the corners of buildings made of deceits and glimpsed goblins oozing wormily through the broken tilework of public urinals for men.³⁴¹

These sinister, gothic images reflect and connect both the corruption of the city environment with its inhabitants. Gibreel's view of London as a metamorphosing monster is grotesque and similarly couched in terms of bleeding and degraded flesh.³⁴²

The city in it's corruption refused to submit to the will of the cartographers, changing shape at will and without warning [...] Some days he would turn a corner at the end of a grand colonnade built of human flesh and covered in skin that bled when scratched [...] Wren's dome, the high metallic spark-plug of the Telecom Tower, crumbling in the wind like sand-castes.³⁴³

³³⁹ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, pp.15-16.

³⁴⁰ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.320.

³⁴¹ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, pp. 320-321.

³⁴² Hariharan similarly describes the city as having a 'skin,' *When Dreams Travel*, p.67.

³⁴³ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.327.

The endurance of St. Paul's Cathedral, relative to the time-scale of individual human lives, and the shining metallic intensity of the Telecom Tower compared to the fragility of skin, does not assure their preservation against the rigours of the environment.

Lacking any comfortable sense of 'continuity' in this 'most insecure and transitory of zones, illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic,'³⁴⁴ Rushdie states that transformation is at the centre of the novel, forming 'a migrant's-eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity.'³⁴⁵ In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie is even more specific, stating that *The Satanic Verses* is about 'a group of people most of whom are British Muslims, or not particularly religious persons of Muslim background.'³⁴⁶ Thus, he seems to privilege the human, and it is significant that his animal metamorphoses are largely couched in negative terms as 'loud, stenchy, hideous, grotesque, inhuman, powerful.'³⁴⁷ Thus, although one might determine that 'inhuman' selves, those entities that are not human are necessary constituent parts in evolution, 'inhuman' in *The Satanic Verses*, is couched as monstrous rather than merely 'not human.' Rushdie's technique is striking in ways that Annanya Dasgupta describes as 'pyro-technic'³⁴⁸ involving explosions, manticores and horned devils. Although Saladin retains some recognisable human features, he undergoes a 'macabre

³⁴⁴ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.5.

³⁴⁵ Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands, Essays and Criticisms, 1981-91* (Great Britain: Granta, 1991), p.394.

³⁴⁶ Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, p.394.

³⁴⁷ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, pp.288-289.

³⁴⁸ Annanya Dasgupta, 'Do I remove my Skin, Interrogating Identity in Suniti Namjoshi's Fables', *Queering India, Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p.102.

demoniasis,³⁴⁹ developing cloven hooves and horns stereotypically aligned with the devil.

A figure out of a nightmare or a late night TV movie, a figure covered in mud and ice and blood, the hairiest creature you ever saw, with the shanks and hoofs of a giant goat, a man's torso covered in goat's hair, human arms, and a horned but otherwise human head covered in muck and grime and the beginnings of a beard.³⁵⁰

Similarly, the manticore has an 'entirely human body' but the head of a 'ferocious tiger, with three rows of teeth.'³⁵¹ Thus, these are not complete animal transformations but nevertheless exhibit stereotypical characteristics of a monstrous animality: hairiness, flatulence, bad breath, coughing slime and the inability to speak.³⁵² Saladin experiences a nightmarish transformation into a 'supernatural imp,'³⁵³ who is ultimately only able to communicate in shrieks: 'Eek...Argh, unnhh, owoo.'³⁵⁴ The patients in the hospital are all similarly undergoing transformations into 'lesser' beings capable only of 'animal noises: the snorting of bulls, the chattering of monkeys, even the pretty-Polly mimic-squawks of parrots or talking budgerigars.'³⁵⁵

'There's a woman over that way,' it said, 'who is now mostly water-buffalo. There are businessmen from Nigeria who have grown sturdy tails. There is a group of holidaymakers from Senegal who were doing no more than changing planes when they were turned into slippery snakes. I myself am in the rag trade; for some years now I have been a highly paid male model, based in Bombay, wearing a wide range of suitings and shirtings also. But who will employ me now?' he burst into sudden and unexpected tears.³⁵⁶

In crafting more affirmative animal metamorphoses, subverting hierarchical distinctions of species and thus illustrating the essential commonality of

³⁴⁹ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.159.

³⁵⁰ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.188.

³⁵¹ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.167.

³⁵² Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.168.

³⁵³ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.158.

³⁵⁴ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.162.

³⁵⁵ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.166.

³⁵⁶ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.168.

epigenetic responses in global ecosystems, Hariharan and Namjoshi authorize the potential for a dynamic vision of ‘the whole wheeling universe itself.’³⁵⁷

³⁵⁷ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p.1.

CHAPTER THREE

‘Creatures as Strange and Complex as Ourselves.’³⁵⁸

**“May I become a serpent, with a body
Stretched full-length forward!” Even as he spoke
He stretched out full-length forward, felt his skin
Harden, and scales increase, and mottled markings
Sprinkle his blackening body.’³⁵⁹**

³⁵⁸ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.17.

³⁵⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p.100.

These essays were not intended as a survey of contemporary biology. I do hope, though, that they will provide at least a sketch of a plausible general view of living processes that is emerging from our best science, point out the flaws in some still popular misconceptions about life, and assist the less expert reader in reaching more judicious assessments of some of the marginally scientific claims with which we are all constantly confronted. These are ambitious goals enough; indeed, for anyone like myself who takes it as obvious that we ourselves fall within the subject a matter of biology, but also that this obvious truth requires that we develop a conception of biology expansive enough to include creatures as strange and as complex as ourselves, there can be few goals more ambitious or inspiring.³⁶⁰

This extract from *Processes of Life* summarises Dupré's aspiration for an ambitious and more challenging evaluation of science and 'popular misconceptions about life.' In this chapter, I largely focus on the interlocking lives and multiple perspectives of Namjoshi's characters as illustrating Dupré's expansive conception of biology involving what he terms the 'metaorganism,' subverting the concept of discrete classifiable entities. 'Strange,' shared and multiple perspectives explicate Dupré's theories which designate life as continual process, erasing Neo-Darwinian philosophies of hierarchical linear evolution: 'biological entities are dynamic and diverse collaborations and so boundaries are flexible and unfixed.'³⁶¹

A commitment to life as exclusively cellular and monogenomically organismal would mean that the origins of life must involve a single leap from fully non-living to fully living ... our thesis of multi-modal, interconnected and overlapping life processes suggests a more continuous vision of evolutionary history.³⁶²

The lack of discrete boundaries between individuals, what Dupré terms as 'promiscuous individualism,' and individuals with the environment or 'promiscuous realism,'³⁶³ involving processes of adaption, collaboration and

³⁶⁰ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.17.

³⁶¹ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.225.

³⁶² Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.228.

³⁶³ Dupré, *Peocesses of Life*, p.8.

symbiosis, are elucidated by Namjoshi's 'radical re-groupings'³⁶⁴ and her literary metamorphoses. These interactions are more intricate and multifaceted than those suggested by natural selection; the primacy of conflict and competition invoked in dominant Neo-Darwinian theory. 'Promiscuous' models of life are more complex, accurate and meaningful than previously simple and much-vaunted evolutionary theory. Thus, despite its fantastical nature, or paradoxically precisely because of it, the multiple perspectives and metamorphoses of Magic Real fiction effectively describe a radical and more ecologically authentic 'real' world-view.

Such radical re-thinking is intrinsic to Namjoshi's work and, as she declares, related to Hinduism where 'identity is fluid'³⁶⁵ and arbitrary, since 'who you are is just who you happen to be this time around.'³⁶⁶ This fluidity is fundamental to Dupré's promiscuous individualism and the pluralistic perspective of promiscuous realism involving a 'continuum of collaborativity',³⁶⁷ and the 'omnipresence of symbiosis.'³⁶⁸ As such, it can be considered as more in tune with Hindu philosophy rather than the ordered hierarchy of unique and discrete selves as invoked in western philosophy.

³⁶⁴ Anannya Dasgupta, 'Do I remove my Skin, Interrogating Identity in Suniti Namjoshi's Fables', *Queering India, Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society*, p.100.

³⁶⁵ Suniti Namjoshi, *Building Babel* (Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press, 1996), p.xv.

³⁶⁶ Suniti Namjoshi in Olga Kenyon, *The Writer's Imagination* (Bradford: University of Bradford Print Unit, 1992), p.115.

³⁶⁷ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.228.

³⁶⁸ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.8.

3.1 Promiscuous Individualism

Namjoshi claims she is composed of a ‘myriad manifestations and multiple histories,’³⁶⁹ of everyone she has ever known and who simultaneously inhabit her body. Indeed, in her autobiography *Goja*,³⁷⁰ she describes her body as ‘infested’ with the ‘monsters’ of her family and everyone she has ever met. Despite the use of these somewhat pejorative words, she does not see this as problematic, declaring: ‘All these people are jostling one another, entering into me, living with me. I am an ark.’ This multiplicity may initially be suggestive of the confusion of voices in the Christian biblical tale of the Tower of Babel, yet in her revision of the tale, *Building Babel* (1996), Namjoshi stresses the intensely valuable nature of diversity, rather than the chaotic destruction of the original story. In the introduction to *Building Babel*, Namjoshi argues that such complex connections are positively affirming rather than disconcerting.

It may be worthwhile though, for all of us to examine how our backgrounds have affected our thinking – or, as they’d say in Babel, to understand how our memes have mutated and merged. The results can be startling.³⁷¹

Namjoshi’s use of the word ‘memes’ here invokes Richard Dawkins’ theory involving the inheritance of memories as occurring in much the same way as genes are inherited in Neo-Darwinian terms. However, Dupré’s theory of promiscuous individualism is less linear, involving a criss-crossing of experience, a doubling back; a retention of the past rather than a relatively simple forward movement as suggested by Dawkins and Neo-Darwinist theory. In *Building Babel*, the characters of Medusa, Cinders, Red Riding

³⁶⁹ Namjoshi, *Building Babel*, p.24.

³⁷⁰ Suniti Namjoshi, *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2000), pp.30-31. Significantly, both Hariharan and Rushdie also consider individual identity as a composite of other lives and ‘ghosts’ of the past. In this respect their work evidence what John Dupré terms promiscuous realism and promiscuous individualism.

³⁷¹ Namjoshi, *Building Babel*, p.xvi.

Hood, Alice in Wonderland and the Cheshire Cat frequently mutate and merge into variations of themselves. Significantly, as indicated by the subtle modifications of their names, they retain crucial traces of their past, rather than undergoing complete transformations.³⁷² Medusa morphs between Mad Med, Merry and M; Red Riding Hood is also Little Red; Solitude is Sister Sol, Solly, The Solipsistic one and Solitude; the humble Black Piglet is described as both the Black Prince and the Black Princess. Ironically, in *Building Babel*, after a short period of contentment in what is described as a ‘Garden of Eden’ or Alice’s ‘Wonderland,’ power structures inevitably resurface and all creatures are in therapy. It is the ‘impeccably orderly’³⁷³ vision that Alice seeks to assert that is ultimately destructive since, in ecological terms, the tyranny of ‘proper control’³⁷⁴ limits the potential of metamorphoses and ends in disastrous sterility.

Med and Alice stepped out of the mud. They make a garden, build a wall, and dig a well. They have babies, they regulate gender. They have sex. They change sex. They squabble over words. They fight furiously. They try very hard. They build Babel ... Meanwhile, in the short term, in the interlude so to speak, the garden is a place of idyllic splendour. Everyone exists, everyone persists ... It is a Pleasure Garden ... Everyone has the same power ... Everyone’s an individual ... Every creature is put into therapy the moments it’s born – just in case. As long as they’re healthy in mind and body, they can go on forever or for as long as they like, change with the seasons, spiral and swerve, metamorphose – it’s one long festival.³⁷⁵

The staccato rhythm of these stilted short sentences, through the use of ellipsis and hyphens, mimics both tension and control, echoing the linearity and discrete phases of development in Neo-Darwinism. The taut style condenses the timescale of Babel’s development, isolating each individual

³⁷² In preserving a trace of the past they can be described as ‘plastic’ in Malabou’s terms. I discuss this in Chapter One.

³⁷³ Namjoshi, *Building Babel*, p.138.

³⁷⁴ Namjoshi, *Building Babel*, p.155.

³⁷⁵ Namjoshi, *Building Babel*, pp.157-159.

stage, evidencing a lack of contiguity rather than the spiralling and swerving of more fecund visions of evolution. However, unlike the original myth of Babel, the novel has no clear structure or definitive ending since there is an invitation from Spinifex Press,³⁷⁶ to the reader to contribute to the ‘building’ of Babel via the Internet. This potential for an infinite number of perspectives results in a positive commotion rather than the disastrous hubbub of the original tale. Indeed, Namjoshi claims that such tumult is ecologically authentic and that precisely because of its potency ‘Cyberspace is rapidly turning into something very like the real world.’³⁷⁷ This enigmatic claim, identifying the actuality of multiple exchanges; linking computer science with reality; disrupting borders of the virtual and the real, precisely describes Namjoshi’s consciously disorientating method. In negotiating physical and imaginary boundaries the Internet, if considered as an extension of the brain and as a site of interchange, facilitates the cultural process. It can be considered as the ultimate ‘crossroads’ where the storing, recording, relaying of culture occurs. As Namjoshi claims:

This process goes on any way, with or without computers or indeed, any particular form of technology. However, the notion of bits of information stored in computers immediately suggests the other equally obvious notion of bits of information stored in human brain cells. That is culture. And the accumulation, interchange and restructuring of this information is the cultural process. That we make use of the tools on offer and engage in the process consciously is, in my opinion critical.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Namjoshi, *Building Babel*, p.xxv. (<http://www.spinifexpress.com.au/babelbuildingsite.htm>) The intention to eventually record these constructions in an anthology may be limiting in that it would shut down the process.

³⁷⁷ Namjoshi, *Building Babel*, p.xxv. She has designed several other websites including her homepage (<http://www.ex.ac.uk/~smnamjos/>) and a site that offers interactive workshops (<http://www.ex.ac.uk/~smnamjos/CYBERSHAPERS/CYBERSHAPERS.HTML>).

³⁷⁸ Suniti Namjoshi, <http://www.sawnet.org/books/authors.php?Namjoshi+Suniti> (Accessed 23/03/2010).

Namjoshi identifies the importance of the ‘cultural process’ whereby the ‘accumulation and restructuring’ of vast amounts of information erases essentialism at the basis of authorised hegemonic binary systems.³⁷⁹ The insistence on process, central to this thesis, is described by a constantly relocating ‘crossroads’ rather than a static positioning, and evades concepts of a simple ‘mix’ of information.

The complexity of promiscuous individualism is similarly evident in *St. Suniti and the Dragon* (1993),³⁸⁰ where Namjoshi uses a diary form, apparently written during the Gulf War, to explore how it might be possible to live ‘blamelessly’³⁸¹ in the modern world. The character of St. Suniti, perpetually traverses spurious boundaries of gender and nation since the canonical, heroic male English, Christian saint and mythological figure, is also Indian, Hindu and lesbian. Indeed, in ‘Sir Suniti and the Fearful Dragon,’ the knight is an ‘Elderly gentlewoman’ seeking to make a ‘bargain with the devil.’ Through blurring these distinctions, St. Suniti emerges not merely as a feminist icon but as ‘Humanity’s Rep,’³⁸² a universal, non-gendered ‘Saint,’ battling the restrictions of normative gendered, species and national categories embodied in the form of the ‘dragon.’

In her collection of fables and poems *Sycorax* (2006),³⁸³ Namjoshi similarly blurs the identities of Prospero and Sycorax, from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. As Ariel states at the beginning of Namjoshi’s poem: ‘It’s clear that the old woman is as bad as the old man. There is no difference in

³⁷⁹ Judith Butler, ‘Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of “Postmodernism,”’ *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p.6. Judith Butler terms this the narrow and ‘violent reduction’ involved in the construction and promulgation of universal classifications.

³⁸⁰ Namjoshi, *St. Suniti and the Dragon* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1994).

³⁸¹ Namjoshi, *St. Suniti and the Dragon*, p.23.

³⁸² Namjoshi, *St. Suniti and the Dragon*, p.47.

³⁸³ Namjoshi, *Sycorax, New Fables and Poems* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2006).

their indifference.’³⁸⁴ Namjoshi foregrounds the character of Sycorax, previously absent from the play, and describes her fundamental resemblance to Prospero, problematizing their relationship beyond traditional theories of dominant male and silenced female. Indeed, there is some evidence for this more complex relationship in Shakespeare’s play, since although Sycorax is physically absent, Prospero speaks one hundred and twenty lines about her, indicating the centrality of Sycorax to the narrative. Prospero’s speech abjuring his art in Act V of *The Tempest*, adapted by Shakespeare from Medea’s speech in Book 7 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, further indicates an intrinsic connection between witch and wizard. Originally from Algiers, Sycorax, like Prospero, is not native to the island, but was first to colonise it and enslave Ariel. Prospero and Sycorax rule the island for a period of twelve years each, both treat Ariel cruelly, and despite their magical powers neither are able to escape time and change. When Sycorax dies at the end of the sequence of poems, Namjoshi writes that: ‘The stage was left empty, til later somebody else occupied it,’³⁸⁵ possibly suggesting Prospero’s imminent return; explaining why they do not appear on stage together. The poem, which starts defiantly, echoes the gradual descent into old age and death with a sense of an increasing powerlessness. Sycorax ‘sits like an idol on her lonely island, wishing that someone would come.’³⁸⁶ She is ‘engaged in taking leave of her senses’ because time robs her of her wits, eyesight and hearing.³⁸⁷ Thus, it is not Prospero who is her ‘real enemy,’³⁸⁸ but time and

³⁸⁴ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.6, Ariel’s first-person narration.

³⁸⁵ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.16, ‘The Death of Sycorax.’

³⁸⁶ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.8, ‘The Old Woman’s Secrets.’

³⁸⁷ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.5.

³⁸⁸ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.12, ‘Being Robbed.’

age that 'devour' her daily,³⁸⁹ and will one day 'take everything.' Ultimately, Sycorax's death is un-dramatic and she merely 'dissolves in the dew',³⁹⁰ leaving only a 'mild turbulence' on the water. Certainly, her death is not momentous enough to cause the island to 'sink into the ocean',³⁹¹ and her passing does nothing to prevent the 'Imperial Powers' from 'still warring.' Death is inevitable and ultimately her individual existence, although assumed as dominant and powerful in the context of the island, is ultimately no more significant than the lives of the animals she says she must eat to survive.

In similar respects to Prospero and Sycorax, a collection of poems co-authored by Namjoshi and Handscombe in 2001, 'And There's You and Me My Sweet Duality',³⁹² defines their relationship as complementary; a cross-cultural exchange between East and West and an affirming 'locus of experience.' The poem is less successful than 'Sycorax' since it is overly simplistic. The opening lines taken from Section Four of a poem by Handscombe entitled *Sybil: The Glide of Her Tongue*,³⁹³ lists a series of dualities which seemingly entrench hierarchical notions of the 'Other,' and the repetition of 'us and them' serves as a refrain that binds the poem together, placing the poets as seemingly privileged and set apart, rather than forming, as they claim, a locus of experience.

There, says Sybil, watch them go, untoward, inelegant: hims and hers, blacks and whites, straights and dykes, doing the two-step, never bored. There's rich and poor, us and them, Irish and not Jewish and not, Third World and not, American and not...³⁹⁴

³⁸⁹ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.13.

³⁹⁰ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p15, 'The Death of Sycorax.'

³⁹¹ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.16.

³⁹² Suniti Namjoshi and Gillian Handscombe, 'And There's You and Me, My Sweet Duality,' *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 24, No.3/4, 2001, pp.401-407.

³⁹³ Gillian Handscombe, *Sybil the Glide of Her Tongue*, (Melbourne: Spinifex, 1992).

³⁹⁴ Namjoshi and Handscombe, 'And There's You and Me My Sweet Duality,' p.401.

In claiming that: '[f]or us the *locus* of experience extends across all hemispheres: west and east, north and south,' they seem somewhat trite and self-congratulatory, and could be interpreted as confirming the dual oppositions of East and West, rather than undermining them. 'Locus,' in terms of apparently defining a specific location is too absolute; the sense of hybridity too reductive and suggestive of a more specific positioning; an absolute, implying closure rather than continuing process. The term is infinitely more promising if one considers it as progressively re-positioning crossroads. Such exchanges offer more vibrant and generative anticipations, since such understandings, rather than jettisoning the past, crucially retain traces of it, and a possibility of return. In 'Sycorax,' rather than creating a clearly defined 'locus' of experience, Namjoshi more successfully describes the relationship of Prospero and Sycorax in terms of promiscuous individualism where they co-exist in much more complex ways. *The Tempest* has frequently been employed as a postcolonial paradigm involving 'repeated, reinforcing, transgressive appropriations'³⁹⁵ of the play and involving a plethora of interpretations of the 'colonised' characters of Sycorax, Caliban and Ariel. Rob Nixon claims that *The Tempest* 'exemplifies the porous boundaries between European and Afro-Caribbean cultures even within the anticolonial endeavours of the period.'³⁹⁶ Kamau Brathwaite, whose 1994 work *Barabajan Poems* includes 'Sycorax's Book' as a counterpart to 'Prospero's Books' in *The Tempest*, claims that Sycorax represents the silenced black third world woman and is 'a paradigm for all women of the Third World, who have not yet, despite all the effort, reached

³⁹⁵ Rob Nixon, 'Caribbean and African Appropriations of 'The Tempest'', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 13, Politics and Poetic Value (Spring, 1987) p.558.

³⁹⁶ Nixon, 'Caribbean and African Appropriations of 'The Tempest'', p.570.

that trigger of visibility which is necessary for a whole society.’³⁹⁷ In their version of the play in 1670, William Davenant and John Dryden gave Sycorax a vocal role, although she was still portrayed as the embodiment of evil. In ‘Die Geistervisel’ (1778), a German version of the play, Sycorax is powerfully present but symbolises a dark and malign influence since she controls the island at night, whereas Prospero reigns in the day representing his comparative nobility. In Eugene Scribe’s version of 1846, the powerless Sycorax is hidden from view, but continually pleading with Caliban to free her. In Aime Césaire’s version *Une Tempête* (1969), Prospero remains on the island at the end of the play and Caliban is given a more prominent role since Césaire seeks to address the notion of Prospero as ‘the wise man who forgives,’ claiming instead that he is the ‘complete totalitarian.’

I was trying to ‘de-mythify’ the tale... What is most obvious, even in Shakespeare’s version, is the man’s absolute will to power. Prospero is the man of cold reason, the man of methodical conquest – in other words, a portrait of the ‘enlightened’ European...At the same time, Caliban is also a rebel –the positive hero, in a Hegelian sense. The slave is always more important than his master – for it is the slave who makes history.³⁹⁸

However, it is interesting to note how many commentators have observed Caliban as the colonized and objectified figure in *The Tempest* ignoring Sycorax completely. Namjoshi has her ‘hovering in the wings’ waiting for the opportunity to reclaim her ownership of the island. Not only does Namjoshi give Sycorax a voice, but she also provides the space in which Sycorax is able to ‘say clearly’ and forcefully, through the use of capitalization, that Prospero lied, that rather than the island being uninhabited

³⁹⁷ Kamau Brathwaite, quoted in Gowda, H.H. Anniah, ‘Creation in the Poetic Development of Kamau Braithwaite,’ *World Literature Today*, 68.4 (Autumn 1994) pp. 691-696, www.questia.com (Accessed 3/11/2009).

³⁹⁸ Césaire, quoted in S. Belhassen, “Aime Césaire’s *a Tempest*,” in *Radical Perspectives in the Arts*, ed. Lee Baxandall (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.176.

– ‘I LIVED ON THAT ISLAND.’ She is manifestly addressing the effacement of her existence and the appropriation of her ‘space.’ In the first eight lines of her poem, Namjoshi allows Sycorax, not only to speak, unlike her counterpart in *The Tempest*, but to attempt to reclaim the geographical and political space within which she, doubly colonized as woman and colonial object, emerges towards agency and subjectivity. The fact that Prospero has apparently effaced her identity, and therefore her pre-existing claim to the island represents a colonial androcentric arrogance previously noted by many postcolonial researchers writing on *The Tempest*. Namjoshi does more than this, essentially releasing Sycorax from the role of voiceless victim in the colonial encounter. In fact, rather than being the silent victim of Prospero, her name may suggest her eloquence. Dan Harder³⁹⁹ has suggested that ‘Sycorax’ may relate to Corax of SYracuse (my capitalisation), the founder of the first ‘systematic’ rhetoric, emphasising her verbal authority. Shakespeare, as a student of rhetoric, would have been knowledgeable about Corax, as would a contemporary audience, and in this respect Sycorax’s name has quite different resonances.

In ‘By the Wayside,’⁴⁰⁰ Sycorax displays the authoritative voice on the island where she produces the social and, in the poem, the anonymous subject through her mastery and use of language through composing ‘her own’ poem. As Sycorax hails a passersby with ‘Hey! Gimme a word?’ and ‘Oi,’ she establishes her authority and interpellates the unnamed subject through her use of language. Similarly, in *The Tempest*, Prospero teaches Caliban his language – not allowing him to master it, but gaining fluency

³⁹⁹ Dan Harder, ‘The Tempest in the Trivium,’ (2003) www.sycoraxcorax.com, (Accessed 10/1/2010).

⁴⁰⁰ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.13.

only in so far as he is able to curse in it. Therefore, in ‘The Prologue,’ speaking in the first person, Sycorax’s identity is clearly central since she is not apparently preoccupied with the motives and ego of her colonizers but in seeking her individual ‘self.’ ‘I may return, and ask myself, not who/They were, but who I was and what I mourn.’⁴⁰¹

In Freudian terms, the individual elements of Sycorax’s psyche are splintered and exist separately on the island,⁴⁰² increasing the task of finding her ‘self.’ In this regard, the ‘monster’⁴⁰³ Caliban as Id (Freud’s term being ‘das Es’ or ‘the It’)⁴⁰⁴ reflects concerns with instinct, bodily desires and self-gratification. Interestingly, in her earlier poem ‘Snapshots of Caliban,’ this character is female but reverts to male in the later collection of poems. Ariel, the narcissistic and spiritual super ego (das Uber-Ich or the Upper-I), is constantly ‘checking his reflection,’⁴⁰⁵ in a paradoxical interweaving of a celebration of what he sees and anxious attempts at reaffirming existence and personal identity. In direct contrast to the Id and Caliban, Ariel is aligned with the elemental, spiritual and supernatural element, ‘*Doesn’t she realize that I am the weather?...that I am the island.*’⁴⁰⁶ He metamorphoses into a bird in order to spy on her, but with typical wry humour Namjoshi notes, through Sycorax, that he does not become a dull sparrow but in a typically narcissistic fashion chooses to become ‘a bright red bird, a cardinal, no less?!’⁴⁰⁷ Clearly, the use of the pun on ‘cardinal’ further links him with the

⁴⁰¹ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.1.

⁴⁰² Namjoshi, *The Conversations of Cow*, p.37. The character of Suniti splinters and forms S2. It is only when Suniti is able to address her anxieties that S2 ‘merges’ back and she returns to ‘normal.’

⁴⁰³ Referred to constantly as such in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

⁴⁰⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (Vienna and Leipzig: *International Journal for Medical Psychoanalysis*, 1923, repr; in English 1927).

⁴⁰⁵ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.1.

⁴⁰⁶ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.7.

⁴⁰⁷ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.7.

spiritual. Sycorax, as ego (Das Ich or ‘the I’) of the poem is the mediator between the opposing elements of Id and Superego and, as Freud states, constitutes consciousness and a sense of self. This reflects the first person narrative of Sycorax throughout most of the sequence. Freud’s theories of the tripartite self involve ‘an ‘ego,’ a ‘self,’ and ‘I.’ Ariel and Caliban are therefore integral in the development of Sycorax/Prospero as subject. Rather than celebrate her release from Prospero, Sycorax mourns his loss as an internalised and integral part of her psyche, which turns upon itself, much in the same way in which Hegel’s theory⁴⁰⁸ of the Lord and Bondsman functions in the master/slave dialectic. Prospero declares in Act V scene i of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*: ‘This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine’ referring to the way in which his treatment of Caliban has turned him into a ‘monster.’ This could also refer to Sycorax, Caliban’s mother, who forms part of Prospero’s identity. As Judith Butler states, it is this ‘turning *on oneself*’ that ‘operates as part of the explanation of how a subject is produced.’⁴⁰⁹ It is through recognising the ‘other,’ and through the melancholic loss of ‘self’ that a subject is continually produced and reproduced as suggested by promiscuous individualism and the shedding of skins. Therefore, Sycorax and Prospero do not exist as individual fixed subjects, but instead undergo perpetual transformations, shifting gender and nation, between witch and wizard, European and African, disrupting hegemonic and gendered boundaries. Sycorax’s ambiguous and uncertain comment that she ‘may return’ to the island, and to her ‘self,’ suggests that

⁴⁰⁸ George Willhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Germany, Bamberg and Würzburg: 1807).

⁴⁰⁹ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power, Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), p.3.

she is hesitant to take the final step, as it is a painful process. The eventual reclamation of her 'self' is therefore not entirely celebratory as, with it, she necessarily mourns the loss of Prospero. Sara Salih notes that melancholia forms a positive 'potential means of subversion and agency, a site of refusal and revolt rather than uniquely a scene of suffering'⁴¹⁰ - yet melancholia cannot be said to be without suffering as it involves a crucial loss, not just of Prospero but of her previous 'selves.' In Namjoshi's poem Sycorax's identity has been formed through her 'erratic computer, my meandering mind' making repeated 'copies' of 'earlier selves' including Prospero, and of her mother 'Syco the Dam, also blonde, also blue-eyed, but twenty years older and engaged in taking leave of her senses.'⁴¹¹ It is this incorporation of her mother in terms of her identity, as well as the incorporation of Prospero as colonial 'other,' which establishes the complexity and contingency of Sycorax's shifting identity. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler discusses Freud's theory of 'Mourning and Melancholia,'⁴¹² where melancholia is the result of the internalisation of the lost object of love – in Sycorax's case her earlier 'selves' – resulting in the 'interior dialogue of two parts of the psyche'⁴¹³ in an 'ambivalent and unresolved relationship.' Sycorax's relationship with Prospero is unresolved as she cannot directly confront him – and ambivalent as she declares that, in fact, it is not him, but ultimately time and age which is her enemy.

The subject is characterised as an intersubjective, melancholic entity which comes into self-consciousness through its recognition of the other, and its concomitant loss of self.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁰ Sara Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.9.

⁴¹¹ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, 'Copies,' pp.4-5

⁴¹² Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia* (Leipzig and Vienna: *International Journal for Medical Psychoanalysis*, 1917).

⁴¹³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p.83.

⁴¹⁴ Sara Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader*, p.7.

Sycorax's relationship with Ariel fluctuates between being comically spiteful when she makes him fly into a cliff - evoking a visual cartoon humour,⁴¹⁵ and also malicious and mutually destructive. Indeed, Ariel claims that she possesses all of the cruel and arrogant character traits of Prospero, and that his enslavement to Sycorax and Prospero is identical. Ariel says:

*It's clear that the old woman is as bad as the old man. There is no difference in their indifference. She thinks I'm as cold as water or as harsh as stone – in accordance with her mood. She does not know that in trying to please I have forgotten who I am. She sees only that I'm probably not who she wants me to be.*⁴¹⁶

In Namjoshi's sequence of poems, Ariel is the subordinated 'other,' at the mercy of the cruelty, indifference and whims of both Prospero and Sycorax, desperate for approval and losing his sense of self through the desire to perform the role they have given him. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Ariel appears 'sexless,' but Namjoshi declares that Sycorax has 'decided' that Ariel is a type of gay man.⁴¹⁷ Therefore, as colonising authority she 'decides' and labels Ariel's gender.

In terms of female gender, the stereotypical binary of Domestic Angel and Witch, has long been addressed in feminist criticism and in Namjoshi's earlier *Feminist Fables* 'The Wicked Witch'⁴¹⁸ appears as wise and comforting, pouring tea and benevolently offering advice. Sycorax, the 'absent' mother of Caliban in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, appears as neither of these two extremes. Namjoshi's Caliban similarly traverses the 'porous boundaries' of gender and is female in 'Snapshots of Caliban,'⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁵ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.7.

⁴¹⁶ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.6, Ariel's first-person narration.

⁴¹⁷ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.6.

⁴¹⁸ Namjoshi, *Feminist Fables*, pp.40-41.

⁴¹⁹ Namjoshi, 'Snapshots of Caliban,' in *The Bedside Book of Nightmares*, In the later poem, Caliban reverts to being male.

although, in the later fable, Caliban reverts to being male. The next section on 'promiscuous realism' relates how literature explicates Duprè's theory of the 'metaorganism,'

3.2 Promiscuous Realism

Let it be borne in mind how infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life.⁴²⁰

Namjoshi's work, inspired by animal fables such as the *Panchatantra*, Sanskrit moral fables written in 300 AD, *Aesop's Fables* written in Ancient Greece between 620 and 564 BCE, evidence her desire not to be separated from 'the birds and the beasts'⁴²¹ and relates to Dupré's theory of promiscuous realism. As such, her work frequently incorporates creatures from Eastern and Western locations, and her foregrounding of commonplace animals in comparison, for example, to the more alluring tigers in Amitav Ghosh's critically lauded *The Hungry Tide* (2004), is significant in that it troubles long-held notions of species hierarchies. However, it may also partly explain the relative lack of popularity and critical engagement with her work since the domestic and 'lesser' species she employs have generally not been considered the subject of 'important' literature. Furthermore, when she does employ an iconic creature, such as a tiger,⁴²² she often does so in subversively ironic ways thus perhaps, in some sense, lessening the import. 'The Saint and the Tiger'⁴²³ adopts a cynically humorous tone where the Saint declares she is an endangered species. In environmental terms, humanity is usually considered as endangering rather than endangered, but here the usual stereotypes are reversed and rather than the tiger appearing as an aggressive 'man-eater,' it tries to help the Saint survive by insisting that

⁴²⁰ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.67.

⁴²¹ Namjoshi, *Because of India*, p.29. See my discussion on hybridity in Chapter One.

⁴²² Such as the concentration on Charismatic Mega-Fauna in texts such as the tigers in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. The 'Big Seven' in South African conservation are the lion, leopard, elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo, whale and the shark.

⁴²³ Namjoshi, *Sycorax, New Fables and Poems*, pp.17-18.

she should eat instead of being eaten. This link to the ‘survival of the fittest’ is ironically reductive, and since the saint argues that she is unable to kill the tiger, they companionably walk off together to kill someone else.

In her prose piece entitled a ‘Mythical Mammal,’⁴²⁴ Namjoshi postulates that, as her next incarnation, she may consider creating a ‘rare and unknown species’ from Australia, one that traverses the distinction between ‘fur and feather.’ As such, she states she would be able to cross the *locus* of experience, becoming a seemingly paradoxical creature that is solitary and ‘unique’ and yet one that comprises ‘an entire class’ of collective transformations.

It would probably be best to be unique: a solitary individual, comprising in herself an entire class. The Mythical mammal ... Then she could tell herself stories about herself, about her origin for example, about her transformation, her many transformations, eventually, if she liked, even about her stellification...

Thus, by such means, I argue that Namjoshi and Hariharan’s work is significant to ecocritical debate since it subverts anthropocentrism, and species hierarchies. Paul Shepard identifies the hierarchical nature of Western philosophy that has traditionally perceived humanity as iconographic and possessing an immutable and distinct integrity set in stone like the ‘heraldic lion.’⁴²⁵ Steve Baker also notes this trend and, in particular, the tendency of artists in ‘the last quarter of the twentieth century’ to use animals as ‘little more than remote ciphers for human meanings.’ Baker argues that this limited vision has fortunately, increasingly given way ‘to instances of artist and animal coming closer together as living beings caught

⁴²⁴ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.20.

⁴²⁵ Shepard, *The Subversive Science*, p.3.

up in each other's affairs, willingly or otherwise.'⁴²⁶ In 'The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women's Fiction,' Marian Scholtmeijer describes this powerful potential as the 'Anarchy of metamorphoses.'⁴²⁷ Perpetual transformations across species, cultural and geographical boundaries, what I term as 'plastic perspectives,' forcefully interrogate dominant theories of philosophy, evolutionary biology and ecocriticism. I argue that both Namjoshi and Hariharan's work highlight this potential through an ecologically productive 'coming together.'

It is only comparatively recently that academic research on the literary animal has become widespread. In 'What Kind of Literary Animal Studies Do We Want, or Need?' (2014),⁴²⁸ Robert McKay states that despite the ubiquity of non-human animals in literature, by the mid to late 1990s few academics were engaged in researching them.⁴²⁹ Although fables and anthropomorphized animals have long engaged human sympathies and imagination, McKay recalls that in 2000 a UK publisher rejected his proposed collection of essays on animals in twentieth-century literature because it was not considered a popular area of research. Literary animals, anthropomorphism and animism have all been viewed as unscientific and as

⁴²⁶ Steve Baker, 'What Does becoming Animal Look Like?' in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), p.67.

⁴²⁷ Marian Scholtmeijer, 'The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women's Fiction', Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan eds. Introduction to *Animals and Women, Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 3rd Printing, 2006, p.254. 'In their work on animals, moreover, women writers perform that most anti-androcentric of acts: thinking themselves into the being of the wholly "other", the animal. It turns out that this act is not an act of self-sacrifice but of empowerment.' p.233.

⁴²⁸ Robert McKay, 'What Kind of Literary Animal Studies Do We Want or Need?' review of *Beckett and Animals* (2013) edited by Mary Bryden and *Polymorphous Domesticities: Pets, Bodies and Desire in Four Modern Writers* (2012) by Julia Schiesari, *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 60, Number 3, Fall 2014, pp.636-644.

⁴²⁹ McKay, 'What Kind of Literary Animal Studies Do We Want or Need?', p.637. He states the importance of Marian Scholtmeijer (1993) and Margot Norris (1985) in developing 'forward-looking works that helped set the stage for the intellectual vibrancy and ethical scope of later contributions to literary animal studies,' Marian Scholtmeijer, *Animals in Modern Fiction* (1993), and Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* (1985).

lacking the potential for academic rigour. Daston and Mitman address the problem of ‘thinking with animals,’ specifically ‘how might we capture the agency of another being that cannot speak to reveal the transformative effects its actions have, both literally and figuratively, upon humans.’⁴³⁰ In ‘Discerning the Animal of a Thousand Faces,’⁴³¹ Deidre Dwen Pitts takes a derisory view of anthropomorphism, describing the use of talking animals in fables as a demeaning and ‘pathetic mechanism.’ Whilst it is true that a focus on the totemic ‘fluffy’ animals of many children’s stories would indeed be too narrow a remit, Pitts’ argument that children’s literature should respect ‘the dignity of [the animal’s] ordered world’ is similarly anthropomorphic and reductive. It is over-simplistic to assume that the animal world is fundamentally ‘ordered’ from an anthropocentric perspective.⁴³² Daston and Mitman describe anthropomorphism as an ‘irresistible taboo’ because although it has been considered as demeaning, what they call the ‘irresistible pulse of empathy’⁴³³ evokes the ‘identification and responsiveness to animals necessary for a more balanced ecological perspective. Indeed, Daston and Mitman claim that experienced ethologists increasingly anthropomorphize animals since ‘the yearning to understand what it would be like to be...an elephant or cheetah’ increases with proximity and experience.

This extreme form of thinking with animals is the impossible but irresistible desire to jump out of one’s own skin, exchange one’s brain, plunge into another way of being.⁴³⁴

⁴³⁰ Daston and Mitman, *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, p.5.

⁴³¹ Deidre Dwen Pitts, quoted in Marian Scholtmeijer, ‘The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women’s Fiction’, *Animals and Women, Feminist Theoretical Exploration*, Adams and Donovan, eds. p.241.

⁴³² John Dupré, *The Disorder of Things: Metaphysical Foundations of the Disunity of Science* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1995). Dupré argues that, on the contrary, the world is essentially ‘disordered.’

⁴³³ Daston and Mitman, *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, p.8.

⁴³⁴ Daston and Mitman, *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, p.8.

Felipe Fernández-Armesto argues that despite some scornful accusations of juvenility, didactic anthropomorphic fables like Aesop's have proven universally popular, amusing, and oddly credible. He argues that they are more convincing precisely because although the moral tales are for human ears, they are more convincing when the characters are 'crows and mice and foxes.'⁴³⁵

The satires of Aristophanes would not bite so deeply into the foibles of humans if they were not disguised as birds and frogs ... The muppets would not be half so amusing if they were presented as humans, rather than fluffy pigs and cuddly bears. Satan is plausible as a serpent; C.S. Lewis re-cast Christ as a lion. Totemic myths tug at our sympathies. Our imaginations blur and traverse the frontier between humans and other animals.

In an interview with Olga Kenyon in 1992, Namjoshi claims the *Panchatantra* as a central influence. This collection of Sanskrit moral fables about animals is similar to Aesop's, but composed much earlier in India, in approximately 300AD. Whilst Namjoshi notes the obvious popularity of animals and the appeal, over centuries, of the *Panchatantra*'s fundamental 'common sense,' she argues that it is significant that certain aspects of the tales are more brutal and chime with Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1514) infamous for its immoral ruthlessness. They are therefore much more than simple, childish, didactic moral parables.

There is a book called the *Panchatantra*, a book of old Sanskrit fables. They are like Machiavelli's *The Prince* in some ways, good, common sense advice about human nature. And in ordinary conversation people are quite likely to make a point through a story. Remember that Hinduism is pantheistic. In Christianity you make a difference between animals and human beings – and gods. In Hinduism you don't have to animate animals, they already have an anima.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁵ Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *So You Think You're Human?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.9.

⁴³⁶ Suniti Namjoshi in *The Writer's Imagination*, Olga Kenyon, (Bradford: University of Bradford Print Unit, 1992), p.110. A significant difference between Aesop's fables and *The Panchatantra* is that Hinduism considers animals as having souls.

In *Sycorax, New Fables and Poems* (2006), Namjoshi's poem titled an 'Homage to Aesop',⁴³⁷ subverts stereotypical personality traits associated with certain animals. A 'foolhardy fawn' desires the heart of a lioness, a wolf disguised in sheep's clothing is nearly slaughtered as a sheep, and a crow 'outfoxes' a fox. Despite such familiar characters and associated personality traits, anthropomorphic literature is engaging on many levels. Like the Magic Real, both anthropomorphism and animism have been associated with strangeness, and it is precisely because of this that they are generative concepts in shaping diverse plastic ecological perspectives.

What does make sense is animism for once we engage in the extension of the boundary of the self into the "environment," then of course we can imbue it with life and can quite properly regard it as animate – it is animate because we are a part of it. Metaphoric language is an indicator of "place" – an indication that the speaker has a place, feels part of a place. Indeed, the motive may be as Frye claim, "a desire to associate, and finally to identify, the human mind with what goes on outside it, because the only genuine joy you can have is in those rare moments when you feel that although we may know in part ... we are also part of what we know."⁴³⁸

In the nineteenth century, the anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) considered animism as at the foundation of what he termed unscientific and irrational 'primitive' religions.⁴³⁹ More recently, Graham Harvey (2006) has redefined animism in more secular, scientific and fundamentally positive ecological terms as: 'the attempt to live respectfully as members of the diverse community of living persons (only some of whom are human) which we call the world or cosmos.'⁴⁴⁰ This less circumscribed perspective removes animism from an association with what Burnett Tylor considered 'primitive' magic and alternative religions, relocating it as an

⁴³⁷ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, pp.24-29.

⁴³⁸ Evernden, 'Beyond Ecology, Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy,' Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.101.

⁴³⁹ Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, (London: John Murray, 1871), Chapter XII, p.1.

⁴⁴⁰ Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p.xi.

important central tenet in the attempt to understand and sustain global ecologies. Harvey's definition recognises that 'personhood' may not be limited to humanity alone –to what has traditionally been considered sentient or animate. Hierarchical, and largely arbitrary, boundaries delineating what may constitute an individual or organism, a species or collective community are erased in a change of perspective, highlighting instead the centrality of interconnected ecosystems and universal processes. Harvey states that 'ethnographically informed and respectful considered views of indigenous and other animist worldviews and lifeways flow together with a variety of philosophical currents.'⁴⁴¹ Yet, in citing the work of David Abram, amongst others, as contributing to this field, the theory is still couched in somewhat romantic terms associated with Deep Ecology. Previous ecocritical research concerning literary texts has largely concentrated on either non-fiction documentary or an idealised 'soft-focus' view of nature in texts by Western writers such as Thoreau or Walt Whitman. Here, as in the theory of Deep Ecology, nature is considered as the site of a romanticised escapism seemingly linked to a quasi-mysticism. In *The Spell of the Sensuous*,⁴⁴² David Abram states that humans are instinctively 'plugged in' to the natural environment in a sensual, emergent process that benefits all – in what he terms the 'exchange of possibilities.'

⁴⁴¹ Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, p.209.

⁴⁴² David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, (London: Vintage, 1997).

Humans are tuned for relationship. The eyes, the skin, the tongue, ears and nostrils – all are gates where our body receives the nourishment of otherness. This landscape of shadowed voices, these feathered bodies and antlers and tumbling streams – these breathing shapes are our family, the beings with whom we are engaged, with whom we struggle, and suffer and celebrate. For the largest part of our species' existence, humans have negotiated relationships with every aspect of the sensuous surroundings, exchanging possibilities with every flapping form, with each textured surface and shivering entity that we happened to focus on. All could speak, articulating in gesture and whistle and sigh a shifting web of meanings that we felt on our skin or inhaled through our nostrils or focused with our listening ears, and to which we replied – whether with sounds, or through movements or minute shifts of mood. The color of sky, the rush of waves – every aspect of the earthly sensuous could draw us into a relationship fed with curiosity and spiced with danger. Every sound was a voice, every scrape or blunder was a meeting – with Thunder, with Oak, with Dragonfly. And from all of these relationships our collective sensibilities were nourished.⁴⁴³

In this idealised landscape, human beings seemingly reign supreme, but ironically, this romantic pastoral landscape would be unrecognisable to the majority of human populations. The collective emergent process is not, as Abram states, an entirely positive and familiar 'negotiation' accompanied by the 'whistles' and 'sighs' of mere 'breathing shapes.' Indeed, Abram reduces all non-human life to nebulous 'shivering,' 'textured,' sighing and 'flapping forms;' mere transient and insubstantial outlines that only truly exist when humans 'happen[ed] to focus on' them momentarily. It does not fully acknowledge potentially deleterious or violent exchanges. The process and pain of metamorphoses in Magic Real Literature, rather than merely offering a Romantic idea of refuge or renewal, is able to describe universal experiences of literal pain and suffering, explicating and expanding on outmoded, mechanistic scientific models which offer a refuge in the reassuring order of a divine plan. What Abram describes as a 'negotiation' with our sensual surroundings has been driven by much less commendable

⁴⁴³ Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p.ix.

motives than curiosity as he suggests in this passage, and has often proved gravely injurious to both individual species and the planet as a whole. Rather than offering what Abram terms the ‘nourishment of otherness,’ this exchange has more often consisted of an inequitable dialogue with a ‘shadowed’ and ‘othered’ voice which is reduced merely to gestures, whistles and sighs, and prey to very much more traumatic and destructive interactions than what he terms as ‘minute shifts of mood’ fuelled by the ‘spice’ of danger. Furthermore, a truly constructive ecological vision of our ‘collective sensibilities,’ as he terms them, must include far more diversity than he indicates through his use of the robust and exquisite examples of Thunder, Oak or Dragonfly – ecological authenticity requires that they also include smog, diseased Elm and Cockroach. Abram’s statement ‘the boundaries of a living body are open and indeterminate; more like membranes than barriers, they define a surface of metamorphosis and exchange,’⁴⁴⁴ and in recognising the importance of ‘the ongoing interchange between my body and the entities that surround it,’⁴⁴⁵ yet this is still couched in somewhat mystical terms often aligned with animism. As such, the ‘imagination’ is ‘othered’ as something mysterious, ‘hidden or invisible.’⁴⁴⁶

Such out-dated concepts of ‘rational’ human motive and dominance have been used to justify self-gratifying human actions, but are intensely counter-productive ecologically. As Anthony Kubiak states ‘[t]he issue is not, to put

⁴⁴⁴ Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p.46.

⁴⁴⁵ Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p.52.

⁴⁴⁶ Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p.58. ‘From the magician’s, or the phenomenologists, perspective, that which we call the *imagination* is from the first an attribute of the senses themselves; imagination is not a separate mental faculty (as we do so often assume) but is rather the way the senses themselves have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things that we do not sense directly, with the hidden or invisible aspects of the sensible’.

it crudely, whether animals are people too'⁴⁴⁷ but that all 'persons' are sentient to some degree in that they respond to environmental stresses.

Kubiak states that compassion and an awareness of the permeable boundary between 'self and other' disrupts the notion of human beings as removed from their environment and other life,⁴⁴⁸ not as an emotional or sentimental response, a criticism often aimed at anthropomorphic or animistic interpretations, but in a genuine recognition of mutual dependence. He argues that humans have an 'impulse' towards recognizing 'personness.'

The *ratification* of personness emerges from the recognition of dis-ease in the other, from the realization that the boundaries between self and others are permeable, fluid and constructed. This recognition – that the dis-ease of the other is my own anguish – is the recognition of compassion. The recognition of compassion, in turn, is born not of an emotional response but of recognition, awareness. Thus, although animals are persons ... we also recognize plants, insects and arachnids, bacteria, virus and provirus, as well as natural formations like rain forests, mountains, oceans and rivers as entities worthy of our concern, entities that are to different degrees arguably sentient – i.e. responsive to stress, moving towards equilibrium as integral parts of complex adaptive systems on scales both large and small. These entities, in other words, continually shift their communicative responses to our and the ecosystems concerns. We trade places with them and each other ... or more correctly, the positions of environmental components are indeterminate, moving, overlapping, fluid. They, like us, are becoming-persons.⁴⁴⁹

Thus, Magic Real dynamic metaphors for individuals, communities and ecosystems offer more powerful discourses of 'becoming' than dominant philosophy and evolutionary biology has thus far delivered. In 'What Does an Animal Look Like,' Steve Baker asserts that Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of the becoming-animal only occurs 'for an instant' and it is the 'artist's responsibility...to work fearlessly to prolong such instants.'⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁷ Anthony Kubiak, 'Animism, Becoming-Performance, or Does this Text Speak to You?', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, Published by Routledge 16/08/12, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2012.712252>, (Accessed 1/2/13), pp.55-56.

⁴⁴⁸ What Shepard, terms 'isolated sacks,' *The Subversive Science*, p.2.

⁴⁴⁹ Kubiak, 'Animism, Becoming-Performance, or Does this Text Speak to You?', pp.55-56.

⁴⁵⁰ Baker, 'What Does becoming Animal Look Like?', p.67.

Similarly, ‘becoming-persons’ described through plastic perspectives in literature and art relay such instants in affective and transformative ways.

If the writer is a sorcerer, it is because writing is a becoming, writing is traversed by strange becomings that are not becomings-writer, but becomings-rat, becomings-insect, becomings-wolf, etc ... Writers are sorcerers because they experience the animal as the only population before which they are responsible in principle.⁴⁵¹

The writer must indulge in ‘strange becomings,’ – involving beasts that humans do not readily empathise with - to rat, insect and wolf, and recognising the fundamental human responsibility to attempt to consider multiple perspectives in these ways. Kubiak states that becoming does not involve one animal ‘becoming’ another but that it is ‘is something far more troubling and exhilarating, no mere relationship between species but a boundary erasure among all strata of the Kingdoms, creative permutations and permeations generated through a species of *élan vital*, a force that moves not simply between species (wolf/rabbit), but between mineral and plant (potassium/nitrogen/phosphorous), plant and animal (grass/buffalo), animal and insect (rat/flea),’ or, in other words, what Dupré identifies as Promiscuous Realism. To be able to relay this *élan vital* may indeed involve the kind of ‘sorcery’ evident in the Magic Real.

Indeed, the initiating fable behind Deleuze’s writings is not mammalian but insectal, a fable whose final transect emerges with the realization that ‘becomings’ in the Deleuzian archaeology involve the multiple cross-infestations that have become the very understanding of life as a purely inter-relational phenomenon. Virus and cell, parasite and host, and the hosts that themselves become vectors and symbiotes to larger forms generate the endless infiltrations, cross-pollinations and excesses of creation that biologist Lynn Margulis saw as the promiscuity of life within the wider conspiracies of matter.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (UK: Athlone Press, 1988; repr. 2004), p.240.

⁴⁵² Kubiak, ‘Animism, Becoming-Performance, or Does this Text Speak to You?’ p.53.

It may also be that this type of ‘sorcery’ is required to address the fact that animals are traditionally perceived in the West as bestial, with all its negative connotations. Eastern philosophies do not recognise such a division. As Namjoshi states:

To me a beast wasn’t “bestial” in the Western sense. To me a bird or a beast was a creature like anyone else. Hinduism is, after all, pantheistic; and the popular notion of reincarnation attributes a soul to everyone. This may sound odd to Western ears, but for me, it was as familiar as it was unconscious. It was in the very air I had breathed while growing up.⁴⁵³

The word ‘beast’ has generally been used in pejorative ways, to describe creatures who do not exhibit human ‘civilized’ traits. Insects, scales, carapace, hair or fur seem to designate a negative, and even repulsive, animality fundamentally alien to traditional notions of human subjectivity and pre-eminence but, in evolutionary terms, humans are not so removed from such ‘bestial’ characteristics. When portrayed as beasts, human characters, and most especially women, are scorned, ostracized and vulnerable and have frequently been considered as ‘less-than-human.’ In *Because of India* (1989), an autobiographical text which relates the influence of India and the belief in transmigration, Namjoshi reclaims the word ‘beast’ as being very much more inclusive and affirmative. In being classed as the ‘other’ animals are more clearly connected to women.

⁴⁵³ Namjoshi, *Because of India*, p.28.

It's apparent to many women that in a humanist universe, which has been male-centred historically, women are "*the other*", together with the birds and the beasts and the rest of creation. An identification with the rest of creation, possibly with the whole of it, would only be logical; unless, of course, one wished to create a mirror image of the humanist universe, with woman at the centre, accepting the consequences of consigning everything else to "the other". But I don't want to be separated from the birds and the beasts, nor do I want to "humanise" them particularly. (It should be said that as far as I can understand it, Frye's Anagogic Man includes rather than excludes. But surely the demonic version of this is that he eats up everything instead of letting things be?) All this complicated process still left one question unresolved. All right, I was a beast, a creature. But what sort of beast was I?⁴⁵⁴

In a humanist centred universe, what Namjoshi terms the 'demonic version' of Frye's anagogic man swallows and 'contains' nature in an allegory of destructive human dominance and careless consumption. As such, the reappraisal of the universe requires more than mere gender reversal with women 'at the centre.' It requires more inclusive and plastic perspectives; a reassessment of both subjectivity and dominant hierarchies in what Namjoshi considers a 'logical' acknowledgement of ourselves as 'beasts.'⁴⁵⁵ As Bhadravati⁴⁵⁶ the Brahmin lesbian cow tells the character Suniti in *The Conversations of Cow* (1985), 'identity is fluid. Haven't you heard of transmigration? And you call yourself a good Brahmin?'⁴⁵⁷ Bhadravati is a complex creature, a goddess capable of multiple incarnations and a thousand names, eccentric, sarcastic but as vulnerable as the character Suniti. The cow undergoes perpetual transformations as 'The Cow of a Thousand Wishes;' a lesbian talking cow called both Bhadravati and B; a large white American man called both Baddy and Bud; and a woman in a sari feeding chipmunks.

⁴⁵⁴ Namjoshi, *Because of India*, p.29.

⁴⁵⁵ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton University Press, 1957), p.115. In Northrop Frye's anagogic phase, nature 'becomes, not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols, the city, the garden, the quest, the marriage, are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature' and exist only 'inside the mind of an infinite man.'

⁴⁵⁶ In Sanskrit, 'Bhadravati' means 'noble in character'.

⁴⁵⁷ Namjoshi, *The Conversations of Cow*, p.32.

‘That night I dream. Cow has transformed herself into a woman. She is wearing a sari and sitting on the lawn of a large house under a banyan.’⁴⁵⁸

Bhadravati and I have undergone plastic surgery. We have the faces of women and the hindquarters and legs of Brahmini cows and we wear top hats like true gentlemen.⁴⁵⁹

In Namjoshi’s collection *Sycorax*, the assertion of the Christian bible that humanity has ultimate dominion over animals is ironically portrayed in the poem ‘Animals.’⁴⁶⁰ *Sycorax*, a re-imagining of the witch in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, insists on what she believes her ‘rightful’ dominion over ‘her’ island and its occupants, claiming that ‘real’ animals are unimportant and easier to ‘deal with’ in a ‘matter of fact’ manner. Indeed, *Sycorax* classifies animals as ‘real’ or ‘non-real’ simply in terms of their use to her. In Namjoshi’s poem ‘Visitors,’⁴⁶¹ a dolphin complains about human dismissiveness in that they assume because her mouth ‘curves upwards’ and she leaps in the air that she does not feel ‘the slightest pain.’ The tone is both intensely poignant and ironic, the dolphin concluding that humanity is cruel and brutish - ‘both murderous and ludicrous: an unpleasant mix’ and paradoxically ‘hard to turn into literature.’ In western tradition, animals have largely been considered merely as adjuncts to humanity, assessed in terms of their potential to assist or threaten human survival. In the poem ‘*Sycorax*’ the witch claims that animals can be ‘forced to die’ because, as she consoles herself, they ‘do not mean anything’ on their own. Their worth is only in relation to what they contribute to human survival - a ‘need to live.’ In an echo of *Sycorax*’s complaint about Prospero usurping her ownership of the

⁴⁵⁸ Namjoshi, *The Conversations of Cow*, p.44.

⁴⁵⁹ Namjoshi, *The Conversations of Cow*, p.33.

⁴⁶⁰ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, pp.2-3.

⁴⁶¹ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, pp.10-11.

island at the beginning of Shakespeare's play, at the beginning of this sequence of poems Sycorax's ownership is similarly refuted by a lizard who states that Sycorax does not 'have the right to welcome her' because the lizard's ancestors predate her own. It is 'her home, her shack, and her planet.' Although Sycorax is fully aware that she too is an animal, 'one of them,' she sinks her teeth into the lizard symbolising the simplistic hierarchical classification of animals into those who 'eat' and those who are 'eaten.' Sycorax knows that the 'need' to consume animal flesh to survive is merely an 'excuse,' a 'lie' to assuage her guilt, and it does not condone the violence with which she rips their raw flesh with her teeth.

It's necessary to distinguish between unreal animals and real ones. First there's the bitch. I am not afraid of her. She does not bite ... the real animals are easier to deal with. A lizard for instance. I could catch a lizard and sink my teeth in. Yes, I've eaten her raw. Not pretty, but a matter of fact. I need to live. The lizard of course is forced to die. No malice there. Is that my excuse? Real animals are not symbolic. They do not mean anything. And that too is a lie ... Once I wanted to learn the language of birds, of all sorts of animals, even pigs, but most especially birds. Oh, I fancied myself chattering with birds! I spent the rest of my life unlearning that. Now when pigs scream and chickens stutter, I hear nothing; nothing at all that makes any sense. On this island though, I may dream again. On this island where the earth is waiting to eat me up. I know very well – whether the birds and beasts acknowledge it – that I am one of them.⁴⁶²

Sycorax has consciously 'unlearnt' modes by which she is able to communicate with other species, and as she can no longer make sense of what the animals utter since she has conveniently become deaf to their suffering. Animal's 'voices' are discounted because she cannot interpret their 'screams' or a 'stutters.' Normally, the animals in Namjoshi's fables and poems are extremely eloquent. Indeed, it is Sycorax, the witch, who must bribe the gulls and the sparrows with chips to listen to her poems.

⁴⁶² Namjoshi, 'Animals,' *Sycorax*, pp.2-3.

In Namjoshi's *Building Babel* (1996), relatively un-heroic Eastern and Western fairy-tale characters, both human and animal, such as cats and pigs, metamorphose into a series of avatars in a never-ending effort to construct a utopia. The choice of such 'unglamorous' animals runs contrary to the choice of environmentalists who have historically sought to engage public attention and concern for the environment by employing images and campaigns involving 'charismatic mega-fauna.'⁴⁶³ Aesthetically pleasing animals such as tigers, lions, whales, dolphins and the iconic Giant Panda used in the logo for the World Wild Life Fund for Nature, are seemingly the most easily appreciated. In Namjoshi's *The Blue Donkey Fables* (1988), a donkey is persecuted simply on the basis of conventional aesthetics because it's unconventional skin colour clashes with the environment.

They approached the donkey, who happened to be munching bright pink carrot which clashed most horribly with the bright red bridge. 'O Donkey,' they said, feeling they had better get it over with at once, 'we'd like you to turn an inoffensive grey or else move on.'⁴⁶⁴

The fact that, as Dupré states, human bodies contain more microbes than human cells, leads to a questioning of epistemological certainties. Microbes can be considered 'dominant organisms' since they have proven incredibly successful in terms of adaption and survival.

⁴⁶³ The first use of the term "charismatic megavertebrates" was coined by Professor of Law at the University of Idaho, Dale Goble in 'Newsweek' Magazine on April 22, 1985

⁴⁶⁴ Namjoshi, *The Blue Donkey Fables*, p.1.

It is not merely that the vast majority of living things are microbes, though they are, or that microbes are able to occupy a far greater diversity of environments than are complex multicellular organisms, though they are. It is rather the picture of microbes as something primitive and distinct from 'higher' organisms that have evolved in more recent times is confused. Higher organisms did not evolve as separate from the pre-existing microbes, but as parts of complex symbiotic systems that always included microbes, usually in vast numbers. Indeed, the boundaries between ourselves and microbes...are not as clear as we might wish. Viewing the biological world from the perspective of these dominant organisms can transform our view of life.⁴⁶⁵

There are obvious difficulties when faced with the prospect of discerning the perspective of creatures not normally considered as iconic or engaging, and it is here that the value of literature is clearly key. It is impossible to imagine how we might start to attempt to 'transform our view of life,' to envisage the perspective of other animals, in any other way than through fiction, and this is a more difficult challenge in cases of animals and insects that have been considered as unattractive or repulsive.

The epidermis of invertebrates is not skin as we usually think of it, because it is composed of only one layer. Yet, in its structure and function, it is the primitive forerunner of our skin and that of all other vertebrate animals.⁴⁶⁶

Akira Mizuta Lippit states that representation of animals is ever more apparent in 'philosophy, psychoanalysis and technological media'⁴⁶⁷ because they are increasingly less evident in urban modern experience. Yet vermin and domestic animals, which more proximate to most human experience, have proved 'hard to turn into literature.' Ironically, those species, such as invertebrates, that are considered to have no notion of 'unified self' and as non-sentient, are those most obviously and spectacularly engaged in processes of transformation, yet such 'unglamorous' or 'repulsive' creatures

⁴⁶⁵ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.4.

⁴⁶⁶ Jablonski, *Skin, A Natural History*, p.26.

⁴⁶⁷ Akira Mizuta Lippit, '...From Wild Technology to Electric Animal', Chapter 7 in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), p.122.

have rarely been used in affirming ways. Domestic creatures are considered as insignificant and highly disposable whilst ‘unattractive’ animals are feared, despised and exterminated. Indeed, the bat in Namjoshi’s ‘Visitors’⁴⁶⁸ is ‘not necessarily beautiful’ and so necessarily faces ‘almost certain extinction.’ Insects frequently induce a visceral repulsion, emphatically remaining outside the ‘widening circle of human empathy and sympathy’⁴⁶⁹ and not normally subject to anthropomorphism. Domestic animals, insects and vermin are ignored in favour of more appealing species because ‘broadcasters like National Geographic International look for a “hero character” among the animals with whom viewers can identify.’⁴⁷⁰

There seems to be no simple explanation as to why some species are singled out as good to think with and others not. Phylogeny may be part of the answer, and domestication, another: chimps and dogs are prime candidates, amoebas⁴⁷¹ and eels are not ... baby fur seals display [similar] neotenic features, but what about elephants? Why should they, or dolphins for that matter, become favoured species?⁴⁷²

Humankind is often repulsed by, and seeks to distance itself from, the grotesque and ‘minor’⁴⁷³ species, ‘downgraded’ on the basis of aesthetics and notions of sentience.⁴⁷⁴ It has proved more difficult to project human sensitivity onto ‘unattractive’ organisms that have no recognisable expression, yet to preclude the possibility of ‘feeling’ and consciousness merely on the basis of ‘beauty’ is reductive and absurd. As Marcus Bullock states it is ridiculous to ‘deny any possibility that animals do experience

⁴⁶⁸ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, pp.10-11.

⁴⁶⁹ Daston and Mitman, *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, p.5. They note that the circle of empathy now includes ‘whales and wolves’.

⁴⁷⁰ Daston and Mitman, *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, p.6.

⁴⁷¹ In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi describes both herself and her mother as being a ‘one-celled unit,’ p.13.

⁴⁷² Daston and Mitman, *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, p.11.

⁴⁷³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Paris: Les editions de Minuit, 1975, repr; Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁴⁷⁴ Mark W. Scala, ed. *Fairy Tales, Monsters, and the Genetic Imagination* (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), p.10.

something, even though we do not have the resources in our linguistic imagination to represent it.⁴⁷⁵ The onus is on us to develop our linguistic imagination in ways that enable perspectives beyond the human.

In Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* (1999), Duniyazad designates the endless refraction of stories as a 'circus without animals,'⁴⁷⁶ yet the main female characters are increasingly described in animal terms. Duniyazad first appears dressed as a man and gives the: 'overwhelming impression' of control, but as a woman 'with her breasts unbound, her hair freed of grime and knots with a wet comb, her allegiance is to a lesser known species.'⁴⁷⁷ In Scholtmeijer notes the powerful potential of 'lesser' or 'minor' creatures where, as she states, both Nadine Gordimer in *The Soft Voices of the Serpent* (1959), and Katherine Mansfield in 'The Fly' (1922), 'use insects to throw human readings of life off balance, and perhaps even to negate those readings entirely. Insects, although vastly removed from human experience and yet they maintain an identity hence the value of Kafka's having turned a man into one in "The Metamorphosis."⁴⁷⁸ In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, the boy Mani, who is mentored by Vasu, is called 'Bluebottle,' and metaphorically heals Vasu by laying eggs in his wound. In Namjoshi's piece 'When the World Order Changed,'⁴⁷⁹ despite the recognition of an ant's attributes of strength and flexibility, it is considered as insignificant as the whining of a gnat and is eventually eaten by a chick. No one hears the ant's rebellion against the unfairness of being 'murdered for the pleasure of partridges.'

⁴⁷⁵ Marcus Bullock, 'Watching Eyes, Seeing Dreams, Knowing Lives,' *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), p.112.

⁴⁷⁶ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.237.

⁴⁷⁷ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.35.

⁴⁷⁸ Scholtmeijer, 'The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women's Fiction', Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan eds. Introduction to *Animals and Women, Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, p.243.

⁴⁷⁹ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, p.75.

Ants are light, ants are lithe, ants are strong; and he had in his way made a magnificent protest. The problem was that the partridges and their chicks hadn't heard a thing. The ant's voice had been tinny and faint like the whining of a gnat, and one of the chicks had eaten up the ant without any qualms at all ... later when the world order changed, and even the ants were given some sort of rights, a group of ants wished to erect a statue of this ant. But had the ant been a saint and a martyr? Or merely the unfortunate victim of an accident? 'You see,' explained the partridges, 'there was no malice intended. It was just that it was impossible to hear the ant.'

Despite their 'monstrous' distortion from what humanity consider as 'beautiful' or 'natural,' vermin and insects have proven to be highly successful in adapting to the environment. The extraordinary epithets Thoreau gives to the 'strong and beautiful bug' in *Walden*, illustrate both the unconventional splendour and fantastic survival ability of an insect having been hatched from an egg 'deposited in the living tree many years earlier' yet able to gnaw its way out of an apple-wood table after lying dormant for sixty years.

Everyone has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which has stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years ... from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still ... which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the heat of an urn.⁴⁸⁰

Insects make up approximately eighty per cent of the world's species, are highly successful in terms of evolution and yet, largely because of their appearance, are detested by much of the human population. Having noted the 'positive transformations' in tales such as 'Beauty and the Beast' and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Warner comments on the 'monstrosity' and 'grubbiness' of insect metamorphoses which 'comes under pressure from their empirical observation.'⁴⁸¹ An aesthetic judgment involving an 'ultimate perfected outcome' is clearly problematic, impossible to define objectively

⁴⁸⁰ Thoreau, *Walden*, pp.306-307.

⁴⁸¹ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, pp.23-24.

and loaded with hierarchal assumptions of 'worth' merely in terms of beauty. When discussing Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Nabokov's butterflies,⁴⁸² Warner uses terms that resonate with long held aesthetic preconceptions; butterflies, considered as beautiful once hatched, are traditionally aligned with the soul, whilst Kafka's beetle is 'monstrous vermin.'⁴⁸³ Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis into a bug has 'diabolical overtones,'⁴⁸⁴ and, as such, considered negatively as impermanent, insignificant, and 'less than human.' Yet, Kafka's use of the name Samsa⁴⁸⁵ is possibly linked to 'Samsara,' the belief in reincarnation, and the Wheel of Life in Hinduism and Buddhism. As Warner states, Gregor's harrowing 'transmogrification into a bug, with its diabolical overtones, nevertheless precedes the reinvigoration and restoration of the Samsa family, in a cruel irony that intensifies poor Gregor's fate. His disposability, literally swept up and thrown away, circulates energy through the organism of his immediate family.'⁴⁸⁶ As Malabou claims, 'Gregor's awakening at the beginning of the story is the perfect expression of destructive plasticity. The inexplicable nature of his transformation into an insect continues to fascinate us as a possible danger, a threat for each of us.'⁴⁸⁷ Gregor's individual traumatic transformation, considered in terms of adaption and natural selection, is a sacrifice through which the organic system of his family is strengthened. The continual movement of the 'wheel' clearly relates to productive ecological systems, erasing notions of finalism and the linearity of biological processes towards a stable entity that, as John

⁴⁸² Vladimir Nabokov, Boyd, Brian and Robert Michael Pyle eds., *Nabokov's Butterflies*, trans. by Dmitri Nabokov (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2000).

⁴⁸³ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses* p.113.

⁴⁸⁴ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses* p.115.

⁴⁸⁵ Michael P. Ryan, 'Samsa and Samsara: Suffering, Death and Rebirth in *The Metamorphosis*', *German Quarterly* 72 (1999), pp.132-152.

⁴⁸⁶ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p.115.

⁴⁸⁷ Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident*, p.15.

Dupré states, ‘are ultimately processes’ and not ‘understandable in terms of one set of properties, say those of the adult organism.’⁴⁸⁸

... It is the robustness of the cyclical process that makes possible the recurrence of the various stages rather than the stability of the stages that makes possible the cycle. And crucially, evolution consists of sequences of overlapping and interacting life cycles rather than just a series of adult organisms.

In *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), Neil Evernden cites the example of a small fish called a Cichlid which, during the breeding season, apparently does not recognize what an ‘insignificant specimen’ he is and considers himself as ‘as big as his territory.’ The fluidity of the element within which the fish lives is obviously evocative in this context and Evernden states that similarly ‘instead of a detachment from the environment’ we must recognize a ‘subtle diffusion into it.’⁴⁸⁹ ‘The fish is no longer an organism bound by skin – it is an organism-plus-environment bounded by an imaginary integument.’ There is no clear point of division between the individual and the environment,⁴⁹⁰ but a ‘gradient’ that acts as a ‘field’ by which the ‘self’ is more concentrated towards the centre of the territory. Evernden identifies the separation between notions of the ‘self’ and environment in western philosophy as being a central problem in environmentalism, and admits that to extend this analogy to human territoriality may be a ‘precarious step.’ Nonetheless, it is a necessary step.

Not only are we not part of an environment, we are not even part of a *body*. We, the “real” us, is concentrated in some disputed recess of the body, a precious cocoon, separate from the world of matter. Far from extending our “self” into the environment as the territorial fish does, we hoard our ego as tightly as we can.

⁴⁸⁸ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.2.

⁴⁸⁹ Evernden ‘Beyond Ecology, Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy’, *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.97.

⁴⁹⁰ Evernden, ‘Beyond Ecology, Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy’, *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.98.

Fish are not usually considered in anthropomorphic ways because they are cold-blooded, perceived as unfeeling, without consciousness or memory. Indeed, they are seemingly so ‘other’ as to sometimes be considered as representing an alternative consciousness.⁴⁹¹ In Indian mythology, fish symbolise the concepts of creation and transformation as embodied in the ancient Hindu flood myth where Vishnu’s first transformation is as the fish ‘Matsya’ who saves Manu and other creatures from drowning⁴⁹² by pulling their boat to safety. In ‘Zoomorphism in Ancient India, Humans more Bestial than Beasts,’ Wendy Doniger discusses the traditional Indian story where two sages argue on a bridge about the existence of fish and whether it is possible to tell if they are happy.⁴⁹³ She argues that the physical bridge upon which the sages stand represents an ‘inexplicable bridge of emotion’ connecting us with the fish as other living entities, as well as being a metaphor ‘for all that *separates* us from the fishes. We can never be certain that we know their happiness.’⁴⁹⁴ This echoes Nagel’s conclusion in ‘What is it Like to be a Bat,’⁴⁹⁵ where the bat is considered strange and fundamentally ‘alien,’ but whilst having a character ‘beyond our capability to conceive’ we are still able to recognise ‘something that it is like to be a bat.’ Although we are unable to fully fathom the subjective existence of an animal, this does not preclude an attempt to consider other perspectives – what it might be like to be them.

⁴⁹¹ Wendy Doniger, ‘Zoomorphism in Ancient India, Humans more Bestial than Beasts,’ *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, eds. Lorraine Daston and Greg Mitman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p.18.

⁴⁹² In African myth, Mangala the Creator plants seeds from which two fish appear representing the first instance of life. In Norse and ancient European cultures, fish symbolised adaptability and the fluidity of life. In Greco-Roman mythology fish represented transformation and change. In China they represent unity and fidelity, and in Christian belief they symbolise faith.

⁴⁹³ Which has its foundation in a well-known Daoist tale.

⁴⁹⁴ Doniger, ‘Zoomorphism in Ancient India, Humans more Bestial than Beasts,’ *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, p.19.

⁴⁹⁵ Thomas Nagel, ‘What Is It Like to Be a Bat,’ *The Philosophical Review* 83 (1974), pp.435-450.

In 'Inventive Fish,' a poem from *Sycorax*, Namjoshi describes the pet fish kept by a Chinese Empress as 'poets,' but as merely representing 'thoughts in the Empress's head.'

First there are fish. Each flicker of their fins engenders geometries. Each instant traversed renews the marriage of time and space. Is their space bounded or unbounded? Bounded. They are poets. Their boundaries are elastic, changing, changeable. Their boundaries are boundless. Meaning they're liars? No poets. Exuberant, inexhaustible ... They create boundary after boundary, solar systems, stars, galaxies, universes. What about her? Who? She in whose universe the fish shimmy. Shimmy? Yes ... the fish are thoughts in the Empress's head. Is that sufficient? Oh, yes. Once imagined, the fish do the rest.⁴⁹⁶

Seemingly, the fish only exist in the imagination of the Empress who ultimately holds dominion over them. She sees them as merely 'restful' and uses them as a mere screensaver for they are 'no more than a hobby of hers.' The texture of Namjoshi's prose piece is dreamlike; the sentences are short and questioning, possibly mimicking the difficulty of grabbing hold of the fish in water, as well as the inability to grasp the subjective experience of the fish. Paradoxically, fish are both the 'flickering' imagination of the Empress; existing merely within her head, as well as antecedent creative entities with 'elastic, changing and changeable' boundaries described by plasticity. In her universe the fish create space. 'First there are fish,' follows the predominant model of evolution. Yet, it soon becomes apparent that the fish are merely prey to human desires; and eventually they merely 'shimmy' in the Empress' universe and are entirely subject to her whims. In an allegory of an uncaring deity she is especially fascinated by those who are suicidal, watching their pain as entertainment and as a means by which she can lull herself to sleep. Deciding, goddess-like, to secure their immortality

⁴⁹⁶ Namjoshi, *Sycorax*, pp.32-33.

with a bigger aquarium and more oxygen, she is more concerned with self-congratulation, to remain in control whilst appearing charitable and concerned, ‘the thought that she is now the owner of immortal fish makes her smile,’ but finally she eats them without any pang of conscience. The occasional lapse, when she cannot resist consuming them, as Namjoshi describes as ‘delicately pan-fried,’ she is amazed when ‘plate and fishbone’ surprisingly reappear, as if the Empress is removed from all culpability. This is similar to the way in which Namjoshi describes the witch Sycorax justifying the fact that she ate the lizard that occupied the island before her.

In contrast to cold-blooded and less ‘relatable’ animals, apes have often been considered in the human imagination as our closest relatives. However, animals, including the great apes, are still widely regarded and treated as being lower down on some notional phylogenetic hierarchy than humans. Although considered generally as empathetic creatures and obviously valuable to human imagination, apes are generally considered as ‘hairy’ primitive ancestors and thus ‘less’ than human. Darwin’s theory still remains contentious to some Creationists in this regard. As Dumsday opines in *The Satanic Verses*: ‘If I believed that my great-granddaddy was a chimpanzee, why, I’d be pretty depressed myself.’⁴⁹⁷ Yet, as Jonathan Marks states, because there have been relatively few genetic changes related to major morphological differences between humans and chimpanzees, it would be accurate to say that humans are ninety eight percent chimpanzee,⁴⁹⁸ and although human hairs are thinner and often invisible, humans have as many

⁴⁹⁷ Rushdie, Eugene Dumsday in *The Satanic Verses*, p.76.

⁴⁹⁸ Jonathan Marks, *What it Means to be 98% Chimpanzee: Apes, People and their Genes* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 2003).

hairs as apes and monkeys.⁴⁹⁹ Despite this fact, the association of fur with ‘beastliness’ and uncontrolled sexuality has meant that ‘degenerate humans’⁵⁰⁰ are often represented as monkeys.

Traditionally, monkeys and apes, in being closely linked genetically to humans, perhaps by some considered as ‘dangerously’ close to human beings, have been used in a variety of images that span the ‘brutish’ to the ‘humane,’ from King Kong to the P.G. Tips chimpanzees. Despite some reluctance to accept these undeniable evolutionary connections, Fernández-Armesto states that the relationship between humanity and apes forms the foundation of many tales of metamorphosis in many cultures.

In Franz Kafka’s ironic short story, ‘A Report to an Academy’ (1919), the ape Rotpeter, undergoes a transformation from ape to human and consequently addresses a human audience about his traumatic captivity and subsequent ‘civilising’ metamorphosis. On board ship, he is cruelly imprisoned in a cage that is too small for him and cuts his flesh. Whilst being captured, he is shot twice, once in the face leaving him with an ugly large red scar, and the reason for his new name, and a ‘severe wound’ near his hip leaving him with a limp. Ironically, maintaining polite social etiquette is deemed more important than recognition of the level of cruelty meted out to him. It is what is considered as the inappropriateness of his insistence on removing his trousers to show people his scar that determines that his transformation to ‘human’ is not complete.

Hopelessly sobbing, painfully hunting for fleas, apathetically licking a coconut, beating my skull against the locker, sticking out my tongue at anyone who came near me – that was how I filled in time at first in my new life ... of course what I felt then as an ape I can represent now only in human

⁴⁹⁹ Jablonski, *Skin, A Natural History*, p.19.

⁵⁰⁰ Fernández-Armesto, *So You Think You’re Human?* pp.63-64.

terms, and therefore I misrepresent it, but although I cannot reach back to the truth of the old ape, there is no doubt that it lies somewhere in the direction I have indicated.⁵⁰¹

An attempt at representing perspectives beyond ‘human terms,’ made with the best intentions, even with the possibility of inevitable misrepresentations, is better than no attempt at all. As Doniger discusses in ‘Zoomorphism in Ancient India, Humans More Bestial Than the Beasts,’⁵⁰² parallel monkey and human characters are evident in Ancient Indian Sanskrit texts like the *Ramayana* written between the second century BCE and second century CE where each of the major human characters has a ‘double’ among the monkeys who help Rama kill Ravana and rescue Sita. Doniger states that this indicates that, ‘bestial qualities [are] imputed to the human usually reveal an observation of animals more detailed (if no more accurate) than that of anthropomorphism.’⁵⁰³ In an eastern context: ‘Monkeys are like people, and special monkeys are the sons of gods, as special people are.’⁵⁰⁴ In the *Ramayana*, the monkey god Hanuman is the ‘hero’ character central to the rescue of the Goddess Sita from the demon Ravana, and significantly speaks in formal Sanskrit. In Western tradition, beasts are generally less heroic; the image of fur is ambiguous, representing both unbounded bestiality and the ‘fluffiness’ of familiar domestic animals and pets.

Namjoshi and Hariharan both frequently use images of women as monkeys, and significantly as one-eyed monkeys, to indicate both their vulnerability and their physical strength; they are also inventive, adaptable and powerfully enduring. This paradox has its origins in Greek mythology

⁵⁰¹ Franz Kafka, *A Report to an Academy* in *Der Jude* (Germany: Martin Buber, 1917).

⁵⁰² Daston and Mitman, *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, pp.17-36.

⁵⁰³ Wendy Doniger, in ‘Zoomorphism in Ancient India, Humans More Bestial Than the Beasts,’ Daston and Mitman, *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, p.17.

⁵⁰⁴ Doniger ‘Zoomorphism in Ancient India, Humans more Bestial than Beasts,’ Daston and Mitman, *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, p.20.

where the Cyclops Polyphemus, son of Poseidon, is a powerful one-eyed giant but is victim of Odysseus' trickery.⁵⁰⁵ In 'The Stellification of the One-Eyed Monkey,' Namjoshi describes the surprising success of a monkey who adapts and exploits her perceived debility by starting a fashion for eye-patches.

The one-eyed monkey had made it. She had achieved beatitude – well if not beatitude, then something better...She was famous, she glittered, she should have been happy...They thought she disagreed about having come a long way, so they said to her persuasively, 'Monkeys don't have much of a chance in society. Monkeys are nothing. And so for a monkey you've done remarkable well, and even more so for a one-eyed monkey!'⁵⁰⁶

In the fable 'Moonstruck,'⁵⁰⁷ Namjoshi exemplifies a one-eyed monkey who, fascinated by the moon and reaching for its reflection in a lake, is considered 'A little slow to learn? Excessively childish?' It is believed that she cannot tell the difference between 'reality' and 'reflection,' and so it is hoped that she will 'grow up to be a reasonable poet.' Ironically, despite what are considered conventionally as unexceptional expectations, she becomes an eminent physicist – generally considered a more prestigious occupation! In 'The Monkey and the Crocodiles Once Again' the one-eyed monkey celebrates that, ironically, she can now 'see both sides of a question, and, on occasion, several more sides.'⁵⁰⁸

In *When Dreams Travel*, Hariharan describes Shahrzad's sister Dunyazad, the servant Dilshad and the slave Satyasama as 'freakish'⁵⁰⁹ and 'monkey

⁵⁰⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Imaginary Beings* (Buenos Aires, 1967; repr. London: Vintage, 2002). Borges writes a section on the power and inventiveness of 'One-Eyed Beings.'

⁵⁰⁶ Namjoshi, *Sycorax, New Fables and Poems*, pp.63-64.

⁵⁰⁷ Namjoshi, *Sycorax, New Fables and Poems*, pp.45-46.

⁵⁰⁸ Namjoshi, *Sycorax, New Fables and Poems*, p.111. The ease with which she seems to summarise and address existence may unfortunately appear trite, as I discuss in 'And There's You and Me, My Sweet Duality,' and may therefore explain why Namjoshi has not been more widely read and critically reviewed.

⁵⁰⁹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.44 and p.90.

like,⁵¹⁰ foregrounding their connection to each other and to the more-than-human world. Satyasama, meaning ‘truth-tranquillity’ in Sanskrit, is cast out as a baby by her parents because of her fur and simian features.

When Satyasama’s downy baby face grew a mask of fur, the parents were sad and frightened. But when her forehead widened and receded, and the sharp family nose was blunted so that her features grew suspiciously simian, they were furious; they just had to throw her out.⁵¹¹

Eventually sold as a slave, Satyasama’s pelt makes her a ‘rare and entertaining catch,’⁵¹² a strange addition to the ‘freaks’⁵¹³ wing of Shahryar’s harem. Covered in a ‘sleek lightweight fur,’⁵¹⁴ she is considered ‘laughably childish,’ and her claim to be a poet an ironic ‘crowning touch’ to her otherness and perceived animality. Satyasama, is renamed Bilquis in the harem ‘in honour of the woman with hairy legs who spoke to butterflies,’⁵¹⁵ after the legend of Queen Makeda of Ethiopia. Known as Bilquis by ancient Moslems, and the Queen of Sheba in the bible, she is said to have mistaken the glassy floor of the palace for a pool of water and, when lifting her skirts, to have revealed hairy legs and cloven feet. This ‘concealed’ hairiness and cloven hooves are traditionally associated with the devil and increases the sense of exoticism, sexuality and seductive power. Indeed, Freud writes that foot and hair fetishes are associated with the ‘longed-for sight of the female member.’⁵¹⁶ Alternatively, it could be that, as Warner states, hairiness and transformation into beast is a form of refuge since ‘their metamorphosis

⁵¹⁰ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.167. Dilshad, Satyasama p.263.

⁵¹¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.136.

⁵¹² Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.91.

⁵¹³ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.136.

⁵¹⁴ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.91.

⁵¹⁵ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.92.

⁵¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Fetishism* (1927), quoted in Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (UK: Chatto and Windus, 1994) repr; (UK: Vintage, 1995), p.113.

changes their problematic fleshy envelope' to escape the 'undesirable desire' they have inspired.⁵¹⁷

She was called Satya, and apparently made the mistake of taking her name seriously. Her verse, a little too truthful for some tastes, offended the ruler of her city. He summoned his hangman and the noose was slipped round her neck and tightened. But at the last minute the hangman felt an unreasonable compassion and loosened the rope. Her neck was ringed with angry red bands and her voice was changed forever ... Shahryar and his cup-companions were struck by the story. They tried to coax Satya into reciting one of her poems, but she stood there silent, stupid and hairy.⁵¹⁸

Despite her last-minute reprieve, because the hangman develops what is dismissively described as an 'unreasonable compassion' for something so grotesque, Satya is 'saved' but is left permanently traumatised, scarred and unable to speak – merely cawing like a crow. Muteness is assumed to designate stupidity, and the power of melodious language only assigned to 'higher' species. The discordant noise of a crow classifies her as a ridiculous figure of fun, and when she finally starts to 'sing' it only attracts other monkeys because the cacophony is not what humans would conventionally perceive as musical.

Now that One-eyed Monkey-Face had found herself a home, she was fully grown up. With just one eye (and that one trained to focus long-distance) she had even more trouble keeping up appearances. Her fur was entirely ungroomed on the right side. Her rump was a matted mess of flattened hair and a torn tuft or two. More important, she suspected it didn't matter. In her bones she felt her beauty had nothing to do with fur or face ... Once Monkey-Face had learnt confidence, begun to revel in her one-eyed self, she was ready for the second phase of her career: she took to singing. At first her singing attracted only a few stray monkeys. Though they were not human like her, they were tame and docile.⁵¹⁹ Eventually, Satyasama's⁵²⁰ dying kiss bequeaths, 'a scrap of fur, date-sized, cockroach-shaped'⁵²¹ on the face of the slave girl Dilshad who, we are told,

⁵¹⁷ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers*, p.353.

⁵¹⁸ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.91.

⁵¹⁹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.139.

⁵²⁰ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.89.

⁵²¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.114.

has ‘numerous disguises.’⁵²² This strangely sensual image of a generally reviled but notably robust insect is both a curse and a powerful image of survival; an empowering legacy on Dilshad’s skin that also keeps Satyasama’s ‘hardy beast of a soul alive.’

Before she died in Dilshad’s arms, she mustered the strength to give the girl a parting kiss, a kiss that had nowhere else to go. It hooked itself onto Dilshad’s skin, a blessing or a curse. The poet was gone; she became memory; memory turned into legend. But as long as a slavegirl carries her kiss around like a tattoo on her face, the poet’s soul - Satyasama’s hardy beast of a soul – will manage to stay alive.⁵²³

In the next chapter, I discuss ways in which skin, as permeable and protective interface with the environment, and that perpetual skin processes and epigenetic responses connect all living and non-living entities. I focus on Hariharan’s vivid and nightmarish imagery which is able to relay abstract ecological and evolutionary theory in intensely physical ways.

⁵²² Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.88

⁵²³ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.94.

CHAPTER FOUR

Plasticity and Skin

**‘For shield, he had a lion’s skin, for weapon,
A lance with shining point of steel, a javelin,
And, his best armour, a courageous spirit.’⁵²⁴**

⁵²⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p.59.

Nina Jablonski traces the similarities and evolution of skins across species and over three hundred million years. From the thickened membrane of single cells in multicellular organisms, to the protective but relatively simple epidermis of invertebrates such as nematodes, the earliest vertebrates, the first tetrapods, reptiles, birds, and eventually mammals, skin has formed a protective and yet permeable interface.⁵²⁵ It may be uncomfortable to acknowledge these common beginnings, and vastly more reassuring to assume an essentially ordered, linear evolution with humans close to reaching an ultimate perfected outcome at the pinnacle of species hierarchy, but skin, common physical responses to the environment and evolutionary connections blur the notion of ‘discrete’ and dominant organisms.

Individual man has his particular integrity, to be sure. Oak trees, even mountains have selves or integrities too ...To our knowledge, those other forms are not troubled by seeing themselves in more than one way, as man is. In one aspect the self is an arrangement of organs, feelings and thoughts – a “me” – surrounded by a hard boundary: skin, clothes and insular habits ...The alternative is a self as a center of organization, constantly drawing on and influencing the surroundings, whose skin and behaviour are soft zones contacting the world instead of excluding it ... Attitudes toward ourselves do not change easily. The conventional image of a man, like that of a heraldic lion, is iconographic ...We are hidden from ourselves by habits of perception. Because we learn to talk at the same time we learn to think, our language, for example, encourages us to see ourselves – or a plant or animal – as an isolated sack, a thing, a contained self. Ecological thinking, on the other hand, requires a kind of vision across boundaries. The epidermis of the skin is ecologically like a pond surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much as a delicate interpenetration. It reveals the self ennobled and extended rather than threatened as part of the landscape and the ecosystem, because the beauty and complexity of nature are continuous with ourselves.⁵²⁶

This passage from *The Subversive Science*, remains as controversial as it was in 1969, because the notion of ‘self,’ usually assumed as *human* selves at the

⁵²⁵ Nina G., Jablonski, *Skin, A Natural History* (Berkeley C.A. and London: University of California Press, 2006, repr; 2013), p. 56. Follicles in human skin contain generative stem cells which are able to regulate hair growth and which are only found in the epidermis - these same cells occur in birds and allow the growth of feathers that initially evolved to prevent heat loss but then developed to allow flight.

⁵²⁶ Paul Shepard, *The Subversive Science, Essays Toward an Ecology of Man*, p.2.

centre of ecosystems, remains firmly entrenched. In *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1995), Neil Evernden similarly states that humanity has historically exhibited an unfortunate ‘mania for separate packages,’⁵²⁷ because humans find it easier to focus on proximate individual crises than to envisage vital ecological connections and engage with broader challenges. It is ‘easier to deal with pollution’ as a separate issue ‘than to contemplate a fundamental error in our set of cultural assumptions.’ What Shepard identifies as the essentially subversive element in ecology involves the recognition of the ‘delicate interpenetration of skin,’ not just of individual skins but collective skins, representing a ‘vision across boundaries’ between the ‘self’ and the world, between the ‘outside’ and the ‘inside,’ between environment and populations. Keratin, which forms the tough impervious outer layer of the epidermis, is found in all mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles.⁵²⁸ As such, skin forms the cross-species dynamic site of transformation as well as protective integument, described by Malabou’s theory of plasticity. Shedding, wounding and healing of skin involves the loss and replacement of cells, yet the ‘skin’ remains the same, and in cases of scarification, may retain overtly discernible traces of the past.

Humans shed approximately one and a half million skin cells every hour, achieving a new skin surface roughly every twenty-eight days. Some invertebrates cast off a whole layer of skin in the process of ecdysis, whilst some arthropods shed their exoskeletons, and some insects shed wings. Skins are shed and yet remain the ‘same’ thus illustrating an essential ‘plasticity.’ The mythological representation of shedding skin, as a means by

⁵²⁷ Evernden ‘Beyond Ecology, Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy’ from: *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, p.96.

⁵²⁸ Nina G. Jablonski, *Skin, A Natural History*, p.21.

which various inventive transformations are accomplished is long established. In Celtic and Icelandic mythology, Selkies are mythological creatures said to be able to shed their seal skin and temporarily take human form. Eliza Keary's (1827-1918) poem 'Little Seal Skin' details the kidnapping of a Selkie by a fisherman to be his wife. In this poem Keary considers how women of the mid 1870's faced the increasing pressure of modern existence and societal expectations. 'The Little Mermaid' by Hans Christian Andersen similarly describes the sacrifice of women to societal mores. The mermaid begs to be transformed by a witch, to have her fish tail removed and replaced it with human limbs so that she may marry the prince – even though it means that every subsequent step she takes will be agony. In the tale of Red Riding Hood, the wolf dons the skin of the dead grandmother as a disguise. Donning another skin is the ultimate metaphor of what Namjoshi calls the 'robbing of careful disguises.'⁵²⁹ In Namjoshi's 'The Message, the Medium and the Missionary' from *Sycorax*, the rabbit dons 'sheepskin' and 'wolfskin' to conceal herself. She is eventually devoured by wolves, and significantly only her skin is left behind as enduring evidence of her existence.

Skin processes in response to environmental stimuli similarly occur across species, and the erosion of non-living entities over time, and in response to environmental conditions, may also be considered in terms of a shedding. Thus, although skin has more often been considered as delineating separate individual and group identities in often negative ways, it may more positively form a collective trope through which to consider common responses to the

⁵²⁹ Namjoshi, 'Submerged,' *Sycorax*, p.108.

environment; in what Ingold terms ‘biosocial becomings’ and an ‘all-embracing matrix of relationships.’⁵³⁰ Indeed, entities not normally considered as ‘alive’ can be said to share similar responses, and if one defines skin as the essential interface with the environment, everything has a skin of sorts. Yet, Jablonski states that despite ‘the importance of the skin and the functions it performs, it is striking that relatively few scientists study its evolution.’⁵³¹ She notes that until about thirty years ago most scientific studies involved modern human skin and diseases.

In the introduction to *Thinking Through the Skin*, Ahmed and Stacey call for a ‘skin-tight politics’ which takes its orientation not [from] the body as such, but the fleshy interface between bodies and worlds,’ and which ‘poses the question of how skin becomes, rather than simply is, meaningful.’

To ask such a question is to suggest that the skin is always open to being read (and being read differently), we can also consider the ways in which these various techniques for reading produce skins in specific and determinate ways. For example, in consumer culture we are encouraged to read skin, especially feminine skin, as something that needs to be worked upon in order to be protected from the passage of time or the severity of the external world, and in order to retain its marker of gender difference in the softness of its feel.⁵³²

Yet, skin is ‘open to being read’ in very many more ways than ‘softness’ and is clearly essential to survival in many ways other than merely acting as a ‘sack’ within which ‘we’ are enclosed. Ironically, it is the notion of what lies ‘under the skin’ - what is ‘inside’ us – that is considered more significant. In her key research on epigenetics published in 2015, Clare Hanson states that epigenetic research is currently ‘uncovering mechanisms by means of which

⁵³⁰ Ingold, *Biosocial Becomings*, p.8.

⁵³⁰ Meloni, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, p.1.

⁵³¹ Jablonski, *Skin, A Natural History*, p.21.

⁵³² Sarah Ahmed, and Jackie Stacey, eds. *Thinking Through the Skin. Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2001), p.1.

the external environment can get *under the skin*...'⁵³³ [my emphasis] and also notes that 'early nurturing (e.g. breast-feeding) leaves epigenetic signatures under the skin.'⁵³⁴ Whilst this might highlight important and clearly intense interrelationships, it does not consider the plethora of processes occurring on the surface of the skin. Historically, human and animal, identities have been superficially delineated and judged as 'negative' or 'positive' by outward appearance and the skin. As Rushdie writes in *The Satanic Verses*, they are 'rendered objectionable' - or not – 'by the nature of their skin.'⁵³⁵

Judgements made on the appearance of skin are a means of exclusion or acceptance and are culturally determined by things such as pigmentation, signs of aging or marks like piercings, tattoos, and scarification. Considering this, it has been more acceptable to consider 'what lies beneath' skin in terms of authentic notions of identity, but rather than being a means by which difference is inscribed, skin offers more commonalities than variation, even across species. Skins are confronted by a huge variety of challenges such as desire and pleasure, trauma and pain, inscription and re-inscription, renewal and death. These varied and sometimes paradoxical processes, describe a very much more complex ecological interconnectedness – as an interface with the environment; a fundamental plasticity of skin similar to the way in which Malabou describes the brain.

The idea of cellular renewal, repair, and resourcefulness as auxiliaries of synaptic plasticity brings to light the power of *healing* – treatment, scarring, compensation, regeneration and the capacity of the brain to build natural prostheses.⁵³⁶

⁵³³ Clare Hanson, 'Epigenetics, Plasticity and Identity in Jackie Kay's Red Dust Road,' *Textual Practice*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rtpr20>, Published online 27th April 2015, (Accessed 24/7/15), p.436.

⁵³⁴ Hanson, 'Epigenetics, Plasticity and Identity in Jackie Kay's Red Dust Road,' p.437.

⁵³⁵ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.300.

⁵³⁶ Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*, p.27.

As well as clothing the surface of all other sites of the senses, skin constitutes the largest sense organ of the body. It forms a sensitive and yet protective integument that is also mutable. We are assumed as 'safe' within our skins, indeed deep-rooted philosophies are described as present 'under-the-skin,' and we can also be negatively judged or 'imprisoned' by it. These seemingly contradictory traits are effectively described by Malabou's theory of plasticity in that skin both 'gives' and 'receives' form; it encompasses, responds and records. Everything has a 'skin' of sorts, a permeable and yet protective interface subject to environmental stimuli. Seemingly disparate and contradictory processes occur on the surface of both 'living' and 'non-living' bodies in what Evernden terms a 'genuine intermingling,'⁵³⁷ rather than mere inter-relatedness or interconnectedness. Skin and metaphors of skin describe this intermingling where, as interface with the environment, it forms the site of desire, pleasure, trauma, pain, inscription, re-inscription, and regeneration. Thus, tropes of skin are eminently appropriate to describe the complex evolution of shape-shifting bodies in their wider temporal, cultural and environmental contexts.

A consideration of a 'genuine intermingling of parts of the ecosystem' through the manifold trope of skin, draws together varied philosophies of science, ecocriticism and literature in ways that are mutually illuminating. Skins form the point of convergence between history and biology; the interface between stories and bodies that suggests the writing of history is an enduring narrative between body and environment. This persisting narrative is not neatly ordered, linear and entirely genetically determined, but involves

⁵³⁷ Evernden, 'Beyond Ecology, Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy', p.93.

chaotic, cyclical and collective responses to epigenetic stimuli. This project is attentive to the particular power of Magic Real metaphors, to affectively convey the unifying processes and material complexity of skin. As Stephen Connor states, skin designates ambiguous functions as screen, filter and site of exchange, and as an interface between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ it defines both.

If the skin is a screen and a filter, it is also the medium of passage and exchange, with the attendant possibility of violent reversal or rupture. The skin is the vulnerable, unreliable boundary between inner and outer conditions and the proof of their frightening, fascinating intimate contiguity.⁵³⁸

Shepard states that the ‘delicate interpenetration of skin,’⁵³⁹ not just of individual skins but collective skins, represents a ‘vision across boundaries’ between the self and the world, between the outside and the inside, between environment, individuals and populations. Ingold calls for a reconsideration of the notion of discrete, bounded entities, arguing that there is no ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ but that we are:

... of the same flesh of the world, that there is no way of thinking or knowing that is not, in that sense, directed from within which we seek to know, and that this knowing, in the practice of our science, is part and parcel of the process of becoming that makes us who we are and shapes our very humanity, this approximation is immediately exposed as the artifice it is.⁵⁴⁰

Merleau-Ponty’s theory of a collective ‘flesh of the world,’ similarly involves considering the ‘flesh’ as interface⁵⁴¹ between ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ the mind and the body, ‘the seer’ and ‘the seen.’⁵⁴² Although seemingly

⁵³⁸ Stephen Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), p.65.

⁵³⁹ Shepard, *The Subversive Science, Essays Toward an Ecology of Man*, p.2.

⁵⁴⁰ Ingold, *Biosocial Becomings, Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology*, pp.9-10.

⁵⁴¹ The theory of its mediation between the body and the sensual experience of the world has links to Didier Anzieu’s theory of the skin ego.

⁵⁴² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945; repr. Oxford: Routledge Classics, 2002). Quoted in Dorothea Olkowski and James Morley, eds. *Merleau-Ponty Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World* (New York: State University of New York, 1999), p.8.

productive in ecological terms, his theory is problematic since he argues that life can only truly be termed ‘existence’ at the human level.⁵⁴³ Although focusing on sensual response as a collective and inclusive trope, where the world is populated by beings that are seen and seeing, ‘the flesh of the world’ as a crucial point of contact, of touching and being touched, Merleau-Ponty remains focused on the idea of human consciousness and pre-eminence. To perceive the world as existing only as a ‘staging ground’ for human behaviour is a narrow view that continues to bring the world to the brink of an environmental catastrophe. Thus, a re-thinking of ‘flesh’ requires recognition of its commonality and plasticity.

The trope of skin and its ‘plasticity’ in terms of its giving and receiving of form – its renewal and loss in shedding, scarring, wounding, flaying and healing describe an essential ecological and evolutionary interconnection between the organic and the inorganic, between the living and the non-living. Magic Real metaphors of common biological skin processes therefore explicate scientific theory in more relatable terms. In *The Ontology of the Accident*, Malabou argues that ‘we must find a way to think a mutation that engages both form and being, a new form that is literally a form of being.’ Malabou argues that it is problematic that ‘form can be thought separately from the nature of the being that transforms itself. The fact that form is presented as skin, vestment or finery, and that one can always leave without an alteration in what is essential.’⁵⁴⁴ I argue that metaphors of skin have much broader connotations than ‘what could be left hanging like a garment on a chair’ and thus offer a new way to ‘think mutation.’ The wholesale

⁵⁴³ Olkowski and Morley, *Merleau- Ponty Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World*, p.3.

⁵⁴⁴ Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident*, p.17.

shedding of skin can be positive, offering a means of flight through spontaneous transformation or the donning of another ‘skin,’ and the gradual shedding of skin is a ubiquitous process of renewal. Skin, offering refuge within a ‘cocoon’ or in the body of a collective super-organism or metaorganism, can preserve a sense of identity, conversely, it can delineate the loss of identity or the devastation of flaying. The comparatively straightforward donning or ‘wholesale’ removal of skin and identity in ‘instant’ metamorphoses is ubiquitous in ancient myth, legend, fairy tales and folk tales from all over the world, such as ‘Donkey Skin’⁵⁴⁵ and ‘Seal Skin.’ In a section entitled ‘Fairy Tale’ from her autobiography *Goja*, Namjoshi reinvents some of the same characters from *Building Babel*, one of which is The Black Piglet who announces that the Queen of Spades:

... dons my own flayed skin and is utterly transformed, is no longer Queen. And as for me, I am free... The Queen of Spades and the Black Piglet are they the same? The Queen of Spades and the Black Piglet are different. One sticks the pig. The other is the pig. The pig squeals. The Queen of Spades and the Black Piglet inhabit the same body. Two bodies? No, my body. This monster I have made from my own imaginings.⁵⁴⁶

The word ‘monster’ has obviously negative connotations, but ‘monstro’ in Latin means to show or point out. Imagination constructs and ‘points out’ visions beyond rigid boundaries of the ‘literal.’ In ‘The Lion Skin’ from Namjoshi’s *The Blue Donkey Fables*, the protagonist asks: ‘Do I remove my skin?’ and is encouraged to do so by her lover, who ultimately flays her, saying ‘You be me, and I’ll be you.’ This describes the intense physicality of a torturous transformation into compliant lover, as well as alluding to the dominance of human over animal in the cutting of the lion’s skin to ‘fit’ human desires. The lady in the poem describes the flesh as ‘delectable, firm

⁵⁴⁵ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, gives several references to these phenomena.

⁵⁴⁶ Namjoshi, *Goja*, pp.24-28.

and juicy'⁵⁴⁷ and 'good to eat,' taking great pleasure in the process of flaying, whilst her lover admires the precision with which she does it. It is evident that the lover feels exquisite pain 'there's a pleasure in the nerve ends that makes one want to scream.'

At last I screamed. And such was the measure
of this rare lady and such her supreme
and unexampled skill that she made me scream
again and again and long to wake and still to dream.

This image is troubling in that it describes the willing compliance of the lover/animal in such a torturous process, but the transformation, as the sexual act, conveys the physicality of skin in both intensely painful and pleasurable ways.

Surprisingly, the imagery of flaying is sometimes represented as generative in relaying the ability to extemporaneously take on another identity. Such spontaneous transformations, as in the donning of another skin, occur in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a means of escape in response to fatal threat. As Stephen Connor states: '[f]laying is always, it seems, accompanied or followed by the possibility of a re-assumption: either the assumption of another skin, or the resumption of one's own skin (through healing).'⁵⁴⁸ As such, Connor argues that '[t]he skin therefore provides a model of the self preserved against change, and also reborn through change.' In this sense, it is plastic in both receiving and giving form, describing a newness that retains a trace of the past and so is not new. Using an analogy from Greek mythology, Connor states that the aegis, the goatskin shield, given to Zeus by his goat-nurse and which he then gives to his daughter Athena, and who then gives it to Perseus, becomes more and more powerful

⁵⁴⁷ Namjoshi, 'The Lion Skin' *The Blue Donkey Fables*, p.33.

⁵⁴⁸ Connor, *The Book of Skin*, pp.31-32.

as it is passed on. Thus, each stripping of skin, rather than an adverse loss, empowers the next generation.

The aegis passes from Zeus' goat-nurse Amaltheia to Zeus, and then, metaphorically to Zeus' daughter Athena, who uses it in her battle against the giant Pallas, whose skin she strips off for her aegis. The power of the aegis passes to Perseus, in the form of the bronze shield with which he deflects the gaze of the gorgon, before decapitating it and fixing it to Athena's aegis, to increase its power even more. At each stage, the aegis becomes more itself, its power generalized and concentrated even as it is shared.

The wounding, scarring or healing of skin is similarly ambiguous, offering positive affirmations of 'belonging,' in scarring or branding or as a punishment that designates chastisement, exile or loss. As such, I argue that skin has an essential 'plasticity' through its constant renewal whilst also remaining the 'same,' to the extent that it is considered as a marker of identity.

Hariharan's characters in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, and the one thousand and one nights of Shahrzad's stories in *When Dreams Travel* (1999) represent the collective 'survival modes' of transforming bodies. In an interview with Antonia Navarro-Tejero in 2005, Hariharan states that Devi, the main character in *The Thousand Faces of Night* who returns to her maternal home in India after an unsuccessful sojourn in America, is named for the Hindu Mother Goddess whose multiple incarnations represent the mutability of 'ultimate reality.'⁵⁴⁹ In this respect she represents the 'thousand faces' of the title, and is 'greedy for her own story.'⁵⁵⁰ She is a 'chameleon' wearing a deceptive 'inconspicuously brown

⁵⁴⁹ Hariharan in an interview with Antonia Navarro-Tejero, *Gender and Caste in the Anglophone-Indian Novels of Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan, Feminist Issues in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, p.45.

⁵⁵⁰ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.137.

sari,⁵⁵¹ considered to be complex, a ‘risky oddity,’⁵⁵² belonging neither in America nor in India, and alternates between dreams of being the ‘woman avenger’⁵⁵³ of her grandmother’s stories and behaving with a cowering submissiveness in response to her ‘tormentor.’⁵⁵⁴ Hariharan states that Devi finally retrieves the multiple disguises that she claims have been ‘given by the goddess’ and ‘robbed’⁵⁵⁵ by men.

Indeed, Hariharan attributes the ultimate ‘survival mode’ of her characters to ‘multiple disguises;’ the ability to transform, the crafting of shared stories, and collectively evolving, powerfully enduring bodies whose skins are ‘vulnerable to sudden changes.’⁵⁵⁶ The interlocking narratives of Devi, her mother Sita and the elderly nursemaid Mayamma collectively repair the ‘cracks’⁵⁵⁷ which ‘gape’ in their individual stories.

I think, in that sense, the plurality of the title – the faces- should be taken quite literally. If you see Devi by herself, you are going to see this rather pale weak creature being buffeted about by patriarchal realities. It is only by seeing all the women in that book together, as a composite woman, that you are able to achieve the survival modes of Indian women the book is talking about. In fact, the questioning central figure, a composite figure of many faces and voices, is something that has long fascinated me, and it recurs in my second and third novels.⁵⁵⁸

Devi wants to ‘stretch her frame’⁵⁵⁹ and to finally ‘take the reins of her life,’⁵⁶⁰ and draws strength through her connection with both women. She and her mother Sita have a fundamental genetic connection forming what

⁵⁵¹ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.124.

⁵⁵² Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.21.

⁵⁵³ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.39.

⁵⁵⁴ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.54.

⁵⁵⁵ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.92.

⁵⁵⁶ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.87.

⁵⁵⁷ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.vii.

⁵⁵⁸ Hariharan in an interview with Antonia Navarro-Tejero. *Gender and Caste in the Anglophone-Indian Novels of Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan, Feminist Issues in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, p.45.

⁵⁵⁹ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.137.

⁵⁶⁰ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night* p.89.

Hariharan, despite their avoidance of physical contact, describes as a ‘one celled unit of mother and daughter.’⁵⁶¹

Amma and I did not touch each other and we certainly did not talk about love...But in the first few weeks after my return to Madras, we were intensely conscious of each other; we were pulled together by a tender protectiveness that encircled our necks with its fine threads...we became a one-celled unit.⁵⁶²

Devi’s identity and narrative are also entwined with her nursemaid

Mayamma. Although they are not biologically related, Mayamma is mainly responsible for Devi’s subsequent development, upbringing and socialization evidencing the importance of epigenetic factors in evolution and

development. As Dupré states, ‘far from the behaviour of a cell being ‘programmed’ in the DNA, it can now be seen to be jointly determined by a bewildering array of molecules and subcellular structures, many of these in turn being open to important influences from outside the cell.’⁵⁶³ The

importance of both biological and epigenetic influences is clear in the way that the narrative is shared by Devi, her mother and her nursemaid, all three characters individually narrating a chapter in Part Three of the novel.

Hariharan describes their collective story in terms of ecological discourse where they all walk ‘a tightrope and struggle[d] for some balance; for some means of survival they could fashion for themselves’⁵⁶⁴ when subject to a plethora of spurs and environmental influences.

At university in America, Devi feels the ‘pull’ of deeply held traditional beliefs, and of what she sees as the ‘burden of Indianness.’⁵⁶⁵ Devi’s relationship with her African American lover Dan alleviates the ‘white

⁵⁶¹ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.13.

⁵⁶² Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.13.

⁵⁶³ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.1.

⁵⁶⁴ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.135.

⁵⁶⁵ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.4.

claustrophobia of an all-clean American campus,⁵⁶⁶ but it culminates in a ‘dismally insistent separateness,’⁵⁶⁷ foreshadowed by his black friends’ reaction to the wall hanging of the ‘blue, baby-faced’⁵⁶⁸ Krishna that she gives them as a gift. After a late night swim in the ocean, she is almost drowned by Dan’s desperate attempts to save himself by clinging to her and she then recognises that she has merely become part of his superficial collection of ‘exotica.’⁵⁶⁹ She considers life in America as the female ‘other’ as no less imprisoning than that of an arranged marriage in India and decides to go home. In recognising that skin ‘gets in the way,’⁵⁷⁰ Devi refers to sexual desire as well as familial, societal and cultural expectations. Convention is so completely insinuated into physical bodies that, as her mother Sita claims, if one were to scratch beneath the surface of her skin one would find ‘a good, south Indian Brahmin.’⁵⁷¹ Devi is similarly ‘branded’ with the conviction that in being ‘so fragile, so feminine,’⁵⁷² she must assume traditional female roles as daughter, daughter-in-law, wife and lover. Her father-in-law Baba, is a Brahmin and retired Sanskrit professor, clearly representing strict Hindu tradition as enshrined in the Laws of Manu. ‘Marriageable’ women are required to be ‘fair, beautiful, home-loving and prepared to ‘adjust.’⁵⁷³ Yet, significantly, the goddess Devi is the only goddess in the Hindu Pantheon who is not consort to a male god. Being ‘fair’ is meant in literal terms concerning the paleness of skin. Devi’s grandmother’s servant Gauri, meaning golden, is named for an incarnation of

⁵⁶⁶ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.1.

⁵⁶⁷ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.5.

⁵⁶⁸ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.5.

⁵⁶⁹ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.2.

⁵⁷⁰ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.89.

⁵⁷¹ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.17.

⁵⁷² Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.93.

⁵⁷³ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.17.

the mother goddess, Parvati, who asks Brahma to lighten her skin in order that she may more easily seduce Shiva. Brahma takes Parvati's dark skin and uses it to create the destroyer goddess Kali. In the novel, Devi's grandmother rubs her skin with coconut oil to make her complexion lighter⁵⁷⁴ and more attractive. Despite her dark skin, Sita has 'won an auspicious' marriage, because of her skill on the Veena.⁵⁷⁵

Ironically, Devi initially finds temporary refuge from 'the travesty of the myths that had filled [her] childhood'⁵⁷⁶ in Baba's entrancing stories which 'hold back [the] yawning emptiness'⁵⁷⁷ of her marriage.⁵⁷⁸ She feels a physical 'piercing ache' yet a 'nameless dread'⁵⁷⁹ at the prospect of returning to India, her mother and the 'precious dungeon'⁵⁸⁰ of an arranged marriage, where her body will become 'a stranger'⁵⁸¹ and merely a 'receptacle for motherhood.'⁵⁸² Having submitted to tradition and to her determined mother Sita,⁵⁸³ Devi marries Mahesh who, she quickly realises is not the prince of her grandmother's enchanting childhood stories.⁵⁸⁴ Devi describes herself at this point as an 'obedient'⁵⁸⁵ and 'wooden puppet.'⁵⁸⁶ She is a 'glamorous vending machine,'⁵⁸⁷ controlled by tradition, her family, lovers, and husband and, as such, is gradually 'diminishing.'⁵⁸⁸ At this point, Devi can only dream of the bodily transcendence found in Hariharan's later novels, bodies

⁵⁷⁴ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.19.

⁵⁷⁵ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, pp.102-103.

⁵⁷⁶ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.23.

⁵⁷⁷ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.68.

⁵⁷⁸ Devi is similarly entranced by the music of her lover, the 'beautiful despot' Gopa, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.128, suggesting her weakness in the face of desire.

⁵⁷⁹ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.7.

⁵⁸⁰ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.74.

⁵⁸¹ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.88.

⁵⁸² Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.89.

⁵⁸³ Named for the goddess who represents the 'perfect' wife and mother in Hinduism.

⁵⁸⁴ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.22.

⁵⁸⁵ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.136.

⁵⁸⁶ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.83.

⁵⁸⁷ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.73.

⁵⁸⁸ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.93.

freed from physical, religious and cultural constraints, and capable of ‘tearing away their shadows and melting, like liquid wax burnt by moonlight.’⁵⁸⁹ In fact, Devi becomes so compliant and dependent on her father-in-law’s stories that ‘grief clings like small hooks to the pores of [her] skin.’⁵⁹⁰ At this point she is described as weak, ‘an ignorant child imprisoned in a woman’s body,’⁵⁹¹ and is only able to fantasise about becoming an incarnation of Durga, and being able to grow ‘three extra layers of skin’ as ‘impenetrable armour’⁵⁹² that is eventually composed of the skins she ‘shares’ with her grandmother, the nursemaid Mayamma and her mother Sita.

In contrast to Baba’s stories, Devi’s grandmother describes ‘enchanted ritual’⁵⁹³ involving superhuman women ‘warriors’⁵⁹⁴ who have been ‘twisted’ and ‘turned inside out,’⁵⁹⁵ describing the painful and yet affirming ability to adapt. The stories offer ‘ideal moulds, impossibly ambitious, that challenged the puny listener to stretch her frame and fit into vast spaces, live up to her illustrious ancestors.’⁵⁹⁶

In her second novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), Hariharan develops the ‘composite figure[s] of many faces and voices.’⁵⁹⁷ Vasu, named after the eight gods who represent nature in Hinduism, is a retired and ailing schoolmaster whose body is similarly inhabited by the ‘ghosts’ of his ancestors. He takes on the challenge of mentoring and ‘healing’ Mani, a

⁵⁸⁹ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.74.

⁵⁹⁰ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.85.

⁵⁹¹ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.128.

⁵⁹² Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.42.

⁵⁹³ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.15.

⁵⁹⁴ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.27.

⁵⁹⁵ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.20.

⁵⁹⁶ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.27.

⁵⁹⁷ Hariharan in an interview with Antonia Navarro-Tejero. *Gender and Caste in the Anglophone-Indian Novels of Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan, Feminist Issues in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, p.45.

mute ‘pale-skinned boy.’⁵⁹⁸ The prophet Mani 216 CE was the founder of Manichaeism, a religion based on the opposing dualities of light and dark, good and evil. In what could be seen as an ecologically balanced model, Vasu’s ghosts and stories complicate this simplistic dualism, and forms a collective ‘well-rounded story’ through the ‘manifold path ... the ability to perceive the world – real and imaginary – as one poetic whole.’⁵⁹⁹ This is not suggestive of static hybridity, but a dynamic plasticity where change does not involve a jettisoning of the past.

All nature’s manifestations, he continued, be it a mango or a flower or a rock or a pat of cow-dung or human consciousness, go through a process of change. A change that is inevitable and that follows a cyclical pattern. What is the pattern? The first phase is birth, freshness, innocence, purity. The second is outward growth when the first innocence is shed. The third phase is decay, which leads to death or transformation. The struggle with death is a natural instinct. It is an expression of desire to live on, to be reborn, and this is what happens at the end of the third phase. So – a new birth again, and the cycle goes on, round and round.⁶⁰⁰

Mani and Vasu have been ‘branded’ with names that are reductive ‘empty titles,’⁶⁰¹ and Vasu declares that such designations are damaging. All gurus ‘have to renounce their individual names; shed chunks of their personal histories. They become part of a collective spirit that connects them forever with their disciples.’⁶⁰² In this respect, he and Mani are able to ‘heal’ each other. Vasu’s ever-present ancestral ‘ghosts’ contribute to composite identities in the novel, but his collective spirit notably includes other species that are normally considered to be ‘lesser’ creatures. He is ‘invaded by memories, mice, crows, spiders, even the hosts of flies.’⁶⁰³ Vasu’s body has

⁵⁹⁸ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.8.

⁵⁹⁹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.266.

⁶⁰⁰ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.22.

⁶⁰¹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.103.

⁶⁰² Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.161.

⁶⁰³ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.7.

‘layers of skin’ like an onion,⁶⁰⁴ and the unity of shared bodies and skins, engaged in perpetual evolution and resilient syntheses crucial to survival, compensate for individual ‘deficiencies.’⁶⁰⁵ Indeed, Vasu questions whether it is possible that ‘a single face [can] contain all the features of truth?’⁶⁰⁶ The question of ‘who am I?’⁶⁰⁷ in Hariharan’s terms, foregrounds the ‘peculiar unstable situation’ of the body, the ‘perennial navel gazing question’ of the connection between the ‘inner worlds’ of mind and body, and the ‘outer worlds’ in the perpetual resilient syntheses of a radical immanence. It is through the reconnection of Vasu’s ‘divided self,’ his frail and ‘mangled body,’⁶⁰⁸ with his robust questioning mind,⁶⁰⁹ the strong youthful body with the damaged mind of Mani his pupil, that both Vasu and Mani are ‘healed.’

...from this vantage point I could also look back in snatches, remember all the parts of the changeable body, its ancestors and descendants, so that I could see it whole again. Otherwise I became a flat, one-dimensional figure, a man in the presence of an empty room, on the verge of extinction.⁶¹⁰

Indeed, Vasu’s ‘one-dimensional’ body is ‘cadaverous,’ with a ‘stringy neck, yellowing fangs, and a dark pitted skin,’⁶¹¹ a ‘map of lines and grilles,’⁶¹² and on the verge of extinction. His body is ‘fleshed out’ through the ‘invasion’ of other bodies and stories in a sometimes painful, but ultimately ‘healing’ process. Mani, too, is ultimately ‘filled’ with the ‘models’ of stories that

⁶⁰⁴ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.160.

⁶⁰⁵ Ironically, although he is so frail physically, Vasu’s doctor tells him that it his mind which is the source of his ‘illness’ – not his body, p.108. Vasu seeks to heal Mani’s mind. p.25. ‘Perhaps some of us will learn to hate what these bonds make of us: deficient creatures with bound arms or amputated feet.’

⁶⁰⁶ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.55.

⁶⁰⁷ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.71.

⁶⁰⁸ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.25.

⁶⁰⁹ The Master of the title as well as the fact that Vasu is a schoolteacher, p.90.

⁶¹⁰ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.90.

⁶¹¹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.71.

⁶¹² Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.40.

Vasu tells him, retelling them ‘not as mere copies’ but as his own ‘three dimensional’ narrative with ‘a secret landscape equal to any other.’⁶¹³

In contrast, Vasu’s wife Mangala, is reluctant to adjust and therefore, unable to evolve and survive, becomes nothing more than an insubstantial ‘ghost’ with ‘sheer skin.’⁶¹⁴ Ironically, after she is dead, she is ‘more receptive, open to the possibility of change.’⁶¹⁵ Consequently, she and her still living friend Jameela form a ‘completion of each other,’ a woman ‘with two faces, bodies;’ a ‘coexistence of earthy and ethereal, cocoon and butterfly.’⁶¹⁶ Mangala and Jameela: the dead and living, the past and the present, are thus ‘ineluctably linked.’⁶¹⁷ The boundary between their bodies is further blurred when Eliamma, a character from Mangala’s story, is lifted out of her ‘visible body’⁶¹⁸ by a skeletal stranger with the ‘freakish gift’ of invisibility, a shadowy stranger representing the omniscient storyteller, who occupies and directs the intricate web of narrative with the ‘god-like’ power to erase or create.

Shahrzad, the ‘shape-shifting woman,’⁶¹⁹ and her dreams and stories, travel slowly across India, Persia, Arabia, France and England. ‘Fleshed in different bodies,’ Shahrzad, the ‘cityborn’ is also known as the ‘exotic Scheherazade, a name that means nothing more than pretty tinsel in a child’s treasure chest,’ but it is a name that ‘unpacked and reconstructed by men across the seas, is persistent ... Shahrzad, like her own story, is a survivor.’ She is able to survive because she, her sister Dunyazad, the slave Satyasama,

⁶¹³ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.233.

⁶¹⁴ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.42.

⁶¹⁵ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.123.

⁶¹⁶ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p. 43.

⁶¹⁷ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.131.

⁶¹⁸ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.129.

⁶¹⁹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.25.

and the servant Dilshad inhabit the same skins. Their narratives occupy Shahrzad's body, and despite her physical absence from most of the novel, her body 'holds the scene together.'

Can one girl be two, two one, or is this just another clever, taunting notion? Shahryar's tongue pauses. The air smells of fear and saliva. This shape-shifting woman, the woman who turns into a shape-shifter the minute she gets into his bed: is she an invention of his? Or is it he who is a morsel of drifting bait in Shahrzad's oceanic imagination?⁶²⁰

Shahrzad represents powerfully evolving metamorphoses of women and their tales, both the abstract and infinite possibilities on the 'shifting soils of history'⁶²¹ (as implied by the 'thousand' nights) as well as their potent materiality. 'The self is never really alone, or single, or impossible to patch and mend when violated.'⁶²² The characters, like those in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, employ collective 'survival modes' representing a 'tightrope walk'⁶²³ of collaboratively evolving and enduring bodies across time and space. Duniyazad is 'swathed in steam, water, assorted fragrances' in the hammam where 'the insistent voice of the self and its distinctly outlined body are subdued into a blur. She feels not just protected, but held; with a closeness that need not be feared or examined because nothing is expected in return.'⁶²⁴ The narrative shifts between Shahrzad, the slave Dilshad, the poet Satyasama and Shahryar.⁶²⁵ Each occupy different roles in a repeated set tableau in the novel, and a narrative where the 'skin of those old names ... can be moulted in the middle of nowhere, discarded once they have been used up.'⁶²⁶ These shared narratives commence on the thousand and first night,

⁶²⁰ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.260.

⁶²¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.29.

⁶²² Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.95.

⁶²³ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.135.

⁶²⁴ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.82.

⁶²⁵ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.262, Shahryar takes on the role of storyteller here.

⁶²⁶ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.117.

the end of the last night in the original story, and the usually silent Duniyazad, in previous versions of the tale, takes on the role of storyteller. In the repeated scene in Shahrzad's bedroom, Dilshad and Duniyazad are situated on either side of her, alternately referencing her, and responding to each other, in a complex interweaving of narrative. The setting is surreal, and the repetition of words and subtly varied passages form an 'incantatory'⁶²⁷ text, yet the structure is almost mathematically composed. In an interview with Urvashi Butalia, Hariharan explained that the multiple voices and symmetrical structures of the Taj Mahal were the inspiration behind the narrative and arrangement of *When Dreams Travel*.

In the new book, there are many storytelling voices. I had this building hovering somewhere at the back of my mind: the Taj. I remember wandering around it and seeing that it had two symmetrical structures on either side, one called the jawab. This gave me the idea of Duniyazad and Dilshad telling two sorts of stories in two different voices, the second one responding to the first...

The structure is built around numbers and couples, couples of people and things. The whole thing was rather like a tightrope walk.⁶²⁸

Despite the dual scheme behind the narrative construction, the emphasis remains on the fusion between couples, on syntheses that conflate character and stories, placing them 'halfway from somewhere, halfway to somewhere.'⁶²⁹ They negotiate a 'tightrope walk' expressed by the palpable tension between the dualities of the text and the urge to break away from them.

Hariharan does not create stereotypical representations of human gendered bodies merely engaged in a reversal of ultimate 'truths.' The similarity of Shahrzad and Shahryar's names immediately indicates more of an ambiguous

⁶²⁷ Githa Hariharan, interview with Urvashi Butalia in Outlook India Feb 1 1999, www.outlookindia.com (Accessed 2/11/11).

⁶²⁸ Hariharan interview with Urvashi Butalia.

⁶²⁹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.115.

discourse than simply that between tyrant and victim.⁶³⁰ Shahryar briefly takes on Shahrzad's role of narrator of the tales 'as if he is the woman, she the man,'⁶³¹ whilst the 'solidly built'⁶³² Shahrzad is not merely the passive inspiration behind the tomb Shahryar has designed as her memorial, but helps him build it.

Shahrzad and her tyrannical husband are closer than the obvious links of man and wife, ruler and subject. The womanly fabricator, the builder who strips others' creations of what takes his fancy to build monuments for his own times – there is a parallel here. Dunyazad recalls a useful proverb her mother taught her two growing girls: 'If the dishes increase in number, it is likely they are from the houses of neighbours.' Shahrzad must remember this too, especially when she slips someone else's passing idea into her narrative, or when she cribs a phrase or two, sometimes an entire frame ... The synthesis will be hers, and in that sense, the authorship.⁶³³

The 'authorship' of Shahrzad's construction remains her own until she bequeaths it to a younger generation – donating her skin as 'canvas' for them to don and 're-work.' This shared survival depends on the ability to adapt to the constant change of costume, language and setting; evading the 'officious parent' of legitimate history, traditional evolutionary biology and genetic determinism.

[N]o story will be made, told, which cannot fit into the canvas she has stretched for a thousand and one nights ... she bent her back and built the skeleton of enduring bones, the framework. Others stretched their canvas in her frame. They colonized her body, her skilfully planned design, to paint their sticky colours and words, their own moral themes.⁶³⁴

Significantly she recounts the tale of Bulukiya, who endlessly searches the cosmos for the herb of immortality, but although the scene is 'immortal,' individual human bodies are not, and Shahrzad's aging body must necessarily evolve into one 'larger body.'

⁶³⁰ In much the same way that I discuss the relationship between Prospero and Sycorax.

⁶³¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.262.

⁶³² Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.7.

⁶³³ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.133.

⁶³⁴ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, pp.273-274.

It could be the entire play itself, all of life compressed into a permanent entanglement – so self-contained does it seem, so complete its power over the players who make up its four limbs. But this scene is only the heart – though the hungry, searching heart – of a much larger body.⁶³⁵

Shahrzad's body must be taken over by those previously silent women whose 'girlish yielding – cannot last forever.'

Their young hands, smooth, plump; lifting the robe to her waist, holding it there to expose a pair of flabby thighs. Her thighs, voluptuous battleground of a thousand and one intimacies, now fallow, creased; folds of flesh hanging loose from their pegs of sharp bone.⁶³⁶

In telling their own stories they bring Shahrzad back to life⁶³⁷ as they now share a 'joint career.'⁶³⁸ Their futures are joined with hers, in one 'larger body,' 'curving one into the other, a circle with no beginning and no end.'⁶³⁹ Dilshad literally inherits Shahrzad's golden books,⁶⁴⁰ dresses in Shahrzad's 'leavings' and repeats both Shahrzad's and Dunyazad's words.⁶⁴¹ After Shahrzad disappears the tableau is repeated with different permutations of characters and roles and is described as 'shamelessly immortal,'⁶⁴² in a literary realisation of Dupré's theory of promiscuous individualism. The cycle of death and renewal in response to the physical, social and cultural environment occurs at the level of individual biological cells, 'shared' bodies and collective narratives, as well as the larger inanimate environment, in what Dupré terms 'multi-modal, interconnected and overlapping life processes suggest[ing] a more continuous vision of evolutionary history.'⁶⁴³

⁶³⁵ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.7.

⁶³⁶ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.268.

⁶³⁷ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.118.

⁶³⁸ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.23.

⁶³⁹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.276.

⁶⁴⁰ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.240.

⁶⁴¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.261.

⁶⁴² Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.7.

⁶⁴³ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.228.

These overlapping narratives and syntheses conflate both character and stories, bringing a sense of history to Dupré's model.

The central and explicit representation of perpetual metamorphoses, the interconnectedness of all species and their vital ecological adaption is described by the plasticity of the 'travelling tale'⁶⁴⁴ that evades fixed categories and the 'weight' of bounded 'legitimate history,' but remains in the memories of Shahrzad and the women that come after her. The tales commence and continue beyond the last night of the original tales in a complex interweaving of character, setting and narrative voice across both time and space. This constantly evolving tale, as in Namjoshi's *Building Babel*, is not 'killed with a definitive interpretation,'⁶⁴⁵ but continues beyond the one thousand and first night, beyond the novel and beyond Shahrzad herself. In *When Dreams Travel*, Hariharan writes that the 'names' which are 'engraved so clearly on our memories are only sand patterns.'⁶⁴⁶ Specific names and identities are 'unfailingly mortal' and 'subject to the shape-shifting force of the wind.'

The skin of those old names – Duniyazad, child of the world, Happy-Heart Dilshad – can be moulted in the middle of nowhere, discarded once they have been used up.

In *When Dreams Travel*, Dilshad's ability to shed identity and skins like veils is vitally effective in evading capture and punishment.

She has already seen several Dilshads today [...] Now – in this night with its familiar promise of tale and marvel – will Dilshad shed her numerous disguises? Strip herself of all those flimsy, hint-woven veils to reveal something closer to the skin?⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁴ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.25.

⁶⁴⁵ Faris, *Magical Realism, Theory, History, Community*, p.175.

⁶⁴⁶ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.117.

⁶⁴⁷ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.88.

A sloughing off of skin can be a torturous process, leaving one vulnerable and sensitive. However, despite the pain, it is a liberating experience from the confines of a 'skin' that has been imposed on one, or that one has outgrown. Hariharan's metaphors of the radical immanence of, raw, wounded, shedding and renewing of skins is dynamic and vital.

He gently slipped off the tight, striped band that bound his back. He stroked the raw, sore flesh that had been deprived of air for so long. Like magic, or a prophecy come true at last, the flesh slowly began to heal; acquire a dull glow.⁶⁴⁸

In *When Dreams Travel*, even inanimate objects such as the palace, the city and the night are described as having skins that are shed at certain moments in the narrative. The palace has 'different species' of skin⁶⁴⁹ and possesses its own 'seductive, anachronistic tales.'⁶⁵⁰ Darkness, the 'dreaming' night, and the 'mirage-city' are all able to 'conjure a range of identities,' eluding 'the moorings of dates and milestones' and making it impossible to 'pin a single name' on them. In this novel 'shifting' environments appear as central to the tale as 'shifting' identities.

The curtain rises. Darkness, that furry old familiar of night, spreads itself on stage. It means to stay, this sinuous, long tailed night, moulting its woolly skin again and again, a thousand times if necessary. Or a thousand and one times – a safer measure of uneven infinity.⁶⁵¹

Shedding is clearly significant in terms of renewal – but so too is the cocoon, but what is left behind is usually dismissed. The focus on the discarded cocoon disrupts the notion of 'inner' and 'outer worlds.' Malabou argues the importance of what has previously been considered as castoffs.

Organic matter is like the sculptor's clay or marble; it produces its refuse and scraps. But these organic evacuations are absolutely necessary for the

⁶⁴⁸ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.244.

⁶⁴⁹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.67.

⁶⁵⁰ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.80.

⁶⁵¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.5.

realization of living form, which ultimately appears, in all its density, at the cost of their disappearance.⁶⁵²

Literary Metamorphoses occur over varying time-scales as rapidly or instantly, dependant on perspective. Human evolution constitutes only a tiny part of the earth's evolution, yet an anthropocentric perspective judges everything in partial terms. Instances of metamorphoses may not be not visible to the human eye, or occur in human timescales, but the absence of human witness does not lessen their significance. A focus on the emergence of the butterfly from a cocoon may, superficially, appear as a sudden 'leap' or transformation. The crucial period inside the cocoon, because not easily visible, often wrongly assumed as inactive, and the cocoon itself considered insignificant. In the chapter 'Begum-Three-in-One' from Hariharan's *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, Mangala relates the metamorphoses of three female caterpillars, Ammukutty, Nanikutty and Ummikutty. These represent Mangala herself, and her friends Jameela and Eliamma who companionably pass 'their first test' in life, of each splitting 'the baby skin that had got too tight for her.'⁶⁵³

Once Ammukutty, Nanikutty and Ummikutty had shed skins a second and a third and a fourth time, they began, like the eager young things they were, to talk among themselves; of what they would see and do once they were through with their childish pleasures.

Ammukutty, Nanikutty and Ummikutty are all engaged in weaving tapestries or 'cocoons' composed of their individual and collective stories. Thus, the cocoon, normally regarded as insignificant and the by-product of metamorphoses, is powerfully significant in itself as recording and leaving a trace of the past.

⁶⁵² Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident*, p.5.

⁶⁵³ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.133.

They took turns describing futures. This they did by twisting their silk threads into all kinds of fantastic shapes... in a series of swiftly changing pictures, their varied dreams...they had a common fund of patterns; a rich mingling of dreams, a tapestry that belonged to all three equally.

Ultimately, Ummikutty is the only survivor, transforming into ‘Begum Three-in One,’ ‘hiding in the forest’ and constantly spinning ‘fantastic shapes;’ complex stories that are ‘not all her own’ and ‘not easy to unravel’ in a shared ‘ever dissolving,’⁶⁵⁴ and ever renewed ‘tapestry full of meaning.’ In *Biosocial Becomings*, Tim Ingold states that ‘life is a task’ and describes becoming ‘a kind of tapestry. But like life itself, the tapestry is never complete, never finished.’⁶⁵⁵ Although the implication of a never ending complex process is apposite, it is complicated by his belief that humans are ‘perpetually, never-endingly and collaboratively’ involved in creating themselves, he states that we ‘guide the ways of consociates.’ This is a hierarchical and reductive perception, suggestive of a rather more benevolent relationship between humans and the rest of the world.

In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, it is through the invention and telling of stories, involving a series of thinly disguised representations of themselves as culturally reviled animal characters, that Vasu weaves ‘magical cocoons’ from ‘the most prosaic and ordinary materials’ and is consequently able to ‘heal’ Mani. Malabou similarly describes Gregor in Kafka’s text, as an insect, a ‘monster’ that ‘manage[s] to weave a cocoon.’ Malabou states that his cocoon ‘slowly becomes a text’ that is ‘completed by us the readers.’ Thus, the voices are manifold and cross species boundaries from beetle to human forming a ‘circle of plastic possibilities.’⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁴ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.137.

⁶⁵⁵ Ingold, *Biosocial Becomings*, p.8.

⁶⁵⁶ Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident*, p.15.

The narrative voice is not entirely that of an insect. This invisible butterfly has a non-bestial voice, the voice of a man, the voice of a writer. What is a metamorphosis that can still speak itself, write itself, that does not remain entirely unique even when it experiences itself as such? As Kafka writes in his letters, art is no salvation. Yet it can preserve. After all, one can't help recognizing Daphne's bark in Gregor.

Malabou concurs with Kafka in the belief that art 'preserves' since it effectively holds resonances of the past, just as Gregor's metamorphosis has connections to Ovid. I argue that art offers the potential for more than this in the 'salvation' of the acknowledgement that we are not 'entirely unique,' and in an attempt at a 'conversation' with other voices and perspectives.

In 'Perspectivism, the bounded subject and the nature-culture divide,'⁶⁵⁷ Noa Vaisman discusses the significance of shed DNA in citing the example of an attempt to ascertain the identity of two children described as 'the living disappeared'⁶⁵⁸ in Argentina. It is thought that the children were taken from their biological parents and appropriated by the military regime. One of the children, Guillermo Gabriel Prieto, refused to give a blood sample in order to confirm his identity and parentage, and so, a raid on his home was authorized in order to collect shed DNA as a means by which to ascertain his parentage. This clearly focuses on some key assumptions about the body and its physical borders because although it was not deemed an inappropriate invasion of his body to take a blood sample against his will, it was considered appropriate to forcibly 'invade' his home and remove DNA since the material they collected was 'detached' from the body at the time. The 2009 Argentine Supreme Court decision was that the protection of rights as written in the Constitution was not 'unconditional' and that if it were in the

⁶⁵⁷ Noa Vaisman, 'Perspectivism, the bounded subject and the nature-culture divide', Tim Ingold and Gisli Palsson, eds. *Biosocial Becomings, Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.106-122.

⁶⁵⁸ Vaisman, 'Perspectivism, the bounded subject and the nature-culture divide', p.108.

interests both of the state and at international level in terms of human rights, then this should be allowed, regardless of the individuals rights. Vaisman argues that 'shed' DNA is in fact not shed at all but rather 'an extension of our body-self, which exists in and through our environment. This way about thinking about shed-DNA requires that we begin to reconsider such basic western dichotomies as inside/outside, human environment, us/other.'⁶⁵⁹ Indeed, organisms that feed on dead skin, such as bacteria on the surface of human skin, further complicates notions of species boundaries.

Warner's novel *The Leto Bundle* (2001)⁶⁶⁰ relates the story of a young woman endlessly searching, in various guises and across centuries, for her baby son. Initially, in both a retelling of Leto's rape by Zeus, and an account of the removal of Leto's sarcophagus to a western museum in the twentieth century, the novel is, like *When Dreams Travel*, a 'travelling tale'⁶⁶¹ that crosses both time and space. Interestingly, the 'shed' wrappings of the mummy that represents the normally 'discarded' cocoon or element of metamorphosis, is subject to an unusually close examination when the mummy itself disappears.

There was a bundle of stuff, linen strips braided in mummy style. But the X-ray showed, to our very great surprise, that there was no body inside them. There were some traces of human remains, of hair and skin, but no more than you'd find on a hotel carpet.⁶⁶²

In the museum, the sarcophagus becomes a site of pilgrimage for refugees, and it is the increase in dustballs, composed of shed skin and lint, that indicates the huge rise in the numbers of people visiting the museum. Thus,

⁶⁵⁹ Vaisman, 'Perspectivism, the bounded subject and the nature-culture divide', p.114.

⁶⁶⁰ Marina Warner, *The Leto Bundle*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 2001), repr; (London: Vintage 2002).

⁶⁶¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.25.

⁶⁶² Warner, *The Leto Bundle*, p.36.

normally discounted traces of shed skin are centrally important to the narrative.

So it came as a surprise when the number of visitors to Room XIX began to grow... it was Pilar, one of the cleaners on the early morning shift, who noticed the change, though she did not feel it necessary at first to report that dustballs were collecting at the corners. This was a familiar sign, instantly legible to her and the troop of women trundling round their laden carts of mops and brooms and bin-liners, that human traffic had increased... the crowds would have left behind them – especially in winter when they were wrapped in woollens and tweeds – a tideline of hair and flakes of skin and lint, making a slut's wool, a mortal rime of leavings, which the cleaners would sweep up as best they could.⁶⁶³

What is normally considered as insignificant is therefore a powerful marker in complex ecosystems and environments. Clearly, more violent abrasions and erosions of the skin are similarly significant. As Malabou states:

As a result of a serious trauma, or sometimes for no reason at all, the path splits and a new unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room. An unrecognizable persona whose present comes from no past, whose future harbors nothing to come, an absolute existential improvisation. A form born of the accident, born by accident, a kind of accident. A funny breed. A monster whose apparition cannot be explained as any genetic anomaly. A new being comes into the world for a second time, out of a deep cut that opens in a biography.⁶⁶⁴

Malabou describes trauma as integral to 'existential improvisation.'

Thus, accidents contribute to the development of a persona, rather than the randomness of natural selection. 'Scars' remain as important memories or traces of history in either positive or deleterious ways. They evidence both wounding and healing. In *Stigmata* (1998), Hélène Cixous, describes the nature and legacy of the literal and metaphorical wounding of flesh as empowering and injurious. Although it heals, scarring leaves a physical trace of the past. In this respect it has links to the theory of plasticity and the

⁶⁶³ Warner, *The Leto Bundle*, p.14.

⁶⁶⁴ Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident*, pp.1-2.

giving and receiving of form, a ‘new’ form that is not entirely new. Cixous claims that all literature is ‘scarry’ since it:

... celebrates the wound and repeats the lesion... *scar adds something*: a visible or invisible fibrous tissue that really or allegorically replaces a loss of substance which is therefore not lost but added to, augmentation of memory by a small mnesic growth. Unlike scar, *stigmata takes away*, removes substance, carves out a place for itself.⁶⁶⁵

This ambiguity is also implied in her use of the word ‘stigma’ variously defined as the fertile part of a flower, or a sense of abiding disgrace; the association with the word ‘stigmata,’ the wounds of Christ on The Cross, connotes sacrifice and pain. Cixous argues that the ‘scarriness’ of literature adds a sense of history, whilst stigma, as with the *plastique* ‘wounds and spurs, stimulates.’⁶⁶⁶ This is analogous to the giving and receiving of form, yet it is also significant in clearly relating literature to skin. Trauma and scarring of skin, the embodied trace is central to human memory and survival – independently, collectively and in response to the environment. Wounding is central to Silvana Carotenuto’s discussion in “‘Go Wonder’: Plasticity, Dissemination, and (the Mirage of) Revolution.’ Carotenuto undertakes a ‘plastic reading’⁶⁶⁷ of Zoulikha Bouabdellah’s sculpture as “‘plastic” art par excellence,⁶⁶⁸ created through acts of ‘soft transgression’ enabling ‘the interaction of the philosophy of plasticity with the incisive strength of deconstruction.’⁶⁶⁹ Thus, in these terms, wounding and healing, the giving and receiving of form, can be considered as parts of the same generative process.

⁶⁶⁵ Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1998; repr. 2008), p.xiii.

⁶⁶⁶ Cixous, *Stigmata*, pp.xi-xiii.

⁶⁶⁷ Silvana Carotenuto, “‘Go Wonder’: Plasticity, Dissemination, and (the Mirage of) Revolution’, Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller, eds. *Plastic Materialities, Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis* (Cornwall: Duke University Press, 2015), p.145.

⁶⁶⁸ Carotenuto, “‘Go Wonder’: Plasticity, Dissemination, and (the Mirage of) Revolution’, p.136.

⁶⁶⁹ Carotenuto, “‘Go Wonder’: Plasticity, Dissemination, and (the Mirage of) Revolution’, p.146.

By piercing the surface of her sculptural and painted figures through probing, cutting, scraping, filing, sewing, shredding, stitching and other techniques, she strives to see herself on the other side of her art. This offers in Caratenuto's words, "a 'chance' to 'chance.'" And in so doing, she remains plastically and deconstructively open to the difference that the revolutionary future can bring.⁶⁷⁰

Cixous' description of the bite from her dog, Job, elucidates the frustration and 'indignation' of the domestic pet in response to inequitable privileging of the human.

My dog, an avatar of Job, lacerates my foot with his desperate teeth and forever prints his message of indignation in the flesh of my memory. None of the scenes that are played again here in painting, in language, in its several truths, avoids the cruel mark.⁶⁷¹

In the Christian Old Testament, Job stoically endures disempowerment and immense cruelty; but ultimately God rewards his fortitude. As an avatar of Job, the dog represents the suffering meted out by humans, those traditionally assumed to dominate the hierarchy of species linked to the notion of sentience. This is far from what Abram describes somewhat romantically as a relationship where 'nourishment' is derived from the 'exchanging of possibilities.'⁶⁷² In *Stigmata*, the 'intolerable' frustration of the 'dumb,' domestic pet can only be expressed through a violent act of defiance when Job, desperately tearing at flesh, permanently leaves a scar as a 'mark' of his rebellion. In Christian belief, animals are not believed to possess immortal souls and are therefore deemed unworthy as subjects of human ethical concern; much less recipients of divine reward. However, Cixous describes the 'reward' as the ability to 'save one's skin;' in the sense of leaving a trace, a memory, an immortal 'mark' – which is what Job the dog manages to do.

⁶⁷⁰ Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller, eds. Introduction to *Plastic Materialities, Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis*, p.17.

⁶⁷¹ Cixous, *Stigmata*, p.xiv.

⁶⁷² Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p.ix.

This highlights the necessity of acknowledging the true nature of relationships between humans and other species, domestic and otherwise.⁶⁷³

At the same time, each of these scenes is a scene of flight in the face of the intolerable. But not only flight in order to ‘save one’s skin’ as French idiom says. In fleeing, the flight *saves* the trace of what it flees. This is why they flee: to *maintain* the horror *unforgettable* – the horror we would not live in the present although we want to keep its awful treasure, its proof, its testimony, its transfiguration...⁶⁷⁴

Cixous discusses the visceral nature of literature wrought from such trauma; the ‘awful treasure’ where traces of ‘wounds’ permanently remain evident, painful and unhealed whilst simultaneously enabling transformational ‘flight’ and the ability to ‘save one’s skin.’ Although, significantly, the skin one ‘saves’ does not remain the ‘same’ but retains a trace of the past. This incongruity, in evolutionary terms, evidences inheritance and adaption, continuance and change. Referring to Spinoza’s theory of a state of being ‘in-between life and death,’ ‘as if there were a partial death resulting from a mysterious metamorphosis,’ a ‘death that is not death,’ Malabou states:

This is one of the only references made in a philosophical text to a destructive metamorphosis of the nature of a being, from whence a new being, who is in some senses a living-dead, is born. The body can die without being dead. There is a destructive mutation that is not the transformation of the body into a cadaver, but rather the transformation of the body into another body in the same body, due to an accident, a lesion, an injury, or a catastrophe.⁶⁷⁵

The body that Vasu has previously ‘lugged’ around has been nothing more than a ‘scar’ and, it is not until he is finally ‘independent’ of it, renouncing individualism and tradition in the ‘legitimate history’ of his ‘ghosts’ that he is able to recognise his ‘own’ radical immanence as the result of a ‘destructive mutation’ - the ‘transformation of the body onto another

⁶⁷³ Cixous, *Stigmata*, pp.xi-xiii

⁶⁷⁴ Cixous, *Stigmata*, p.xiv.

⁶⁷⁵ Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, pp.33-34.

body in the same body.’ Therefore, he considers his body from a distance in both senses of the word – in terms of proximity and perspective, as well as experiencing the intense internal pain and ‘slipperiness’ of his gut.

It was strange that the body I had lugged as part of me, as an inevitable piece of baggage, a shadow or a scar, had suddenly begun to exist as an independent thing... I was seized by a foolish desire to see my skin, my meagre sagging belly, and the matchstick-legs with doorknobs for knees. Even the pain inside seemed my own, just as my colicky stomach was, and my slippery, open-ended intestines.⁶⁷⁶

In the chapter headed ‘The Hole in the Sea,’ Vasu identifies ‘the nagging hole in each of us’⁶⁷⁷ who, as fallible entities seeking ‘balance,’ are subject to time, convention and change. As a ‘prisoner of time’⁶⁷⁸ and of history, Vasu’s aging body has a hole ‘pecked’ out by the great ‘white beaked ones’ of societal convention, as well as the ‘Black Crow’ of death which plunges ‘his beak into the fleshiest part’⁶⁷⁹ of him. Mani’s brother, Gopu, has a ‘sly, growing hole’ of doubt in his ‘monotheistic vision,’⁶⁸⁰ his left-wing political convictions and his ‘stern categories of right and wrong.’ Gopu, too, will have to ‘travel a long, arduous path before he filled it up – this hole that he was perhaps not even aware of.’⁶⁸¹ Vasu constantly views Mani and himself ‘in terms of losses; absences; holes;’⁶⁸² which must be repaired in order to survive (as with the ‘cracks’ in Devi’s narrative in *The Thousand Faces of Night*).⁶⁸³

When Vasu reaches the end of his life, he confronts the ‘ghosts’ of his father, grandmother, the Swami, and Gopu, representing family history and

⁶⁷⁶ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.72.

⁶⁷⁷ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.198.

⁶⁷⁸ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.196.

⁶⁷⁹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, pp. 91-92.

⁶⁸⁰ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.249.

⁶⁸¹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.250.

⁶⁸² Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.120, See also p.171, 172, 173, 198.

⁶⁸³ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.vii.

the ties of tradition, religion and society, asking each of them in turn for the means to heal his 'wound.' Significantly, it is only when wandering in the fertile and overgrown backyard of his father's house that Vasu realises that an individual cannot possess all the answers. He no longer believes the 'hypnotic lies,' of his grandmother, father, Gopu and the Swami because you cannot 'see the world through one knot-hole.'⁶⁸⁴ Vasu's body is infested with the past.⁶⁸⁵

I felt itchy... I felt something crawling over my back, arms and legs...till the pores of my skin were oozing six legged insects, caterpillars and even tiny, scurrying mice.⁶⁸⁶

Suddenly the dream turned into the kind that cunningly separates body and soul; actor and spectator. I saw myself on the cot, examining my skin. The man without a body saw his corporeal twin examining a wound like a pink balloon. A semi opaque skin was stretched out over the swelling wound, dust free, a different colour from the rest of his body. He could detect movement behind the skin, a soft surging movement like that of water. When he cut it open, he was prepared for the gushing of. The pus was there, but not as much as he expected, and it oozed out reluctantly. Then he saw why. The wound was choked with maggots – hundreds of tiny, restless creatures, feeding and growing, filling up the gaping hole.⁶⁸⁷

This grotesque image 'pink balloon'⁶⁸⁸ of flesh containing writhing maggots, illustrates both the form and formlessness of plasticity. This is the way in which Mani, nicknamed 'Bluebottle,' inhabits and repairs the 'gaping hole' in Vasu's body with maggots. Interestingly, maggots are used in modern medicine to clean and heal wounds. Language centred on skin and wounds makes this moment particularly meaningful since it marks Vasu's recovery, but is significantly couched in repellent terms of pus and oozing, complicating the notion of the healing process as comfortable. The use of the verb 'surging' emphasises the uncontrollable movement and vitality of the

⁶⁸⁴ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.267.

⁶⁸⁵ Namjoshi describes her body as infested in this way in *Goja*, p.30-31.

⁶⁸⁶ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.122, One of the symptoms of an awakening Kundalini is the sensation of snakes or ants crawling on the body.

⁶⁸⁷ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.122

⁶⁸⁸ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.117.

‘alien’ but therapeutic entities that choke his wound. The dual perspectives in this piece, which move from first person to third person, as ‘actor and spectator,’ effectively describe Vasu’s close examination of himself on the cot – similar to an out-of-body experience, whilst the use of the third person develops the engagement of the reader as if we too inhabit his body.

Jablonski states that for centuries before the invention of modern medicine in the eighteenth century, skins offered a means by which to diagnose disease. Dermatological medicine continues in the modern era and, as Jablonski states, when ‘[l]ooking at a picture of a skin disease, we can imagine the distress and self-consciousness the sufferer must feel.’⁶⁸⁹ Such pictures are, indeed, highly affecting in visceral ways and Magic Real images similarly evoke such responses. Vasu and Mani heal each other: ‘I looked at Mani in the dim light and saw that he too had a wound. I examined it carefully and tended it. I forgot my own for a brief and blessed intermission.’⁶⁹⁰ Vasu heals Mani’s mind whilst Mani caresses Vasu’s ‘raw, bleeding wound’ with ‘a small cool hand:’

he – not being squeamish; not being full of hypnotic lies; not being ruthless; and being entirely without words- stroked my wound till I thought a hard, thick scab might grow over it.⁶⁹¹

Ayurveda, practised by Vasu’s father, is a holistic, ancient method of medicine which, when translated from the Sanskrit, designates the science and knowledge required for life. Vasu’s father scrutinises details on both the ‘faces and bodies’ of his patients and says that: ‘a person is three things at a time. To reach him, educate him, all three – his body, his self and his social

⁶⁸⁹ Jablonski, *Skin, A Natural History*, p.19.

⁶⁹⁰ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, pp.256-258.

⁶⁹¹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, pp.256-258.

involvement – must be touched.’⁶⁹² Ayurveda describes the intimate connection of individual and collective minds and bodies with each other and the environment, thus representing ‘local’ ecology at the level of individual cells and a wider global ecology. Indeed, Vasu considers his chronic diarrhoea as the result of an unchanging Brahminical ancestry, and the trauma of Gandhi’s assassination.⁶⁹³

Start with the body, he would say. If you want to cure the wounds of our motherland and treat her festering sores, start with your body[...] Life is nothing but one long balancing act. The minute you have an imbalance of air, a little too much phlegm, not enough bile, what happens? Disease. Ayur is life; Veda is science and knowledge. Need I say more?⁶⁹⁴

Thus, trauma and the unacceptance of change results in imbalances of the body and therefore sickness. Vasu’s father becomes increasingly unable to adapt to change, to what he sees as unacceptable developments in Ayurveda, involving ‘money-spinning ayurvedic pills’ and closer links with its ‘sister-science’ Unani. The previously ‘unshakeable pillars’⁶⁹⁵ of his rigid beliefs begin to disintegrate when faced with the impossible ‘struggle’ to ‘quell’ disturbance on a ‘shifting floor.’⁶⁹⁶ In the company of Mani, Vasu finally confronts the truth of his father’s old age and death; his father’s ‘bewilderment’⁶⁹⁷ as he sits by the ‘crumbling pillars’⁶⁹⁸ of his beliefs; his body that was once so ‘firm and fleshy’ now sagging and reduced to ‘bone and wrinkle.’ His father’s eventual suicide by drowning in a murky well, symbolises devastating stagnancy and a disastrous inability to change.

⁶⁹² Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.178.

⁶⁹³ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.73.

⁶⁹⁴ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.21-22.

⁶⁹⁵ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.17.

⁶⁹⁶ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.267.

⁶⁹⁷ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.239.

⁶⁹⁸ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.238.

Similarly, in *The Satanic Verses*, the characters of Mahound, Hind, and Ayesha are ensnared in their inflexibility.⁶⁹⁹

Vasu's father's partial interpretation of Ayurveda involves the 'individual [as] the only category:' 'Who needs all the other trouble makers? Every person (and so every country) has an inner power of self preservation or adjustment, which is always struggling to quell any disturbance in the constitution.'⁷⁰⁰ Yet, this is a reductive interpretation of a much wider and complex theory beyond notions of individualism and nationalism. Ecological balance and dynamism depends on a consideration of 'all the other trouble-makers.' Mani and Vasu's joint survival and evolution is told in their 'Unfinished Fable,'⁷⁰¹ which, described in terms of a snake with its tail in its mouth, symbolises the wheel of life and bestows a form of immortality.

And then it all begins again, the tragic-comic antics of an apparently random sample of humanity, a streetful of passing faces; it continues, picks up a thread and ties others into intimate knots, the pictures moving one at the tail of what went before, like the partly hidden view of a wheel. Like a serpent, gliding past silently, sensuously, taking care never to leave me too far behind.⁷⁰²

The latter sentence evokes the complexity of both the length and sinuous movement of the snake, as well as the perpetual movement of the 'wheel' involving 'an apparently random sample of humanity.'⁷⁰³ When Vasu is prompted in to action by 'the final awakening of his will to act,'⁷⁰⁴ the 'Great Serpent' Kundalini, that 'rests in three and a half coils at the base of [his]

⁶⁹⁹ Sabrina Hassumani, *Salman Rushdie, A Postmodern Reading of his Major Works* (London: Associated University Press, 2002), p.69.

⁷⁰⁰ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.180.

⁷⁰¹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.249.

⁷⁰² Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.274.

⁷⁰³ Snakes symbolise renewal and immortality and because of their ability to shed skin.

⁷⁰⁴ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.259.

spine’⁷⁰⁵ gradually fills the ‘hole’ in his body that has been ‘pierced deep into the bottom end of his back’ by ‘Crow.’⁷⁰⁶

A thousand eyes (I did not count, but I knew there were a thousand of them), were embedded along its sinuous body. All the eyes were open and unblinking; they were pools of still, transparent water...I felt some of the snake’s pride, its distinct identity, seep into me as I stood there in a spell. The frayed threads and rags in my mind were hypnotized, then drawn out in the shape of a hardy rope; all the weak, disjointed strands now linked and strengthened.⁷⁰⁷

Kundalini representing the spirit of Shakti, the fertile, feminine creative energy that controls each individual cell of the physical body, finally gives Vasu the strength to confront his ‘ghosts.’ Speaking in the third person and in the past tense about ‘Grey Mouse,’ Vasu says that in not dwelling on his pain associated with the inheritance from the ghosts that inhabit his body because something more ‘solid and dauntless’ replaces the gaping hole in his gut – something more tangible than ‘ghosts.’

Another strange thing happened around this time. As I have said he stopped brooding over the pain in his hole and nursing it. Immediately the vapour ghosts and devils who had taken refuge in the hole, like homeless tramps in a derelict building, began to fade away. He felt in their place the beginnings of something solid; and dauntless; a long curvaceous shape that twisted and turned, adapting itself to the contours of the hole.⁷⁰⁸

A ‘blocked’ Kundalini, sometimes said to be the result of rigid cultural or religious conventions, can end in disease. Vasu’s bowel disorder is the result of his father’s and grandmother’s inflexible philosophies, the unbending beliefs of the Swami, and the rigidity of the teaching system that Vasu has undergone and been employed within. When the Kundalini is ‘freed,’ the release of long dormant memories, possibly from previous generations can cause psychological distress. Vasu confronts this in his dreams and works

⁷⁰⁵ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.93.

⁷⁰⁶ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.172.

⁷⁰⁷ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.265.

⁷⁰⁸ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.252.

through them in his relationship with Mani. In the chapter headed ‘When the Python Wakes,’ Vasu relates the story of a tribe called the ‘Nagaleelas’,⁷⁰⁹ who individually dream of ‘bundles of skin and bone; hollow men and ragged women,’⁷¹⁰ but who collectively, as a huge serpent, progress in a ‘never-ending line of sinuous movement.’⁷¹¹ The serpent’s advance is ‘slow and painful,’ but its ‘raggedy appearance’ (of the pre-shedding phase) represents ‘never-ending’ renewal and something ‘far stranger than their dreams had prepared them for,’⁷¹² limitless possibilities.

Stripping, stroking, healing, glowing: this went on in all parts of the forest. Everywhere the insects helped each other shed their striped uniforms; hope filled the hearts of the humblest worms.⁷¹³

Skin, particularly female skin and bodies, are frequently aligned with desire, sensuality and danger. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi suffers the ‘the sacrificial knife of marriage,’⁷¹⁴ which hangs like the sword of Damocles over her neck for years. Yet, she can be considered as compliant in her suffering since she has ‘learnt to love’ her tormentor; her desire overwhelms her self-preservation. The image of the knife is clearly phallic and the sacrifice couched in sexual terms.

The sacrificial knife, marriage, hung a few inches above my neck for years, and I see now that I had learnt to love, to covet my tormentor. I am still a novice in the more subtle means of torture. I thought the knife would plunge in, slit, tear, rip across my neck, and let the blood gush, the passion of the sacrifice whole, all-encompassing.⁷¹⁵

In *When Dreams Travel*, disturbingly violent imagery is used in stark contrast to the dreamlike quality of most of the narrative. Hariharan

⁷⁰⁹ In Sanskrit ‘nag’ means serpent.

⁷¹⁰ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.166.

⁷¹¹ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.168.

⁷¹² Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.168.

⁷¹³ Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, p.244.

⁷¹⁴ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.54

⁷¹⁵ Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, p.54

describes the tortured and exiled slave Satyasama as a poet who refuses to die. She is a 'one-eyed monkey-woman' who is 'chopped limb from limb, till all that was left of her was a misshapen trunk.' She is reduced to a 'thing of matted fur and blood' that refuses to die.⁷¹⁶ In a mirror inversion of Shahrzad's story, Satyasama offers to tell stories to keep the guards awake, but rather than surviving the ordeal, she is hacked to pieces because of her refusal to be silent. Although Satyasama's body is described as 'filthy bloody remains' which 'writhed like a mad thing and then lay still,' she endures, refusing to be silent: 'only her silence would earn her the right to be a free citizen of Eternal City.' Her insistence on singing the 'truth,'⁷¹⁷ results in her mutilation and the murderous rage of the city:⁷¹⁸ 'first they chopped her limbs: one, two, three, four. Next the left eye, the blind and gifted one, was gouged out; then the right so that blindness would be perfect and complete, the tongue, that word-dripping treacherous tongue, was pulled out and thrown into a purifying fire.'⁷¹⁹

But when they touched the trunk, it began moaning, it was a hair-raising, heart-breaking moan, the kind that made many Eternals wish they were deaf, or that they could go into exile somewhere to hide their fear and self-loathing.

The horribly dismembered bodies of the executed brides of the Shah are also vividly present in Hariharan's narrative, whereas, in the original tales, the sacrificed virgins are physically absent. In *When Dreams Travel*, they appear in both the Shah's and the wazir's nightmares⁷²⁰ as they swim in a pool of 'exclusively female discards' representing the reduction of women to

⁷¹⁶ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.135.

⁷¹⁷ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.148.

⁷¹⁸ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.149.

⁷¹⁹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, pp.148-149.

⁷²⁰ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.272.

separate, sexualised body parts: breasts, nipples, thighs and buttocks – ironically some of which the wazir recognises and who now ‘lovingly’ seek to entrap him in a grotesque embrace.

He feels the pain of every severed head, every slit throat, every torn, shrivelling limb. He is brutal in his haste to push and clear a way for himself out of the pool. His hands claw at a hyacinth face, minus eyes and nose, floating towards him; his legs thrash at slimy tendrils that wrap themselves lovingly around him. In that cruelly elongated series of minutes, he seems – and this is the worst of the horrors – to recognize some of the mutilated spoils. A breast, a stomach, a pear-shaped buttock, greet him with familiarity, as if he has met them before on their rightful flesh-and-blood owners.

These grotesque images, like the ‘tiny strip’ of ‘shrunk dead skin’ he finds on his tongue, are hideous and repellent. The ‘hellish oasis’⁷²¹ vividly describes the devastating objectification of women whose survival is reliant on them entertaining and pleasing the Shah.

A whole population of dismembered bodily parts, pickled in a viscous fluid, are floating around the wazir; a long snake-haired, purple throated head, a hairless thigh, a lone breast with a hideously engorged nipple.

The entrancing Shahrzad is transformed from the exoticised and flimsy ‘pretty tinsel of a name’ into a ‘matriarch of impressive proportions’;⁷²² a substantial and creative physical presence whose breasts are described as ‘heavy domes, her legs palatial pillars,’⁷²³ who is deeply rooted in flesh and blood, and who is the incarnation of a ‘monstrous collective memory.’⁷²⁴ She is a ‘shapeshifting woman’ whose material presence is neither dreamlike nor ethereal but one whose manifestations loom over everything. Shahrzad’s strong ‘solidly built,’ ‘sweating, exhausted, ambitious body’⁷²⁵ takes precedence over ‘the ragged, porous umbrella of a story, a wandering story,

⁷²¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.171.

⁷²² Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.7.

⁷²³ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.7.

⁷²⁴ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.155

⁷²⁵ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.7.

said to haunt travellers on the roads leading to paradise,⁷²⁶ a story whose soul is ‘shop-worn’⁷²⁷ and whose background and setting, in comparison to Shahrzad’s solid tangibility is ‘sketchy and moth-eaten.’⁷²⁸ On the mornings after her ‘performance,’⁷²⁹ a balance is restored where the stories of the night are described as being secondary to her intense physicality; merely a ‘pale copy of her erect-nippled breasts, or the sloping valley of his back curving firmly into twin arcs.’⁷³⁰

The nights of tale-telling have not in any way diminished the rights of bodily matters. If anything the body has been supreme. It has literally been the object of the enterprise – to keep bodies whole and alive, just as it was the subject of the original transgression, the body as a vessel of the unchaste.⁷³¹

In the initial tableau, Shahrzad wears a flimsy robe insufficient to cover her substantial naked body. She reclines in a bed whose sheets are a ‘rumpled mess of sweaty silk’ covered in ‘slime and stickiness’ with a ‘damp neck’ and breasts with ‘fresh, red marks swelling on them.’⁷³² Shahryar is not fascinated by her stories at this point, but by her powerful sexuality. He is ready to ‘devour her’ – as evidenced by the teeth marks on her breast. There are frequent references to Shahrzad’s earthy sensuality as she wipes away sweat with the hem of her gown, and quenches her thirst throwing back her head and drinking deeply, wetting her lips with her tongue before she starts again.⁷³³ Whilst crafting the tales, Shahrzad is as much in the ‘thrall of desire’ as Shahryar.

⁷²⁶ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.7, ‘the ragged porous umbrella’ is a repeated phrase. See also p.115.

⁷²⁷ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.115.

⁷²⁸ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.10.

⁷²⁹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.6.

⁷³⁰ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.98.

⁷³¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.123.

⁷³² Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.6.

⁷³³ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.6, ‘leaky’ female bodies and somatophobia.

Eyes glazed, jaw hanging loose, Sharhyar moans like a stag that has escaped the tiger only to die of its wounds. And there, there is Wise Sharhzad, her skin dripping with sweat and slime. Lying on her back, breasts splayed, legs thrown apart. Her eyes are shut. She looks incapable of saying a word again.⁷³⁴

She is not merely his sexual victim, but a willing participant, powerfully erotic and eminently in control of his body as well as her own, having to coax his 'unreliable desire' to perform. Her body which has 'declared itself a medium of unpredictable pleasures,'⁷³⁵ has been 'with the greatest of care and deliberation, bathed, scented, ornamented; kissed and caressed; licked, pierced, penetrated,'⁷³⁶ and she finds refuge in rooms which 'once throbbed with the queen's secret pleasures.'⁷³⁷ She finds sanctuary in the erotic that, as Audre Lorde states, was once considered the source of power and information, but has been vilified in Western society.⁷³⁸

The heavily pregnant Shahrzad is the substantial 'floating island' of the title at the beginning of Part Two who finds refuge in the rooms of Shahryar's unfaithful queen while she attempts to plan the most efficient way of giving birth, allowing herself a speedy return to the sultan's 'ravenous bed.' Shahrzad's huge stomach is a 'melon-shaped hill' with the 'skin stretched so tight round this ocean that it is translucent.'⁷³⁹ Shahrzad's heavily pregnant body, like Shahryar's 'unreliable desire,' must be 'coaxed

⁷³⁴ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.56.

⁷³⁵ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.123.

⁷³⁶ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.123.

⁷³⁷ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.121.

⁷³⁸ 'The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives. We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within Western society. On the one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence'. Audre Lorde, 'Uses of the Erotic, The Erotic as Power', from *Sister Outsider*, (California: The Crossing Press, 1984) and cited in *Writing on the Body, Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, Sarah Stanbury eds., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p.277.

⁷³⁹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.122.

and manipulated 'as it has 'independently declared its intention like a free citizen, or a mutinous subject,' but she needs a 'more obedient' body, one which is capable of flexible transformations, of union with mind and memory in order to successfully 'deliver' her progeny. 'I will tell you a tale which, if Allah wills, shall be the means of our deliverance.'⁷⁴⁰

The light and pliable one of a contortionist, capable of response to all the gymnastics of desire. Only this supple, shape-twisting woman can rise to the need of the moment: to relate all she has heard, but also to unleash and wield the power of an invention-embellished memory.⁷⁴¹

Her 'plastic' supple body is 'programmed to fulfil its relentless functions.'

She fantasises about taking 'a day off in the gawky, untouched girl's body she used to wear' but her flesh firmly roots her 'to the earth;' her body is simultaneously the site of escape and entrapment echoing the paradox within the Magic Real. This ambiguity is furthered in that she is, at the same time, 'suicidal' and excited, drowsy but unable to rest.

But to be a saviour rooted to earth by so much solid flesh, slowed down by prosaic pregnancy! Shahrzad is breathless and tired; both feelings, suicidal on-stage, must pass when this hour is at an end. She is also drowsy, so deprived of sleep that she can sense an empty space behind her eyes. But the unknown excitement that lies ahead, as well as the banal fact of her sticky, itchy skin, make rest impossible.⁷⁴²

The birth is couched in terms of a journey, similar to the travelling tale that takes the traveller 'dangerously close to the afterlife.' The story she intends to divert Shahryar with similarly distracts her from the pain which 'spurs her to travel faster,'⁷⁴³ from the 'mundane domestic torment'⁷⁴⁴ in an 'airless harem.'⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴⁰ Epigram to *When Dreams Travel*, p.26 from *The Thousand and One Nights*.

⁷⁴¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.123.

⁷⁴² Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.122.

⁷⁴³ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.127.

⁷⁴⁴ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.128.

⁷⁴⁵ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.127.

Dunyazad has clearly envied Shahrzad's sexual relationship with Shahryar, for when she meets Shahryar she reflects on the fact that 'she knew him first, and best, as a dangerous and exciting enemy'⁷⁴⁶ and wonders if his 'grand, despotic desires still live under the skin of this stranger?' However, when faced with the enormity of the 'frame' she must fill, Dunyazad feels like a 'spineless puppet'⁷⁴⁷ where 'story and myth and legend pinion her body with their overturned bowls of flesh.' Dunyazad anticipates the 'delicious nightly reward of caressed flesh,'⁷⁴⁸ dreaming of [y]oung skin, deep brown skin' that 'stretches out and falls into place, a glossy map of sinew and muscle.'⁷⁴⁹ Yet, it is the desire of 'solid flesh' that roots her to the earth; it is 'sticky and itchy and won't let her rest.'⁷⁵⁰ The virgins sacrificed to Shahryar's tyranny are similarly prey to his desire. They are 'stripped to the skin that will be on display just once, its trembling freshness fingered, handled and penetrated so that a few drops of blood may be shed.'⁷⁵¹ Thus skin is 'deadly' in that it is described as the site of desire, and also in terms of a seductive lure.

In 'The Woman Under the Deadly Skin'⁷⁵² from *When Dreams Travel*, Satyasama relates the story of her travels to the 'Hall of Virgins' where she discovers a picture of a 'strange woman called Poison-Skin.'⁷⁵³ Consequently, a scholar tells Satyasama a story about a woman who was once a poor goatherd called Nanni; a 'happy animal,' 'filthy but contented' and lying in the sun, but who changes skin and identity. When a passing

⁷⁴⁶ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.59.

⁷⁴⁷ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.69.

⁷⁴⁸ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.22.

⁷⁴⁹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.79.

⁷⁵⁰ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.122.

⁷⁵¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.168.

⁷⁵² Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.201.

⁷⁵³ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.202.

stranger recognizes Nanni as the ‘double’ of his princess, he decides that she could be useful as a means by which to deceive the enemies of the city:

‘You’re going to love our city’s enemies, little Poison-Skin... you’re going to love them to death.’⁷⁵⁴ Promising her riches and a handsome prince as a husband, she is taught to be a ‘lady’⁷⁵⁵ and given a ‘rare potion to make her skin as fair and flawless as that of a real princess.’⁷⁵⁶ The potion makes her beautiful ‘milky skin’ deadly poisonous and so she is consequently named: ‘luscious little Poison-Skin’⁷⁵⁷ – connecting female sexuality to danger. Yet, rather than consenting to commit murder, she escapes, becomes a recluse and takes a vow of chastity. Because of the self-sacrifice and ‘saintliness’ of Poison-Skin, Satyasama is surprised that she can find no statue in homage to her. A passing goatherd confirms that this is because the tale is untrue: ‘He grinned at her with a suggestive charm. “It’s not a complete lie,” he assured her. “Just a few weeds here and there and once these are pulled out, you’ll know what you are looking for.”’⁷⁵⁸ In the second version of the tale, which the goat-herd now relates, Nanni is described as a ‘whore’ who rather than abjuring earthly temptations, allows her appetites to readily succumb to the sensual invitations of her guardians: ‘there were new and good things to see and feel and taste here!’ She is re-named ‘Fresh-Face’⁷⁵⁹ and is ‘beautiful and a little vain.’⁷⁶⁰ Trained as a professional assassin,⁷⁶¹ she learns the

⁷⁵⁴ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.206.

⁷⁵⁵ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.204.

⁷⁵⁶ In Asia, fair skin has long been considered beautiful and a sign of wealth. The skin-lightening market in Asia is valued at over \$13bn (£8.5bn) Advertising campaigns target men and women. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21525456>. 20 February 2013. (Accessed 15/12/16). There is a well-established clinic in Pune called ‘The Poison-Skin Clinic.’ In *The Satanic Verses*, Alleluia Cone knows that the girls want to ask her about the whiteness and ‘miracle of her skin,’ p.195.

⁷⁵⁷ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.205.

⁷⁵⁸ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.207.

⁷⁵⁹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.209.

⁷⁶⁰ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.209.

⁷⁶¹ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.210.

‘swift and soundless method of piercing a fleshy dummy with a knife hidden in her hip girdle.’

All she knew was that she was pampered and well fed, being fattened in fact, her breasts and hips swelling by the day. Her skin, the innocent dirt-caked skin she never took notice of, was now a well-oiled glistening sheet, alive to fragrance and silk and cares...she was no longer a mere Nanni or even Fresh-Face but Pearl-Skin, a beauty fit to be a queen...Pearl-Skin was inflamed with new desires, her skin felt taut with expectation as if it was waiting for a promised feast.⁷⁶²

These highly physical images describe Nanni as perfumed, oiled and in thrall to her appetites and desires. Ironically, she is now given the rather romantic name of ‘Pearl-Skin,’ but she is ‘fattened’ like an animal into a ‘curvaceous poison-skinned trap for the cities enemies.’⁷⁶³ During her treacherous seductions she is graphically described in insect and animal terms. Spider-like, she ‘devour[s] each like a fly caught in the sweet and sickly motions of love,’⁷⁶⁴ trapping her victims and mercilessly stabbing them in the back after sex: ‘Her hips swayed from side to side, a pair of open wings, while her legs held him in a clamp around his back. He could feel himself being sucked into a very tight, hot and dangerous place...’⁷⁶⁵ Eventually disgusted by the cloying smell of death on her skin,⁷⁶⁶ she escapes and hides in a goat-shed, where she encounters a goatherd, who, having been poisoned by a snake, is close to death. They eventually ‘cure’ each other in their desperate and violent physical relationship; their poisonous blood merging into ‘one wholesome, sparkling river.’

⁷⁶² Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.210.

⁷⁶³ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.210.

⁷⁶⁴ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.211.

⁷⁶⁵ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.211.

⁷⁶⁶ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.211.

For a day and a night they loved each other, two soldiers in thrall of battle, skin and muscle, as if their lives depended on it; till finally, as their pungent, sweaty bodies fell part, two streams of poisonous blood merged and turned into one wholesome, sparkling river.⁷⁶⁷

This may seem a somewhat romantic and simplistic ending. Certainly, the notion that the poisonous smell of her skin gradually fades with time until she smells like a goat is hugely ironic. Goat-Skin, is the ‘golden-hearted harlot’ and ‘lover of humble men,’ and over the course of her ‘third career’⁷⁶⁸ she grows old and reaches a point where ‘names no longer mattered, and by the time she died, all her earlier disguises were long forgotten.’ She is now ‘Mother-Goat: a woman who fed their many hungers, keeping at bay the poison of sorrow clouding their hearts.’ Thus, Poison-Skin’s career, as told by the scholar in the first version and the goatherd in the second, describe deep-rooted stereotypes of virgin and whore, reflecting ‘poisonous’ and rigid androcentric hierarchies.

⁷⁶⁷ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.212.

⁷⁶⁸ Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, p.213.

CONCLUSION
Fabulous Fiction and (Un)Doings

**‘Nothing is permanent in all the world.
All things are fluent; every image forms,
Wandering through change. Time is itself a river
In constant movement, and the hours flow by
Like water, wave on wave, pursued, pursuing,
Forever fugitive, forever new.’⁷⁶⁹**

⁷⁶⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p.371.

In arguing for the importance of literature in ecocritical theory, I concur with Warner, that metamorphosis and ‘shape-shifting’ are clearly highly significant in expressing ‘conflicts and uncertainties,’ of life. As such they ‘embody the transformational power of storytelling itself, revealing stories as activators of change.’⁷⁷⁰ The significance of the Magic real is highlighted by DeLoughrey and Handley who state that ‘a civilization which is geared towards progressive realism cannot solve the hazards and dangers and the pollution which it has inflicted upon the globe.’⁷⁷¹

This thesis begins with a contemplation of metamorphosis, becoming and plasticity. Ovid’s ‘pliant’ wax is discussed as a valuable way to engage with the mutability and interconnected nature of all living things, an inclusiveness not yet sufficiently evident in ecocritical research. Yet, wax is solid or liquid and perhaps more allied to Ovid’s instant metamorphoses that seemingly ‘leap’ from one form to the next, and therefore more applicable to Namjoshi’s more traditional representations. Malabou’s theory of plasticity, whilst seemingly related to the pliability of wax, relays the intricacy of transformations in yet more complex ways, describing the newness of what evolves, whilst importantly retaining a sense of history. In this respect, it may more readily represent the ‘ghosts’ and scarred flesh of Hariharan’s metaphors. As Clare Hanson states, in addition to broadening biological and ecological debate, the importance of literature and most especially metaphor, is in the potential to enable public engagement by offering an alternative means by which to relate to scientific theory.

⁷⁷⁰ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses*, p.210.

⁷⁷¹ DeLoughrey and Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies, Literatures of the Environment*, p.4.

The new thinking on metaphors provokes many questions. How might literary expertise in handling metaphor, modeling, and narrativisation contribute to better public understanding of these conceptual shifts?⁷⁷²

Magic Real metaphors of skin bring much to scientific discourse in that they describe the ‘literal’ physicality of transformation in fantastic ways. Indeed, ‘plastic readings’ of skin enable a vigorous connection between the fantastic and the real that, as Malabou argues, has only previously been ‘glimpsed’ in fantasy literature but has never been achieved in philosophy and science.

Never has the power of ontological and existential explosive plasticity for subjectivity and identity been granted an identity. Approached but avoided, glimpsed often enough in fantasy literature but never connected to reality, neglected by psychoanalysis, ignored by philosophy, nameless in neurology, the phenomenon of pathological plasticity, a plasticity that does not repair, a plasticity without recompense or scar, one that cuts the thread of life in two or more segments that no longer meet, nevertheless has its own phenomenology that demands articulation.⁷⁷³

Yet, some theorists remain resistant to the role of fantasy, literature and the humanities in environmental debate. In *Literary Darwinism, Evolution, Human Nature, and Literature* (2004), Joseph Carroll is forthright in his condemnation of what he considers the retrograde nature of the arts and humanities, arguing that they are analogous to the primitive ‘Third World.’

⁷⁷² Clare Hanson, ‘Beyond the Gene-epigenetic science in 21st century culture.’ <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/beyondthegene/about/metaphors.page>, (Accessed 20/01/2013).

⁷⁷³ Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, pp.6-7.

It seems likely that within two decades that the sheer force of progressive empirical knowledge will almost inevitably bring about a fundamental transformation in the social sciences. In all likelihood, the humanities will eventually follow in the train of this movement but they will probably be slow and late in catching up. The conceptual shift that takes place when moving from the Darwinian social sciences to the humanities can be likened to the technological shift that takes place when travelling from the United States or Europe to a country in the Third World. While travelling in space, one also moves backward in time. In the humanities, scholars happily confident of their own avant-garde creativity continue to repeat the formulas of Freud, Marx, Saussure, and Levi-Strauss – formulas that have now been obsolete, in their own fields, for decades. It is as if one were to visit a country in which the hosts happily believed themselves on the cutting edge of technological innovation and, in support of its belief, proudly displayed a rotary-dial phone, a manual typewriter, and a mimeograph machine.⁷⁷⁴

From the title of this text, one might assume that Carroll would value literature and the arts, yet this is clearly not the case since he favours science as progressive, innovative and representing positive attributes he solely assigns to the ‘First World.’ Carroll considers the humanities as akin to an out-dated, irrelevant ‘Third World’ thus evidencing an unfortunate and outmoded perspective couched in similarly antiquated and offensive terms. Carroll’s description of ‘Third World’ countries as ‘underdeveloped’ is flawed as many increasingly being recognized as dynamic economic and intellectual locations.⁷⁷⁵ Indeed, ‘Third World’ locations may have had more ‘developed’ ways of living in ecological terms. Additionally, it is hugely ironic that Carroll should criticise ‘obsolete’ theory and ‘formulas’ merely on the basis of being ‘backward in time’ when he concentrates on Darwin

⁷⁷⁴ Joseph Carroll, *Literary Darwinism, Evolution, Human Nature, and Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p.x.

⁷⁷⁵ Diksha Madhok in India Today Oct 1 2009, The rapidly growing economy of India and the growing awareness of an urban population has led to huge investment in Medicine and cutting edge research in stem cells, genomics and molecular diagnostics. Medical tourism is a fast growing industry. Microsoft has a thriving research centre in India. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/Medicine:+The+cutting+edge/1/64346.html> (Accessed 22/8/2012). On 26th June 2012, the Australian and Indian Governments set out a joint project to support thirteen new collaborative projects and seven joint workshops through the Australia-India Strategic Research Fund. <http://www.india.embassy.gov.au/ndli/pa1712.html> (Accessed 22/8/2012).

(1809-1882) and many of his near or close contemporaries.⁷⁷⁶ Ironically, whilst stressing the need to move forward, Carroll chooses to reflect solely on the scholarship surrounding Jane Austen, an icon of the traditional western canon, rather than that of contemporary texts from a broader arena. Rather than embracing interrelatedness, as espoused by Darwin himself, Carroll clearly expresses a hierarchical bias in favour of a notion of empirical science adopted in the 17th century and in privileging what he terms the ‘developed’ world.

In 1983, Gillian Beer identified Darwinian studies as proving a ‘highly productive seam at the critical coalface’⁷⁷⁷ of evolutionary biology and literary criticism, and *Darwin’s Plots, Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, has been reprinted several times. Yet, significantly, Carroll fails to recognise Beer’s more sophisticated text, categorizing it alongside what he terms as ‘more fashionable, other recent studies [which have] attempted to characterize Darwin, with perverse ingenuity, as a forerunner for the irrationalist antirealism of such contemporary authorities as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.’⁷⁷⁸ Thus, in one sweeping statement Carroll dismisses decades of research since Darwin as merely fashionable. In *Processes of Life*, Dupré discusses C.P. Snow’s ‘famous jeremiad about the Two Cultures’(1959),⁷⁷⁹ that describes the apparent rift between science and the humanities. Dupré’s claim that ‘the opposition between the two camps sometimes seems as strong as ever’ is seemingly evidenced by Carroll’s polemic. Dupré:

⁷⁷⁶ Darwin (1809-1882) Marx (1818-1883), Freud (1856-1939), Saussure (1857-1913) and Claude Levi-Strauss (1829-1902).

⁷⁷⁷ Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots, Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 3rd Edition 2009), p.xxv.

⁷⁷⁸ Joseph Carroll, p.45.

⁷⁷⁹ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, pp.37-38.

In the contemporary Science Wars, in which angry scientists rail against the humanists alleged to have discussed science with insufficient respect and expertise, it is still clear that science is assumed to form a hegemonic unity, and there is a strong tendency for the opposition to be constructed as an equally unified Luddite whole. Enemies, real or imagined, are a classic device for reinforcing solidarity or unity.⁷⁸⁰

Dupré argues that both science and the humanities are inextricably linked; not positioned as two opposing ‘grand cultures’ but are comprised of ‘many small and overlapping subcultures.’⁷⁸¹ In *Darwin’s Legacy, What Evolution Means Today*,’ he identifies the reluctance of Neo-Darwinists to recognise the limitations of the traditional theory of evolution: ‘much in biology, and more especially human biology, needs a good deal more than evolution if it is to make sense.’⁷⁸²

Many scientists, rightly impressed by one of the most significant advances ever made in our understanding of the world we live in, try to get more out of Darwin’s theory than it can provide.

In ‘Beyond Ecology, Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy’ published in *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), Neil Evernden argues for the value of the arts, stating that ‘Environmentalism involves the perception of values, and values are the coin of the arts. Environmentalism without aesthetics is merely regional planning.’⁷⁸³

Evernden argues that ecological issues cannot be addressed solely by the ‘tool[s] of the scientist’ or the existing lexicon of environmental science,⁷⁸⁴ thus, he states that it is ironic that society (assumed as Western society) should cleave exclusively to environmental science as the most ‘logical

⁷⁸⁰ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, pp.37-38.

⁷⁸¹ Dupré, *Processes of Life*, p.39.

⁷⁸² John Dupré, *Darwin’s Legacy, What Evolution Means Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2003), p.119.

⁷⁸³ Evernden ‘Beyond Ecology, Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy’, p.103.

⁷⁸⁴ Evernden, ‘Beyond Ecology, Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy’, p.102.

choice as advocates in the environmental movement.⁷⁸⁵ Evernden claims that this may be due to ‘the reluctance of society to pay attention to anyone who is not a scientist’ and possibly the ‘fear that anyone interested in animals and flowers will be labeled a Romantic.’ He concludes that in fact he believes it is more due to the ‘old assumption that the proper study for man is man.’ Yet, he argues that ‘an involvement by the arts is vitally needed to emphasize that relatedness, and the intimate and vital involvement of self with place,’ the diversity of life.

Ultimately, preservation of the non-human is a very personal crusade, a rejection of the homogenization of the world that threatens to diminish all, including the self. There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place.’

In ‘How Novels can Contribute to our Understanding of Climate Change’ (2010), Peter Middleton similarly argues for the inclusion of the arts, specifically fiction, in environmental discourse and states that: ‘To be deprived of literature means to be deprived of a chance to play with and test the paradigms of knowledge of a given period in a manner that is not simply mimetic.’⁷⁸⁶ Middleton’s argument in support of the intrinsic value of the arts, and specifically for the role of fiction, in the burgeoning environmental movement, discusses Kim Stanley Robinson’s trilogy of novels about climate change. He states that the novels evidence a fundamental resistance to prevailing ‘apocalyptic rhetoric’⁷⁸⁷ concerning the issue of global warming; controversially describing ways in which a shift towards an extremely cold climate in temperate areas could, rather than be catastrophic, encourage the

⁷⁸⁵ Evernden, ‘Beyond Ecology, Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy’, pp.102-103.

⁷⁸⁶ Peter Middleton, ‘How Novels can Contribute to our Understanding of Climate Change’, *History at the End of the World, History, Climate Change and the Possibility of Closure*, Mark Levene, Rob Johnson and Penny Roberts eds. (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2010), p.223.

⁷⁸⁷ Middleton, ‘How Novels can Contribute to our Understanding of Climate Change’, p.218.

resurgence of meritorious ‘pioneer traditions of self-sufficiency’ which are undoubtedly enshrined in American culture. Robinson describes a vision of the frozen Potomac as an open-air park where every race and ethnicity on Earth ‘find themselves all ‘partying together’ on the ice.’ Middleton questions whether such utopian anticipations, in direct contrast to the more usual calamitous predictions surrounding climate change, should be credited with any value since they are products of a radical imagination rather than ‘reliable’ empirical models. Certainly this utopian vision may seem overly confident when faced with the ‘reality’ of the environmental problems we face, but its value is in offering a less conventional and thus wider perspective. Middleton seemingly questions the usefulness of ‘poetic license’ in contributing to our understanding of climate change much beyond mere entertainment or the recruitment of a ‘few more campaigners,’ but it is perhaps unproductive to downplay ways through which to garner crucial concern.

Our conventional wisdom tells us that novelists, especially genre writers, are not bound by truth nor committed to the dependable transmission of knowledge, they are entertainers who use narrative and character to create compelling fictions... What possible use is a form of writing not grounded in the exacting rigours of climate science and objective evaluation of global geography? The exhaustive winnowing of theories and data by the IPCC⁷⁸⁸ in order to arrive at a sufficient consensus about what does constitute reliable knowledge about potential climate change is testament to the difficulty of establishing confidence sufficient to persuade governments, politicians, corporations and publics to support initiatives that may curtail their economic and social freedoms... Robinson might help recruit a few more campaigners, but does such literature have any value beyond grabbing the attention of readers and inciting them to go to more trustworthy sources for guidance?⁷⁸⁹

Whilst acknowledging the ways in which canonical popular science writing such as Rachael Carson’s *Silent Spring*, and James Lovelock’s *Gaia* have

⁷⁸⁸ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change established 1988.

⁷⁸⁹ Middleton, ‘How Novels can Contribute to our Understanding of Climate Change’, p.219.

effectively defined the global environmental crisis, Middleton argues that, as yet, the novel has fallen short of similar achievements. He states that some novels such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) have 'come close' but that no novel about global climate change has yet achieved this.⁷⁹⁰ Despite this lack, Middleton repudiates the position that fiction has no practical use. He argues that the ways in which literature has previously been considered 'useful' in environmental terms: as a means of 'alerting audiences' to the consequences of their actions, as a 'secular equivalent' of the cautionary apocalyptic images used by medieval preachers, and as a 'nursery stage of political activism' where lessons are learnt through 'fantasy play',⁷⁹¹ is far too limited. Indeed, he asserts that the 'enormous complexity that is taking place across the entire range of human knowledge and experience' requires a similarly comprehensive intellectual inquiry, one that encompasses all human experience, and is 'capable of producing new understandings of our society, and its ethical and cognitive dilemmas.' Indeed, as Robinson asserts, we require a more complex means by which to negotiate environmental concerns beyond human time frames: 'if it was going to take 200 years, and temperatures were going to change five degrees, how do you tell that story?'⁷⁹² The plasticity of Magic Real metaphors can relate 'lived,' rapid/metabolic, gradual/developmental, contingent evolutionary processes in meaningful ways, thus avoiding the limitation of 'realistic' genres that adhere to human time-scales and perspectives.

⁷⁹⁰ Middleton, 'How Novels can Contribute to our Understanding of Climate Change', p.222.

⁷⁹¹ Middleton, 'How Novels can Contribute to our Understanding of Climate Change', p.220.

⁷⁹² Kim Stanley Robinson interview with Ralph Brave, 'Fear of a frozen planet: A North-state novelist tackles global climate change', Newsreview.com, 2006, quoted in Middleton p.222.

Rapidly changing scientific projections, the tension between the novel's focus on individual lives and the vast scale of climate transformation, as well as the tendency of the genre of the novel to work best with the known dense textures of actual history rather than the imagined landscapes of the future, have so far held back writers. There is no reason, however, to think that novelists of ideas will not meet this challenge over the next few years, and produce works as powerful as the non-fiction texts already mentioned.⁷⁹³

Middleton states that the genre of the novel works best with 'individual lives' and the 'known dense textures of actual history,' but the potential of the genre from this viewpoint is limited, and perhaps illustrates why the production of 'powerful' environmental fiction has previously not been recognized. While identifying the fact that radical thinkers, what he terms 'novelists of ideas,' will undoubtedly eventually produce such texts, Middleton overlooks those from a genre of fiction that, whilst not perhaps often considered as canonical literature, has already been extant. Middleton identifies the novel as a source of 'controlled daydreaming,'⁷⁹⁴ but arguably the most 'dreamlike' of genres, the Magic Real, has not so far been considered as a valuable resource in environmental or ecocritical terms. Middleton states that 'storytelling play[s] a role in the collective creation and recreation of human knowledge on which we depend even if our theories of literature and science are not very good at analysing this relationship.'⁷⁹⁵ Yet myth, fable and fantasy, some of the oldest forms of storytelling, are not seemingly considered significant since they are considered the least 'realistic' and thus the least 'reliable' in these terms. Magic Real literature, although considered by many as out-dated and specifically of the 1990's, can thus be recuperated as offering a means by which the 'plasticity' of rapid and gradual metamorphoses of both collective and individual, animate and inanimate

⁷⁹³ Middleton, 'How Novels can Contribute to our Understanding of Climate Change', p.222.

⁷⁹⁴ Middleton, 'How Novels can Contribute to our Understanding of Climate Change', p.222.

⁷⁹⁵ Middleton, 'How Novels can Contribute to our Understanding of Climate Change', p.221.

entities, within often ‘unreal’ landscapes, meets the challenge Middleton and Huggan describe.

Dana Phillips similarly highlights the complexity of ecosystems as requiring a ‘*more* anti-representational’ approach than other forms of criticism.⁷⁹⁶ As a literature of ‘the margins’⁷⁹⁷ and of the ‘marginal,’ the idea of the ‘plastic’ and Magic Real metamorphoses are able to transcend the perceived boundaries between science and the humanities, between the human and ‘more than human’ thus offering what DeLoughrey and Handley term a ‘different idea of the universal glimpsed’⁷⁹⁸ through shared dynamic processes of ecological and evolutionary ‘becoming.’ Daston and Mitmann similarly claim that perpetually transforming ‘textual, metaphor animal[s]’ have the potential to ‘achieve a more integrated’ and generative discourse for the future.⁷⁹⁹ I argue that Plastic Magic Real metamorphoses evoke complex evolutionary processes and the association between healing and wounding, renewal and death involving both traditional notions of genetic inheritance and epigenetic responses to the environment. Thus, within epigenetic and ecological discourse, the siting of fiction, and most specifically literary metaphor and metamorphoses in Magic Real fiction, is crucially important in practical terms, as offering ways through which we may attempt to more tangibly become a ‘part’ of the wider ecosystem, avoiding the prevailing focus on human consciousness and perception, and identifying commonalities of environmental experience, response and development.

⁷⁹⁶ Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.48.

⁷⁹⁷ Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, p.9.

⁷⁹⁸ DeLoughrey and Handley, *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literature of the Environment*, p.192.

⁷⁹⁹ Daston and Mitman, *Thinking with Animals, New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, p.5.

As Malabou states: 'Metamorphosis is existence itself, untying identity instead of reassembling it.'⁸⁰⁰ The ambition of this thesis is to illustrate ways in which Magic Real metamorphoses essentially describe an (un)doing rather than a linear becoming; the generative disorder of post-genomic theory in comparison to the neat rationalisation of Neo-Darwinian genetic determinism. In concentrating on marginal authors and marginal entities, I hope to have broadened the field of ecocriticism beyond canonical texts, privileged 'totemic' species and western locations. Such 'plastic' perspectives, relayed through fictional metamorphoses from the 'inside' as intensely 'felt,' effectively describe a dynamic connection between the literary and the philosophical.

⁸⁰⁰ Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident*, p.15.

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