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English**

**Endangered Bodies: Woman and Nature in the Contemporary British Novel
by Women Writers**

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Abstract

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Writers

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Criticism that involves the linkage of the terms 'environment' and 'literature', or 'ecocriticism', has focused largely on texts such as nature writing or on fiction that is set in rural or wilderness settings. This project attempts to widen the scope of ecocriticism by analysing the contemporary British novel, in which nature conceived in such stereotypical ways is largely absent. However, in my analysis of the fifteen texts selected here, I demonstrate that British women writers employ new discursive constructions of nature in order to contest deterministic formulations that subjugate both women and nature. My focus on female textual bodies enables me to explore representations of the fluid interfaces of nature and culture. In my analysis of novels from an environmental standpoint, 'environment' is reconceived to refer to 'where we live, work, and play' and may include not only the countryside and urban nature, but also the female body itself. Thus, the nature of my title is an inclusive term that includes contemporary discourses of nature employed by the sciences of biomedicine, genetics and technology.

This project examines the ecofeminist premise that discourses of mastery not only affect subjugated others such as women, animals and others, but also influence the treatment of the natural environment. Analysing novels that employ forms of embodiment that foreground extreme bodily conditions such as pregnancy, monstrosity and death, I employ the theoretical constructs of Mikhail Bakhtin (the grotesque body,

carnivalisation and dialogism) and Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection as tools of analysis to provide a new conception of ecological bodies. Novelists such as Jeanette Winterson, Fay Weldon, Penelope Lively, Zadie Smith, Margaret Drabble, Kathy Lette and Eva Figs provide a wide range of viewpoints from which to gather evidence of the insistence of the recurring trope of the endangered body within the troubled landscape of contemporary Britain.

Keywords: female embodiment and environment; toxic discourse; grotesque body; British novel; women writers

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Endangered Bodies: Woman and Nature in Contemporary British Novels by Women

Writers

Introduction

But while we remain trapped within this dominant narrative of heroic reason mastering blind nature there is little hope for us. For the narrative itself and its leading characters are a key part of the problem, leading us to reproduce continually the same elements of failure—including the arrogance and ecological blindness of the dominant culture—even while we seek desperately for solutions within it. Val Plumwood¹

There is a pressing need for new narratives that would attempt to reconfigure the way we see ourselves and our place in the world, for the old stories enthroning the mind as masculine set against a backdrop of feminized nature not only reflect a flawed dominant world view but also aid in perpetuating it. Val Plumwood, a foremost environmental philosopher, has challenged systems that tend to map the corporeal with a debased nature, while the unmarked (male, white) rational mind is set against it on the side of culture. For Plumwood, this means that all that is viewed as natural Other is emptied of intrinsic value and drafted into service to the dominant party: this refers not only to the way in which nature, in opposition to culture, is made inferior and subjugated to human constructs, but also to the way in which the body, as that which is aligned to animality, is seen as less significant than rationality. Thus, as Plumwood asserts, ‘the ideals which are held up as truly worthy of a human

¹ Val Plumwood, Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason (London and

life exclude those aspects associated with the body, sexuality, reproduction, affectivity, emotionality, the senses and dependence on the natural world.’²

Humanity is defined as emphatically discontinuous with its natural or animal self. At the same time, since woman has been construed as being essentially more deeply linked with embodiment through the processes of reproduction and her identification as a sexual and emotional, rather than rational, being, she is linked with this nature that man has transcended. As well as constituting grounds for the oppression of women, this view has environmental implications that are far reaching. As Plumwood asserts,

The failure to conceive ourselves as essentially or positively in nature leads easily into a failure to commit ourselves to the care of the planet and to encourage sustainable social institutions and values which can acknowledge deeply and fully our dependence on and ties to the earth.³

Recovering corporeal reality and reinstating it as central to the stories we tell may be a means of reinstating a banished nature.

This study focuses on a question that is attracting increasing attention within literary studies: what is the relationship between nature and narrative, and how can ‘nature’ be represented so as to alter our perceptions of it as secondary, subordinate, or as mere subtext to the main story which centrally concerns humanity? Traditionally, nature has featured in the novel as setting, as mere backdrop for the human events of the story. However, the past ten years have seen a radical reevaluation of this view. The joining of the concerns of environmentalism with literary study in the form of ecocriticism has meant the reconceptualization of nature,

New York: Routledge, 2002) 6.

² Val Plumwood, Feminism and the Mastery of Nature (London: Routledge, 1993) 71.

the human, and the representation of their interrelation within narrative and nature writing.⁴ As a result, textuality is conceived in new ways within critical theory and literature, and new kinds of phenomena are coming to the fore in literary study.

In her introduction to The Ecocriticism Reader, Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as the ‘study of the relationship of literature and the physical environment.’⁵ Lawrence Buell’s more restrictive definition of ecocriticism terms it ‘the study of the relation between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis.’⁶ The breadth and simplicity of the former definition will serve to identify the parameters of the present project: here I apply the term ‘physical environment’ not only to surrounding nature or urban setting, but also to the primary environment of the human body. This study will analyse the contribution of contemporary British women writers to a new understanding of what it means to be embodied within an increasingly threatened physical environment. At the same time, as I have suggested, the female body itself may be experienced as subject to endangerment, especially within biomedical perspectives or the deterministic discourses of genetics. In this study I hope to challenge the view that

³ Plumwood, Mastery, 71.

⁴ The following works are generally credited with bringing about the awareness of what is variously termed ‘ecology’ or ‘environment’ and literature: Jonathan Bate, Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition (New York and London: Routledge, 1991); Lawrence Buell, The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1995); Joseph Meeker, The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic (Tucson, Arizona: U of Arizona P, 1997) and especially the collection of essays that introduced the term ‘ecocriticism’ to a wide audience: Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (Athens, Georgia: U of Georgia UP, 1996).

⁵ Glotfelty, Ecocriticism Reader, xviii.

⁶ Buell, Environmental Imagination, 430. In his second book about environmental writing, Buell acknowledges that Glotfelty’s ‘big-tent definition’ may be more satisfactory. See Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2001) 267.

the contemporary British novel excludes nature and has little environmental consciousness. As I will demonstrate here, women writers increasingly evince consciousness of the enmeshment of the body within nature and culture in ways that indicate how problematic it may be for female autonomy and human survival. In my close readings of various novels, I trace an emergent consciousness of the ecofeminist perception that forms of oppression that exist with regard to gender, race, and class are also worked out on the human body, nature and the land. This study aims to investigate the ways in which female experience is lived through the bodily crises presented by pregnancy and childbirth, monstrosity and death. I have structured my analysis around topics that bring into focus notions of embodiment and normality in order to examine the role that nature plays as both discourse and setting in the novel today, instigating changes in narrative strategies and textuality. As indicated by my title, the notion of endangerment from various 'environmental' sources, both natural and cultural, and with its particular rhetoric and ethics, denotes a specific positioning and response to perceived external events.

Within American literature, a number of ecofeminist critics endorse the 'corporeal turn' within ecocriticism.⁷ One ecofeminist study of women writers examines the relationship between woman and nature, showing how these writers have carved out a space for women in a terrain that had previously embalmed her as corporeal, passive matter. In Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist

⁷ The work of Gretchen Legler, Rachel Stein and Stacey Alaimo forms prominent examples of this approach. See Gretchen Legler, "Who will contest for the voice of nature?": Nature/body politics' in Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells, eds., Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature (London: Zed, 1998. 71-87); Rachel Stein, Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' Revisions of Nature, Gender and Race (Charlottesville and London: Virginia

Space (2000), Stacey Alaimo analyses the way in which feminists have fled nature, following arguments by Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Wollstonecraft and Shulamith Firestone, that since woman has been too long aligned with nature and mired in her embodied state, her only recourse for emancipation is to transcend this problematic area. For some feminists, this has precluded maternity as a viable option for the liberated woman. Since the domestic sphere has been regarded as one that imprisons her in a traditional role, it must be abandoned for the public sphere, which often entails an urban life. The question Alaimo poses to various forms of American culture is germane here: whether nature can be a liberatory space for women, or whether it represents a return to traditional and confining social and cultural roles. Her investigation of the work of early feminists in the area of birth control in a chapter entitled 'Reproduction as Natural Disaster' is highly suggestive for the questions posed in this project regarding the ways in which women writers have dramatized such bodily issues as infertility, pregnancy, and childbirth.

As yet no ecocritical study has been undertaken within the field of contemporary English literature to survey women writing about the troubled terrain of nature. British Romanticism has yielded a number of studies into the relationship of gender and nature, but much ecocritical work on women writing in Britain today still remains to be done.⁸ This is the task I have set for myself in my investigation of

UP, 1997); Stacey Alaimo, Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2000).

⁸ One recent anthology of ecocriticism contains only one article in English Literature: Stephen Hunt, 'Wandering Lonely: Women's Access to the British Romantic Countryside' in John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington, eds., Reading Under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism (Salt Lake City: Utah UP, 2000. 51-63). Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammels, eds., Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature (London: Zed books, 1998) contains three articles that focus on English writers, Crabbe, W.H. Hudson and Oscar Wilde, but there is

novelists that portray the embattled relations between women and nature in their fiction. The novels that might have been chosen for such a preliminary study are numerous: Jenny Diski's Rainforest and A.S. Byatt's Angels and Insects are two novels that are particularly notable for their concern with woman, nature, and the discursive constructions of these within anthropology and natural history.⁹ These are perhaps natural choices of fiction for the ecocritic, containing as they do such manifest examples of concerns that mirror those of the criticism. However, in situating 'nature' within the female body as well as in its environment, I have attempted to loosen the grip of ecocriticism upon works that mirror its own theoretical concerns. Of course, in addition to studying nature writers, and novels that take place within pastoral or wilderness settings, many ecocritics have moved the terrain of analysis to that of urban, suburban or even futuristic landscapes.¹⁰ In favouring an oblique approach to the themes and issues under discussion, I hope to have moved beyond a form of ecocriticism that appears to practise only upon texts that obviously portray its own concerns.

To give an example of this process of selection, I have elected to discuss Maggie Gee's The Ice People (1998) rather than the novel that is more closely concerned with the impact of social activism and environmental cataclysm, Grace

no work on their counterpart women writers. John Parham's collection, the first to focus exclusively on English literature, contains one essay on ecofeminism and the fiction of Virginia Woolf. John Parham, ed. The Environmental Tradition in English Literature (Aldergate, Hamps.: Ashgate, 2001).

⁹ Jenny Diski, Rainforest (London: Methuen, 1987); A.S. Byatt, Angels and Insects (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992).

¹⁰ Two collections that take this stance most effectively are: Michael Bennett and David W. Teague, eds., The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1999) and Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, eds., Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism (Charlottesville and London: UP of Virginia, 2001).

(1988). The latter novel depicts characters responding to the Chernobyl disaster in England, the trains that carry nuclear waste through the city of London, the death of activist Hilda Murrell, and finally, the unleashed force of a hurricane.¹¹ In Grace, Maggie Gee creates a character who is faced with the problem of writing about the death of anti-nuclear activist Hilda Murrell, who was murdered by thugs purportedly instigated by forces within British Intelligence. Gee records the difficulties of representing such issues within the perspective of her protagonist, who is herself presented with the analogous problem of response and representation:

When she thinks about the murder of Hilda Murrell, she still feels an anger that's paralysing, blinding. But the story leaves Paula oddly mute, in a blind alley of indignation. She feels there is something very obvious that passionate anger makes her miss. Sighing, she turns to journalism.

Paula's response to the complexity of her own anger, muteness, public apathy and the seeming irresolvability of the interconnectedness of environmental problems with corrupt political systems is first, paralysis, a 'blind alley of indignation,' then the relief of expression through the relative simplicity of journalism. There she finds a forum of expression for the persuasive ideas that guide her as researcher and environmental activist. This scenario seems to indicate that, while there is space for such expression within the array of Gee's narrative strategies, tellingly, the novel as a whole resists such simplicity. Within Gee's later novel, the present is transmuted still further into a possible world of the near future. Such distancing devices may finally be more effective means of communication within the repertoire of the novel, as they engage the reader's interest within a form that provides potentially greater aesthetic satisfaction.

¹¹ Maggie Gee, Grace (London: Heinemann, 1988).

Given the many novels by women writers that might be analysed here, what has governed my choice? Although my argument is that the theme of contesting nature is pervasive in British women's writing at this time, the novels selected have been chosen largely for their prominent use of the trope of female bodies. My selection has been guided by three criteria: first, I wanted texts that would reveal a wide range of narrative strategies that emerge from an author's encounter with discourses of nature. Second, I wanted texts that would provide evidence of varying degrees of knowledge and sympathy toward ecology, science and feminist thought. Third, diversity was a crucial consideration, as it must be, for an ecocritical perspective; consequently, writers with various social, racial and sexual identities comprise this study.¹² Maternal bodies, monstrous bodies, and mortal bodies are considered with attention to the use of narrative strategies that are capable of expressing these corporeal realities. These are notably intensified forms of embodiment: abject forms of the body that have often been repressed, suppressed or at best, ignored within Western culture.

My intent here is to show how such theories of embodiment can contribute to an ecological reading of fiction. In addition to examining the ways in which bodies are represented in literature, most particularly within fiction by women, I hope to show that writing that engages the discourses of the body must employ new literary forms to realise this reconfiguration of the female body within nature. The texts I

¹² Patrick N. Murphy makes this point in much of his work. One essay that focuses on diversity is 'Otherness and inhabitation in recent multicultural American literature' in Kerridge and Sammels, eds., Writing the Environment, 40-52. In the same collection Jonathan Bate makes a related point in 'Poetry and biodiversity' (Writing the Environment, 53-70.) Bate states the significance of the concept of biodiversity as follows: 'Among every multitude of apparently expendable species, there is one which will be the keystone on which new eco-systems will be built' (54). The 'profligate diversity' upon which nature depends can be taken as a principle of selection, whereby representativeness and breadth is of utmost

analyse share not only thematic preoccupations with embodiment and nature, but also illustrate remappings of this territory. Whereas much postmodern philosophy argues that the body is determined by discourse, there is little sense of the body talking back and affecting discourse. The women writers selected here employ a variety of methods, genres and voices to enact this voicing of the body and to reflect concerns with the bodily situation in place. The plurality of writers selected here ranges across a spectrum of class, race, and sexual orientation, expressing a wide diversity in age and social situation. The novels in turn are diverse in genre, plot, and literary technique, and it is unlikely that they would undertake the same approaches to the problems they address, yet I hope to show that they do constitute a body of work that indicates not only a consciousness of the problems and possibilities of female embodiment, but also reflects on the connections that can be established between the body and the environment. This project traces the emergence of an ecofeminist canon in contemporary British writing.

Most of the women novelists included within this study are prominent British writers who require no introduction: Penelope Lively, Fay Weldon, Jeanette Winterson, Margaret Drabble and Eva Figes have contributed both to the development of the contemporary British novel and its criticism. Eva Figes and Fay Weldon have mounted critiques of androcentric culture in non-fictional texts such as essays and literary criticism.¹³ A younger generation of novelists such as Maggie Gee, Kate Atkinson, Zadie Smith and Lucy Ellmann have received critical acclaim,

importance.

¹³ See Eva Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society* (New York: Persea Books, 1970, 1986) and *Sex and Subterfuge: Women Writers to 1850* (New York: Persea Books, 1982) and Fay Weldon, *Godless in Eden: Essays* (London: Flamingo ed., Harper Collins, 2000).

and constitute an accomplished group of novelists. Kathy Lette is representative of an alternative approach, as well as the different marketing strategies, of popular fiction for women. What joins these writers is their desire to scrutinize the conventions associated with fiction relating women and nature.¹⁴ As women have tended to be construed as nature, with emphasis on biological determinations of the female body, these writers have employed various emancipatory strategies to tease apart the threads of inexorable connection to expose the workings of ideology. I hope to show that this diverse group of writers constitute an emergent ecofeminist canon within British fiction, a group that, despite its diversity and range of stances toward nature, female embodiment and environment, provides evidence of the interest in these themes in contemporary writing in Britain. That there is a great range and variety of perspectives found within this group of authors, many of whom would not regard themselves as ecofeminist, does not weaken this assertion, but rather indicates the liveliness and intensity of debate regarding the matters in question.

The Textual Body

The body has been at the centre of much feminist, and post-Foucauldian theory.

Prevailing metaphors view the body as being inscribed by culture; the body is thus

¹⁴ Carolyn Merchant, Ludmilla Jordanova, Adrienne Rich, Val Plumwood and Greta Gaard are among the many feminist theorists who have written about this connection. See Carolyn Merchant, The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980); Ludmilla Jordanova, Nature Displayed: Gender, Science and Medicine 1760-1820 (London and New York: Longman, 1999); Val Plumwood, Feminism and the Mastery of Nature (London: Routledge, 1993); Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Womanhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago books, 1977 and

conveniently viewed as surface and its potent interior is eviscerated. In consequence, nature is sent to the margins while culture prevails. What is needed is a reconception of the body that fully acknowledges both aspects of the body and enables attention to nature as well as culture. Thus, fictions that centre on active, 'speaking' bodies, as many of the novels studied here do, engage in unsettling the unquestioned assumptions of narrative, and further, may aid in remapping the human-nature relationship. Then it will be possible to imagine nature-body connections that celebrate both nature in the body and the body in nature. For women writers, 'writing the body' entails taking on a set of subjects that have been elided, simply ignored, or regarded as trivial in the past. At the same time, it poses the challenge of writing women's experience from the vantage point of what has been long viewed as essential to feminine identity: that place from which there is no advancement and no transcendence of nature.

Although the focus of this study is upon women writers, I do not make the claim that only female novelists have attempted such representations of the body and nature. From the Joycean carnivalesque through the vitalistic bodies of D.H. Lawrence to the ecological import of the contemporary novels of Graham Swift, Jim Crace, Adam Thorpe and Martin Amis, there have been attempts by male writers to write the language of the body and place in novels. Indeed, a striking literary precedent for this is found in a poem by W.H. Auden, in which he celebrates the notion of body as habitat, beginning with the vocative greeting to the various

1997); Greta Gaard, ed., Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993).

microcreatures that cohabit his bodily terrain.¹⁵ I do argue, however, that writing the female body is a more perilous endeavour for women, inasmuch as it risks reinscribing outmoded notions of essentialism and the female as part of, or closer to, nature.¹⁶ If woman has been viewed in the past with an emphasis on the reproductive body as constituting femaleness, then writing about the pregnant body may appear to celebrate such biologically–determined (essentialist) notions of femininity. At the same time, as a philosophy that links embodiment with ecology, ecofeminism has often been linked to retrogressive concepts of womanhood that emphasize the nurturant, motherly qualities of women, falling into the dualistic trap of simply inverting existing stereotypes about male and female qualities. Writing with a focus on the female body may entail rewriting ideas about nature, and conversely, rewriting concepts of nature has consequences for perspectives on female embodiment.

The term ‘nature’ itself is an embattled notion that bears fuller discussion. Memorably, Raymond Williams has called ‘nature’ ‘perhaps the most complex word in the English language.’¹⁷ There are many excellent book-length discussions of the topic, so here I will merely refer to a few discussions that lucidly elaborate notions of

¹⁵ W.H. Auden, ‘A New Year Greeting’ Selected Poems (London: Faber, 1972) 255. The conceit of body as habitat, with pores as pools, forests located in arm pits etc., enables Auden to revivify the classical surfaces and interiors of the body, and even to recast them as catastrophic and inadvertently inhospitable to other (micro) lives.

¹⁶ The notion of essentialism is a key problem in feminist thought and refers to the ascription of timeless, universal values to women on the basis of biological sexual characteristics. The following definition is offered by Peter Brooker in Cultural Theory: A Glossary (London and New York: Arnold, 1999) 85-6: Essentialism denotes a term ‘describing the assumption that human beings, objects or texts possess underlying essences which define their “true nature.”’ This idea can be traced back to Aristotle. Essentialist arguments in feminism may have recourse to notions like women seen as ‘more nurturant, maternal, co-operative and peaceful’ as Lynne Segal warns in her criticism of essentialist thinking. See Lynne Segal, Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism (London: Virago, 1987) ix.

¹⁷ Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London: Fontana,

what will constitute nature for the purposes of this project.¹⁸ The key insight outlined by William Cronon informs my use of the term throughout this study:

It is simply that “nature” is a human idea, with a long and complicated cultural history which has led different human beings to conceive of the natural world in very different ways. Far from inhabiting a realm that stands completely apart from humanity, the objects and creatures and landscapes we label as “natural” are in fact deeply entangled with the words and images and ideas we use to describe them.¹⁹

This is a definition few literary critics would have difficulty in accepting; on the other hand, it appears highly controversial for many environmentalists. The reasons for this are instructive and bear further consideration. William Cronon notes that ‘environmentalism has often asserted its moral authority by invoking nature as an uncontested and transcendent category whose appeal is so compelling that no right-thinking person could resist it.’²⁰ There is also a tendency to assume that a nature which is imbricated with culture is only an idea, ‘that there is no concrete referent out there in the world for the many human meanings we attach to the word “nature.”’²¹ There is similarly little justification for considering a culturally-situated nature as being wholly relativistic as some critics have asserted.²²

1976, 1983) 219.

¹⁸ See for example, Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (London: Hogarth Press, 1993); Katie Soper, What is Nature? (Oxford, U.K. and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995); and Barbara Adam, Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁹ William Cronon, ed., Foreword, Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1996, 1995. 19-22) 20. Although this simple definition may appear obvious, it has in fact been a contentious issue among environmentalists, among whom many regard it as a form of capitulation, a crossing over to the other side, that is, culture. This statement of the identity of nature is far from one which would deny its material reality.

²⁰ Cronon, Uncommon Ground, 20.

²¹ Cronon, Uncommon Ground, 21.

²² See for example Michael Soulé and Gary Lease, eds., Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction (Washington, D.C and Covelo, California: Island Press, 1995) as representing this pole of the debate. Some of the authors included in this collection, notably

Donna Haraway expands on a notion of Nature as culturally constructed thus: '[It] is a figure, construction, artifact, movement, displacement. Nature cannot pre-exist its construction. This construction is based on a particular kind of move—a *tropos*, or turn. Faithful to the Greek, as *tropos*, nature is about turning.'²³ Nevertheless, as Roland Barthes has observed, to invoke 'nature' is often to evict history:

Any classic humanism postulates that in scratching the history of men a little, the relativity of their institutions or the superficial diversity of their skins...one very quickly reaches the solid rock of a universal human nature. Progressive humanism, on the contrary, must always remember to reverse the terms of this very old imposture, constantly to scour Nature, its 'laws' and its 'limits' in order to discover History there, and at last to establish Nature itself as historical.²⁴

The attempt to remove history from nature is perhaps a tendency more representative of American than British environmentalism. One of the canonical texts of American nature writing, Emerson's Nature, sets out to do just this, in asserting the primacy of experience over received views:

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographical histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines today also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are

N. Katherine Hayles, are more sympathetic to a poststructuralist position.

²³ Donna Haraway, 'Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others' in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds., Cultural Studies (New York: Routledge, 1992: 295-337) 296.

²⁴ Roland Barthes, Mythologies Trans. Annette Lavers. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 1957, 1990) 101.

new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.²⁵

Emerson's emphasis on the contemporary experience of nature may have been salutary for his contemporaries, but his move to cast out the 'dry bones of the past' (albeit symbolically) is symptomatic of a tendency in American thought to privilege wilderness (without its original inhabitants) over inhabited forms of nature.²⁶ As I intend to demonstrate in my readings of British women's novels, however, these 'dry bones of the past' may supply fertile links of person to place, implying forms of rootedness and attachment. This trope forms a potent figure of human embeddedness within nature that merits further investigation.

There is a fruitful discussion of the nature/culture dichotomy in English literary history in Jonathan Bate's comparison of the common view of Jane Austen as representative of culture in contrast to a Thomas Hardy aligned with nature. He unravels the earlier meanings of culture, from which is derived the concept of agriculture, showing that culture itself was inextricably linked to nature. For Bate, the movement of the notion of 'culture' from 'common currency in the context of agricultural subsistence to technical usage in biological research is itself a little

²⁵ See Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Nature' (1883) in Derek Wall, ed., Green History (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 108. As Thoreau's literary precursor and seminal influence on American transcendentalism, Emerson is an extremely important figure who helps to serve as demarcating a point of divergence of American and English natures. Further, in speaking of 'the occult relation between man [sic] and vegetable' Emerson inaugurates a recognition of the intimacy of the human-nature relationship without which we would be much impoverished.

²⁶ In his work on transatlantic influences on American nature writing, James McCusick establishes the depth of influence of English romanticism on the ecological thinking of writers such as Emerson and Thoreau. See James C. McKusick, Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

allegory of the march to modernity.’²⁷ For many environmental philosophers, the dualistic schema that would oppose the two ideas is a potent source of the Cartesian habits of mind that lead to the objectification of nature.

Linking the related concepts of nature and culture is the figure of the textual body. An important study that deals with the body within literary history has been undertaken by Peter Brooks in Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative. My analysis of Brooks’ approach will signal the importance of the semiosis of the body in literature, but at the same time will underline the limitations of his approach, which are characteristic of much contemporary thought. Brooks views the treatment of the body in literature as overdetermined by such factors as ‘modern concepts of the individual and “personality,” or new concepts of privacy and modesty, or modern medical science with its new concepts and technologies of the body.’ He indicates that a history of the literary body ‘would have to take account of many types—heroic, sacred, suffering, tragic, carnivalesque, pornographic, even moribund’; however, his study confines itself to the body within the erotic tradition—the body conceived as the agent and object of desire. For Brooks, desire provokes an ‘epistemophilic’ desire: that is, the desire to know. The body thus becomes the nexus of desire, and the desire to know, and narrative: in this way the body becomes ‘a site of signification—the place for the inscription of stories—and itself a signifier, a prime agent in narrative plot and meaning.’ For Brooks, the defining moments of meaning for the body occur in its encounter with the Other, here defined as the object of desire.²⁸

²⁷ See Jonathan Bate, The Song of the Earth (London: Picador, 2001) 4.

²⁸ Peter Brooks, Body Work Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative (Cambridge, Mass:

The body is central to the structuring of narrative itself, and meaning 'takes place in relation to the body... we are forever striving to make the body into a text.'²⁹ Examining the way in which the body is at once a sociocultural construct, yet also includes areas that we think of as pre-linguistic, such as sensations of pleasure and of pain, Brooks considers the earliest experiences of the body as foundational to all symbolism. Understanding narrative is undertaken through Brooks' development of a Barthesian narratology, so that the sense of the body's otherness, that which is outside of culture, is that which seeks representation in language:

It becomes part of the human semiotic and semantic project, a body endowed with meaning. Conversely, language seeks to reanimate itself as a symbolism with an original referent in the body: to become a language embodied. Narratives in which a body becomes a central preoccupation can be especially revelatory of the effort to bring the body into the linguistic realm because they repeatedly tell the story of a body's entrance into meaning. That is, they dramatize ways in which the body becomes a key signifying factor in a text: how, we might say, it embodies meaning.³⁰

The body thus becomes endowed with significance for the writing of the story, as well as a motivating factor in its origin and development. Although Brooks acknowledges feminist theory and is deeply aware of the significance of the male gaze in objectifying the female body, his almost exclusive focus on the female body, and the nude, has the effect of replicating this phallogentric objectification.³¹

There are more serious limitations to this approach, however. Brooks initiates his opening discussion with a telling misreading, a willful misprision that gives his project force and originality. He cites Wallace Stevens on the origin of poetry,

Harvard UP, 1993) 3-6.

²⁹ Brooks, Body Work, 6.

³⁰ Brooks, Body Work, 8.

³¹ The exception here is in Brooks' discussion of Mapplethorpe's controversial photographs of the male nude. See Brooks, Body Work, 278-9.

suggesting that the body is the primary originary moment of writing. Yet, in so reading the poem, Brooks makes a deliberate swerve away from the world referred to in the poem in a move to make the body itself the origin of primary and exclusive significance. Wallace Stevens puts it this way:

From this the poem springs: that we live in a place
That is not our own and much more, not ourselves
And hard it is in spite of blazoned days.

The world is thus constructed as ‘a place that is not our own’ and ‘not ourselves’: however, Brooks interprets these words to refer exclusively to the body as belonging to the world and ‘not to our ideally constructed selves.’³² For Brooks then, ‘the motive of poetry becomes an attempted recuperation of an otherness,’ which he construes as being the body itself.

This emphasis forms a telling shift that is characteristic of much literary criticism: it misplaces the estrangement of the self from the world, and from place, to a site closer to the self. This move is symptomatic of much literary criticism in that it is wilfully blind to references to the external world in which human life takes place. Lawrence Buell has commented on the myopic reading habits of literary scholars who exclude the external world referred to in texts as a matter of course; yet such lack of interest applies not only to literary studies, but also reflects a more general turn of thought that looks to the human as the index for all significance.³³ Yet, what if we were to take Stevens at his word and locate the origin of poetry elsewhere, in, as he writes, the person’s relation to ‘being in the world’, namely, as a body in place? For Stevens, the alienation comes from living ‘in a place that is not our own

³² Brooks, Body Work, 2.

and much more, not ourselves': that is, he depicts the discomfort of the human in a world from which he or she feels separate. An ecocritical reading would attempt to restore to the poem its sense of the world to which it refers; despite the fact that, as Neil Evernden puts it, man is 'the natural alien.'³⁴ Brooks reads this poem as authorizing his reduction of the context of the self in the world to the body and the quest to know another, the pursuit of the object of desire. What if the meaning of the bodily situation were to encompass more of the world? What if the meaning of the erotic were to acquire a wider meaning, one more social, historical and situated in its scope?

Ecofeminist theory has broadened the notion of the erotic to include a spectrum of everyday practices within an ecological perspective. Instead of being confined to the sexual, this energy would inform social practices too, so that, as Audre Lorde has stated, 'Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinise all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives.'³⁵ This new perspective of female sexual desire reframes it from the traditional historical view of the realm of competition between men, of romance and sexual domination, and is now viewed as 'the feminist desire to bond with other women, a desire to form mutualistic relationships poised on the intersection between autonomy and connection.'³⁶ What

³³ Buell, Environmental Imagination.

³⁴ Neil Evernden, The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

³⁵ Audre Lorde, 'The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power' Sister Outsider (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984) 53. Chaia Heller extends this idea and applies it to ecology in her Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1999).

³⁶ Heller, Ecology of Everyday Life, 22.

would this wider and more inclusive definition of the erotic mean for conceptualizing the self in its attempt to establish identity and find love, meaning and fulfilment?

Peter Brooks' admirable tracing of the importance of the body for the narrative enterprise could well be expanded beyond the psychoanalytic framework of the individual and the human other to take in the larger canvas of the world in which we live. Such a perspective is found in ecocriticism, which as Cheryll Glotfelty has defined it, is based on 'the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it.'³⁷ The move to sever the human from a wider context in the world is utterly predictable and commonplace in modern thought: indeed, the interest in the body indicates an attempt to recover the materiality that has been lost in the Cartesian equation of the self with its rational ability. Yet the anthropocentrism that is characteristic of much modern thinking draws a line around the body as marking the limit of material significance for the human. Attempts have been made, however, to rectify the limitations of thinking in this exclusively human-centred way.

In ecofeminist literary criticism, Gretchen Legler points out, one strand places a strong emphasis on the body, challenging 'the humanist notion that the "authentic self" is necessarily dependent on the managing of spatial boundaries, especially the boundaries between nature and culture, between the me and the not me, between the I and other.'³⁸ Ecofeminist Rachel Stein has analysed the concepts that underlie the dual degradation of women in the past and nature. Stein argues that the conception of America as 'Nature's Nation' is a formulation that relegates Others such as

³⁷ Glotfelty, *Ecocriticism Reader*, xix.

³⁸ Gretchen Legler, 'Ecofeminist Literary Criticism' in Karen Warren, ed., *Ecofeminism:*

indigenous peoples, people of colour and women to positions of inferiority. Her readings of Emily Dickinson, Tony Morrison, Alice Walker and Leslie Silko illustrate the ways in which women writers have contested dominant paradigms of womanhood and nature to revision themselves in relation to a newly invigorated conception of the more-than-human world.³⁹

Many ecocritics have sought in phenomenology an approach that sets the human in place, that brings the experience of person in place to the forefront.⁴⁰ Following the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, itself derived from some of the teachings of Heidegger, these critics have located in phenomenology a way out of the Cartesian mind/body split that elevates rational enquiry over the experience of the lived body. However, this approach risks a return to the literal, a route that bypasses the Western philosophical cul-de-sac of the ideal over the real, the mind over the body, and culture over nature.

For Elizabeth Grosz, the body 'far from being an inert, passive, non-cultural and ahistorical term... may be seen as the crucial term, the site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual and intellectual struggles.' In Volatile Bodies, a work that has become the touchstone for a feminist philosophy of the embodied subject, Elizabeth Grosz considers the work of Nietzsche, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, and various psychoanalytic accounts from Freud through Lacan, Irigaray and Cixous. She notes that social constructionist accounts of the body rely by opposition on

Women, Culture, Nature (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1997) 229.

³⁹ Rachel Stein, Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' Revisions of Nature, Gender and Race (Charlottesville and London: Virginia UP, 1997).

⁴⁰ See for example, Carol H. Cantrell, 'The Locus of Compassibility' in ISLE 5 (2) 1998:25-40; Carol Bigwood, Earth Muse: Feminism, Nature and Art (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993) and David Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous (New York: Vintage, 1996).

biological, or essentialist theories, and thus proposes that the body be seen as ‘a cultural interweaving and production of nature.’⁴¹ Bodies are thus viewed as a threshold or borderline concept ‘that hovers perilously and undecidably at the pivotal point of binary pairs.’⁴² As such it has the capacity to upset intransigent oppositions:

The body is neither—while also being both—the public or the private, self or other, natural or cultural, psychical or social.... This indeterminable position enables it to be used as a particularly powerful strategic term to upset the frameworks by which these binary pairs are considered.⁴³

For Foucault, the interface between bodies and knowledges is a place that merits intense scrutiny: ‘The body—and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and soil—is the domain of descent [the object of a genealogical investigation]. The body manifests the stigmata of past experiences and also gives rise to desires, failings and errors....’⁴⁴ Yet where Foucault places emphasis upon the inscriptions of history upon the human body, an ecocritical perspective would place additional stress on such environmental factors as climate, soil, quality of air and the like—all of the material, yet often intangible, qualities of place. History would then become linked with geography, and space, as well as time, would become significant in terms of the way in which bodies are inscribed—inside and out—and experience themselves amid their surroundings.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994) 19.

⁴² Grosz, Volatile Bodies, 23.

⁴³ Grosz, Volatile Bodies, 23-4.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, in Donald Bouchard, ed., Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977) 148.

For Judith Butler, the body itself is a formation: there is no return to the physical or 'the real' outside of language.⁴⁵ Yet the point has never been that 'everything is discursively constructed,' as some critics have charged. The point rather, has been to understand more clearly 'the constitutive force of exclusion, erasure, violent foreclosure, abjection and its disruptive return.'⁴⁶ This strand of poststructuralist feminism which attempts to disengage the body from nature fully is made partially in response to feminists' own attempts to resuscitate traditionally degraded feminine characteristics, female anatomy, reproductive capacities and the like (viz. Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous).⁴⁷

The impasse between a form of cultural imperialism on the one hand that allows no area outside its scope and a naturalism on the other that leads inexorably to foundationalism and thereby to essentialism and biological determinism would appear to be insurmountable: a path between Scylla and Charybdis that admits no safe passage. Carol Bigwood attempts to re-naturalize the female body in a poststructuralist move that nevertheless bypasses the notion that 'culture' subsumes all meaning: she argues that 'that our human bodily being takes place within a natural/cultural situation and thus is neither the sole result of biological determinants

⁴⁵ Judith Butler, Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex' (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁴⁶ Butler, Bodies that Matter, 8.

⁴⁷ See Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985); Julia Kristeva, Desire in Language Trans. Léon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1980). (See especially the essays 'Stabat Mater'; 'Maternity according to Giovanni Bellini'.) Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. Signs 1:4 1976: 875-893.

nor purely culturally constructed.⁴⁸ The poststructuralist construct of the body is challenged by Bigwood as follows:

Nature is thereby reduced to a cultural idea, the body to a signifying cultural surface, and our incarnate, natural-cultural situation to purely cultural discursive practices and configurations of power. A body and nature formed solely by social and political significations, discourses and inscription are cultural products, disemboweled of their full existential content. The poststructuralist body, it is true, is historically and culturally contextualized and thereby achieves some of our experienced significances. However, the poststructuralist body is contextualized only as a place marker in a linguistic system of signifiers. It is so fluid it can take on almost limitless embodiments. It has no real terrestrial weight.⁴⁹

The challenge as Carol Bigwood outlines it is to note the anthropocentrism of such forms of thought, and the androcentric resource-oriented worldview to which it has been put to use:

It is necessary to affirm the body and our connectedness to the earth in new terms if we are to rediscover our mortal belonging to the earth, not as cultural constructors removed from, and in control of, the earth, but as thinking sentient beings open to the earth.⁵⁰

This way of thinking thus forms a synthesis of postmodern views which have often been seen as incompatible, and further, illustrates through its methodology the possibilities of practising embodied philosophy.

Yet as Fuss has noted, '*The* body connotes the abstract, the categorical, the generic, the scientific, the unlocalizable, the metaphysical.'⁵¹ The challenge to particularize the body is met outside philosophy, however, by novelists writing about

⁴⁸ Carol Bigwood, *Earth Muse*, 40.

⁴⁹ Bigwood, *Earth Muse*, 44.

⁵⁰ Bigwood, *Earth Muse*, 45. The chapter entitled 'Renaturalizing Gender' is interleaved with musings on pregnancy and the maternal body by the author. These interventions disrupt a metaphysics based on the absent body and invest philosophical discourse about materiality with fleshly thoughts and feeling.

⁵¹ Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989) 52.

particular people, in specific locations and determinate historical conditions. The inadequacies of a bloodless philosophizing can be thus addressed by the novel, which engages with the always specific and particular.

Further, the ecological vantage point provides a necessary corrective to abstract philosophies of nature and the body. In her examination of cancer and environmental causes of elevated disease rates, the ecologist Sandra Steingraber views the human body and its setting as central actors in the epidemiological drama of cancer. She states, 'From dry-cleaning fluids to DDT, harmful substances have trespassed into the landscape and have also woven themselves, in trace amounts, into the fibres of our bodies.'⁵² Here the body forms a continuum with the land, a microcosm that contains in miniature the toxins that are present upon the larger surface. The problems of inadequate controls upon pollutants, dumping of hazardous wastes and releasing toxins into the air, water and land are not just 'environmental' problems somewhere 'out there'; they have become part of our very physical make-up, and no doubt, form the key to our personal futures. Philosophical issues such as free will, autonomy and agency are severely tested given the inexorability and indeterminacy of these external factors. Determinants such as class, race and sex must also be recognized as playing a key role in questions associated with risk of disease and illness due to environmental factors. In this work the body is conceptualized as relatively passive consumer, an unwilling imbiber of the countless, often untested toxins that make up the world outside the self. Yet, Steingraber's research also presumes an active

(Emphasis in original).

⁵² Sandra Steingraber, Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment (London: Virago, 1999, 2001) 12.

subject that will use the knowledge that is available, and agitate for research into areas that remain unknown, in order to create liveable spaces for healthy citizens.

There is also a linguistic or literary dimension suggested by Steingraber's work. In her discussion of the work of Rachel Carson, Steingraber examines taboos and silences: hesitations, blanks and self-censoring, the way in which Carson had to veil all traces of her own battle with breast cancer during the public inquiries into chemical hazards. It was crucial that Carson be perceived as a disinterested scientific researcher rather than a cancer victim in testifying as an expert witness against agribusiness and industry. In Steingraber's own work, however, she refuses to keep silent about the way in which her own study of ecology, toxicology and epidemiology is motivated both by her personal encounter with cancer and the death of a close friend to the disease.

Ecology offers the possibility of being a truly subversive science, overturning common notions about what it is to be human among other life forms. It forms a means of supplementing and correcting impoverished philosophical concepts of embodiment and being in the world. This subversive aspect of ecology arises from a correct understanding of the concept of interrelatedness. Whereas this term merely suggests a causal connection to the Western mind, notes Neil Evernden, in which 'things are inter-related if a change in one affects the other...what is actually involved is a genuine *intermingling* of parts of the ecosystem.'⁵³ This entails a radical reinterpretation of the body, so that the skin is no longer perceived as an impermeable shell, but rather, as Paul Shepard describes it, 'ecologically like a pond

⁵³ Neil Evernden, 'The Ecological Self' in Glotfelty and Fromm, eds., The Ecocriticism Reader, 96.

surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much as a delicate interpenetration.’⁵⁴ This conception of the body significantly recasts the way in which Western man has tended to think about the physical self—a self that is isolated from other forms of life, which is impermeable and independent of its environment.

The notion of the cyborg forms a further challenge to ‘natural’ notions of the body and forms both a topic and theme to be investigated through this study. If the notion of the human as ‘cybernetic organism’ is problematic for some theorists, an expression of our dependency upon various technologies, the trope of the human machine is presented by Donna Haraway as a liberatory figuration with which to explore new political possibilities.⁵⁵ In her influential essay entitled ‘A Cyborg Manifesto,’ Haraway introduces the science-fiction figure of the cyborg in order to re-examine the place of the human, particularly within the perspectives of socialist feminism, at the nexus of science and technology in the late twentieth century. This cyborg figure, literally combining the cybernetic machine with the human organism, escapes the dualisms of self and other, male and female, nature and culture, and the like. Unlike the earlier ecofeminist figure of the Goddess, a superhuman figure that emphasizes feminine power within an often prehistoric cosmos, the cyborg acknowledges the realities of relating to nature within our machine-driven, post-industrial present. At the same time, this figure unsettles such established categories as sex and gender with their historically-fixed positions for women and creates havoc with fixed ideas about the human/nature interface. Women novelists such as Octavia

⁵⁴ Paul Shepard, (intro.) in P. Shepard and D. McKinley, Ecology: The Subversive Science (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1969) iii.

⁵⁵ For technosceptic positions, see for example, Neil Evernden, The Social Creation of Nature (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992) and Paul Virilio, Open Sky

Butler, and more recently, Maggie Gee in The Ice People (1998), have used such figures to provoke thinking in new ways about such issues as gender, sexuality, and humanity in an age of informatics and machines.

An account of the narrative strategies envisioned by an ecofeminist criticism is offered by Gretchen Legler in her account of ecofeminist narrative strategies.⁵⁶ This form of criticism, like ecocriticism as a whole, is an emergent discipline whose methods are still in a process of formation. Despite wide divergences in the field, methods and approaches, ecocritics are generally agreed upon one thing, and that is that ecocriticism is a hybrid form, bridging the disparate areas of ecology and literature. Sue Ellen Campbell's call for a 'magpie' criticism is a particularly compelling statement of methodology. Drawing on the natural/cultural figure of the magpie, Campbell outlines a form of criticism that uses a kind of Lévi-Straussian 'bricolage,' seizing on objects that have been hitherto ignored, gathering this and that together for a pragmatic criticism that wants to attend both to literariness and the world to which it refers.⁵⁷ The hazards such a methodology pose are not inconsiderable, but the verbal nest it enables is both serviceable and innovative.

Trans. Julie Rose. (London and New York: Verso, 1997).

⁵⁶ Legler, 'Ecofeminist Literary Criticism,' 231. Legler employs the term 'emancipatory strategies' used by Patricia Yaeger for feminist criticism in Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing (New York: Columbia UP, 1988). Legler's extension of the term for use in ecofeminist interpretation provides a useful summary of the ways in which women writers have used narrative to enable different conceptions of the human/nature relationship. These strategies coincide with and are partially enabled by: French feminist efforts to revision phallic representations of female desire and sexuality; efforts by feminist scientists to develop a theory of 'dynamic objectivity'; and efforts by ecofeminist philosophers to develop an ecofeminist environmental ethic (231).

⁵⁷ See Sue Ellen Campbell, 'Magpie' in Kerridge and Sammels, eds., Writing the Environment, 13-26. See also her attempt to reconcile the (apparently) polarized fields of deep ecology and deconstruction in a landmark position paper, 'The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet' in Glotfelty and Fromm, eds., Ecocriticism Reader, 124-136.

Another ecocritic who has been drawn independently to this metaphor is Jonathan Bate, who employs the idea of nest-building for the creation of a poem.⁵⁸ Bate suggests, 'we can make a verbal nest by gathering and cherishing odd scraps of language, the words which stand in for the bits and pieces of hay, rotten leaf and feather that are the pettichap's material.' By comparison, the magpie's nest is, of course, not restricted to organic materials and would include plastic and bright shiny things, a better methodological model for the practising ecocritic. Though less discriminating than other birds, the magpie is familiar with both urban settings and suburban gardens, the synthetic amid the natural.

My approach throughout this study is to inquire into the dual representations of the body and the environment, viewing the body and nature as 'always, already' cultural as well as natural. I hope to demonstrate that an ecological reading which places emphasis upon the materiality as well as social constructions of both body and nature, can suggest ways in which these writers bring not only feminist but also environmental concerns to bear upon the field of the twentieth-century British novel. I analyse the shape of narrative, the force of metaphors, and the scale of time, setting and characterization to indicate what is emerging as a notable concern for these writers in the embodied emplacement of character.

This study is structured topically with reference to the malleable bodies that form the focus of each text; rather than bodily *beings*, the 'becoming' body is at issue here. The first section consists of fictions that dramatize the situations of pregnancy and childbirth and elaborate a maternal body. These are topics that are largely absent

⁵⁸ See Bate, 'Nests, Shells, Landmarks' Song of the Earth, 153-175. Bate interweaves his nest-building here with that of Gaston Bachelard in The Poetics of Space (Boston: Beacon

as central concerns from novels written by men, and have been largely passed over by women authors of the past as being an unsuitable fictional focus. Here the idea of 'nature' encompasses not only female embodiment and location in place, but necessarily also the cultural assumptions that have acquired an almost universal or natural status, like the heterosexual couple, gender polarization, and the distinct identities of women and men. The critique of narrative thus enables the dismantling of certain plots and conventions. In this project there is emphasis on innovative modes of characterization, plotting and uses of time and space that bring about new perspectives on woman and nature.

In the second section, I move from woman at her most 'natural' to exceptional beings such as clones, cyborgs, she-devils, hybrids and shape-shifters. This focus on the monstrous allows me to elaborate the connections between gender, nature and the unnatural, often represented here by the conjunction of the human with technology or biomedicine. This section considers the dichotomy between 'the promises of monsters' that Haraway suggests with the figuration of the cyborg and the persistence of the fictional spectre of Frankenstein's monster.

Finally, the third section analyses plots shaped around absent bodies, that survive only through the narratives in which they are embedded. As I argue here, these meditations on mortality have enormous potential for an ecological framework of what it means to be human. In these texts, the body is closely associated with place in ways that stress a (his)storied nature. Like section one, these fictions are also novels that deal with plots that go 'beyond the ending,' but here they not only help in unravelling problematic gender associations, but also revive a sense of the

embeddedness of the human within place.⁵⁹ Renovations in the ways in which women and nature are conceptualized are reflected in the shape of plotting, which tends to place stress on cyclical patterns, emphasizing season, gestation, and decay. This alternative view of the novel not only revises the form of the plot from linear and necessarily goal-driven to the cyclic, but at the same time alters the role of the hero and the necessity of conflict as a constituent of narrative. A new tradition is emerging, one that grapples with problems of feminine embodiment and environment within the traditional landscape of English literature to suggest new possibilities and perspectives.

⁵⁹ This term is used by Rachel Blau Duplessis in her study of novels that change the courtship plot of the 19th century romance novel by refusing to end with the marriage of the heroine. In undoing this teleological device that suggests the only aspect of interest in feminine life is the period between eighteen and marriage, women novelists were able to revise expectations and assumptions about women's lives. See Rachel Blau Duplessis, Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Writers (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985).

M(O)thers: Narrating the Maternal Body

First wave feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir declared that only elite modern man could hope to gain development, or transcendence, over the alleged stasis and repetition of the natural world. Women and the rest of the oppressed must remain within immanence, or within a state of unending latency, without any hope for development. In The Second Sex, Beauvoir asserted that 'woman is related to nature; she incarnates it: vale of blood, open rose, siren, the curve of a hill, she represents to man the fertile soil, the sap, the material beauty and soul of the world.'¹ Literary critics have attended to the ways in which such representations of nature in terms of the female form have provided justification for the ill-treatment of women, indigenous peoples and the land.² Thus, in seeking liberation from repressive social roles, feminists have sought to differentiate themselves from the world of nature through abandoning maternity in the pursuit of careers, or even seeking in new medical technologies possibilities of alternative means of childbirth.³ Female sexuality has been described in negative imagery that leaves little room for self-respect, let alone celebration: again, here is Simone de Beauvoir's description:

Woman lies in wait like the carnivorous plant, the bog, in which the insects and children are swallowed up. She is absorption, suction, humus, pitch and

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex Trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley. (New York: Random House, 1952) 281.

² See Annette Kolodny, The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Rachel Stein, Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' Revisions of Nature, Gender and Race (Charlottesville and London: Virginia University Press, 1997) and Louise Westling, The Green Breast of the New World (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1999).

³ See Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectics of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution (New York: William Morrow, 1970).

glue, a passive influx, insinuating and viscous: thus, at least, she vaguely feels herself to be.⁴

A new generation of feminists would undertake the rehabilitation of such retrogressive imagery, questioning and discarding imagery that link women with nature in ways that establish her passivity, inferiority, and immanence.⁵ For this project, the experience of pregnancy and maternity necessarily constitutes an important area for revision.

However, locating woman within this field of bodily experience forms a minefield for feminists concerned with the overidentification of woman with the female body. Sherry Ortner has argued that man is culture and woman, nature for so many cultures around the world precisely because 'she is *closer* to nature than men.'⁶ Woman's body makes her more involved with 'natural' biological activities such as giving birth, lactating, and the associated tasks of child care, while man is free to engage in cultural pursuits. These bodily activities then place her in 'social roles that in turn are considered to be at a lower order of the cultural process than man's,' which in turn results in a different feminine psychic structure which appears closer to nature.

⁴ Beauvoir, Second Sex, 406-7.

⁵ Particularly good examples of this revisionism are found in Mary Ellmann, Thinking About Women (San Diego: New York and London: Harvest Brace Jovanovich, 1968) and the work by Nathalie Angier, Woman: An Intimate Geography (London: Virago, 1999).

⁶ Sherry Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?' in Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., Woman, Culture and Society (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1974) 74. Enormously influential when it was written and included in many anthologies, this essay has been criticized for its attempt to universalize what many critics have claimed are features characteristic of Western societies. As Stacey Alaimo has indicated, many of Ortner's claims 'do not stand up to cross-cultural scrutiny' (189). See also Marilyn Strathern, 'No Nature, No Culture: The Hagen Case' in Carol P. MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern, eds., Nature, Culture and Gender (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980) 174-222.

The dual connection of women of letters with production and reproduction is a somewhat uncanny creature: Barthes wittily comments that in literary journalism 'the woman of letters is a remarkable zoological species: she brings forth, pell-mell, novels and children.'⁷ Barthes comments on the prevailing ideology that for a woman to be an artist she must have first submitted to 'the eternal statute of womanhood.' Barthes expands on this condition:

Woman are on earth to give children to men; let them write as much as they like, let them decorate their condition, but above all, let them not depart from it: let their Biblical fate not be disturbed by the promotion which is conceded to them, and let them pay immediately by the tribute of their motherhood, for this bohemianism which has a natural link with a writer's life.⁸

Barthes describes the necessity for women to acknowledge the limits of 'nature,' which Barthes suggests, consists of reminding women that their achievement is to be bought by acknowledgment that she is different from men, and that her freedom is possible only when she admits the obligations of her nature.

Yet, even as feminists have tried to extricate themselves from what has been felt to be an overly close association, even identification, of woman with nature, at the same time, green philosophers have sought the basis for drawing man closer to nature. Deep ecologists such as Arne Naess and George Sessions have identified humanity's estrangement from nature as the root problem of the environmental crisis.⁹ Naess calls for wider identification of the human with nature as a means not only for increased self-realisation, but for a means of bringing anthropocentrism to an

⁷ Roland Barthes, 'Novels and Children' in Mythologies Trans. Annette Lavers. (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1957, 1990, 50-52) 50.

⁸ See Barthes, Mythologies, 51.

⁹ Bill Devall and George Sessions, Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered (Salt Lake

end. Ecofeminists, while distancing themselves from essentialist claims that women have any 'natural' closeness to nature or possess any special qualities that entitle them to the task of rescuing the planet, nevertheless assert that as a group that has often been most badly affected by the degradation of habitat, women play a central role in becoming politically involved in environmental activism.¹⁰ Yet, the role of playing 'angels in the ecosystem' as Val Plumwood has ironically termed it, appears to be a resuscitation of familiar stereotypes about woman as carer and nurturer. Ecofeminists have tended to slip all too readily into such familiar traps as extolling the activity of 'earthkeeping' for women, who presumably know from experience the best methods and the most effective household tools to use to go about it.¹¹ Plumwood warns that there is no need to accept the alternatives of demolishing the inheritance of woman's identity in the past or enthusiastically embracing it in its entirety, as Janet Biehl has suggested.¹² Plumwood states her position thus:

To the extent that women's lives have been lived in ways which are less directly oppositionally to nature than those of men, and have involved different and less oppositional practices, qualities of care and kinds of selfhood, an ecological feminist position could and should privilege some of the experiences and

City, Utah: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985).

¹⁰ See Karen Warren, ed., Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1997) and Vandana Shiva, Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development (London: Zed Books, 1988). An essentialist position identifies women with biological constraints which are unchangeable, since womanhood is derived from this equation of woman with the female body. In her earlier work Vandana Shiva took such a position, but has increasingly moved away from it. For an extended analysis of the position of women within various environmentalist movements, see Joni Seager's Earth Follies: Coming to Feminist Terms with the World Environmental Crisis (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹¹ Stacey Alaimo points out that Carolyn Merchant in Earthkeeping tends to fall into this trap, conflating domestic activities and environmental activism as 'natural' activities of women. Despite her claim that the feminist movement cannot succeed unless 'the home is liberated from its status as a "woman's" sphere to that of "human habitat"' (166), Merchant quotes Elin Wagner thus: 'It is beginning to dawn on women that they must assume the responsibility for housekeeping nature' (167). See Alaimo, Undomesticated Ground and Plumwood, Mastery.

¹² Biehl, 'What is Social Ecofeminism?' Green Perspectives 11 1988. 1-8.

practices of women over those of men as a source of change without being committed to any form of naturalism.¹³

Later Plumwood says that because of their exclusion from an oppositional culture, 'their life-choices and historical positioning often compel a deeper discomfort with dualistic structures and foster a deeper questioning of dualised culture.'¹⁴ Plumwood insists that we rethink certain interrelated categories so that both men and women are seen as 'continuous with, not alien from, nature.' Plumwood's argument is admirable for its clarity and should clear up the persistent criticisms of the 'essentialist' nature of ecofeminist philosophy. Yet, as Deborah Slicer has pointed out, some of the above assertions are still undeveloped. For example, which life choices 'compel a deeper discomfort with dualistic structures'? What qualities of 'care and kinds of selfhood' privilege women's experiences? Finally, Slicer asks, what women is she talking about here?¹⁵

In her discussion of ecofeminist philosophy, Deborah Slicer advances the notion that the female body itself may provide a fruitful starting place for an ecofeminist standpoint. Having analysed the positions of Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway in their discussions of the need for feminist epistemologies (Harding's 'strong objectivity' and Haraway's 'situated knowledges') and reviewed the claims by Val Plumwood and Ariel Salleh of women's perspectives as material caregivers or identities as materialized/naturalized 'others' as the basis for standpoint theorizing, Slicer suggests that constructionist views of the body (viz. Grosz, Butler) have much to offer ecofeminism. However, Slicer sides with Bordo in her critique of Butler's

¹³ Plumwood, *Mastery*, 35

¹⁴ Plumwood, *Mastery*, 36-7.

¹⁵ Deborah Slicer, 'Toward an Ecofeminist Standpoint Theory: Bodies as Grounds' in Greta Gaard and Patrick N. Murphy, *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* (Urbana and Chicago: Illinois UP, 1998. 49-73) 69.

Gender Trouble, noting that the strong linguistic foundationalism of Butler's approach leaves little room for material reality: as Bordo asserts, "'biology' is *ipso facto* and in all contexts merely the discursive 'product' of heterosexist and sexist regimes' (59). Slicer cites the work of N. Katherine Hayles for further refining the constructivist position in a move she terms 'constrained constructivism,' which takes into account the respective roles of bodies, social forces, and the constraints physical matter imposes on knowing. Hayles notes the organizing roles of the human body—'our physiology, including binocular vision, vertical posture, bilateral symmetry, apprehension of the electromagnetic spectrum we call light, and so forth' and draws attention to the significance of their part in knowledge construction.¹⁶ Slicer draws the following conclusion:

The body is a position ...from which we can recognise and assess the gaze as it grips, similarly, the female body and culturally feminized other bodies/matter. And in attending to bodies we should also recognise their intentionality, bodies as agents. Beginning with our own bodies, we have positions conducive to ecofeminist standpoint theorising that may radically challenge traditional Western ontological and normative paradigms that are particularly unfriendly to everything ontologized as material life, including women.¹⁷

In her textual criticism within the same article, Slicer demonstrates the centrality of the body as it intersects various discourses about male and female, the land, and ways of conceptualizing gender, nature and the human body. Her analysis takes up places in the text where the body is given agency, where power relations are acted out and where the effects of highly managed agriculture are observed on bodily health.¹⁸ In

¹⁶ N. Katherine Hayles, in Soulé and Lease, Reinventing Nature?, 49.

¹⁷ Deborah Slicer, 'Bodies as Grounds,' 69.

¹⁸ Here Slicer's criticism dovetails with the concerns of the author Jane Smiley; there is complete congruency between the method of analysis and the text itself. The obvious question that presents itself is, how effective would this form of ecofeminist criticism be for texts that do not

the essay 'The Body as Bioregion,' Slicer both provides a critique of bioregionalist theory and suggests that the body be conceptualized as habitat, the most primary and universal attachment of the human being to a place in the world. In a rich interweaving of autobiography, feminist and environmental ethical theory, Slicer advances the notion that 'We must come to terms with the complex and destructive social meanings of the body, of that ecosystem with which we are self-identical and about which most of us are virtually ignorant.'¹⁹ This discussion ranges between discussion of her mother's death at age 37 of breast cancer, the ways in which the disease was discussed and silenced at the time, and the complex history and politics of the American Cancer Society, which funds pharmaceutical research but has failed to support any political measures to address the environmental causes of disease.²⁰ Slicer draws parallels to ways of thinking about the body and the ways in which nature is conceived.

In this argument, Slicer attempts to recover the materiality of the body in a literal identification of a primary bioregion, the body, and the self: 'The body as bioregion. The bioregion as me...The only bioregion that we can claim strict identity with is the body.'²¹ Here the claim of both bioregionalists and deep ecologists of a deep identification with a particular place is dismissed as arrogant, as proclaiming too

focus so centrally upon the human body? Does this limit the theory to an extremely narrow range of fiction, or can it be applied effectively even to texts that do not fit this ecofeminist mould?

¹⁹ Deborah Slicer, 'The Body as Bioregion' in Branch et al., Reading the Earth (Moscow, Idaho: Idaho UP, 1998, 107-118) 108.

²⁰ Slicer's argument is deeply embedded within American constructions of nature, as exemplified by the Wilderness Act and the Endangered Species act, and political and cultural conditions deriving from Reaganite politics. However, although the specific thrusts of her criticism are greatly inflected by the American cultural situation, the broad lines of her argument are suggestive for application here to British culture and literature.

²¹ Slicer, 'Body as Bioregion,' 112-3.

great a continuity between the self and nature in ways that do not acknowledge its otherness. The obvious question that arises here is how woman can be identified with the body and the land without making essentialist or retrogressive claims about woman's relationship with nature. Slicer argues that it is crucial to pay attention to the stories we tell about the body, that "Our bodies not only will place certain limiting conditions on the stories we invent but that they also will be active narrators, if we attend to them; they will interrupt, talk back, and rupture stories when we don't attend to them."²² While conscious that the body is 'swaddled' in culture, Slicer wants to place a new emphasis on the importance of the organism itself that constitutes the body. The silence of environmentalists about the corporeal nature that is the body reflects an attitude that it is irrelevant and continues to enact a history of Enlightenment thinking that marks a rupture between body and mind, between the mental and the physical. Yet, though I am largely sympathetic with Slicer's call for new attention to the body, it is important to remember that there is no direct access to the 'organism itself,' as she would have it; it is more helpful to think about 'forms of embodiment,' denoting what is conceptualized, rather than the body itself. To claim a special privileged access to the body in this way is to risk a new fetishism of the real. And to substitute the body for the deep ecologist's wilderness is not necessarily a move forward. However, the way in which Slicer weaves together the various threads of subjectivity, health and environmental issues with the body forms an intricate tapestry of the personal with the political, and the physical with the ideological.

²² Slicer, 'Bodies,' 114.

This ecology of mind bears little resemblance to the tendency toward the disembodied environmental ethics of deep ecology: it proposes an ethics of caring based on the acceptance of human embeddedness in a bodily material existence, the importance of human relationships, and connection with the earth. Such awareness is specific to the particular culture out of which it has arisen, yet it posits a vision that undermines views of nature as unspoiled wilderness that are a-historic and anti-human preserves. As Michael Zimmerman points out, 'Deep ecology does not sufficiently appreciate that nature is not merely "out there" in a beautiful landscape or a polluted aquifer, but in our living bodies.'²³ Slicer's articulation of an ecological body can mount a challenge to this form of environmentalism and is thus valuable for a strategic critique of Western ideas of nature.

The impasse created by feminist theory's debates about difference and the female body can be addressed by redefining nature. As Stacey Alaimo proposes, 'If nature is no longer a repository of stasis and essentialism, no longer the mirror image of culture, then the female body may not be misogyny's best resource.'²⁴ Alaimo demonstrates that the move to declare nature and culture as (mere) cultural constructs may appear to indicate a solution to the problem, but in fact replicates the original attitudes in which culture is assumed to be dynamic, while nature is static. Within post-structuralist theory culture has been portrayed as a 'fluid field of signification by implicitly or explicitly contrasting it to the silent, static, and hence, rather dull

²³ Michael Zimmerman, Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity (Berkeley and L.A: University of California Press, 1994) 281.

²⁴ Alaimo, Undomesticated Ground, 10.

horizon of nature.’ Terming nature the ‘toxic repository of essentialism,’ Alaimo notes that it has been sidelined within the poststructuralist field of vision.²⁵

Val Plumwood has urged for a radical re-thinking of the categories of mind and body, woman and nature, citing the conceptual remapping that has been undertaken by postmodern philosophy.

Undoing the mind/body and mind/nature dualisms also involves the rigidity of the boundaries, and especially polarized conceptions of identity obtained through exclusion. Postmodern philosophy is beginning to discover the body in the mind, the mind in the animal, the body as the site of cultural inscription, nature as creative other. ...We can conceive mind as more bodily and body as more mindlike, and we can also conceive their relationship in friendlier and more co-operative terms.²⁶

However, the notion of cultural inscription offered by philosophy appears inadequate for an ecological rethinking of embodiment, emphasizing as it does both surfaces and the metaphor of inscription. The restrictive emphasis upon surfaces has been challenged by a feminist critic of science who has attempted to relink biology and the female body in non-reductive ways.

Lynda Birke notes that because much feminist theory construes the biological body as equivalent to mechanism and fixity, it is absent from much feminist theory. Birke notes the way in which ‘body theorists have concentrated on the socially constructed body—the malleable surface of an internally stable corporeality.’ This emphasis upon the surface allows the body to slip out of much feminist theorizing. Birke’s account focuses on the ‘shadow’ interior that has been left out of these accounts.²⁷ This account of the body takes us further toward a conception of

²⁵ Alaimo, Undomesticated Ground, 11.

²⁶ Plumwood, Mastery, 124.

²⁷ Birke, Biological Body, 137.

corporeality that is not afraid to explore beyond the surface of the skin, to think about theories that relate to the bodily interior, yet it too fails to link up this biological/cultural body with its environment.

For an ecological account of the body, we must return to the ecologist Sandra Steingraber, who theorizes the body both as surface and interior, with reference to it both as autonomous organism and as subject to its environment, both as object and agent. Like Slicer, she is concerned to note the inextricable links between person and place, though as an ecologist, she points out the difficulties of determining environmental causes of disease. She notes the institutional industrial and political forces that motivate the lack of research in this area. Barbara Adam also draws attention to the threat of environmental hazards that are an increasingly notable fact of postmodernity and the way in which these challenge common perceptions. Ulrich Beck puts it as follows:

In the threat people have the experience that they breathe like plants, and live from water as the fish live in water. The toxic threat makes them sense that they participate with their bodies in things—‘a metabolic process with consciousness and morality’—and consequently, that they can be eroded like the stones and the trees in the acid rain.

Adam argues that it is necessary to break down the old boundaries and to reconfigure the nature-culture divide in order to bring such an understanding home:

It seems that the conceptual implications of the environmental threats have not yet penetrated everyday understandings of nature. That is to say, despite the permeation of nature by technology and irrespective of the recognition that environmental hazards do not discriminate between animals and humans, the nature-culture distinction continues unabated as the dominant everyday conception in (Western) industrial societies.²⁸

²⁸ Barbara Adam, Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards (London: Routledge, 1998) 25.

The concomitant notion of human transcendence can only be redressed by an understanding of nature that places it within culture, and an understanding of the human body that places it simultaneously within nature and culture.

In Living Downstream Sandra Steingraber gives an exhaustive account of the effects of hazardous chemicals that pervade the soil, air and water that constitute our environment. Steingraber turns to the specific hazards and risks faced by the growing foetus in Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood.¹ Writing from the standpoint of an expectant mother, Steingraber records the horror and revulsion experienced while perusing research that documents the ravages of certain chemicals upon the unborn baby. My study focuses on the lived experience of the body as represented in fictional works by women. Throughout the study I will bring to bear feminist critiques of science, of biomedicine, epistemology and environmental ethics on the fictional works under analysis. Feminist theorists such as Irene Diamond, Ann Oakley, Donna Haraway and others have attempted to extend the notion of embodiment, and particularly the framework of reproduction, within wider networks beyond the individual.² Haraway writes,

Western feminists have been struggling to articulate a phenomenology of pregnancy that rejects the dominant cultural framework of productionism/reproductionism, with its logic of passive resource and active technologist. In these efforts the woman-fetus nexus is refigured as a knot of relationality within a wider web, where liberal individuals are not the actors, but where complex collectives, including non-liberal social persons (singular and plural), are.³

¹ Sandra Steingraber, Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment (London: Virago, 1999) and Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood (Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus, 2001).

² See for example, Irene Diamond, Fertile Ground: Women, Earth and the Limits of Control (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); Donna Haraway, 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others' in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds., Cultural Studies (New York: Routledge, 1992, 295-337) and Ann Oakley, 'The China Syndrome' Essays on Women, Medicine and Health (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993).

³ Donna Haraway, 'Promises of Monsters,' 335.

Rather than the private bourgeois individual, the pregnant woman is refigured as ‘a knot of relationality’ radiating outward from the other within to others without. The contribution of Sandra Steingraber forms a prominent addition to this work of reconceptualising the pregnant woman as part of both society and environment. Here I want to explore the way in which Steingraber’s ecological research refigures ‘the woman-fetus nexus ... as a knot of relationality within a wider web,’ constituted by place.

Here ‘place’ includes birth and workplace, including the natural and non-natural constituents of air, water and soil, as well as the over-arching industrial and political forces that conspire to achieve silences and omissions regarding these factors. I want both to consider what this approach suggests for the literary works I will examine, and to reflect at the same time on the theoretical implications of this research for broader issues, such as ecofeminism and the representation of political struggles. Does this work reinstate a problematic ‘motherhood environmentalism’ that views the private sphere as the forum of action for women? Or does it employ a maternal standpoint to alter the ways in which the private sphere and the discourses of mothering are conceived?

We have only to recall Val Plumwood’s trenchant critique of ‘angels in the ecosystem,’ regarding varieties of ecofeminism that extol traditional feminine values and their efficacy for environmental activism. This aspect of ecofeminism has also been examined extensively by Catriona Sandilands in her discussion of the essentialist identity politics of ecofeminisms. She acknowledges that many forms of

ecofeminism do not fall into the trap of neo-conservative discourses that associate motherhood with ecological sainthood, and housekeeping with earthkeeping, yet those that do, ironically use the metaphor of housekeeping for a desired public outcome—‘cleaning up the mess.’ This effectively ‘reprivatizes public life, and along with it renaturalizes the gendered relations in which the terms are cast.’⁴ Moreover, Sandilands also points out that whether based on biologically or socially constructed versions of woman, ecofeminism employs the politics of identity in often problematic ways. She notes that ‘identity, as a goal, suppresses difference, halts the multiplicity of the social and creates a situation in which claims of exclusion are not only likely but almost inevitable.’⁵ As has been already mentioned, identity on the basis of motherhood also revivifies stereotypical ideas that are quickly reinstated, equating woman with a biologically-determined identity. Yet, if such conflation of motherhood with environmentalism allow progressive ecological thinking but serve a conservative social agenda, must those constructions continue to serve that agenda? My question here is, given the dangers of writing from this standpoint, what are its enabling strategic possibilities? I also want to read this non-fictional work in terms of its ecological content and rhetorical effect. Does the ecological focus on environmental danger entail a ‘narrative of resignation’ or can it form the basis of motivating political action?⁶ This chapter will examine the conjunction of mothers,

⁴ Catriona Sandilands, The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota UP, 2000) xiv.

⁵ Sandilands, Good-Natured Feminist, 47. Sandilands is basing her assertion here on an argument made by Iris Marion Young. See also Iris Marion Young, ‘The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference,’ in Linda Nicolson ed., Feminism/Postmodernism (New York: Routledge, 1990) 300.

⁶ I borrow this term from Richard Kerridge in his essay analysing the effect of contemporary environmental novels. See Richard Kerridge, ‘Narratives of Resignation: Environmentalism in

monsters, and bodies of death in the environmental writing of Sandra Steingraber, a work that links the elements I examine in contemporary novels and demonstrates the promise of an ecological feminism. I will situate this text within the framework of ecofeminist issues such as identity, motherhood and politics as well as environmentalist theory. As this text centres on the motifs that form the basis of my project—mothers, monsters, machines and mortal bodies—it will provide an overview in a different register of the environmental significance of these entities.

Steingraber's work has often been compared to that of Rachel Carson, particularly her most well known work, Silent Spring.⁷ As science writing, Having Faith is impeccably researched with numerous data to support its findings and careful objective evaluation of their significance. Like Carson's work, it is both persuasive and lyrical, employing metaphor and imagery to convey complex scientific concepts. However, unlike Rachel Carson, who strove as much as possible to maintain an objective third-person narrative voice, Steingraber's work forms a hybrid genre that writes across generic boundaries to combine the scientific with the personal. As in Steingraber's earlier work, Living Downstream, discussed above, the scientific 'view from nowhere' which has been criticised by feminist theorists such as Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway and Nancy Hartsock, is supplemented by a personal voice which situates the writer as a person with a malleable body, a medical history, and a geography, all of which form a central part of the inquiry into the relationship of person, place and health.

Recent Fiction' in John Parham ed., The Environmental Tradition in English Literature (Aldergate, Hamps.: Ashgate, 2001) 87-99.

⁷ Rachel Carson, Silent Spring (Boston: Houghton, 1962).

In her research on Rachel Carson, Steingraber indicated the silences and omissions within Carson's research on pesticides and its deleterious effects on lifeforms throughout the ecosystem. Carson did not reveal that she was suffering from cancer because it would have undermined her authority and scientific objectivity.⁸ In contrast, the use of autobiography within Steingraber's science writing indicates her determination to stress the positionality and discrete identity of the writer. Thus, the author's identity as cancer survivor in the earlier text foregrounds the physical nature of the writer in a way that continually attests to the significance of the data she considers. Similarly, in Having Faith, Steingraber records her thoughts, feelings and emotions through her personal transformation from an *in-dividual*, that is, that which cannot be divided, into a pregnant woman.

Having Faith explores the intricate relationship between person and ecosystem, between the human, the natural, and the unnatural proliferation of chemicals in the form of pesticides and waste products of industrial processes. Steingraber links mothers to monsters in a chapter that discusses the environmental epidemiology of birth defects. The double valency of the meaning of an internal 'growth' indicates the author's transition from her former identity as cancer patient, in which 'growth' is a negative development, to a pregnant woman, for whom the meaning of 'growth' is reversed. Abject bodies in the form of stillbirths suggest both the tragic natural consequences of environments that contain large quantities of contaminants such as 'pops' —persistent organic pollutants— and a public that is not yet ready to think about these possibilities.

⁸ For an excellent biography of Rachel Carson, see Linda Lear, Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature (New York: Holt, 1997).

The focus on the morbid conjunction of toxins, pregnancy and deformity does not preclude the author's recognition of the beauty found in nature, nor appreciation for the unseen forces and processes that comprise such natural processes as organogenesis, the stage at which the foetus develops organs and limbs. The 'sense of wonder' that Rachel Carson brought to her work on the seaside as ecosystem is similarly found in Steingraber's narrative depicting the details of pregnancy and the human enmeshment in place. Steingraber focuses on the biology of connection between mother and child and describes how this most intimate of human connections can bring about disfigurement and deformity when the world surrounding the mother-child dyad contains toxins that cross the placenta into the unborn baby. The descriptions of babies suffering from deformities brought about by chemicals rightly belong to the genre of ecological horror, yet Steingraber depicts these 'monsters' with empathy, always conveying their humanity. In the search for the origins of deformity, blame is placed not only on the teratogens themselves, but also upon the social, judicial and political frameworks that make their prevalence possible.

Finally, Steingraber uncovers problematic ways of conceptualising bodies, risk and harm that she locates as causal of environmental degradation. As I will discuss later in more detail, Barbara Adams' work outlining a timescape theory of ecology shows the impact of habits of thinking that discount indeterminate causal factors and risks and that work within inadequate time frames. These are ultimately responsible for the lack of regulation of substances that have not yet been definitively shown to cause harm. The notion of the body as bounded at the edges, what Bakhtin describes

as the 'classical' body, is also located as a causal factor in the massive denial of the physical connectedness of the human body within the ecosystem.⁹

What is the effect on the reader of a work that focuses on malleable bodies, monsters, and deaths amid the harmful environments that are the places in which we live, work and play? Does this work in fact constitute another addition to the genre that could be termed 'ecological horror'? And if so, how effective is this information for mobilising the kinds of social and political changes that need to take place in order to live in safer places in the future?

With its focus on the pregnant mother, monsters and teratogenic substances, preventable deaths and the causal counterpart of a denatured Nature, Steingraber's research offers a telling non-fictional parallel to the structure of this study. Just as for Eva Figes the presence of nuclear warheads irrevocably alters the landscape she describes, so Steingraber records the fact that one can never feel the same about 'home' once one has consulted a toxic waste site directory. The notion of 'place' itself falls under this sentence of suspicion, so that rather than being a source of solace, as it is in many works of nature writing by American writers, it becomes a rather more blemished and fearsome entity.¹⁰ Yet, writing within the framework of 'toxic discourse,' Steingraber also records the positive features of the natural beauty of the process of pregnancy itself, and the habitats in which it takes place, both human and ecosystem.

⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World Trans. Helene Iswolsky. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 321. Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body, and its applicability for ecology, will be considered more fully in Chapter Three.

¹⁰ For representative examples of works foregrounding place as source of solace, see Terry Tempest Williams, Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place (New York: Pantheon,

The writer's realisation that being pregnant means becoming a habitat—'My womb was an inland ocean with a population of one'—mirrors a common epiphany of pregnancy that is reflected in the novels examined here.¹¹ What is distinctive, however, is the intense level of awareness of what it means to be a habitat in which all the poisons found outside the body may potentially be transferred to the body of the vulnerable life within. For instance, Steingraber notes the following with regard to amniotic fluid:

Before it is drinking water, amniotic fluid is the creeks and rivers that fill reservoirs. And before it is creeks and rivers and groundwater, amniotic fluid is rain....When I look at amniotic fluid, I am looking at rain falling on orange groves. I am looking at melon fields, potatoes in wet earth, frost on pasture grasses. The blood of cows and chickens is in this tube. The nectar gathered by bees and hummingbirds is in this tube. Whatever is inside hummingbird eggs is also within my womb. Whatever is in the world's water is here in my hands.¹²

This passage textually sews together the diverse elements that form our world. This passage would be exceptionally beautiful, were it not for the reader's awareness of the pesticides, bioaccumulative and largely untested, that cover the orange groves from which the author's morning juice is taken. The inadequacy of individualistic solutions proposed in response to prevalent environmental hazards, found in warnings to the pregnant woman to avoid eating tuna or local fish, is signalled by Steingraber as inappropriate for large-scale problems that require sustained collective action. Moreover, the amniotic testing that provoked these reflections is further embedded within a biomedical politics that privileges genetic origin of disease or deformity over environmental causes, so that the relatively rare incidence of Down's

1991) or Kathleen Norris, Dakota: A Spiritual Geography (New York and Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

¹¹ Steingraber, Having Faith, ix.

syndrome is intensively investigated, whereas the widespread prevalence of carcinogenic compounds is virtually ignored. Steingraber notes that amniocentesis becomes 'a rite of passage for pregnant women, as though chunks of DNA were the prime movers of life itself. As though pregnancy took place in a sealed chamber, apart from water cycles and food chains.'¹³ What the procedure of amniocentesis illustrates is the presence of a dangerous blindspot in the way in which pregnancy is conceived, one that, as we shall see, widely mirrors the institutional importance of genetics over ecology in the biological sciences today.

This ecological account of pregnancy also reveals the importance of fatherhood and paternal workplace safety to a healthy foetus. The link between paternal occupation and birth defect is one that is generally unacknowledged, despite increasing evidence that testifies to it. Evidence concerning the presence of what has been somewhat charmingly dubbed 'sperm-chaperoned agents' serves as a reminder of the importance of the father in the equation of conception and child-raising. The role of the paternal contribution to the baby is signalled as being more extensive than had been hitherto realised. This expansion of the paternal role in conception is significant within the cultural framework of an age in which single motherhood is increasingly common, and where, as Fay Weldon notes, men appear to have a more marginal position in the family and society.¹⁴

As mentioned above, this study suggests that we reexamine the role of environment in diseases that have been presumed to be genetic in origin. In the

¹² Steingraber, Having Faith, 66.

¹³ Steingraber, Having Faith, 75.

¹⁴ Fay Weldon, Godless in Eden: Essays (London: Flamingo ed., Harper Collins, 2000). For a work that addresses similar problems, see also Rosalind Coward, Sacred Cows: Is Feminism

absence of research that uncovers compelling evidence of the environmental origins of disease and birth defects, the science of genetics with its explanatory promise of inheritance is regarded as holding the key to much infant disease. Yet, as Steingraber indicates, the single-minded search for rare genetic defects accompanies a complete disregard for widespread environmental threats to pregnancy. It is significant for the criticism of science, particularly of genetics and the much-vaunted Human Genome Project, made by contemporary women novelists that, as Steingraber notes, the role of genetics is often overstated when the cause of birth defects or deformity is actually unknown. She postulates that environmental insults may also interact with genetic factors that predispose the embryo to birth defects but are not by themselves capable of initiating them. Thus, Steingraber reminds us, 'the [embryological] tango between environment and heredity is an intimate one.'¹⁵ What Steingraber's account of pregnancy does is to insert ecological factors into a discussion which tends to exclude them.

Most significantly, the place of the baby, whether yet unborn or breastfed, is also reconfigured by Steingraber, who emphasizes the fact that it is not Man who is at the top of the food chain, as is so often illustrated, but in fact the most vulnerable member of the human family. The process of biomagnification of toxins continues one step beyond the mother, as her breast milk forms an often noxious concentrate of a lifetime of exposure to various chemicals, which is then delivered to the baby. What is needed to address these problems, Steingraber concludes, is the widespread adoption of the Precautionary Principle stated at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit: 'Where

Relevant to the New Millennium? (London: Harper Collins, 1999).

there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.’¹⁶ Thus, Steingraber’s history of the incidence of teratogenic substances argues the need for a dramatic conceptual reversal in common accepted scientific practices and ways of thinking, one that indeed promises hope for the future.

Elements of a ‘cosmic’ or ‘grotesque’ body elaborated throughout my study are also stressed in Steingraber’s ecological body. The most important characteristic of embodiment for ecology is its permeability, and in her discussion of the historical failure to recognise foetal toxicants, Steingraber at the same time illustrates the failure of the notion of the classical body, which is closed and confined to the individual. That this concept governed medical ideas about the body so persistently helps to explain the relative tardiness (1941) of acceptance of the idea that toxins cross the placenta.¹⁷

‘Having faith’ finally, is not an attitude of wilful ignorance commonly recommended for women by doctors and pregnancy manuals, but rather illustrates a different way of thinking about risk and tolerance of preventable hazards. This faith renews itself in motivated social gathering for change, in political action, and through

¹⁵ Steingraber, *Having Faith*, 79.

¹⁶ Steingraber, *Having Faith*, 284. This principle is the guiding force in the United Nations Treaty on persistent organic pollutants, formally signed by 122 nations in Stockholm in May, 2001.

¹⁷ The discovery that babies born with congenital cataracts owed the disease to rubella was discovered by an Australian physician in Sydney, Australia. Dr. N. McAlister Gregg investigated the connection between rubella and birth defects and published his findings in 1941. It was not until 1969, however, that a vaccine was available to combat the virus. Steingraber notes that this was the first publication ‘to document a causal link between structural human birth defects and environmental factors.’ *Having Faith*, 38.

full knowledge of the dangers posed by an environment of increasing toxicity. Steingraber's work is not situated within the rhetoric of tragic apocalypticism, but rather forms a composite genre that combines personal narrative with biomedical research, lyricism with data. At the same time, this ecological treatise about the hazards of pregnancy and lactation constitutes an impassioned plea to realise that our lives could indeed be otherwise, given the political will for change. This text is persuasive in its aim to communicate both the extensive hazards that constitute the environment and the possibility of constructive political action to rectify the problem. Her representation of interludes in natural settings also indicates that an expanded environmental awareness of hazard does not preclude appreciation of the beauty and living processes of nature. Moreover, a subliminal message is delivered by the author's performative body, which, in bearing baby Faith at this time and in a place as endangered as any on the globe, enacts a poignant gesture of hope.

To return to the initial questions I have posed about this text, regarding the problems surrounding the articulation of a standpoint in a pregnant, lactating and childraising motherhood, does this text revisit conventional notions of woman/mother as environmental activist? Steingraber's research and activism stress the biological bodies of men and women. In addition to delivering scientific testimony at the UN, she passed around a sample of her breast milk so that the scientists involved in discussing the abstract problems involved were also aware of the (abjected) physical realities involved. She describes women activists strapping on plaster replicas of pregnant bellies in order to confront politicians and scientists with

forms of embodiment that may also be erased from political discourse.¹⁸ Upon the belly casts were signs reminding panellists that dioxin is toxic to unborn babies. Thus, these foregrounded bodies form an essential(ist) part of the verbal message delivered. Yet this masquerade employs 'writing on the body' to gesture at a physical form of motherhood that it does not embody so much as enact through mimicry. Undoubtedly this form of activism could play into discourses that construct woman as primarily corporeal, as nature to man's culture, yet here it is a strategic essentialism that employs such notions to precipitate conceptual and political change.

The language of these bodies disrupts and subverts rationalistic discourses that privilege 'dose-response curves, models and data points.' For as Steingraber reminds us, 'real lives are at stake.'¹⁹ In its depiction of the personal within the political, the individual amid the environmental, variable timescapes of the months from conception to childbirth as well as the minute calibration of times that govern dangerous exposures to hazards, Steingraber articulates a complex interweaving of the body, both normal and monstrous, the land, and a history of environmental hazard. What is understated in her work is the environmental justice perspective that environmental risks are not distributed equitably, but rather constitute a much heavier burden for minorities of colour and impoverished social groups.²⁰ This awareness

¹⁸ Lawrence Buell notes that actually seeing the people affected by policies may have a powerful effect on politicians and decision-makers. *Endangered World*, 289. He cites Waddell in 'Saving the Great Lakes,' who reports that one of the members of the International Joint Commission on water quality said, 'to see the people directly, in front of you, that were directly affected, there was an *emotional* impact....that had a *tremendous impact on me*' (154). See Waddell, 'Saving the Great Lakes' in Mary Richardson, Joan Sherman and Michael Gismondi, eds., *Winning Back the Words: Confronting Experts in an Environmental Public Hearing* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993).

¹⁹ Steingraber, *Having Faith*, 287.

²⁰ For details about the environmental justice position, see Andrew Scasz, *Ecopolitism: Toxic*

must underwrite any environmental politics and ethics in a globalised world of unequal opportunities and benefits from industrialisation. This limitation notwithstanding, I employ Steingraber's work here as a non-fictional model of the work that new discourses of the body and environment can do in revising our conceptions of time, place, and the human. The question of whether an incipient consciousness of such issues exists within contemporary writing by women in Britain, and how such problems are articulated within the form of the novel, will form the focus of the chapters to follow.

Waste and the Movement for Environmental Justice (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). Rachel Stein's Shifting the Ground: American Women Writer's Revisions of Nature, Gender and Race (Charlottesville and London: Virginia University Press, 1997). Lawrence Buell's later work contains an awareness of the importance of environmental justice in a way that supplements his earlier and more exclusively biocentric emphasis. See Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2001). Although a belated part of environmentalism in the West, it has long been part of Third World ecofeminist and environmentalist scholarship. See, for example, Vandana Shiva, Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development (London: Zed Books, 1988).

A Portrait of the Artist as a Single Mother: Margaret Drabble's The Millstone

Prior to the advent of feminism, little had been written about the experience of pregnancy and childbirth in fiction. Victorian writers had drawn a veil over this central feature of female experience, despite the fact that there were so many women authors, many married and with children, writing about life from a woman's viewpoint. Enid Bagnold's novel The Squire (1938) was one of the first to portray the last days of pregnancy and the experience of labour. Doris Lessing reflected on the dearth of detail about married women's lives thus, in A Proper Marriage:

If you read novels and diaries, women didn't seem to have these problems. Is it really conceivable that we should have turned into something quite different in the space of about fifty years? Or do you suppose they didn't tell the truth, the novelists? In the books, the young and idealistic girl gets married, has a baby, she at once turns into something quite different; and she is perfectly happy to spend her whole life bringing up children with a tedious husband.¹

Thus, medical manuals and intimate conversation with other women tend to furnish the only information that women receive about these important life-changing events. With the publication of such woman-centred texts as Our Bodies, Ourselves in 1974, the monopoly on information by male doctors was ended, yet fictional accounts of this aspect of life remained few. This reticence can perhaps be accounted for by the fact that women writers continued to follow masculine models of what was appropriate for inclusion in the novel. Or perhaps the indignities visited upon the body during the experience of childbirth were best forgotten.

¹ Doris Lessing, A Proper Marriage (New York: New American Library, 1952) 205-6.

The problem described by Doris Lessing decades ago is echoed by the contemporary account of motherhood by American journalist Naomi Wolf. Her account of pregnancy, childbirth and child-raising relates the lack of balanced information on the subject for the general reader, as well as the drastic change in role, status and rhythm of life experienced by the new mother, particularly in a postfeminist society in which motherhood is not greatly valued. She writes that not only 'are we inadequately informed about what pregnancy, birth and new motherhood really involve, we also lack freedom to describe what we have seen for ourselves along the way.'² Wolf describes the patronizing tone of many manuals designed for expectant mothers with their lacunae in precisely the areas that one would hope to find information. Labour is routinely referred to as 'discomfort' or sugar-coated with the term 'intensity' to describe the painful experience of childbirth. The complaint uttered by Lessing's Martha Quest in an earlier generation remains a problem today: social taboos still prevent women from communicating frankly about their experiences with other women.

Though accounts of pregnancy and childbirth have been largely absent from literature until the advent of second wave feminism, at the same time, theories of (male) creativity have often been based on the metaphors of procreation. The Socratic dialogues were structured in such a way that Plato, the model teacher, would extract the knowledge thought to be present in the pupil: this is the maieutic method by which the teacher is viewed as a kind of midwife. Despite Gilbert and Gubar's contention that the male sexual organ underwrites any creative endeavours and thus causes anxiety of authorship for women attempting to pick up the 'pen', male writers have often

² Naomi Wolf, Misconceptions: Truth, Lies and the Unexpected on the Journey to Motherhood (New York: Anchor books, 2001, 2003) 2.

appropriated metaphors based on the female body or on procreation for theories of literary creativity.³ In revising ideas about the female body, feminist theorists have also unveiled the factitiousness of the biological metaphor used by male writers to appropriate the generative abilities of women. The use of the birth metaphor has been used to legitimate the 'brain children' of men, or as Susan Gubar has noted, 'even more destructively, inscribe female creativity in the womb to insult women whose productions then smack of the mere repetition of reproduction.'⁴

The focus on biological reproduction, re-placing women within the domain of nature, is thus a necessary corrective for revisions of female literary reproduction. Women who wish to revise the outmoded plots of the literary tradition, in Woolf's terms, 'breaking the sequence,' as well as to rewrite the stylistic modes of narrative, 'breaking the sentence,' may well need to revisit uterine spaces in order to create this new perspective.⁵ The focus of this study will be upon the ways that rewriting the natural body may also implicate the body of nature, enabling at the same time the rewriting of landscapes and the terrains, rural, suburban and urban, in which women live.

To begin this discussion, I want to examine Margaret Drabble's novel portraying a single woman choosing to have an illegitimate baby in the London of the 1960s as initiating the tradition that I will focus on in this section.⁶ As its title indicates, The

³ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the 19th Century Life (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979).

⁴ See Susan Gubar, 'The Birth of the Artist as Heroine: (Re)production, the Künstlerroman Tradition, and the Fiction of Katherine Mansfield' in Carolyn Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet, eds. The Representation of Women in Fiction (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1983. 19-59) 26.

⁵ Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1928, 1993). These terms provide the focus of the analysis of Rachel Blau Duplessis in Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Writers (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985).

⁶ Margaret Drabble, The Millstone (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

Millstone portrays the experience of unwed motherhood through a sober viewpoint, yet the story is not the tragic one the title might suggest. Drabble's novel is a challenge to the second-wave feminist assumption represented in the work of Simone de Beauvoir that women must transcend the limitations of the female body to achieve meaning and contribute to cultural work. Instead, this novel places her heroine within the limits set by nature with respect to reproduction, and depicts her both as fully corporeal within the experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, lactation and childcare, and also capable of literary production in these circumstances. Drabble thus challenges not only notions of feminist transcendence of nature, but also disputes the limitations of the oft-repeated choice that had been offered women in the past of the production of babies or books.⁷ This chapter will focus on Drabble's attempt to create a new blueprint of the novel in her writing of a portrait of an artist with child.

Margaret Drabble's novel must be viewed within the mainstream literary tradition of writing about women who become pregnant outside the tradition of marriage. Within Drabble's beloved Victorian tradition, this was the fallen woman plot, a story with one of only two alternative endings: shame and exclusion from society, or death. The existence of this master plot both as literary device and existential framework for women's lives is examined by Woolf as preliminary to understanding the lack of women writers in the tradition of English letters. Virginia Woolf discusses the range of possibilities offered to women writers through the ages in her treatise on women and

⁷ Elaine Showalter establishes in her literary history of women's writing how many women were concerned to portray themselves as fully domestic, and able to juggle both home life and a literary career. Indeed, she gives the term 'feminine' writers to the women of this period. The choice of reproduction or cultural production, though, has been a recurrent choice that has been offered to women, and particularly since second wave feminism. See Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977).

fiction in A Room of One's Own: with no control over fertility and reproduction, women had enormous difficulties juggling literary production with children. She surmises that Shakespeare's sister would have died as a consequence of an unwanted pregnancy in her parallel trip to London to become a writer. Bearing a child a year and composing novels are clearly activities that are inimical to each other. Woolf establishes that freedom from pregnancy is the necessary condition for women's newborn social and literary productions. A Room of One's Own concludes with Woolf's prophecy that Shakespeare's sister will put on the body to be born again in a later age, thus enabling a radical rewriting to the endings of this story.⁸

With the notable exceptions of such novels as Olive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm (1883) Enid Bagnold's The Squire (1938) and Doris Lessing's A Proper Marriage (1952), mentioned earlier, few women had written in detail about pregnancy and childbirth.⁹ Fictional accounts of these states have tended to reproduce the ellipsis that governs open discussion about these topics in society. However, while these accounts of childbirth portray married women within conventional marriages, Margaret Drabble's novel describing the concerns of a single woman academic in the 1960s was therefore new.¹⁰ The social stigma that would be associated with illegitimate childbirth

⁸ See Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1928, 1993).

⁹ For an account of the English novel dealing with childbirth, see Tess Cosslett, Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourse of Motherhood (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1994).

¹⁰ The level of social acceptability of single motherhood during the 60s can be gauged by the fact that the proportion of births outside marriage was only 4 percent: compare this to the figure of nearly 25 percent by the 1980s. See Rosalind Coward, Sacred Cows: Is Feminism Relevant to the New Millennium? (London: Harper Collins, 1999) 34. Moreover, as Sheila Rowbotham notes, despite stereotyped ideas about sixties sexual liberation, '63 percent of women still did not have sex before marriage.' A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States (London: Viking, 1997) 361.

¹⁰ See Ann Oakley for a history of pregnancy as it has been transformed by social and medical

was considerable, and helps to account for the solemnity of the narrative voice. The Millstone not only employs the syntax and the mental habits of a contemporary Jane Eyre, but the narrator also declares herself to be Victorian at heart. Yet Drabble uses this sensibility, and the conventions of the nineteenth-century novel, to make a break between these narrative patterns and the plot of romantic love they embody, and her own consciousness of the need to create a newly emergent plot for the women of her time.

As Susan Gubar has demonstrated, it was only possible for feminists to valorize maternity when the biological imperative had been relaxed by the availability of information and technologies of birth control.¹¹ Gubar argues that fiction in which women artists play a prominent role as characters, ‘in artistic production and biological reproduction are either contradictory models furnishing alternative scripts, or analogous, parallel paradigms’ can enable understanding of the relationship between ‘antiseptis, anaesthetics, and aesthetics.’¹² The identification of two polar attitudes toward reproduction—revulsion and revision—is particularly significant for our reading of Drabble’s The Millstone. I will argue that Drabble writes to revise the fiction of the past, rewriting the romance plot in which a questing heroine gives up the quest in favour of love. Yet, at the same time, the tendency toward revision is coloured by the revulsion of her protagonist toward the transformed body of motherhood and the boundaries that are lost in the process.

institutions in Britain. The Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

¹¹ For an illuminating discussion of the conjunction of motherhood and writing see Susan Gubar, ‘The Birth of the Artist as Heroine: (Re)production, the Künstlerroman Tradition, and the Fiction of Katherine Mansfield’ in Carolyn Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet (eds.) The Representation of Women in Fiction (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1983. 19-59).

¹² Gubar, ‘Birth of the Artist’, 25.

The voice of triumphant individualism found in Jane Eyre recurs in The Millstone. The narrator proclaims her independence, stressing that she is only dependent upon her parents for her apartment in a desirable part of London—not an inconsiderable advantage. Yet rather than the strong-willed, independent woman she claims to be, she is notable rather for her passivity: the baby is a result of her failure to decide rather than a positive decision on her part. Having failed to terminate the pregnancy either by home remedies such as a hot bath and gin or by surgical abortion, (though not yet legal until 1967 in Britain)¹³ the protagonist describes her uneventful pregnancy and successful birth to a baby girl. She frames the pregnancy as ‘letting nature take its course’ (47), and views the experience of pregnancy and childbirth as a window into the world of less privileged women than herself. Though pregnancy provides an entry into the world of mature womanhood and the reality of less privileged people, Rosamund Stacey is portrayed as nothing less than singular: she has the financial support of housing, the advantages of a good education, and a career. As Rosamund says herself, ‘I would not recommend my course of action to anyone with a shade less advantage in the world than myself ... I was equipped to earn my own living, forever, and in a trade that could be employed as well in a hospital bed as anywhere, or almost as well’ (112). She goes so far as to make the claim that she did not believe ‘the handicap of one small illegitimate baby would make a scrap of difference to my career’ and indeed, the events of the novel

¹³ See Ann Oakley for a history of pregnancy as it has been transformed by social and medical institutions in Britain. The Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984). Sheila Rowbotham notes in A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States (London: Viking, 1997) that although abortions were illegal in the early 1960s, ‘more and more doctors were interpreting the proviso “at risk” liberally.’ (360). She notes too, that alongside the NHS, there existed a semi-legal medical practice for women who could pay, ‘making it blatantly obvious that there was one law for the rich and another for the poor,’ a point which Drabble dramatizes in her plot.

convey this somewhat surprising plot of triumph over the (purportedly minor) inconvenience of an illegitimate baby. Rosamund continues to work on her thesis and turns in an excellent piece of work that helps her to secure work as a lecturer. The novel is thus a spirited reply to the plots of disaster of the nineteenth-century novel that women had absorbed and internalized as composing the plots of their lives. The story that had earlier been framed as pregnancy as a form of natural disaster is thus thoroughly revised: this novel finds a way to 'write beyond the ending' not only of the marriage plot, but also its alternative, the tragedy that had formed an inevitable reading of the story of unwanted pregnancy at an earlier time.¹⁴

Rosamund is presented as exceptional not only in her ability to continue intellectual work but in other ways as well. Pregnancy is a condition that she shares with the lower-class women at the clinic, yet she finds them not only unlike herself but also repellent: 'Anaemia and exhaustion were written on most countenances: the clothes were dreadful, the legs swollen, the bodies heavy and unbalanced' (57). However, she realises that her pregnancy makes her similar to these dreadful maternal bodies:

And there we all were and it struck me that I felt nothing in common with any of these people, that I disliked the look of them, that I felt a stranger and a foreigner there, and yet I was one of them, I was like that too, I was trapped in a human limit for the first time in my life, and I was going to have to learn how to live inside it (58).

Pregnancy is employed here primarily as sign of the inescapability of Nature. It places women within the realm of human limitation from which feminism had attempted to extricate them. Drabble is intent on puncturing the myth of the beauty of the pregnant

¹⁴ I owe the expression 'reproduction as a natural disaster' to Stacey Alaimo. See Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP,

woman as 'ships in full sail, and that sort of thing' (57), yet what clearly comes across is the revulsion of her protagonist toward the lower-class women with whom she is aligned for the first time in her life. In her study of childbirth in literature, Tess Cosslett analyses the class dimensions of Drabble's novel and draws attention to the variety of feminism that leads the main character to declare herself equal, not in solidarity with other women, but beyond them, with men.¹⁵ The narrator declares that her mother 'was a great feminist. She brought me up to be equal. She made there be no questions. No difference. I was equal. I am equal' (29). That other women are clearly much less equal does not concern her, although she does feel guilty, briefly, at what she recognizes as the preferential treatment she receives through the NHS as her father's daughter. Equality with men appears to preclude equality among women.

Drabble also attempts to demolish stereotypes based on the perception of the black woman as 'primitive' and thus more natural. She describes a black woman

who sat there not with the peasant acceptance of physical life of which one hears, but with a look of dilating terror. She was moaning to herself softly, and muttering, almost as though she were already in labour: perhaps, like me, she was more frightened of the hospital than of anything else (57).

Though the stereotype of the 'natural' woman who is unafraid and does not feel the pain of childbirth is unsettled here, the black woman rather represents for Rosamund a horrific signifier of an engulfing maternal body. Drabble's heroine undergoes the transformation into the reproductive body she fears, yet she continues to perceive herself as utterly unlike the others.

2000).

¹⁵ Cosslett, Women Writing Childbirth, 99.

After the birth as well, she observes the bodies of the other women and distinguishes herself from them:

After the birth, the muscles of my belly snapped back into place without a mark, but some of the women looked as big as they had looked before. I am haunted even now by a memory of the way they walked, large and tied into shapeless dressing gowns, padding softly and stiffly, careful not to disturb the pain that still lay between the legs (109).

They remain symbols of an abject motherhood that she fears and rejects; note that this suppressed reality will 'haunt' her as a reminder of the limits of the body. Thus, although motherhood provides an entry for this middle-class character into real life, she is careful to distance herself from the animality of women who recover less buoyantly than herself. The maternal body of the protagonist is one that undergoes the experience without being marked by it: it represents a site that is capable of refusing the inscriptions of nature upon it. In this way, Rosamund displaces the nature she fears onto the bodies of lower class women: they are represented in terms of low corporeality which the heroine is able to transcend by her intellectual labour and superior fit body. In contrast to the grotesque body as outlined by Bakhtin, which will form the centrepiece of later chapters, Rosamund's body is conceived in terms of the classical body: bounded, disciplined, and distinct from that of others.

Breast feeding, not surprisingly, is not unproblematic for her: she is forced to give it up because she found 'the process quite infuriating and nerve wracking.' She comments, 'I didn't find the act itself disgusting or anything like that, but the consequences were extremely messy; I grew frantic at the way my clothes got covered in milk' (114). The consequence is a neurotic attitude toward her clothes, 'forever washing [her] clothes before they need it, sending things to the cleaners when [she] can't afford it

and paying secret nocturnal visits to the launderette.’ Breastfeeding is shown as a source of great anxiety for her: perhaps more than any other aspect of motherhood, it represents a state of shameful animality which she seeks to repudiate.¹⁶ Her explanation of giving it up at six weeks is defensive, suggesting that there is much more to it than a simple means of feeding a baby. She concludes, ‘Anyway, only posh middle-class mothers nurse these days, on principle, and I don’t believe in principle. I believe in instinct, on principle’ (114). This is evidently a higher-order instinct, one that serves to preserve one’s clothes against the soiling forces of nature.

In becoming a mother, Rosamund seeks to avoid becoming a woman enmired in nature like any other. Her friend Joe has commented when told that she is going to have a baby, ‘All women want babies. To give them a sense of purpose’ (42). Drabble challenges the mechanism of stereotyping such a blanket statement offers, and in her narrative, she makes it clear that Rosamund is not like ‘all women.’ Drabble tries to establish nothing less than the tellability of this fundamental female experience within a patriarchal literary tradition. When her protagonist tries to articulate the feelings of joy she had experienced, the following dismissal reflects this male-oriented control over topicality. She is told: ‘What you’re talking about ... is one of the most boring commonplaces of the female experience. All women feel exactly that, it’s nothing to be proud of, it isn’t even worth thinking about’ (103). What Drabble has accomplished here

¹⁶ Here Haraway’s contention that breastfeeding is cultural rather than natural is instructive. Haraway notes the way in which women need to be instructed how to perform a purportedly natural activity. Haraway draws on the research of Nancy Scheper-Hughes to show that culture of breastfeeding quickly unraveled in the context of the aggressive marketing of infant milk formulas. Haraway stresses that ‘the body is simultaneously a historical, natural, technical, discursive and material entity. Breast milk is not nature to the culture of Nestlé’s formula. Both fluids are natural-technical objects, embedded in matrices of practical culture and cultural practice.’ See Modest Witness@Second Millennium: FemaleMan© Meets OncoMouse.TM

is to relate precisely the sort of experience that only women have access to and, for that very reason, has been trivialized and seen as unimportant, 'not even worth thinking about.' At the same time, there is clearly a danger in becoming associated with the undifferentiated state of abject motherhood, leaking at the breast and suffering the bulges and deformities visited upon the body in pregnancy. Drabble is at pains to create a heroine who, while undergoing the universal experience of the pregnant woman, nevertheless achieves transcendence through her emotional and economic independence.

Drabble rewrites the way in which the childbirth plot is generally embedded within a fundamental heterosexual romance plot. Unlike many single mothers, Rosamund is not emotionally involved with the father of her baby and thus has no expectations of him. In fact, she has two boyfriends and sleeps with neither of them: a solution of a sort because each takes it for granted that she is sleeping with the other. She comments that if there were a scarlet letter A on her chest it would be for Abstinence, not for Adultery (18). She explains to one of her boyfriends that the other is not the father as he might have supposed, saying with nonchalant understatement, 'So you see, things aren't quite what they might be' (43). The code of decorum that rules over this text is most visible here, and helps to account for the distaste for most of the corporeal excesses associated with motherhood; this linguistic social code also governs the body of the protagonist, who, though pregnant, does not become as bloated or oversized as the others, while in labour has an efficient labour that surprises even the nurses, after the birth snaps back into shape immediately, and though breastfeeding, cannot be expected to like it. The body here is an abject reminder of the inescapable physical facts of womanhood,

which must be tolerated, minimized at all costs, and if possible, transcended for a life of the mind.

Not only is there revulsion for the generative female body, but the text is also deeply imprinted with the expression of matrophobia: that is, ‘the fear not of one’s own mother or of motherhood, but of *becoming one’s mother*.’¹⁷ Because mothers represent the restrictions and limitations of their lives, including lack of control over reproduction, lack of individuation and productivity, they represent precisely what the narrator is attempting to avoid in her own life. The way forward is by no means clear, and examples of women who have achieved what Rosamund Stacey is aiming for are few. Proceeding without a map, she knows only what she wishes to avoid, which is the unfulfilled, dependent lives of other women. As Adrienne Rich points out, ‘If the frontier offered some women a greater equality and independence, it also, ironically, deprived many of the emotional support and intimacy of a female community; it tore them from their mothers.’¹⁸ This point, the withdrawal from female community, is highlighted in a climactic scene in which reproduction and writing are brought together and contrasted.

Literary production and reproduction are set in parallel to stress Rosamund’s dual involvement in both forms of creation. Rosamund’s growing pregnancy is mirrored by her roommate Lydia’s parasitical use of it as subject for her novel. Yet if involvement in childcare does not end Rosamund’s writing career, there is a suggestion that babies may endanger the production of books. Baby Octavia is found amid a sea of paper in Lydia’s room, and though more than half of the book had survived, many pages had been ripped,

¹⁷ Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Womanhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago books, 1977 and 1997) 235. Rich uses the term developed by the poet Lynn Sukenick.

¹⁸ Rich, Of Woman Born, 234.

wadded into the mouth and even ingested. The protagonist fights against wanting to laugh at the comic sight, and admits 'it really was a terrible thing...but in comparison with Octavia being so sweet and so alive it did not seem so very terrible' (147). One might also surmise that the destruction of the book is not so terrible because, after all, it is not Rosamund's book. But here the production of a book and the reproductive ability to produce a child are directly contrasted; the narrator finds 'poetic justice' in Octavia herself destroying the own representation of her by Lydia in a novel. The continual repetition of the protagonist's self-comparisons with other women, and her evident hostility to her friend's work culminates in a scene in which she gaily recounts the incident to a friend from Cambridge who was 'to her [own] great annoyance, nothing but a wife and mother' (149). The reader is by now so familiar with this mechanism that the remark that caps this statement, 'and really I felt I was the better off of the two' is hardly necessary.

This episode allows Drabble to make a direct intervention in literary history, altering the familiar tale of John Stuart Mill's servant's destruction of Carlyle's History of the French Revolution by using it as fuel for the fire. Drabble compares this incident to her own rendition of a domestic accident involving the destruction of a friend's work, and there is much speculation among the characters as to what will be said given the extremity of the situation. After all, no one knows what Carlyle actually said to Mills on the earlier occasion. Here Drabble portrays the complicated feelings of horror and misgiving intermingled with *Schadenfreude* due to the hidden rivalries and resentments between the two writers.

Ursula Le Guin analyses this passage from The Millstone in her discussion of women writers. She poses the question to women friends, 'When you think of a woman writing what do you see?' One woman commented that a woman writing is taking dictation, while another says, 'She is sitting at the kitchen table and the children are yelling.'¹⁹ This is the image that furnishes Le Guin's examination of the woman writing. The passage in The Millstone in which Rosamund's baby eats a book is crucial for Le Guin because of the way in which it positions the woman writer: unlike the male paradigm of the Great Artist, the woman writer is enmeshed in relationships and responsibilities with others, such that they may even endanger her own work. Yet this danger is contextualized within the larger framework of the importance of relationship, children and family, so that the destruction of the art is seen as perhaps not so very terrible after all. As Le Guin puts it,

Babies eat books. But they spit out wads of them that can be taped back together; and they are only babies for a couple of years, while writers lived for decades; and it is terrible, but not so very terrible.²⁰

For Le Guin the absence of the Hero Artist is a strong ethical statement that suggests why in the novel, 'nobody lives in great isolation, nobody sacrifices human claims, nobody even scolds the baby. Nobody is going to put their head, or anybody's else's head, into an oven.'²¹ This is because women do not separate creation and destruction: she suggests they take responsibility for both the baby and the book.

These comments place Drabble's work within the *Künstlerroman* tradition and indicate where Drabble diverges from the conventional path, both in her creation of a

¹⁹ Ursula K. Le Guin, 'The Fisherman's Daughter' in Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places (New York: Grove Press, 1989) 213.

²⁰ Le Guin, 'Fisherman's Daughter,' 230.

questing heroine and in her assessment of the place of literary creation. Still, the lack of fellow feeling for other women that permeates the description of women's embeddedness in corporeality, their confinement to the narrow roles of wifehood and motherhood, and their dissimilarity to the singular artist protagonist strongly impresses itself upon this scene. That Lydia's work is not up to the standard of the narrator's surely does not mitigate its loss so easily. Remarkably, the one person that Rosamund does identify herself with in the novel is her male friend George, as the self that she had been before motherhood conferred (potentially abject) womanhood upon her. Just as in the scene in which 'the pull of nature' became so strong that she feels more in common with the women of the clinic than her old friends, here the experience of motherhood constitutes the formation of a new identity.

Nature is used as a repetitive motif throughout the novel as pregnancy is interrogated as an experience that brings woman into the realm of limitation and necessity. The protagonist eschews participation in natural childbirth classes: she is 'convinced that I had only to go near a natural childbirth class to call down upon myself the most phenomenally unnatural childbirth of all time' (92). Rosamund's tactic 'to expect the worst, as one would probably get it anyway' illustrates the attitude of passivity and obscurantism that is derived from overcultivation of the mind, on the one hand, and denigration of the world of the body on the other. There is no suggestion here that utter ignorance about the body, the stages of childbirth, and breastfeeding may rob women of agency and power. The Millstone is very much a record of an earlier time, that even as it

²¹ Ibid., p. 230.

attempts to record in a new way the experiences of womanhood that have been denigrated in the past, at the same time, registers the same contempt toward corporeality.

The disruption of the romance plot that takes place in the novel with the refusal of marriage, childbirth and the details of childcare, thus breaking the sequence of conventional plotting, is not reflected in a revision of the mode of writing, in the sentence. Persisting in the literary mode of the autonomous self, there is continuation also in the valorization of the mind over the body, men over women, and culture over nature. The demeaning pole of nature represented here by the pregnant female body, childbirth and breastfeeding is repudiated and transcended by Drabble's solipsistic academic character. The ecological promise offered by the focus on the malleable female body with its extended boundary demarcating the self is not taken up by Drabble here: the disconnection of her character from other people, including the father of her baby, is also reflected in the way she is cut off from her environment in general. Setting, here urban London, does not greatly impinge upon the consciousness of the protagonist, or on the events of the novel. Rather than disproving the working hypothesis that intensified bodily states may engender a heightened environmental consciousness, The Millstone indicates that the disconnection between self and body may be reflected by alienation between self and setting.

When Drabble returns to the subject of pregnancy later in The Waterfall (1969), she endows the event with a fuller significance, with the childbirth bed transformed into a fertile bed of love, as Gubar indicates.²² This articulation of what Gubar terms 'matrisexuality' indicates what is missing from her earlier novel: an erotic field that

²² See Gubar, 'Birth of the Artist,' 51.

would extend beyond the conception of the child to embrace more of the members of the immediate world. Here Drabble writes an anatomy of the female body through an emphatically rational consciousness that attempts to deny the realities and messiness of embodiment. The pervasive matrophobia that makes itself felt through The Millstone so persistently is readdressed by Drabble explicitly in The Peppered Moth, in which she explores the legacy of self-doubt and woman-hating left by her own mother. In the latter work Drabble revises the depiction of abject motherhood found here to create characters that in freeing themselves from the limitations of their own mother, as well as the institutions of motherhood, do so without despising the maternal body and denigrating the achievements of other women. Significantly, this novel embraces matter more generally to include what constitutes an environmental statement of the nation.

A Natural History of the Female Body: Puffball by Fay Weldon

If Margaret Drabble contributed to initiating the tradition of representing pregnancy and childbirth in fiction, Fay Weldon extends the discussion of the problem of fecund femininity with her novel Puffball. In its documentation of the nine-month period from conception to delivery, Puffball stresses the contrast between the lived experience of pregnancy and the authoritative, factual medical accounts given at each stage of the pregnancy.¹ Thus, the female body is represented first externally, and then re-coded internally as a biological entity within scientific discourse. This alternation between the fictional and factual constitutes a stylistic departure that enables Weldon to examine the experience of woman as entrapped within the determinist discourse of biology. The premise that 'biology is destiny,' repudiated by second-wave feminists, is thus taken up and subjected to re-examination here, in a plot in which the protagonist submits to the dictates of nature.

Feminist in its intention to examine in detail the experience of a woman undergoing a normal pregnancy, the novel includes scientific accounts that accompany the narrative which are nevertheless burdened with the freight of sexist interpretations of the bodily processes. Feminist critics of science have noted the ways in which 'objective' accounts of the male and female bodies import sexist ideas that often denigrate not only the female body itself and its associations with a lower form of nature, but that also stigmatise processes that are associated with the female reproductive system.

¹ Fay Weldon, Puffball (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1980; Coronet ed., 1981). All subsequent references are to the latter edition and will be placed in parentheses in the text.

Further, biological accounts of sexual difference are not only lacking in objectivity with regard to gender, but they are also invested with class, cultural and racial bias.

In my reading of Fay Weldon's attempt to re-naturalise the body by importing biology into her literary account of pregnancy, I will analyse her work in the light of critiques of science and biomedicine made by feminists working in various fields, such as anthropology, sociology, and science studies, in addition to literary criticism. The discernment of bias in science and medicine by feminism has brought about the re-evaluation of the language and discourses of androcentric perspectives and is thus germane to a reading of a novel that attempts to employ biology for an understanding of the female body. What will be of interest to us here is the way in which Weldon *narrates* this biology, and gives voice to the emerging self of the foetus, within the form of the anti-pastoral.

In Praxis, Weldon signals the protagonist's attitude toward her body as problematic, and symptomatic of a more general problem of the female attitude toward her own embodiment: 'She would not have considered viewing her own body. The body...was a piece of flesh within which she lived., She could make no connection between her body and her feelings.'² In Puffball, Weldon returns to the problem of the body, this time focusing on matters relating to reproduction: here the body cannot be ignored., It thrusts itself into the protagonist's view, and occupies a central space in her text to become the focus of the reader's attention. The body performs its own drama in the text, with a discrete inaugural scene of conception, developing and growing until the scene of climax, with delivery of the baby. Thus, Weldon describes a body not in terms of being, but of *becoming*, a body that dramatically illustrates the metamorphosis that is

² See Fay Weldon, Praxis (London: Book Club Association, 1978) 50.

characteristic of all life shown in time. Puffball is centrally concerned with a body bringing itself into signification in ways that had not before been achieved in the novel.

As Emily Martin has demonstrated, most medical textbooks contain narratives of female bodily processes, such as menstruation and conception, that replicate sexist stereotypes of male and female gender roles.³ Martin demonstrates that the use of verbs indicating failure dominate narratives of menstruation, while images of the aggressive sperm and the passive egg reproduce stereotypes of male-female roles in descriptions of the process of conception. In her account of menstruation, Weldon makes use of the textbooks of the time and thus, I would suggest, unconsciously introduces a teleological view of reproductive purpose into the heart of her revisionist project.⁴ I will quote extensively from one such passage of Puffball:

These follicles ... would all grow until, on the fourteenth day ... the biggest and *best* would drop off into the outer-end of one of Liffey's fallopian tubes, and there unfertilised, would rupture, allowing its oestrogen to be absorbed., ...follicles to *atrophy*... corpus luteum to secrete progesterone and flourish ...then start to *degenerate*, be *disposed of* in the menstrual flow--, along, of course, with the lining of Liffey's uterus, *hopefully* and *richly* thickened over the previous twenty-eight days to receive a fertilised ovum, but so far, on one-hundred-and seventy occasions, *disappointed* (23, ital. mine).

Weldon's narrative account of the adventure of ovulation during menstruation is told in unapologetically anthropomorphic terms: well and good, this enlivens the many factual

³ See Emily Martin, 'Science and Women's Bodies: Forms of Anthropological Knowledge' in Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth, eds., Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) 69-82 and 'The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles' in Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds., Feminist Theory and the Body (New York: Routledge, 1999) 179-189.

⁴ Tess Cosslett has identified Gordon Bourne's classic text Pregnancy (London: Pan Books, 1975) as a possible source for the information Weldon conveys here. She notes that the 'hopefully' of Weldon's passage on fertilization is already found in Bourne. See Tess Cosslett, Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourse of Motherhood (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1994).

accounts that would otherwise resemble textbook writing. However, this story is also a teleologically-oriented account of a regular female bodily process that distorts and renders unnecessarily negative the process of menstruation.⁵ Prevailing metaphors such as the view of body parts as factory, as bank or as police station have obvious implications for the way in which bodily processes are imagined., Martin points out that ‘the view of the body as a hierarchically organised bureaucratic system of control has profound implications for how a basic change in the system is perceived’; thus menopause is seen as a failure or a breakdown of control: ‘ovaries become ‘unresponsive’; the hypothalamus begins to give ‘inappropriate orders.’⁶ Weldon’s account of the process of menstruation likewise imports the metaphor of failure, a story of production that has failed., For Weldon’s plot, of course, the achievement of conception, and subsequently a full-term pregnancy, are necessary. What I want to draw attention to here is the way in which Weldon’s description of the body also borrows from and is embedded in discourses that are determined by her surrounding culture and a particular time period.

Susan Sontag has drawn attention to the horror we have of production out of control in the discourses and metaphors of cancer, yet Martin argues that there is a corresponding feeling of horror regarding *lack* of production: ‘the disused factory, failed business, idle machine.’⁷ To the criticism that the process of menstruation is precisely the failure of the body to become pregnant, Martin demonstrates that the analogous process of a lining being shed, as in the lining of the stomach, does not receive the

⁶ Martin, ‘Science and Women’s Bodies,’ 74.

⁷ Susan Sontag, Illness as Metaphor (New York: Vintage, 1979) 75.

negative treatment given menstruation; rather the emphasis is on *secretion*, a *protective* barrier and the periodic *renewal* of the lining of the stomach--a much happier tale altogether.⁸

Weldon's character is alienated from the body, finding her mother's display of stretch marks distasteful, thus repeating the matrophobia found in The Millstone, and is content with her own boyish figure. Weldon's girl-woman, like most women, had never cared to think too much about what was going on inside her body.

She regarded the inner, pounding, pulsating Liffey with distaste, seeing it as something formless and messy and uncontrollable, and being uncontrollable, better unacknowledged., She would rather think about, and identify wholly with, the outer Liffey. Pale and pretty and nice (22).

Perhaps, given the barely disguised disgust with which female internal processes have been viewed within medical discourse, Liffey's distaste for the bodily is not surprising. Martin notes that the same texts that encode menstruation as a failed process describe male reproductive physiology in glowing terms of approbation: 'The mechanisms which guide the *remarkable* cellular transformation from spermatid to mature sperm remain uncertain...Perhaps the most amazing characteristic of spermatogenesis is its *sheer magnitude*: the normal human male may manufacture several hundred million sperm per day.'⁹ In an earlier analysis that undertakes one of the first discussions of feminist literary criticism, Mary Ellmann notes that the heroism often ascribed to male attributes could well be assigned to certain aspects of female biology. Having noted the persistence of sexual analogies and stereotypes as pervasive themes in literary criticism, Ellmann

⁸ See Emily Martin, The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, 1992).

⁹ Martin, Woman in the Body, 31; emphasis added.,

describes the inaccuracy of some of these with reference to actual, as opposed to folk, physiology. Ellmann notes that since the egg is solitary while the sperm move in large groups, there could potentially have evolved a different myth regarding the woman's character as extrapolated from her body. Ellmann draws attention to such metaphors as the female mind as an enclosed space: the male mind penetrates, the female mind *broods*.

An immobility is attributed to the entire female constitution by analogy with the supposed immobility of the ovum....In actuality, each month the ovum undertakes an exploratory expedition from the ovary through the Fallopian tubes to the uterus, an unseen equivalent of going down the Mississippi on a raft or over Niagara Falls in a barrel. Ordinarily too, the ovum travels singly, like Lewis or Clark, in the kind of existential loneliness which Norman Mailer usually admires. One might say that the activity of ova involves a daring and independence absent, in fact, from the activity of spermatozoa, which move in jostling masses, swarming out on signal like a crowd of commuters from the 5:15.¹⁰

Ellmann makes explicit the connection between the qualities ascribed to the female body and those assigned to the writing of women.

That there are other ways to think about these bodily processes is made evident by the map of the female body drawn by the science writer Natalie Angier in her work Woman: An Intimate Geography revises outmoded and sexist narratives of the body in the light of recent scientific discoveries. She also attempts to rethink the way the female body has been imagined in folklore and artistic imagery, providing more positive ways to imagine the unseen female interior. Commenting on Georgia O'Keefe's visual translation of the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries in the form of the cattle's skull and horns stripped bare in the desert, Angier notes that this imagery suggests a reverie of life-in-death. She revivifies the image with the following metaphor: 'I think instead of water

¹⁰ Mary Ellmann, Thinking About Women (San Diego, New York and London: Harvest Brace

and coral reefs, where the rosy fingers of sea pens and feather anemones brush hungrily from side to side, enlivened as though with wills of their own.’¹¹ In contrast to the arid iconography of the skull, this image is filled with colour, movement, and agency. Such reimagining of the female inner landscape is an important task for women, who, as Germaine Greer noted in 1999, continue to suffer in large numbers from Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), defined as an abnormal preoccupation with a perceived defect in one’s appearance.¹² Greer trenchantly comments that what is considered ‘pathological behaviour in a man--[abnormal preoccupation with one’s appearance] is required in a woman.’ This dissatisfaction has many sources, among which figure prominently the forces of marketing and advertising, but official medical views of the female body must also be taken into account as resulting in negative self-evaluation and ignorance of or distaste for common female bodily processes.

For better or for worse, Fay Weldon’s novel is a product of its time and incorporates viewpoints that were prevalent in medical language that reflects patriarchal values. What is significant for our purposes is that the body plays a dominant role in the novel, equal in importance to Liffey’s husband. In fact, while Richard plays an agentive role in making Liffey pregnant, the actual subject of the novel is Liffey’s body. Within the story, it may well be regarded as an object by Richard and others, yet in the frame narrative, the body occupies the central role. What does this centrality of the body offer to a view of women in terms of their embodiment and nature?

Jovanovich, 1968) 14-15.

¹¹ Nathalie Angier, *Woman: An Intimate Geography* (London: Virago, 1999) 56.

¹² Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman* (London: Doubleday, 1999) 24.

Liffey submits to medical authority, making regular visits to the doctor. However, despite occupying this structure that designates pre-determined roles of authority and patient, Liffey gains in authority as her pregnancy advances. It is as if she is beginning to listen to the knowledge of her body. Nevertheless, she willingly drinks the many noxious potions prepared by her malicious neighbour in the attempt to abort her baby. Weldon has created a speaking body, but she does not necessarily suggest that women have the wisdom to know what it is saying. Indeed, the valorisation of the knowledge of women, in the form of folk medicine, midwives and home births held as superior to the patriarchal technologies found in hospitals is one of Weldon's satirical targets in the novel.

She demonstrates in the sub-plot that the then-current feminist anti-medical discourses may contribute to infant mortality as well as endangering the mother. One of the women subletting Liffey's London apartment, herself pregnant, is advised by her sister to stay away from the hospital—'doctors were an essential part of the male conspiracy against women'—and thus avoid the consequent medical interventions ('enemas, shaving, epidurals, and all the other ritual humiliations women in childbirth were subjected to') in order to 'simply' give birth to the baby (92). Advised thus by her sister not to interfere with 'the course of nature,' Lally has a still-born baby, six weeks beyond term (127). This tragic outcome coincides with the early stages of Liffey's pregnancy to provide an ironic counterpoint to the naïve discourse of the goodness of the countryside and Nature as a salubrious guarantor of healthy motherhood. Weldon caricatures the attempts of contemporary women to wrest the ability to control the event

of childbirth from the medical profession.¹³ Yet, as Paula A. Treichler has demonstrated, the meaning of ‘natural’ childbirth is multiply valenced, referring to a range of meanings from ‘birth without the panoply of hospital procedures--shaving, drugs, enema, fetal monitoring,’ but it can also mean birth ‘with Lamaze and/or without anesthetic, birth outside the hospital, vaginal delivery as opposed to Caesarean section, or the outcome of “natural” rather than in vitro (test tube) fertilisation.’¹⁴ Weldon may appear to be referring to the former definition here, but in actual fact, she creates a scenario in which the pregnant mother resists monitoring of any kind, whether by midwife, health nurse or doctor. It would be difficult to locate feminists who would advocate such an approach: on the contrary, the self-help women’s health movement aimed at getting women to become more knowledgeable and better informed about their bodies, and at providing medical personnel who would grant them a voice in the kind of treatment they received.,

In the debates about natural childbirth, definitions become skewed and bear little resemblance to what women who challenged the norm of childbirth as a pathological, medically-managed event wanted to reform. As one physician pointed out,

Natural childbirth does not mean that you deliver in a cornfield, unattended, while out rounding up the cattle, but rather that you are awake, alert, aware, and able to participate in and enjoy the birth of your baby. It does not mean that you can’t use analgesics or anesthetics, but that the selection of such is done wisely to minimise the effects on you and your baby.¹⁵

¹³ A similar point is made by Finuala Dowling in Fay Weldon’s Fiction, when she notes that Weldon satirises the methods natural childbirth promoted by Sheila Kitzinger. She also notes that the plot is ‘contingent upon a medically difficult pregnancy requiring intervention, [which] brings it into conflict with feminist attitudes to childbirth’ (96).

¹⁴ Paula A. Treichler, ‘Feminism, Medicine, and the Meaning of Childbirth’ in Jacobus et al, Body/Politics, 29.

¹⁵ Treichler, ‘Feminism, Medicine, and the Meaning of Childbirth,’ 32.

Weldon's portrait of a radical feminist who protests against medical care, crying 'Liars! Traitors!' even while her sister is haemorrhaging, sets up an unrealistic straw woman as a portrayal of the natural childbirth movement. In this way, her argument about the dangerous effects of nature grotesquely misrepresents the feminist attempt to gain autonomy over an event that had been largely overtaken by economic, institutional and free market interests; her story relates a tragic tale of woeful ignorance rather than one that represents a feminist, or even a 'natural' approach to childbirth.

A number of theorists dealing with the reproductive body have singled out the dominance of the role of vision as problematic.¹⁶ Reliance on vision, conceived hitherto throughout Western thought as the royal road to knowledge, may now appear 'as a key culprit in the scrutiny, surveillance, domination, control and exertion of authority over the body.'¹⁷ The use of visualisation techniques for the foetus inside the mother's body, termed by Ann Oakley 'a window on the womb,'¹⁸ privileges the role of visual observation over the mother's lived experience. As Emily Martin suggests, a growing concern with the problems associated with 'visualism', among them objectifying and limiting, has led to a new emphasis on hearing as a mode of perception.

In Weldon's novel, the unborn baby speaks, sings, and comforts the mother in ways that cannot be perceived by anyone but the mother. In giving the life inside the womb this kind of agency, Weldon goes beyond the biological discourse in which the

¹⁶ Donna Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991); Emily Martin, 'Science and Women's Bodies: Forms of Anthropological Knowledge' in Jacobus et. al, Body/Politics, 69-82; Ann Oakley, The Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) and Duden, Disembodying Women.

¹⁷ Martin, 'Science and Women's Bodies,' 69.

¹⁸ Ann Oakley, 'The China Syndrome' in Essays on Women, Medicine, and Health (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) 156.

foetus originates in the text to provide an alternative voice to the received wisdom outside the body. The anti-rational, mystical discourse of the foetus enables Liffey to grow beyond her identity as child-wife, docile daughter, ignorant migrant to the countryside, and obstetrics patient, as she begins to challenge the views of those who would give her advice. In a modern version of the annunciation, Weldon employs not the angel Gabriel, but the voice of the natural world to announce the reality of the life within her:

It had been weeks, she felt, since she had looked about her and noticed the world in which she lived., She saw that the leaf buds were on the trees, and that new bright grass pushed up beneath her feet and that there was a sense of expectation in the air. All things prepared, and waited (138).

When Liffey senses the presence of the baby as words spoken in her head, she felt herself 'close and curl, as a sunflower does at night, to protect, and shelter' (139). Here the identification of woman with nature is complete: pregnancy has accomplished what a mere desire for nature, characterized by nostalgia and the blurred vision of romantic yearning, cannot.¹⁹ Cosslett has noted the way in which the male medical model co-exists incongruously next to the female spiritual account²⁰: yet the medical model is undercut from this point on by the active existence of the foetus to which Weldon gives agency in her narrative.

On the face of it, it would seem that Fay Weldon has written a novel tailored to ecofeminist specifications: one in which woman identifies with and communicates with

¹⁹ Chaia Heller has described romantic desire thus: 'Romantic love is based on the lover's desires rather than on an authentic knowledge of the beloved' (15). She claims 'the less we know about rural life, for instance, the more we desire it. Ideas, of 'nature', a blend of notions of exotic 'wilderness' and 'country living', form a repository for a life we have never lived but hope to find someday on vacation at a Disneyfied 'jungle safari' or glittering sweetly inside a bottle of Vermont Made maple syrup' (17). See Chaia Heller, The Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1999).

²⁰ See Cosslett, Women Writing Childbirth, 73.

nature, immersed in it and participating in its work of reproduction, while man is alienated from the countryside, remaining in the domain of urban production. Liffey endorses ecology, while Richard trusts in technology: her worries are described as

not so much personal as ecological, and were about the way the earth's natural resources were being eaten up, and what was happening to the blue whale, and baby seals, and butterflies, and what deforestation did to the ozone layer above Brazil. Richard, who knew that new developments in nuclear, chemical and silicon chip technology would soon solve all such problems, laughed gently and comfortingly at her worries and loved her for worrying (8).

This interest in ecology is portrayed as an extension of her femininity: nature is personalised, with the animals that draw Liffey's attention notable for their cuddliness, prettiness, or remarkable size, as charismatic megafauna capable of focusing ecological attention. This cameo forms a caricature of early ecofeminist theory, in which women have a 'natural' love for nature, while the predatory male takes part in its destruction. However, the picture portrayed by Weldon is in fact far more complex than this simple scheme would allow, and blurs the dichotomies between male and female and such stereotypical positions with regard to nature. Although Richard and Liffey are the perfect couple of the stereotype, consisting of a large, dominant male to Liffey's petite, feminine female, their counterpart in the country is the reverse, with an outsized, powerful woman to a small, sturdy husband. Immersed in the countryside and deeply involved in the practices of witchcraft, Mabs represents the archetypal earth mother, possessing an instinctual sexual and emotional nature and in touch with the forces gathering about Glastonbury Tor; however, Mabs mobilises these forces for malevolent purposes against Liffey's baby. Sexual jealousy and baby envy form a noxious combination that not only

nearly results in Liffey's losing her unborn child, but also nearly kills that of the witch.

Nature, Fay Weldon informs us, is terrible as well as a source of benign comfort.

Liffey believes that 'nature was on her side'; the authorial voice informs us, however, that 'she was its pawn, perhaps, but scarcely an ally' (88). The city is demonised as being full of rapists around every corner, violence, toxic substances and worse, artificiality of life and manners, while the countryside is set up as the domain of goodness, health, and source of a natural culture in which humanity can flourish alongside the birds and the bees. Liffey's approach to nature constitutes a kind of Marie Antoinette play-acting, as when she buys overalls, finding them 'adorable,' or tries to tend a soil that the local residents castigate as 'good for nothing.' Yet, as time goes on, and increasingly with the development of her baby, Liffey becomes involved in environmental practices such as keeping a compost and becomes more attuned to the place around her, finding it not merely picturesque, a spectacle for urban eyes, but learns to listen to the voices that surround her.

Weldon's nature is not merely a backdrop to the human events in the novel as the bucolic countryside setting. In her anti-pastoral the countryside is mercilessly revealed to be a place in which superstition, child abuse, and violence are rife. Yet Weldon is not merely interested in contrasting the settings of urban life and a countryside desired as a playground for weary city dwellers; Nature is also portrayed as the force that determines the essential life of the plot: the hormones and instincts that drive human emotion, the weather, and the necessary demands of the evolutionary process. Human life, while figuring large in the story, is set against the scale of evolutionary time and microscopic, yet determining, biological entities. As Weldon states, 'Nature sets us in motion, Nature

propels us. It is as well to acknowledge it' (118). From a human perspective, we believe we discern a purpose in evolutionary events, but as Weldon informs us,

the perspective is faulty. We no longer see Nature as blind, although she is...if we cannot in all conscience speak of God we must speak of Nature. Wide-eyed, clear-eyed, purposeful Nature. Too late to abandon her. Let us seize the word, seize the day; lay the N on its side and call our blind mistress Sature' (118).

Weldon recalls to us that, as much as we would like to see ourselves as rational, masterly beings, we are in fact embodied, material beings immersed in the forces of Nature, and thus less in control than we would like to think. At the same time, this immersion within the giant narrative of evolutionary selection causes savagery and must be resisted if we are to act as decent human beings. When she asserts in Praxis, 'we must fight Nature tooth and claw,' the argument is not a simple denial of the magnitude of Nature's control of human life. Rather, as embodied beings, this force is one that man has tried to ignore and deny, and which gains as a result greater purchase on human life. The dictum that 'if it feels right, it is right, according to Sature' (119) cannot be applied to human behaviour. Weldon demonstrates that while set in nature, and an inextricable part of its movements and forces, we must nevertheless behave as though we have some control over our feelings and actions. The novel records the various purposes to which nature is put as a discourse of necessity: it appears to justify sexual promiscuity (for man) and to enshrine the place of woman (barefoot and pregnant) in the home near the hearth. Weldon highlights the biological conditions of womanhood, yet does not endorse an ideology of essentialism. Rather she foregrounds the central, yet often unacknowledged, role that various forces of nature play in human life, and challenges simplistic views that would set up Nature as a force to be submitted to, in the case of women, or simply transcended in a move to escape nature's necessity.

Weldon had wrestled with the problem of women and nature earlier in her novel Praxis (1978).²¹ To put it more accurately, Weldon contests the discourse of nature, 'arguments from nature,' as they have been employed to oppress women and to confine them to biology and procreation. Weldon examines the various orthodoxies that proclaim the authority of nature: nature that authorises marriage, motherhood, breast-feeding, health food and the like. Weldon states, 'It's nature that makes us love our children, clean our houses, gives us a thrill of pleasure when we please the home-coming male' (140). Weldon traces the power of nature to internal forces inscribed in the human/female disposition created by evolution in order to further the procreation of the species. She challenges the dictum that nature knows best: 'if it does, it is on the man's side.' Cataloguing various female ailments such as painful periods and placenta praevia, Weldon concludes, 'It seems to me that we must fight nature tooth and claw. Once we are past child-bearing age, this Nature, this friend, we hear so much about, disposes of us' (141). Weldon's argument slips almost imperceptibly between viewing nature as a biological force, one that has certain indisputable effects upon the body, and nature as discourse, as a cultural force of oppression that affects women in particular. On the one hand, she advises women to fight against the biological force that in reducing the flow of oestrogen will diminish certain features of femininity: this might entail taking steps such as cosmetic surgery to halt the damage done by nature, as in fact Weldon herself has done.²² On the other, Weldon notes that the use of nature as authority is generally used

²¹ Fay Weldon, Praxis (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1978; Book Club Assoc. ed., 1979).

²² See Finuala Dowling, Fay Weldon's Fiction (London: Associated UP, 1998). Weldon defended

by men and cautions women to beware of this pervasive device to maintain patriarchal authority.

It would be wrong, however, to take Weldon's slogan-like statements at face value, for she is nothing if not ambiguous, ambivalent and everchanging in her views. It is sufficient to note that in the novel advising women 'to fight nature tooth and claw,' Praxis communes with the stars at significant points in her life: the red dwarf Betelgeuse is a source of consolation and advice. The nature of this advice is far from orthodox: it cautions her against marriage and motivates Praxis to kill the defective infant of her stepchild. Praxis herself construes these moments as the product of imagination, hysteria or stress, 'a retreat from reality, back into childhood fantasy' (225). Yet whatever the origins of the emotion that drives Praxis to commune with the stars so that the rest of the world retreats, Weldon seems to suggest that nature has other functions beyond being the force and discourse that maintains the oppression of women.

Somewhat perversely, Praxis cites an example from the animal world as an example of paragon motherhood:

There comes a time, when the Alaskan brown bear gets fed up with her young. She leads her brood to the top of a tall pine tree and leaves them there. She knows how to get down, but they don't. By the time they've found out, she's off and away, the other side of the mountain and they do without her, well enough. They have to (127).

However unsuited this conduct may be for mothers of post-industrial urban life, Weldon advances it as an example of non-anxious motherhood: the bear is 'altogether free from the instinctive anxiety that plagues the maternal life, animal or human.' As one of the

her decision to have a facelift, claiming that surgery is only a logical extension of the purchase of cosmetics and fashionable clothing. See the Mail on Sunday Sept. 1995: Interview with Shirley Kossick.

forces that cripple women's lives, anxiety, whether present as part of women's natures or the product of present-day life, must be addressed as an internal determinant of woman's failure to achieve liberation. In fighting nature, woman must take on both the internal qualities that may be pre-determined by evolution and the social forces that would amplify sexual differences to keep women in their places.

Weldon's Puffball has been criticised in various ways for its representation of pregnant womanhood. Anita Brookner objects to this identification of women with their maternal function: 'Puffball seems to establish pregnancy as the only experience a woman can rely on for authenticity or indeed for validation.... Superficially, it is a great leap backwards for the stereotype feminist. It argues in favour of the old myths of motherhood and universal harmony: a fantasy for the tired businesswoman.'²³ However, what Brookner fails to take into account here is the irony of the narrative voice that unflinchingly notes the difference between the naivety of the protagonist's desire for a maternal idyll in the country and the more realistic account of events represented by authorial irony. More to the point, I believe, are the critiques that note the way in which the protagonist becomes a mere carrier to the life described growing inside her: furthermore, the mind/body split of Western philosophy is replicated here in Weldon's narrative that alternates between Liffey's (unknowing) mind and the gynaecological story within. Yet, as Cosslett has pointed out, the dichotomy between inner and outer set up at the beginning of the narrative breaks down when growth described in the inner section has parallels with what is occurring in the story and vice versa.²⁴ Critics have viewed Weldon's celebration of motherhood and her identification of the woman with the body

²³ See Anita Brookner, 'The Return of the Earth Mother,' Times Literary Supplement 22 February 1980: 202.

²⁴ Cosslett, Women Writing Childbirth, 74.

and its hormonal functions as retrogressive: Patricia Waugh notes that this technique reflects 'the extent to which her own body ... has been dissected: victimised, constructed, appropriated through the discourse of science and romance.'²⁵ It is true that Weldon is on dangerous ground here, yet, as Cosslett points out, she negotiates the many pitfalls set up by the plot and narrative techniques in a way that playfully exposes 'the inadequacies of our systems of thought, the frames--male-medical or female-natural--we use to structure our experience' (74). Though dealing with the body and the biological constituents that affect its wellbeing and emotional states, Weldon does not equate anatomy with destiny. Rather, she magnifies the forces that operate within the body, giving them voice and agency and admiring the remarkable ways in which they function, unperceived by the consciousness of which they are an intricate part.

What remains retrogressive about Weldon's project is due in large part to the medical reference books to which she referred; advances have since been made by feminist researchers such as anthropologists (Emily Martin), philosophers of science (Hartsock, Haraway) and historians such as Ludmilla Jordanova who have critiqued the bias in purportedly objective scientific discourse. Moreover, scant attention is paid to the hormonal forces that determine male activity in the novel, which contributes to the stereotype of woman being embedded in nature, while man transcends it. One might also raise serious objections to the dénouement of the novel, which, despite the serious marital rifts in the couple during the period of pregnancy, portrays an idyllic portrait of husband, wife, and baby in rosy hues that do not correspond to the story of infidelity, estrangement and separation that has preceded it. Yet this ending illustrates Weldon's gift for

²⁵ Patricia Waugh, Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern (London: Routledge, 1989) 195.

perversity, for if she offers the reader the promise of a clichéd happy ending, the events of her plot, her development of character, even Nature herself, would seem to militate against it. What she offers with one hand is thus skilfully pulled away with the other. Puffball thus presents an ambivalent reading of the perilous desires for nature formed by the conjunction of a (counter) pastoral setting and the pregnant female body.

Revolting Bodies: Maternal Environments in Foetal Attraction and Mad Cows by

Kathy Lette

If we continue to speak this sameness, if we speak to each other as men have spoken for centuries, as they taught us to speak, we will fail each other. Again... words will pass through our bodies, above our heads, disappear, make us disappear. Far. Above. Absent from ourselves, we become machines that are spoken, machines that speak. Clean skins envelop us, but they are not our own.

Irigaray 'When Our Lips Speak Together'¹

A decade after the publication of Puffball, the novels of Kathy Lette take up the difficulties addressed by Fay Weldon in depicting woman in potentially retrogressive ways as wholly subsumed by the biological states of conception, pregnancy, and childbirth. Whereas Weldon sets her tale in a largely pre-feminist landscape in which women are viewed as 'farmyard animals,' an outlook that is contested by the feminist narrative voice, Kathy Lette provocatively aligns women and the 'mad cows' of her title in a move to challenge the sexist backlash of the new millennium. Lette employs the trope of woman as cow—trusting, stupid, and unreflecting—in a novel that focuses entirely on the female bodily processes associated with reproduction. Lette's novels are governed by the logic of carnival, which not only signifies a discrete content—here the use of the grotesque body—but also a form of textualization that is apparent in the narrative strategies and linguistic devices deployed. Improper speech is thus the linguistic equivalent of the grotesque body and is highlighted in this discussion of Lette's use of carnivalization. It will become apparent that the truly grotesque body of Kathy Lette's novels is the text itself. We shall read the contemporary novels of Kathy Lette in

¹ Luce Irigaray, 'When Our Lips Speak Together,' Trans. Catherine Porter and Caroline Burke,

tandem with Fay Weldon's earlier novel and recent essays, as Lette's work represents an essential, yet contradictory, complement of the other.²

In Puffball, Weldon employed the form of the pastoral to interrogate urban yearnings toward an idealized countryside, with its promise of moral certainties and a more simple, wholesome way of life. As Joseph Meeker asserts, the pastoral goal has always been a rural nature that forms the antithesis to the ills of civilization. In contrast to the pastoral, which always leads to frustration and despair due to its inherent contradictions, the picaresque world forms a place in which 'everything is tied to everything else according to complex interdependencies that defy simplification.' Meeker's description of the picaresque to suggest a comic form in which survival represents the ultimate value is suggestive for Lette's novels; here the social journey of the protagonist forms just such a trajectory through a 'chaotic social environment ...which has no niche prepared for [her], and she soon discovers that [she] must create whatever success [she] can from the rawest of materials at hand.'³ As Meeker describes him, the picaro finds that

Those who live within the established social order are well fed, pious, educated in abstractions but often stupid in practical matters and vindictive to all who do not conform to their ideals. The picaro is an outsider to this system, practical, clever, amoral, self-sufficient, and dedicated to making do by the best means available.

This Sex Which Is Not One (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985) 205.

² Kathy Lette, Foetal Attraction (London: Picador, 1993); Mad Cows (London: Picador, 1996). All references are to these editions and will be presented in parentheses in the text.

³ See Joseph Meeker, The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1997) 59. Meeker, trained in evolutionary biology as well as literary criticism, views the tragic worldview as a maladaptive strategy, positing in its place a comic view in which survival, rather than moral questions, is of the essence. Meeker's guiding question is 'from the unforgiving perspective of evolution and natural selection, does literature contribute more to our survival than it does to our extinction?' (4). Meeker's understanding of human nature reflects the deterministic tendency of his mentor E.O. Wilson and tends to downplay the effects of social environments, yet despite this serious flaw, I regard his emphasis on the comic as a salutary reappraisal of a genre that is often underestimated by literary criticism.

Staying alive is his most important purpose, and having a good time comes second. He does not rebel against his society, nor does he try to reform it or escape from it. Rather he looks for weaknesses and loopholes in the system that he can use to his own advantage.⁴

The picaro (or here, picara) is an opportunist rather than the escapist of the pastoral form. Deeply embedded in an antagonistic social world, the picara must live by her wits, as well as here, wit and comic riposte. Interestingly for a novel entitled Mad Cows, the picaro often compares himself to animals and even adopts animal disguises. Meeker points out that ‘animals are congenial images to the picaro, for like him they live in the present and are not subject to self-deceptive illusions.’⁵ Although the traditional setting for the picaro figure is the literary background of a world at war (viz. Grimmelhausen’s Simplicius Simplicimus or Heller’s Catch 22), here the antagonistic setting is formed by the various prescriptive provisos directed at the unmarried expectant mother. Various discourses of nature, such as that of ‘natural childbirth’ are employed to discipline the reproductive body of the picara, who tests a range of different social settings in her journey from conception to delivery.

As Stacy Alaimo has demonstrated, the association of woman with reproduction is fraught with problems for women, since ‘nature becomes essentialist with a vengeance as it reduces the protagonists to breeding bodies.’⁶ With reference to works written in 1930s America, Alaimo has shown that whereas nature offers the young, female characters a liberatory space in which to escape domestic drudgery, when they become women ‘the nature that exists as a liberatory field outside of the domestic manifests itself within their bodies, and paradoxically, renders them the very nucleus of the domestic

⁴ Meeker, Comedy of Survival, 60.

⁵ Meeker, Comedy of Survival, 62.

⁶ Alaimo, Undomesticated Ground, 194.

realm as child bearers.’⁷ However, as black feminists have pointed out, the dichotomy between the domestic as a private sphere and the work world does not apply universally to all women. For black women, the domestic, in other (white) women’s houses, constituted precisely the public sphere, the world of work from which they had never been excluded. Similarly, in the upper-class households of the past in Britain, expert childcare looked after the baby, so that an essential association between motherhood and a confined social sphere does not necessarily apply. Yet the same ‘angel of the house’ ideology that originated in Victorian Britain constructed the home as the proper sphere for women, and for mothers in particular. Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique with its depiction of ‘the problem without a name’ articulated the dissatisfaction of women regarding the inevitability of their place within a domestic setting.⁸ If Weldon shows that the countryside is a trap for women, she does not necessarily portray the home as such. Indeed, the happy portrait that concludes Puffball of a young mother and baby, supported by a husband with full employment and benefits, (however precarious the state of marriage is shown to be) is predicated upon the ability of the mother to stay at home and look after the baby. However, this ‘happily ever after’ conclusion does little to resolve the serious rifts between husband and wife, and ironically provides a metatextual commentary upon such fictional resolutions.

The essays of Fay Weldon collected in Godless in Eden (2000) provide little evidence of the continued victimization of women, reflected in lower wages, high rates of rape and domestic violence, and unequal political representation.⁹ In her essay ‘Girls on Top,’ Weldon proclaims the end of the struggle for liberation and argues that it is now

⁷ Alaimo, Undomesticated Ground, 109.

⁸ Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: Dell, 1963).

time 'to pity the poor men,' as another of her essays is entitled. The picture that Weldon paints here of triumphant women, in power in offices, in parliament and the home may well be unrecognisable for many women (certainly the account given in The Whole Woman by Germaine Greer opposes this version of the unqualified success of the women's liberation movement)¹⁰; yet her claim that there is a need for the categories of 'mother' and 'father' as well as the overly-broad categories of men and women may well constitute a move in the right direction.

Weldon's turn toward a human-rights perspective that addresses problems experienced by men and children, as well as women, may provide a way beyond bitter gender wars toward solutions that benefit the family and society as a whole. However, within the context of contemporary Britain, what evidence is there for the legitimacy of Weldon's claims? Have feminisms, whether liberal, radical or socialist, in fact achieved the goals of equality and pride in female identity at which they aimed at some thirty years ago? Has motherhood itself been revised in terms of the experience of pregnancy, its medical supervision, and childbirth? In what ways does the pregnant body continue to remain an object of surveillance and discipline? Can pregnancy and motherhood provide particular standpoints for new ways to reconfigure nature? In reading Lette's comic novels of pregnancy and motherhood, we shall pay particular attention to her depiction of the difficult conditions of single parenthood and the social forces that militate against reproductive and personal freedoms for women. This battle is engaged primarily through the competing discourses of hieratic, authoritative language—judicial, medical, and political—and the rampant popular slang of the protagonist and the range of low-life

⁹ Fay Weldon, Godless in Eden: Essays (London: Flamingo ed., Harper Collins, 2000).

¹⁰ Germaine Greer, The Whole Woman (London: Doubleday, 1999).

urban characters she encounters. The carnivalesque is thus mounted linguistically and textually as well as reflected in plot and characterization.

Foetal Attraction and Mad Cows both deal with the story of the six-foot tall, redheaded Australian Madeline Wolfe, who has come to London to be with her lover, the naturalist TV presenter Alexander Drake. This novel, more picaresque than Bildungsroman, records Madeline's attempts to absorb English social manners and conversations through her misadventures in a variety of locales, amid members of particular social groups targeted for satire. Madeline soon finds out that her lover is married, with a witty and beautiful journalist wife and two children. She resists the attempts of her lover to obtain a termination and thus proceeds through three stages of pregnancy, on which Foetal Attraction is structured, into childbirth. The teleological thrust of the plot from conception to delivery is subverted, however, by the reversal in the ordering of events, so that the novel begins emphatically *in medias res*, with the narration of childbirth. Childbirth is thus presented here as predicament rather than goal, as problem rather than successful completion.

The novels of Kathy Lette would be best classified as 'pulp fiction.' They are marketed for a mass readership, with bright eye-catching covers featuring blonde women in various stages of undress. However, in describing this fiction as 'popular' I want to avoid the pejorative use of the term, to emphasize its use relationally to contrast it with what is construed as 'high culture' or the literary canon. Stuart Hall indicates that it was the category of 'the popular' 'which effectively cut the Gordian knot—not through an uncritically populist celebration...but because of the way it disturbed the settled contours and— precisely—transgressed the boundaries of cultural classification.' Moreover, as

Hall indicates, since the era of post-modernism, it is increasingly difficult to keep 'the high and the low carefully segregated into their proper places in the classifying scheme.'¹¹ The notion of negotiating the worlds of high and low culture is not only significant for the genre of Kathy Lette's novels, but also self-reflexively informs the plot, language, and characterization.

Like other forms of 'chick lit,' the novels of Kathy Lette feature a sassy, humorous heroine. This heroine is a kind of picaresque figure whose adventure consists in negotiating the social world of contemporary London pregnant and unmarried in a world designed for married couples. Like others of its kind, it is related by a first-person narrator in a confessional, 'girls only' chatty tone. As Zoë Heller has noted, 'these books are not exactly works of literature. Neither do they aspire to be. They aim instead to replicate the easy, jokey, demotic tone of girl talk.'¹² Kathy Lette's work follows in the footsteps of Weldon's 1970s feminism: her character much more closely resembles Praxis, unwed mother, whore and murderess, than the fluffy Bridget Jones. Lette's style is in fact less like 'girl talk' than a stand-up comedy routine; it is caustic, outrageous and aiming to shock. Moreover, unlike Bridget Jones, Madeline does not achieve the stereotyped happy ending with the middle-class husband of a public school background: instead, she rejects the half-hearted reconciliation attempts of her married lover and decides to look after her baby alone. Such a plot twist represents a significant departure from the lipstick feminism of a genre that appears to lead back to a Doris Day pre-70s 'how-to-get-your-man' literary and cultural dead end. Many of these novels appeal to

¹¹ Stuart Hall, 'Metaphors of Transformation' Foreword to Allon White, Carnival, Hysteria and Writing (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993, 1-25) 10.

¹² Zoe Heller, 'Dumped,' Review of Animal Husbandry, Bridget Jones's Diary and Does My Bum Look Big in This? in The London Review of Books, 19 Feb. 1998: 24.

traditional pre-feminist values, however contemporary and up to the minute they may appear. Lette's novels, on the other hand, contest the backlash that led to such films as the memorable Fatal Attraction, in which a desperate single woman, crazed by the ticking of her biological clock, unleashes mayhem upon an innocent family.¹³ In analysing this popular culture novel, I hope to extend the view of feminism beyond its accustomed setting in the worlds of academic, journalistic and literary writing. As much feminism has positioned itself outside of and against the popular, as Joanne Hollows has demonstrated, while still presuming to speak for 'ordinary' women, it is all the more necessary to include popular, as well as literary and culturally-ordained modes of womanhood. Hollows suggests that 'instead of popular culture being the object of a feminist "make-over," analysing "the popular" could teach feminists how to "make-over" feminism.'¹⁴

Foetal Attraction (1993) provides a funhouse reflection of the Britain of the nineties; there are no sacred cows here. The new left intelligentsia, feminist academics, upper-class single women, television broadcasters, politicians and physicians—all are targets of Lette's relentless one liners, ripostes and quips. Although Lette covers much the same territory as Margaret Drabble's 1965 novel The Millstone, in which a single woman inadvertently becomes pregnant and decides to have the baby, Foetal Attraction is

¹³ The notion of an anti-feminist backlash is analysed in Susan Faludi, Backlash : The Undeclared War Against American Women (New York and London: Anchor books, Doubleday, 1991) 112-123. This analysis of media, misinformation and film includes a discussion of the film Fatal Attraction as illustrative of the negativity toward the single working woman of the period. The story, originally conceived by British director and scriptwriter James Dearden, sets out to tell a morality tale about an adulterous man who is made to feel responsible for the consequences of inflicting pain, however unwillingly, on the single woman he has an affair with. The Hollywood rewritings, however, rectified the problem of the unsympathetic male role by putting all of the blame on the adulterous woman.

¹⁴ Joanne Hollows, Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture (Manchester: Manchester UP,

comic where The Millstone is serious and unremittingly sober in tone. Though Lette describes the situation of her pregnant unwed mother as being derived from a nineteenth-century penny dreadful, her novel reflects a contemporary assessment of the situation.

Lette's novels set to the fore female characters whose most notable feature is their menstrual, pregnant or post-partum, lactating bodies—indeed, it would be more accurate to say that the main character in these novels is the recalcitrant female body itself. Involving plots that are set in motion by the failure to find a quiet place to breastfeed, or shoplifting due to an emergency set off by supersaturated nursing pads, they reflect a transgressive sensibility intent on exposing what is generally concealed, revelling in bodily and linguistic excess. This writing expresses a perspective on middle-class English life from *Down Under*: not only irreverent and inventive like much Aussie humour, it also depicts a Rabelaisian bodily world characterized by the excess of the mode of carnival.

The universe of Kathy Lette is diametrically opposed to this world of English middle-class life, and is one that has little tolerance for what her Australian protagonist regards as the insufferable reticence of the English. If her books are coarse, vulgar, and entirely concerned with what Bakhtin termed 'the bodily lower stratum,' this can be largely seen as the result of repudiating the very code of decorum that the protagonist of Margaret Drabble's novel employs. Lette's work must be viewed not only in the light of a feminist concern to deal with topics that are excluded from literature, but also as an attempt to decolonize the Australian identity by unsettling values that Lette construes as stereotypically English.¹⁵ The values of understatement, reticence and self-control

2000) 203.

¹⁵ These stereotypes of 'Englishness' may in fact be out of date, particularly since the watershed

imposed by a privileged use of English and reflective of a particular social status are rejected here, in favour of slang, abusive language, curses, and primarily, humour in the form of puns. The pun is the subversive instrument par excellence: it draws parasitically upon an orthodox usage only to overturn it through a variation that entirely alters its meaning. It forms a means for Kathy Lette to 'write back to the centre' ; to employ terms that are found in one discourse and reorient them humorously as projectiles.¹⁶ Foetal Attraction and Mad Cows set in motion a carnivalization of the English language through various forms of linguistic subversion, and at the same time, they use the language of the body to disturb conventional notions of polite behaviour. Linguistic and bodily excess work in tandem to write woman's experience of pregnancy, childbirth, and social life in the late twentieth century.

Both titles are a case in point: they illustrate the humorous appropriation of derogatory terms of womanhood. Foetal Attraction encapsulates the notion of rampant single womanhood, the terrifying spectre of the career woman with a strong desire for a baby: the woman who wants only one thing and who will do anything to get it— woman as metaphorical rapist, engulfing the powerless male with her rapacious needs and desires. Lette renders in parodic form the way in which single mothers were especially targeted as responsible for many of the social ills of the 1990s. She represents not only a problem for enemies of the welfare state, but also challenges male authority more generally. The term 'mad cows' has already been converted from the primary sense

of the Thatcher period in which more self-promotional behaviours and ways of speaking became prevalent. However, this does not invalidate them as targets of Lette's satire, for, in any case, it is characteristic of the colonial mindset to retain stereotypical and outmoded concepts of the mother country.

¹⁶ See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin for an account of the ways language is used by postcolonial writers in The Empire Writes Back (London and New York: Routledge,

referring to cattle with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) to refer to women: here Lette appropriates the pejorative term that links women with domestic animals, and diseased ones at that.¹⁷ Unlike the two versions of feminist identity we have seen thus far, Rosamund Stacey, the male-identified career woman, and Praxis, representing the 70s feminist Amazon, Madeline Wolfe is sexy, dresses to enhance her sex appeal in mini skirts and leather boots, and frankly acknowledges her desire for a male partner, albeit on her own terms. As a feminist guerrilla, her weapons are relentless punning, transgressive language, and the physical deployment of her six-foot body. She is a riot grrrl to Drabble's Jane Eyre-like 60s (pre)feminist.¹⁸

A couple of examples will suffice to illustrate Lette's style. The first paragraphs of each novel convey a suggestion of the linguistic shock tactics that will follow. From Foetal Attraction,

My female friends had told me that giving birth was like shitting a water melon. They lied. It's like excreting a block of flats—complete with patios, awnings, clothes-lines, television aerials, satellite dishes, backyard barbecues, kidney-shaped swimming pools, gazebos and double garage extensions with the cars parked outside (3).

1989) 38-77.

¹⁷ See Alan Bleakley, The Animalizing Imagination: Totemism, Textuality and Ecocriticism (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000) 1-12. Although the relevance of the BSE crisis as a context to Lette's novel could be brought out more fully, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider these issues here. Bleakley observes that 'the language of anthropocentrism excludes and displaces the animal' (xiv). For Richard Kerridge, the BSE crisis 'throws up as many problems of narrative as Chernobyl' as the presence of beef in 'countless unsuspected foods begins to suggest beef itself as another circulating, all-penetrating substance, nowhere and everywhere.' Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammels, eds., 'Introduction' Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature (London: Zed, 1998) 5. The pertinence of the semiotics of uncontrollability and contagion could well be applied to the transgressive central figure of the novel.

¹⁸ The term 'riot grrrl' was devised to describe women associated with punk rock. Rather than being groupies of the male proponents of punk, they use this term to indicate a separate identity for women based on the style and values of punk. The renaming of girl identity with the more angry 'grrrl' creates a space in which to renegotiate female sexuality within the masculine world

In the context of female-only discourse, the watermelon analogy is commonplace, yet the reference to excretory functions and the usage of four-letter words denotes a register that is notable for its (excessive) frankness. Not satisfied with the clichéd hyperbole of the watermelon, Lette expands it to absurdity, conveying more adequately the discomfort—or to be more accurate, *pain*—of parturition. As one of the features of carnivalization, hyperbole functions to blow up aspects of reality that require rethinking. Here the notion of minimalising the birth experience, according to the orthodoxy of ‘natural childbirth’ (following the dictates of Dick Grantly-Read and Sheila Kitzinger)¹⁹ and maintaining control through breathing and proper mental management, is laid aside. Here, it’s ‘a hard day at the orifice’: the cheerful, managed childbirth advocated by Sheila Kitzinger in her birth manuals and autobiographical accounts of childbirth is vigorously contested.²⁰ Significantly, the setting differs greatly from the good hospital in Marylebone to which the more privileged single mother of Millstone has access; here the physical context is a gritty inner-city London hospital with shabby paintwork and grimy linoleum. The conditions of poverty, crime and drug abuse associated with the inner city are also depicted as environmental conditions that endanger the life of the baby.

If the linguistic excess suggests the world of carnival, the descriptions of the pregnant or maternal body foreground the sense of the grotesque that usually accompanies it. As Bakhtin has demonstrated in his discussion of Rabelais and His

of hard rock. See Hollows, Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture, 161-188.

¹⁹ See Tess Cosslett for a detailed discussion of the history of natural childbirth. Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourse of Motherhood (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1994).

²⁰ Sheila Kitzinger does acknowledge that the pain during childbirth is real enough, but she attempts to recontextualise the birthing experience within woman’s existence as a whole. She also discusses the experience in terms of sensuousness and exhilaration. See Sheila Kitzinger, The Experience of Childbirth (Baltimore: Penguin, 1973) 17-25.

World, the world of carnival encompasses a different sense of the human body from the classic Renaissance model, which presented ‘an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual.’²¹ Bakhtin contrasts the official world of the high literary mode with the underworld of the carnival, which upsets the hierarchies that reign above in a form of play aimed at releasing pent-up energies. The psychic demands of civilization with its accompanying strategies of repression, sublimation and displacement identified by Freud in his Civilization and Its Discontents are abandoned in favour of a world in which the physical realities of the body are celebrated.²² Bakhtin’s theory of dialogical discourse has been identified as useful to ecocritical theory by Patrick Murphy and others: here, however, the focus is upon the mode of carnival as productive not only of an alternative theory of embodiment, but also a mode of thinking that disrupts hegemonic authority.²³

If the classic body is contained and individualized, the grotesque body is the reverse: it is ‘a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created and builds and creates another body’ (317). For Bakhtin, what is significant is that the body is *intercorporeal* in much the same way as the novel is intertextual. Holquist indicates that ‘Like the novel, the body cannot be conceived

²¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World Trans. Helene Iswolsky. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 321.

²² Sigmund Freud, ‘Civilization and its Discontents’ in Sigmund Freud vol. 12, Civilization, Society and Religion Albert Dickson, ed. Trans. under the editorship of James Strachey. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

²³ See Patrick D. Murphy, Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques (Albany: State U of New York P, 1995). I view Bakhtin’s dialogical theory as having so thoroughly permeated the ways in which we think about discourse in narrative as not requiring further mention here; however, Murphy’s use of the idea of ‘anotherness’ offers a provocative way to think beyond binaries like self/other.

outside a web of interrelations of which it is a living part.’²⁴ The grotesque body is not necessarily feminine, although Bakhtin focuses on ‘the body that fecundates and is fecundated, that gives birth and is born, devours and is devoured, drinks, defecates, is sick and dying’ (319). Nevertheless, the overlap of the female pregnant body with the grotesque occurs at many points. Bakhtin envisions the grotesque body as one that exists in continuity with the rest of the physical world; whereas the classic body is characterized by its differentiation from the animal world, that of the grotesque is

blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements. It is an incarnation of this world at the absolute lower stratum, as the swallowing up and generating principle, as the bodily grave and bosom, as a field which has been sown and in which new shoots are preparing to sprout.²⁵

This organic sense of the body, which Bakhtin terms ‘cosmic,’ has many of the hallmarks of an ecological concept of the human body: that is, one not bounded by the skin, but one that extends into its environment, permeable.

This contact with the outer world is made through the orifices of the body, the eyes, ears, mouth, anus and vagina: Bakhtin states,

All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation. ... Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body—all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven.²⁶

²⁴ Michael Holquist is one of the most influential interpreters of Bakhtin’s work. He has done much to sort out the textual ambiguities of authorship that plague research into Bakhtin, whose work has also been published under the names Voloshinov and Medvedev. See Michael Holquist, Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World (London and New York: Routledge, 1990, 2002) 90.

²⁵ Bakhtin, Rabelais, 26-7.

Thus, the pregnant or lactating body potentially illustrates the conditions of being part of the stuff of life more fully than any other: it challenges the sense of self as unitary and bounded obtained at the mirror. Yet if this concept of the body is cosmic, why must it be seen as grotesque?

Mary Russo has noted that Bakhtin's work is free of any form of critical gender analysis and indeed, the example he advances of the laughing hags giving birth (the Kerch terracotta figurines) constitutes a standard form of misogyny.²⁷ While on the one hand affirming the vision that sets the human in a wider context of material life, Bakhtin at the same time expresses the underlying disgust for the feminine and the bodily lower stratum of the official worldview. To account for this disgust and the repudiation of certain aspects of bodily experience, we will need to turn to the theory of abjection as outlined by Julia Kristeva.

Kristeva situates her interest precisely at the intersection of the cultural and bodily as she attempts to account for feelings of disgust, revulsion and horror towards bodily life.²⁸ As Sue Vice points out, whereas Bakhtin sees the contemporary negative view of the grotesque as forming 'part of a historical decline into privatised existence,' Kristeva discusses abjection in terms of the psyche.²⁹ Drawing on the cultural anthropology of Mary Douglas's Purity and Danger, she elaborates a psychoanalytic theory of the notion of taboo, culturally and historically determined, yet universal. Using the multivalent term, 'le corps propre,' Kristeva deploys simultaneously the notions of 'clean' as well as

²⁶ Bakhtin, Rabelais, 317.

²⁷ Mary Russo, 'Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory' in Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury eds. Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory (New York: Columbia UP, 1997) 318-336.

²⁸ Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection Trans. Léon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

‘proper.’ Her focus is on the ways in which ‘proper’ sociality and subjectivity are ‘based on the expulsion or exclusion of the improper, the unclean, and the disorderly elements of its corporeal existence that must be separated from its ‘clean and proper’ self.’³⁰ The objects generating abjection—food, faeces, urine, vomit, tears, spit—all objects that are viewed as impure or defiling elements of human materiality, ‘are neither fully contained within the subject’s body nor ever entirely expelled by it’ (88). Abjection thus constitutes a response to ‘the various bodily cycles of incorporation, absorption, depletion, expulsion, the cycles of material rejuvenation and consumption necessary to sustain itself yet incapable of social recognition and representation’ (88). The underside of the symbolic, abjection corresponds in part to Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque, which is built in opposition to the higher, official orders of representation. The abject is what the symbolic must reject, cover over and contain. Kristeva’s notion of abjection relates significantly to Lette’s project to render the female body with all its bodily impurities and taboos. Writing from the dually subordinate perspective of former colonial as well as woman, Lette foregrounds stigmatised or abjected forms of personhood.

Kristeva’s notion of abjection is particularly important for representations of the feminine, and particularly, the reproductive body. If the feminine is seen to be marginalised by the symbolic patriarchal order, it is the biological woman, that is, the procreative body, that this order abjects. Kristeva states,

It is not the ‘woman’ in general who is refused all symbolic activity and all social representativity.... That which is...under the sign of interdiction is the reproductive woman, through whom the species does not stop at the imaginative producer and his mother, but continues beyond, according to a natural and social law.³¹

²⁹ Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*. (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1997) 167.

³⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, ‘The Signification of the Body’ in John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin, eds., *Abjection, Melancholia and Love* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 80-104) 86.

³¹ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language* Trans. Léon S. Roudiez. (New York: Columbia UP,

The maternal body is abjected because it reminds men of their own origins and mortality. Kristeva asserts in Powers of Horror: 'Fear of the archaic mother proves essentially to be a fear of her generative power. It is this power, dreaded, that patrilineal filiation is charged with subduing.' Because these elements represent such significant area of taboo and 'pollution,' these are precisely the elements of the body that must be articulated and recovered for a reconceptualization of womanhood, and motherhood in particular. If women are viewed either as saintly or demonic, woman must import the corporeality of the lower world into representations of woman as angel. Yet as Stuart Hall points out with regard to the impact of the carnivalesque as a metaphor of cultural and symbolic transformation, 'it is *not* simply a metaphor of inversion—setting the 'low' in the place of the 'high,' while preserving the binary structure of the division between them.' In Bakhtin's carnival,

The low invades the high, blurring the hierarchical imposition of order; creating, not simply the triumph of one aesthetic over another, but those impure and hybrid forms of the 'grotesque'; revealing the interdependency of low on the high and vice versa, the inextricably mixed and ambivalent nature of all cultural life, the reversibility of cultural forms, symbols, language and meaning....³²

Given the tendency of patriarchal thought to transcend the lower order of nature, the ecological possibilities of this theory should be clear. Similarly, the traditional portrayal of mother with child in the form of the Madonna is an emphatically disembodied conception of woman in which not only (the idea of) genitality but the breast too is elided. Characteristically, Lette focuses on this representation for a target of satire.

1980) 253.

³² Stuart Hall, 'Metaphors,' in Allon White, Carnival, Hysteria and Writing (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 8.

If the mode of carnival focuses on a certain content and embodiment that are anti-classical, carnivalization refers not only to a discrete content, but also a means of textualization. It is this form of representation, employing hyperbole, reversal, transgressive detail, and linguistic excess that will provide the focus of this discussion here. If for Bakhtin the official formalistic authoritarianism of Stalinism provided the target within which he had both to work within and repudiate using ‘an explosive politics of the body, the erotic, the licentious and semiotic,’ Lette employs a similar semiotic of the body to challenge the conservative backlash concerning the politics of reproduction and child-raising.³³ Dialogism and heteroglossia are essential components of her satire: the novel as a whole forms a riposte to certain conservative views of motherhood.³⁴

The satirical targets in Lette’s Foetal Attraction are numerous, but for my purposes here I will focus on her critique of anti-abortion and natural childbirth discourses. The encounter with the ‘Right-to-lifers’ outside the abortion clinic is a scene that presents a carnivalesque array of slogans, signs, gestural theatre (protesters spraying Holy Water, waving an embalmed foetus and chanting): Lette characterizes them as ‘Anti-abortionists, arguing that life is sacred, while desperate to reintroduce capital punishment’ (173). Many feminist theorists have observed the elevation of ‘life itself’

³³ Terry Eagleton calls Bakhtin’s engagement with Stalinism while working within Marxist criticism ‘perhaps the boldest, most devious gesture in the history of “Marxist Criticism.”’ See Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (London: New Left Books, 1981) 144.

³⁴ Here I will refer to the definition of heteroglossia provided by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson in Bakhtin’s The Dialogic Imagination (Michael Holquist, ed. Trans. C. Emerson and Michael Holquist) (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981). Heteroglossia is defined as ‘the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance.At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions....’ (428). Dialogism is defined as ‘the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have

into a hallowed concept with which to control women's bodies; the sacredness of foetal life accompanies a rhetoric that deprives women of self-determination.³⁵ Lette punctures the sanctimonious logic of this position by yoking the anti-abortion position with a draconian platform regarding criminal offenders. However, the decision to refuse a termination is figured more in terms of postcolonial than feminist resistance to external control. The narrator experiences a sudden epiphany in which she reasserts her (Australian) rebelliousness:

How had she become so passive? She, who knew how to get bail in every country in the Pacific...knew the first name of every bartender in Bangkok...who could open beer bottles with her teeth? How had she become so tame, so timid, so, well, *English?* (175).

The earlier part of the book dramatised Madeline's sense of foreignness in England and her attempts to adopt more rounded vowels and assimilate: 'Most of the English population equate good articulation with high IQs, better looks, cleanliness, sex appeal and reliability. It's called Received Pronunciation' (97). An earlier acceptance of the form of 'correct' pronunciation represents what Said calls 'conscious affiliation proceeding under the guise of filiation: there is a desire to mimic the centre not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed.'³⁶ If the character of the picaro is usually illegitimate, and from a lower social level, here Madeline's identity as an Australian confers on her this outsider status. Yet here, in her decision to have the baby and her

the potential of conditioning others' (426).

³⁵ See especially Barbara Duden, Disembodying Women Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn Trans. Lee Hoinicki (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard UP, 1993) and Rita Arditti, Renate Duelli Klein and Shelley Minden, eds., Test-Tube Women: What Future for Motherhood? (London: Pandora Press, 1984 and 1989). See also Gina Corea, The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

³⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffin and Helen Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back (London and New

resistance to anti-single parenthood pressures, she affirms this outsider identity, and draws on it for the unruly energy required.

The dominant discourse of ante-natal classes, 'childbirth is *enjoyable*,' is contested here by the single mother who, in opposition to drug-free childbirth proclaims her preference for what she calls the 'Full-Anaesthetic-Elective-Caesarean-Wake-Me-When-It's-Over-and-the-Hairdresser's-Here approach' (195). Moreover, throughout the novel, Lette casts a critical eye at the nature of surveillance over the pregnant body by social workers, feminists, hospital nurses, childbirth consultants, and members of the general public. Ann Oakley has charted the change in medical attitudes in Britain that is reflected by society at large, in which the foetus has begun to assert its unborn rights over the maternal body.³⁷ Moreover, the historian Barbara Duden has argued that visualization techniques, pioneered by Lennart Nilsson, have led to the greater ontological status and political autonomy of the foetus.³⁸ She claims that prevailing metaphors conceptualise the mother as ecosystem for an endangered species, a discourse that has potentially disturbing consequences for women's rights.

Lette's novel reflects the increased surveillance of the public over the pregnant woman as the protagonist is advised, warned, and admonished about her dietary choices. The heteroglossia reflected by characters from different classes and social spheres illustrates the battle between authoritative discourses of medicine, nutrition and the law

York: Routledge, 1989) 4.

³⁷ Oakley, Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

³⁸ Barbara Duden, Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn. Trans. Lee Hoinacki. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1993). See especially 'The Nilsson Effect' and 'The Public Fetus.' See also the collection of essays in Paula Treichler, Lisa Cartwright, and Constance Penley, eds., The Visible Woman: Imaging Technologies, Gender and Science (New York and London: New York UP, 1998).

and the pregnant woman, who is construed as mere carrier to the unborn child, which has greater value within patriarchal society. As Oakley has noted in her history of ante-natal care ranging from 1900 to the present, 'diet is something everyone is an expert on, and the idea that malformed foetuses can be prevented by a healthy diet is an idea with a long history and commonsense appeal.'³⁹ Moreover, Stabile notes that

in the larger cultural sphere, she is bombarded with injunctions as to what substances might potentially "damage" the fetus. Aside from the labelling of cigarette packages and alcohol, she is warned about objects ranging from VDTs (Video Display Terminals) to operating a vehicle.⁴⁰

As Stabile has pointed out, the state of pregnancy which is constructed as the 'natural' state of the female body when abortion is sought, here becomes 'a highly dangerous, pathological condition, subject to intense surveillance.'⁴¹ Thus, the narrator's riposte to unwanted advice, 'Who are you? Its agent?? ... Don't I count? What am I? A pouch?' (223), conveys both a challenge to the idea of woman as 'walking womb' and alludes to Madeline's Aussie identity. Oakley lucidly sets out the consequences for women of their gradual loss of control over the womb:

The wombs of women—whether already pregnant or not—are containers to be captured by the ideologies and practices of those, who, to put it most simply, do not believe that women are able to take care of themselves....The capturing of women's wombs is the domination of the physicalist and masculinist scientific paradigm, the ultimate logic, not purely of the medicalization of life, but of a Cartesian world-view, in which the behaviour of bodies can be explained and controlled independently of minds.⁴²

³⁹ Oakley, Captured Womb, 290.

⁴⁰ Carol Stabile, 'Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance' The Visible Woman (New York and London: New York UP, 1998. 171-197) 187.

⁴¹ Stabile, 'Shooting the Mother,' 187.

⁴² Oakley, Captured Womb, 293.

Foetal Attraction addresses the restrictions upon female autonomy that the state of pregnancy brings into play and indicates the resistance required to maintain the right to decide, not only to terminate or continue a pregnancy, but also to make the myriad micro-decisions that occur during the process of gestation.

Similarly, contemporary childraising discourses of the popular texts for new mothers such as those by Penelope Leach or Dr. Miriam Stoppard come under attack in Mad Cows. The epigraph is a good example of the kind of ‘perfect mother’ discourse that is mocked here: ‘Your new baby can go everywhere with you so long as you are composed and well-prepared. If you are well-organised and self-assured, outings with your baby can be a great joy, and the sooner that you start after bringing the baby home the better’ (1). If in Foetal Attraction Lette challenges the construction of childbirth as ‘the most beautiful and moving experience in a woman’s life’ and refigures it comically as ‘the worst sexist joke ever perpetrated,’ Mad Cows is a rejoinder to child-raising texts with their presumption of the middle-class ideal mother, composed, organised and self-assured. Lette’s second novel sets out to explode the myth of the perfectly contained (literally as well as emotionally), ideal mother in her exuberant and highly exaggerated account of new motherhood. This state is explored not only mentally and emotionally, as Drabble has examined in The Millstone, but also bodily, with graphic descriptions of bodily parts that are not generally referred to outside medical texts. Significantly, single motherhood is framed and set in a distinct political context by the tabloid headline cited as epigraph: ‘Redwood Says Single Mums Should Have Babies Adopted,’ from a News of the World column of 13 August 1995. Tory MP John Redwood is quoted as saying, ‘If you can’t afford to feed your kids—give them up for adoption’— a viewpoint that

provides the impetus for the plot of the novel, in which various women compete for the right to raise the baby of the unwed protagonist. In the initial description of the protagonist, her body is described much like the misshapen bodies that fill the narrator of The Millstone with horror:

It was one month since the birth and her tummy still dangled downwards—a flesh colostomy bag. And *hips*. She'd never had hips before. Two flabby sidecars rode pillion with her everywhere. What she needed were some control-top pantyhose; but for her *whole body*. (3)

The first page alone features such terms as sanitary towels, post-natal constipation, colostomy, distended breasts and the like: here unmentionable body parts, feminine products, accessories, and sundry surgical details converge to build up a identity-kit picture that might have been ripped from an obstetrics manual. At the same time, the grotesque content is emphasized by the use of italics, a sign of confessional, hyper-female discourse. A litany of unmentionable female postpartum disorders such as haemorrhoids, constipation, cramps and mastitis constitute a Rabelaisian mode of excess in which the use of catalogue and hyperbole are notable features.

It is not surprising that the view of Nature expressed here is nothing less than hostile: 'Mother Nature's a mingy, stingy two-faced bitch.... We're talking Lady MacBeth with PMT and a Kalashnikov' (3). In line with the typical repudiation of nature found in earlier feminist theory, Lette would appear to endorse the necessity for women to distance themselves from forces of nature that deform, harm, and maim the body, and to maintain conservative ideologies that would equate women with motherhood. In fact, this view represents a repudiation of motherhood discourses and fictions that portray Madonna with child as disembodied and beatific. Lette brings the experience of the lived

body into the standard idealised portrait of motherhood, rejecting representations that fail to include the 'situated knowledges' of women. Traditional portraits of the Madonna are critiqued for what they exclude: 'In not one of them is Mary crying in agony from cramps, cracked nipples, mastitis, constipation, haemorrhoids...hair loss, tooth decay, nor the sets of crippling contractions triggered by the baby's sucking' (4). This litany of female complaints is far from tasteful and might well be negatively evaluated by such male critics as H.G. Wells, who found Enid Bagnold's 1938 novel too full of unsavoury details, such as the inclusion of breasts and nappies.⁴³ There is indeed shock value in encountering such terms as 'episiotomy' or 'perineum' outside the usual context of childbirth preparation texts generally aimed at a readership of women only, but it must be argued that as features of female bodily existence they are worthy of inclusion. Mary Ellmann discusses the ways in which women are relegated to the sphere of materiality, and materiality is denigrated as a consequence. She notes,

for if the materiality of women is profound, then a novel about them which emphasizes their materiality might be profound as well. But, in fact, the argument is that however profound feminine materiality may be, it is always shallow, women's lives are profoundly shallow.⁴⁴

The impetus of these novels is, to the contrary, to stress what is significant in the experience of the hyper-materiality found in motherhood.

Lette's work, employing the deconstructive strategies of carnivalization and the

⁴³ H.G. Wells stated that he felt as if he 'had been attacked by a multitude of many-breasted women... and thrown into a washing basket of used nursery napkins.' See A. Sebba's Introduction to *The Squire* by Enid Bagnold. (London: Virago, 1987) xvii.

⁴⁴ See Mary Ellmann, *Thinking About Women* (San Diego, New York and London: Harvest Brace Jovanovich, 1968) 100. Mary Ellmann's work is among the first to criticise institutionalised sexism in literary criticism, and is not only a path-clearing work, but also a markedly humorous one. Ellmann's gender critical perspective informs the fiction of her daughter, Lucy Ellmann, which will be discussed in the final section.

grotesque, reinserts the transcendent human into the world of the body. There is indeed something celebratory about even the pains and indignities she conveys through the grotesquely leaky body of her main character. These are aspects of women's experience that may have remained intensely private, even shameful, up until now. And yet, there is nothing inherently unmentionable about any of these topics: they are part of our bodily condition as women, as humans. What is unmentionable about leakages, odours, and such embarrassments is that we are animal as well as human, bodily as well as rational: much in our culture aims to obscure this fact. At the same time, the vulnerable states of pregnancy and lactation are shown as permeable and thus highly susceptible to environmental influences, as when it is noted that the baby is shielded from 'toxic farts of taxi exhaust' (8). As the body extends grotesquely into the outer environment, so does the latter permeate the body in ways that are perceived as dangerous. And while Lette's novel documents ways in which women in public are increasingly under surveillance for private abuses of the maternal environment, the greater socio-economic forces that lead to contaminated environments and hazardous child-raising conditions also enforce their erasure from public notice.

Lette's comedy is in the tradition of the rebellious laugh described by Hélène Cixous in her well-known essay, 'The Laugh of the Medusa.' Cixous outlines the function and nature of 'parler femme' thus:

If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this 'within,' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. And you'll see with what ease she will spring forth from that 'within'⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa: Viewpoint' Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen.

Elaborating a notion of woman as (single) mother that is neither Madonna nor whore, Lette disrupts conventional representations of feminine bodily life, not only through her characterization but also in the language itself, 'biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent a language to get inside of.' Employing a variety of language styles and registers, and bringing about hostile encounters between divergent speech communities, Lette enlists a vigorous heteroglossia to stage the battle over Madeline's body and baby.

While battling ideological forces that would view womanhood as a form of nature to be controlled and legislated, the protagonist also questions dominant ideologies of English Nature as representing a favoured form of 'Englishness.' One strategy for injecting the presence of the alien into England is shown when Lette remaps England onto the Caribbean body: Mamma Joy is described as large, bottom heavy and of 'awe-inspiring rotundity. If she were a map of Britain then her handbag was Ireland....' (9). Another device is the attack upon romantic ideas of the countryside. In demolishing stereotypical views of the countryside, Lette puts into question at the same time ways in which the English have defined themselves in terms of their relationship to a certain kind of landscape. This description of the countryside betrays an awareness that the subject has been treated to exhaustion, and it conveys a sense of alienation rather than the romantic sublime: 'The rolling, green, greeting-card fields, beneath the whipped-cream clouds, knee-deep in daffodils so golden they looked plastic' (109). It suggests a nature that is packaged, an artificial Nature. This suggestion is brought out more fully in the following passage:

Signs 1/4 (1976, 875-893) 887.

It was as if Disney had designed a set marked Quaint, full of toy-town squares sunk in sleep and mock-Tudor mansions. The drowsy countryside has been through its annual strip-tease. Just like the hymn, England did consist of many green and pleasant lands...but also factories, nuclear power stations, motorways and electricity pylons whose gargantuan steel legs strode from coast to coast. Every square inch of British soil was soaked in fertilisers which seeped into streams. The truth about Loch Ness was that there was one hell of a big dead fish down there (219).

The passage might have been taken from Graham Harvey's The Killing of the Countryside, so insistent is it upon the darker realities underlying the beauty of the countryside and its not-so innocent relationship to environmental degradation.⁴⁶ The carnivalesque insists on inclusion of elements that are traditionally elided in idealizations of the countryside. This catalogue of rural woes makes these discordant elements central in Lette's picture of the countryside in the late twentieth century. In a novel that satirises British attitudes and manners, it is not surprising that Lette should target ideas about Nature. If stereotyped ideas about Englishness presume a love of the countryside and idealised conceptions of its beauty, it is necessary for a postcolonial perspective to take issue with the constructedness of such notions, to focus upon the 'stinking fish' in the picture.

Neither is it coincidental that the profession of the married lover featured here is that of a naturalist. If Weldon satirised the city job of the husband in Puffball, whose responsibility was to adjust the salinity of soup products, twenty years later Lette targets a zoologist 'whose main habitat when not in the wild is television.' He is described as the 'missing link between animal and licence-payer: ... he had done for nature what Placido Domingo had done for opera.' Madeline naturalises the type in mock scientific

⁴⁶ Graham Harvey, The Killing of the Countryside (London: Vintage, 1997). Harvey discusses the political decision to maintain low food prices with subsidies for large farms and examines the

language as a 'multi-purpose biped of the species Video Sapiens' (11-12). The obvious discrepancies between his naturalist bent and his life as one of the London glitterati, in addition to the juxtaposition of the nobility of his aims to save various endangered species and the hypocrisy of his personal conduct, form an appropriate target for the author, who ridicules all forms of supposed political correctness.

Additionally, as the representative man of the nineties, he articulates many of the concerns outlined by Fay Weldon in her essays describing the parlous state of the English male. However, in the context of these novels, there is little sympathy for the problems of the middle-aged male. Further, Lette does not ascribe to a woman-as-victim form of feminism; men are also shown as subject to disciplinary bodily regimes in their pursuit of cosmetic surgery, liposuction and the like in the hope of eternal youth and attractiveness. One of the male characters is sent up when the silicon implants in his bottom explode while he is having sex—thus, the 'leaky body' often construed as pertaining solely to the female body is extended to men, as is the malleable body that results from the gym/beauty cultures of 90s disciplinary regimes.⁴⁷ Perhaps rather than an attempt to overthrow sexist stereotypes directed towards women, this satire could also be read as an example of reverse sexism: an example of what Weldon means when she claims that 'sexism becomes something more directed towards men by women than women by men.'⁴⁸

consequences of agribusiness upon rural ecosystems.

⁴⁷ Margrit Shildrick is the source of the term 'leaky bodies.' See Margrit Shildrick, Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and Bioethics (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

⁴⁸ Weldon, Godless, 59.

Lette's novels constitute precisely the kind of 'Girls-on-Top', 'grrrrl-power triumphalism' that Weldon identifies as the cause for the 'gender switch' that she sees as having taken place in the Britain of the 1990s:

Twenty-five years ago men gave women a hard time: now women give men a hard time.... where does this leave the boys now growing up in a woman's world, lumped together, as women once were, as the inferior gender? Having a hard time of it, confused and failing at school, struggling for self-esteem, wondering exactly what men are for. Unemployable, unmarriageable, and hoping for the love of a good woman to save them.⁴⁹

Weldon cites the statistics of one hundred years ago when only one woman in three married and had children and suggests that this 'is a more appropriate rate, *better fitted to our natures*, than the ninety percent we'd managed by the fifties.'⁵⁰ Weldon conveniently discards a social history which includes such factors as the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy, the global movement of corporate labour markets from the First to the Third World, and global recession: uppity women are made to bear the burden for the tremendous economic and social upheavals that have taken place over the past twenty years. These issues are evaluated much more carefully, however, by Rosalind Coward in her questioning of post-feminism in Sacred Cows.⁵¹

Does Weldon's account of 'Girls on Top' have any bearing on the situation portrayed in Foetal Attraction in which the girl fails to get her man and ends up as a single mother? Which comes first, life as a single mother because men are felt to be redundant? Or, when men refuse to make a commitment or walk out of marriage, is it that women find that they can manage by themselves? These are some of the questions

⁴⁹ Weldon, Godless, 56.

⁵⁰ Weldon, Godless, 63, emphasis mine.

⁵¹ Rosalind Coward, Sacred Cows: Is Feminism Relevant to the New Millennium? (London:Harper Collins, 1999).

that arise when Weldon's recent ideas are read against contemporary women's fiction: it is beyond the scope of this project to attempt to resolve the dilemma here, but suffice it to say, the idea of 'nature' as authorising human attitudes and legitimising behaviour is an crucial signifier that circulates through both Weldon's essays and Lette's fiction.

Featuring a heroine as notable for her verbal fireworks as her dominant, misbehaving body, Lette's novels refuse to obey the prevailing codes that govern language, manners and bodily behaviour in middle-class Britain. If the discourse of middle-class childbirth extols labour management, correct breathing techniques, and a stiff upper lip, these are mocked and shown to be insufficient ways to deal with a force that many women experience as a force of nature. As discussed with reference to Puffball, the term 'natural childbirth' may refer to a wide range of options that may be tyrannically enforced as part of prevailing obstetrical ideologies.⁵² If manuals detailing correct behaviour for the new mother elide such messy realities as saturated nursing pads, pain in unmentionable places, and the desire for a lover, these are foregrounded and expanded to hyperbolic levels in this fiction. As mentioned earlier, this refusal to observe codes of polite behaviour and speech is also indicative of the discomfort of a postcolonial viewpoint that finds itself situated within the 'mother' country.

The critique of containment extends across bodily, behavioural and linguistic boundaries, and thus, the narrator violates norms in all of these areas. She is an outsider: larger than life and difficult to ignore in her transgressions against conventional dress codes, social manners and especially, linguistic codes of politeness. She criticises the

⁵² See Paula Treichler for an informative discussion of the changing meanings of this term. She notes the ways in which the term 'natural childbirth' may be evoked within highly prescriptive and tyrannical regimes. See Paula Treichler, 'Feminism, Medicine and the Meaning of Childbirth' in Jacobus et al., Body/Politics, 130.

reticence that characterizes English talk within certain milieux: 'The English don't talk...you carry around invisible crocodile-infested moats at all times. With no drawbridges' (223). The narrator enacts her revenge at the end of the novel when she has learned to express herself with the inarticulacy and vagueness she has been subjected to by (English) others. In her refusal to accept a reconciliation with her lover she replies with a suitable reticence, a reply that covers up more than it reveals: Gulliver has gone native. Yet it would be wrong to see this as a conclusion in which the disorderly is controlled, where the bodily resumes its secondary position; rather, decorum is deployed strategically as mimicry within a discourse that characteristically refuses to be silenced or policed.

Lette situates her dénouement within the narrative of the historic expulsion of the convict to Australia:

Take Two on the convict scenario, thought Maddy. Just like her ancestors two hundred years before, she too was making an inglorious, aquatic exit from the Motherland. England had lured her; a geographic love letter, unscrolling from Jane Austen to Vita Sackville-West; from John Donne to Alexander Drake. And Jack was its precious postscript. That was the Motherland which mattered to her now. The trouble was, she'd believed the sanctified, disinfected myth of the Perfect Mother (288).

The novel revisits the mother and baby groups of the middle class as well the slums of inner city London to conclude that the 'traditional family' was nothing more 'than a psychological theme park which politicians and Baby Book gurus visited occasionally, but in which nobody actually lived' (288). As discussed earlier, rewriting the female body has also entailed rewriting that *locus classicus* of English identity, the countryside itself. New motherhood enables the protagonist to replace the motherland sought in an idealised colonial version of England with her own fully embodied motherhood. This,

however, is a Motherland that eschews euphemisms and clichés to attempt a more faithful, if irreverent and picaresque, representation of the somatic experience contained therein. What Bakhtin terms the ‘double-voiced word’, an utterance that is always conscious of its origin and aware of its own alien nature, is found in the riposte, which is used throughout the novel to talk back to the various authorities that Lette targets here. At the same time, Kathy Lette employs the oversized, hyperbolic body of the immigrant Australian to show how personal and national identity is implicated in both social and environmental history, and does so within a mode of carnivalization that exaggerates the interplay between bodily and environmental boundaries. Engaged in a writing practice that is metatextual (that is, fundamentally critical of mainstream writing), it is ‘equally the expression of a body which refuses to be positioned, regulated and controlled by the mainstream.’⁵³ As Anne Cranny-Francis explains in a different context, ‘In this respect, the body itself is as metatextual as the writing.’⁵⁴ It is this mode of excess that highlights the materiality of both subject and place, and alerts the reader to the importance of re-reading the adventure of personal bodily issues within a rhetoric of social, political and finally, ecological, formulations of the self.

⁵³ Anne Cranny-Francis, The Body in the Text (Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1995) 125.

⁵⁴ Cranny-Francis, Body in the Text, 125.

Who gives birth? And to whom is it given? Certainly it doesn't feel like giving, which implies a flow, a gentle handing over, no coercion.... Maybe the phrase was made by someone viewing the result only.... Yet one more thing that needs to be renamed. Margaret Atwood¹

I think we are only just beginning to realise the enormous importance of environment, not only with regard to men and women, but with regard to one human being and another, and these, do not forget, will differ in character far more glaringly than any differentiation based on sex. Eva Figes²

The novels dealing with pregnancy and childbirth examined thus far portray women undergoing a 'natural' experience as it is handled within the context of modern medicine in patriarchal society. The 'scopophilia' of the male gaze is intensified within medical contexts that conceptualize the female body as deficient, the birth process within metaphors of production and management, and childbirth as inherently dangerous. What would these natural processes look like through a different lens, one that would place emphasis on the continuity of the human experience of childbirth with other processes of nature? How would woman-centred practices of midwifery, herbal medicine, and storytelling alter the ways in which the process of childbirth is envisioned? What implications would such a reconfiguring of this central human experience have for the ways in which nature is portrayed in the novel? In a work that reexamines English history through the perspective of the experiences of women, hitherto viewed as minor characters within the grand narratives of war, imperial exploration and political change, Eva Figes recovers the lost histories of midwifery, 'witchcraft' and nursing in her novel

¹ Margaret Atwood, Dancing Girls and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984).

² Eva Figes, Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society (New York: Persea books, 1970, 1978, 1986) 15.

The Seven Ages.³ Her fictional treatment of the topos of pregnancy and midwifery builds upon the body of feminist research undertaken to mine the lost female voices in history.⁴ Her novel thus constitutes a fictional reply to the questions articulated by Adrienne Rich: 'How have women given birth, who has helped them, and how and why?'⁵

The stories of seven generations of women who practise midwifery and nursing are related through the perspective of a public health nurse and midwife who has taken up retirement in a small cottage in the rural area in which she grew up. These lost stories are recovered through a dual process of memory and imagination as the voices of the past make themselves known to the present-day narrator. Figes uses innovative narrative strategies to effect the shift between faraway periods of time that can only be imagined by the central character through whom the events are focalized. Indeed, Figes has suggested in her critical writings the necessity of a visionary approach to the re-writing of history and thus reconfiguring the female lives that have taken place within it. As she writes with reference to eighteenth-century women writers,

Most novelists, most writers are concerned with showing the world as it is, not as it might or ought to be; the tendency towards conservatism which can be noted in most great writing of the past is due to this fact. Good writers are concerned with truth, and truth compels the writer to tell it how it is, not how he or she would like it to be. Visionary writers are a comparative rarity.⁶

³ Eva Figes, The Seven Ages (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1986).

⁴ See especially Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist P, 1973) and For Your Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women (New York and London: Doubleday, 1978) and Ludmilla Jordanova, Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine Between the 18th and 20th Centuries (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1989) and Nature Displayed: Gender, Science and Medicine 1760-1820 (London and New York: Longman, 1999).

⁵ See Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Womanhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago, 1977 and 1997) 128.

Like Jeanette Winterson after her, Figes belongs to a tradition of woman-centred writing that is concerned with innovation of novelistic technique, especially concerning spatio-temporal representation, as part of a project to revise entrenched ideas about gender and identity.

The theme of childbirth that links the stories in the novel reflects Figes's awareness of the way in which this crucial human activity has been relegated to the background or not represented in fiction.

Birth and death are the elementary facts of life, but because of the way we live now they are pushed into the background and we are hardly aware of them except as the almost abstract limits of personal existence. Pregnancy is carefully concealed, the dead body is discreetly removed by an undertaker.⁷

Significantly for this study, Figes includes the two taboo areas of birth and death as areas that have been abjected from awareness today. Her revision thus consists of representing areas of human experience that appear to threaten the boundaries of rational human life.

Contemporary debates such as the viability of home births versus hospital deliveries are recontextualized within this social history focusing on the management and control of the female body. The history of the transition from childbirth as a female-oriented practice to that undertaken only by medical experts has received much attention by feminist scholars. Many commentators on pregnancy and its medical context have isolated as systemic some kind of dual relationship to the definitions offered by various dominant forces. On the one hand, there is the lived experience of pregnancy and

⁶ Eva Figes, *Sex and Subterfuge: Women Writers to 1850* (New York: Persea Books, 1982) 56.

⁷ Eva Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society* (New York: Persea Books, 1970, 1986) 36. In this early work of feminist analysis, Figes ranges through religion, anthropology,

childbirth, and on the other, the various medical and social contexts that circumscribe them. In Nature Displayed Jordanova has demonstrated that the gradual domination of the medical profession over childbirth involved protracted and bitter disputes over the expertise of the midwives who had delivered babies thus far.⁸ In addition, in her history of the medical care of pregnant women, The Captured Womb, Oakley examines the ‘medicalization’ of pregnancy until the present day in British medicine. There are two main stages in this process:

The first stage consists of its incorporation into medical discourse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a ‘natural’ state; the second is its gradual redefinition as pathology—as a medical phenomenon akin to illness: this process has really only become marked in the period since 1950....⁹

Oakley shows the way in which the development of medical instruments such as the forceps accompanied and ensured the rise of male dominance over what had been a female sphere. Adrienne Rich’s evocative phrase describes this as the shift from hands of flesh to hands of iron.¹⁰ That this was a battle involving bitter disputes between the claims of midwives and surgeons is reflected in this quotation from a male-authored advice manual published in 1789. In his Advice to the Female Sex in General, Particularly those in a State of Pregnancy and Lying-in, Dr. John Grigg declares his own superior expertise, writing that,

It is much to be regretted, that there are yet many of the [female] sex, who are prejudiced in favour of ancient, erroneous opinions and customs, and thereby

psychoanalysis and evolutionary science to draw attention to patriarchal constructions of gender throughout history.

⁸ Ludmilla Jordanova, Nature Displayed: Gender, Science and Medicine 1760-1820 (London and New York: Longman, 1999).

⁹ Ann Oakley, The Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) 12.

¹⁰ Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Womanhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago, 1977 and 1997) 128.

exclude themselves from the advantages they might reap by consulting those who are better acquainted with the human frame, and have acquired a much greater share of this species of knowledge, than others can with any reason be supposed to be in possession of.¹¹

That this battle between male medical authority and the knowledge of women is by no means entirely in the past is reflected in Gordon Bourne's Pregnancy (1975), one of the authoritative texts for women up to the present.¹² Bourne derides the personal experiences of childbirth as they are passed from woman to woman thus: 'the majority of old wives' tales are essentially destructive or demoralizing....Probably more is done by wicked women with their malicious lying tongues to harm the confidence and happiness of pregnant women than by any other single factor.'¹³ It is not surprising that feminist novelists and critics would see such castigation of women's experience as problematic and wish to reaffirm positive aspects of such oral traditions. However, the dichotomous world view in which male science is distinguished from female nature is not restricted to male chauvinism; it is also reflected in disturbing ways in some feminist, and particularly ecofeminist, discourse.

The history of dividing the world up into male science and female nature has been examined by Ludmilla Jordanova in Sexual Visions.¹⁴ Jordanova shows that the polarization of female and male practices into stereotypical dichotomies is reproduced even in contemporary accounts. The following schema illustrates gendered ideas that persist in this debate:

women

men

¹¹ Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born, 144.

¹² Gordon Bourne, Pregnancy (London: Pan Books, 1975).

¹³ Bourne, Pregnancy, 6-7.

¹⁴ Ludmilla Jordanova, Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the 18th and 20th Centuries (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1989).

creative
life and inheritance
plain English
'you'

destructive
threats to life and inheritance
foreign language of 'science'
'them'

She summarizes: 'The female side is life-giving and lovely, it is the realm of nature. By contrast, the male domain of science embodies a threat to life.... The language of women is plain, direct and our own; that for men is doubly alien in that it is 'scientific' and hence abstruse, and 'foreign', that is, of the other.'¹⁵ As has already been shown, this picture has been complicated somewhat by women writers such as Weldon who appropriate the terminology of 'male' science to re-examine internal processes and portray the interpenetration of medical and personal accounts of the body. Moreover, Emily Martin has demonstrated that middle-class women have also on the whole appropriated the medical framework to express their bodily experiences, whereas lower-class women have tended to use a discourse that reflects their experience in colloquial language that is more resistant to medical models of womanhood and the body.¹⁶

In addition, historical accounts of the ways in which pregnancy and the foetus in particular are conceptualized can help to supplement our consciousness of these features as 'natural' or ahistorical. Barbara Duden's analysis of the historical concept of the foetus also attends to the influence of race and class upon the ways in which women are encouraged to think about a pregnancy in terms of a foetus within a 'population.'¹⁷ She notes the way in which interview questions build up the conceptual framework of a slum pregnancy in New York, characterized by such parameters as 'normal development, risk,

¹⁵ Jordanova, Sexual Visions, 161.

¹⁶ Emily Martin, The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, 1992).

¹⁷ Barbara Duden, Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn Trans. Lee Hoinicki (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1993) 27.

expectancy, social security payments, and the like.’ Duden contrasts the experience of a recent immigrant to Harlem with that of her mother and surmises that the pregnancy she undergoes as a result of this particular context would radically alter the nature of the pregnancy; that of her mother is construed as being more sensual, warm, touchable, familiar.

Further, a dimension that is highly relevant to this novel is the environmental and ecological implications and repercussions of reproductive theory and technologies. In an essay that explores the issues involved in fertility and infertility, Irene Diamond inquires ‘whether ecofeminism could provide some greater clarity on the contemporary restructuring of procreation and birth,’ emphasizing the contrasting ethics that inform the areas of ecofeminist philosophy and modern medicine. Diamond asserts the following:

Whereas this dominant masculinist ethic leads to dissecting human reproduction into ever more micro and more ‘manageable’ parts, with the explicit goal of improving the operation of the perceived components, alternative ethics of interconnectedness would take heed of the intricate webs that link the birth and well-being of all animals—human as well as nonhuman—with the health of the Earth’s ecosystems.¹⁸

Rather than replicating essentialist categories of universal male and female orientations, Diamond sets up a framework in which ecofeminism forms a practice informed by the insights of ecology and ‘an ethic of interconnectedness.’

Diamond contrasts medical processes that fragment the body into ever smaller parts, like microcomponents of the machine model it is based on, and a philosophy that would attempt to revisualize the body in more holistic terms, as being an integral part of a living ecosystem. Diamond notes that the debates in which discussion of new medical

¹⁸ Irene Diamond, ‘Babies, Heroic Experts, and a Poisoned Earth’ in Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds., Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism (San Francisco:

and reproductive technologies takes place tend to focus on narrowly technical issues, while issues relating to the social body and environment recede into the background. The question posed by Diamond as to whether an ecofeminist orientation could provide new insights into the ways in which procreation and birth are structured today will be addressed here with regard to a novel which provides a particularly compelling example of ecofeminist ethics. Whether the history of midwifery and the rural past in Figes' The Seven Ages forms not only a revision of women's history, and the practices of midwifery and witchcraft, but also constitutes a model of an idealized and nostalgic past must also be examined here.

The ascendancy of medical science over midwifery, the silencing of women's voices in history, and the lived experience of the body in a particular setting are some of the issues that Figes depicts in her historical account of the experiences of pregnancy and childbirth from the Middle Ages to present-day Britain. The novel belongs to the tradition of pastoral retreat, discussed by Terry Gifford in his work on the pastoral tradition in Britain.¹⁹ The decision to live in the country signals a mental as well as a physical withdrawal from life in the twentieth century, and it provides the narrator with a way of communing with spirits of women from the past. The novel moves from the 'dark ages' into the present, valorizing the knowledge of women of the past, as well as re-evaluating the darkness itself, as the voices assert themselves in the stillness of the night. Thus, Figes overturns the thematics of Enlightenment science, which places emphasis on the power of light to drive away the shadows of ignorance, in favour of an epistemology based not on vision, but hearing, and an emphasis on the 'situated knowledges' of women

Sierra Club, 1990, 201-210) 208.

¹⁹ Terry Gifford, Pastoral (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

of the past.²⁰ The imagery of fire and water are metaphors that link the protagonist not only to place, through such images as the underground spring or the bonfire, but also to time, as these devices enable the voices of historical women to be heard. The narrator's bonfire for her old midwifery texts creates the medium through which the voices of the past arise.

Habitat is a central element in the storytelling. The herbs that formed such an important part of the knowledge and folk medicine of the past are still present and form an environmental connector for the narrator with the past:

There seem to be less than there were, but once you begin to look hard in the long grass you find them easily enough, small blue flowers, yellow or white. Star-shaped, or cupped like a bell. Single or clustered. And I hear forgotten words coming into my head, I hardly know from where, whispered on the night wind like a sigh: stitchwort and mugwort, archangel and milfoil, cinquefoil, catamint and bugle...Vervain. Fumitory. Mullein and mouse-ear hawkeye. Eyebright and periwinkle (2).

Notably, this evocation of plant life bypasses Linnaean Latin names for the flowers, as the names given were used by the inhabitants of the past to whom these were vitally important forms of flora. Memories of wildflowers taught to the narrator by her grandmother combine with other stories of the ancestors of the past, forming a feminine tradition in which the knowledge of herbal remedies and midwifery passes from one generation to the next.²¹ The term 'culture of habitat' used by Gary Nabhan could be

²⁰ Donna Haraway employs the term 'situated knowledges' in her attempt to revise scientific epistemology. See 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives' in Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991, 183-202) 184.

²¹ For a fascinating account of the battle between the experts and the healers, see Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers (Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1973). They record that the Liber Simplicis Medicinæ, written by St. Hildegard of Bingen (A.D. 1098-1178) lists the healing properties of 213 varieties of plants and 55 trees, as well as dozens of mineral and animal derivatives (36).

aptly employed here to describe the importance of this botanical knowledge for the ethnomedical drugs used by successive generations of women for childbirth.²² Figs describes the feminine cultures of this rural past as well acquainted with the properties of wildflowers and herbs. And while men such as monks were also conversant with this knowledge, they are excluded from this account as not central to the process of childbirth.

The continuity between the people and the land is extended, furthermore, through imagery in which the human is conceived as embedded in nature through an imagery that links bodies to leaves, graves to compost. Successive generations leave their mark upon the land and continue to inhere in place, just as fallen leaves form the rich soil of compost. The metaphors for history employed here suggest an organic continuity in which such figures as humus, rhizomes, and roots connote not merely the linear succession of patriarchal genealogies, but a more secret, underground continuity that may have been obscured and unknown. Thus, the relation of person to place is no longer conceived in terms of figure and ground, but gives way to one in which the person *is* place: dreams, person and place are deeply interpenetrated.

The narrator looks out upon this vista: 'The horizon flushed pink and gold, outlining what is left of the old woods, mile upon mile of it, stretching back into our dreams, the leaves of long ago underfoot, rich and dark, nourishing roots and soil in diminishing layers of humus' (17). It is not only 'vista' in the sense of a view that is looked at, but one constituted by the unseen layers that make it up. The link between the human and the land becomes explicit in the following passage:

²² Gary Nabhan, Cultures of Habitat: On Nature, Culture and Story (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1997). Nabhan uses this term to describe the ways in which the indigenous peoples of the Southwest United States use local knowledges of plants as food, herbs, and medicine to illustrate ways that stories encapsulate certain forms of ethnobotanical knowledge.

Generations come and go, tenuous as the leaves now falling. A little bit of humus in the soil, or a thin wisp of grey smoke rising. A few more names chiselled in the churchyard, and the earth underneath fed, as I feed my compost heap in the corner under the trees and let the leaves lie (63).

The past generations literally enrich the soil, just as they metaphorically deepen knowledges of being in place. An environmental practice such as working over the compost of household remains is employed as a metaphor of embeddedness in the land, in place, and in history. In turning over the layers of history in the novel, Eva Figes undertakes the 'shifting [of] the ground' recommended by Rachel Stein in her work of the same title, effectuating a radical change in the ways that women's place in history is configured.

The world of the novel emphasizes gender polarization and dualism. If the feminine tradition is portrayed as one characterized by its lifegiving and nurturing capacities, the male line is depicted as unremittingly involved in war-mongering and violence. From the first warlord, Edwin, to the generations of men involved in World Wars I and II, Figes creates a world in strikingly dualistic terms in which women represent positive values, while men are portrayed as, if not deliberately violent, then harmful in other ways. The suppression of the traditions of midwifery links succeeding generations, from the burning or drowning of witches to the elimination of herbal remedies in favour of 'physics' prepared by doctors of divinity, and the replacement of midwives by doctors. The circumstances in which childbirth takes place change radically as it is envisioned increasingly within a medical model. The storytelling that took place to distract the woman in labour gives way to foetal monitoring, as the stories of experienced midwives are silenced and the authoritative voices become those of medical

practitioners. The implications for the novel in an age that increasingly favours discourses that place value on speed, information and uniformity are suggested in Figes' highly innovative and 'writerly' text.

Though it could well be argued that childbirth *is* inherently dangerous, and that contemporary medical science has to a large extent removed the dangers that threatened women of the past, Figes records the fatalities that took place during the transition from traditional practices to medicalized births. As Oakley confirms in her account of the history of childbirth, the innovation introduced by early doctors and persisting until the mid-nineteenth century was the use of leeches or other forms of bloodletting. The cessation of menses during pregnancy was regarded as an imbalance that had to be redressed by often violent forms of treatment. Figes dramatizes this history in the dispute that takes place between a practitioner of Gallenic medicine, visualizing illness in terms of imbalance between the four humours, and a doctor of divinity who favours alchemy. Driven to temporary insanity, fevers, and finally, loss of consciousness by the meddlings of these doctors, the female patient bears silent witness to the objectification of the pregnant woman. A recurring feature throughout this history is the use of incomprehensible terms on the part of the doctors: the jargon changes, but its use to obfuscate and thus to distinguish the rising profession from laypersons persists across the centuries.

The female body is the terrain upon which battles of knowledge, power and authority are fought through the periods of history depicted in The Seven Ages. The role of medical doctors in proscribing birth control is shown when one woman is advised to keep a separate bedroom as difficult births annually threaten her life. When she inquires

obliquely about contraception, knowledge that is obviously available to the doctor's wife, he cites a litany of conditions that would result: 'Acute metritis, leucorrhoea, ovaritis, hyperaesthesia, hysterical mammary congestion, menorrhagia, haematocele...' (157). The battle for mastery of the female body thus takes place linguistically, through the use of abstruse terms; here again male science is depicted as competing against female nature. A descendant in the early twentieth century is horrified when she discovers that a pamphlet written in simple language that a child could understand had been locked away for more than a century and a half. Thinking of the lives that had been lost due to ignorance regarding means of birth control, she becomes mobilized to fight for birth control in the early twentieth century.

Discourses of control that operate to subjugate the female body are seen to shape and transform the land as well. During the early nineteenth century, the manor house that is central to the story is transformed as a result of the new capital gained from enterprises in the colonies. Although the slave trade is not explicitly named as this new source of wealth, it is clearly alluded to in the figure of the little black boy who is brought back to wait upon the lady of the house. Thus, bodies of colonial others, as well as the bodies of women and the labouring poor are equally acted upon by master narratives of domination.

The landscape itself is transformed through the new conception of landscape gardening—'with pastures flooded to be a lake, and earth moved, whole slopes about to flatten one place and make a hill in another'—and though the men of the village are happy to receive extra wages to drain ditches and build roads, such work destroys the habitats in which women locate the simples required for herbal medicine. Figes states,

when the old hedgerows came down, 'with them went bramble and honeysuckle, dog rose and scabious, raspberry and hawthorn, the hips and haws and cures that we knew about' (128). Figs thus recapitulates the history of enclosures that led to impoverishment of folk medicine, and thus the loss of traditional local knowledges about the body, and simultaneously impoverished the peasantry and instigated the shift from rural to urban economic development.

Figs employs the landscape throughout history to indicate visibly the dualistic gender roles occupied by men and women. The ideological poles are represented spatially through the contrasting landforms of Edwin and Emma's mound: just as Emma's mound represents a continuity of women's knowledge and covert practices for health and childbirth, so does Edwin's stand for the darker forces of weaponry, military technology, and warmongering.

The hyper-separation between the poles of men/science and women/nature depicted in the novel persists into the twentieth century, as the American airbase is sited on the land of Edwin's mound and groups of women mount a protest against the dangers of nuclear weaponry. The land is repeatedly conceived as a chessboard upon which the strategies and military operations of men is played out. The chessboard motif is reiterated in the frame story of the present, when a neighbour is revealed to be a retired military man whose hobby is chess and the logic of armed combat. By contrast, the hobby of his dead wife was her roses. Men are shown to use their intelligence in the services of military, medical and scientific knowledge, while women are portrayed as caring, nurturing beings who, through their involvement in the processes of reproduction, remain immanent within nature. Stories regarding the changing histories of childbirth, birth

control, breastfeeding and the status of women help to buttress the fiction that throughout history women are universally closer to nature. And while class differences are shown as radically altering the way in which women live, woman is depicted as essentially not only closer to nature than man, but also inherently morally superior.

For ecofeminists who are committed to challenging the negative implications of the linkage of women to nature, this assumption of a dualistic opposition between men and science and women and nature is problematic. The linkage of woman to nature is also shown as a consequence of socially and historically-determined roles that deprived women of privileged knowledges that were vigorously defended by men to maintain female subordination. In the twentieth-century time frame, it is significant that the polarization between women and men, and midwifery and medicine, breaks down with the figure of the daughter training to become a doctor. She welcomes such advances as foetal monitoring that provide new visual access to the state of the foetus while immobilizing the female body. Such superior new technologies seem to render the knowledge of the midwife mother obsolete. Here Figs indicates criticism of a form of post-feminism that while benefiting from the knowledge and political struggles of women of the past at the same time denigrates woman-centred approaches.

However, if women are portrayed as less bound to nature in the contemporary frame, there is no denying the persistent depiction of men in terms of their deployment of abusive power and authority over women and the poor, or their continued portrayal as purveyors of war. Here, women are repeatedly characterized as those who look after the land, while men fight over it, conceiving of it only in terms of territory or for purposes aesthetic and economic. When, at the conclusion of the novel, the narrator gives up her

retirement in order to support the women protesting against the nuclear weapons base, she is enlisting in a fight against the wars that have been shown as erupting sporadically for more than a thousand years, and her part is stereotypically determined in advance by her gender.

However, the potential outbreak of war at the end of the twentieth century disrupts the history that has been represented thus far as cyclical: Figs writes,

This time there would be no hope. The cold new moon would rise on a lunar landscape, as stark and dead as itself. None of the old familiar landmarks, hillside and wood, and seasons changing. No sudden beauty to make the heart ache. No lesser celandine breaking through winter in hedge bank and wood, and no eye to see it even if it should do so (184).

The access to greater scientific knowledge has resulted in the technology that would bring about the end of history, if not life on earth. Here, it becomes apparent that the novel of history, as Steven Connor points out, is involved with 'the investigation of its own possibility' in a world that prepares to face the possibility of its own ending.²³

Connor notes that if one form of the novel of history relates to the past,

Another form is concerned with the possibility of narrating a future, and with the assailed potential of narrative as such in a world in which absolute finality and closure, which had hitherto been available to human life only through narratives, now threatened to bring to an end the narrative of human history.²⁴

The narrator hears all the voices of mothers through the ages— a chant of despair in a world that continually proves to be 'no world to bring kids into.' Yet, as the narrator acknowledges, this occasion is unlike the others that have repeatedly occurred over the ages as the threat is qualitatively greater. The conclusion of the novel portrays the re-

²³ This is Steven Connor's thesis in The English Novel in History, 1950-1995 (London: Routledge, 1996) 199.

²⁴ Connor, English Novel, 199-200.

awakening of the narrator's social conscience, as she makes the decision to engage in the battle against the proliferation of nuclear weaponry.

Just as the practices of gardening, weeding and composting arouse a sense of the aliveness of the place in which the narrator lives, here the new knowledge of the dangers of the airfield transforms place prospectively into a landscape of death. Terrence des Pres has written about the way in which nuclear weaponry alters the contours of the land into a grid, thus radically altering not only the land but also dramatically changing the relationship of self to place.²⁵ Further, he wonders about the implications that such a conceptual revision of the natural landscape will have for language and poetry. He asks, 'under nuclear pressure, should poetry contract its domain?'²⁶ Des Pres registers the solipsistic retreat from reality that may occur in despairing response to such unfathomable realities.

In Figes' account, on the other hand, although the centuries past are filled with the sufferings of women, her story is in many ways an optimistic one, inasmuch as it shows some of the gains women have made in achieving autonomy, power and agency. The song of the protesters, *Can't kill the spirit*, resonates with the spirits that have been attended to throughout this history of successive generations of women becoming mothers—women struggling against the forces that would gain control over their bodies and the land. The Seven Ages forms a rich tapestry of diverse voices and experiences,

²⁵ Terrence Des Pres, 'Self/Landscape/Grid' Writing into the World (New York: Viking Penguin, 1996) 175-184.

²⁶ Des Pres, 'Self/Landscape/Grid,' 177. He continues, 'Nature remains the mainstay of our [American] poetry. Natural imagery makes us trust the poem, suggests a permanence at the root of things, and every poem about nature bears somewhere within it the myth of renewal and rebirth. But from the nuclear perspective, these ministrations falter. Permanence? Rebirth?' (181).

illustrating one of the aspects of women's history, an unwritten history of the body, that had yet to be told fictionally.

This return to the past serves not to view history with nostalgia, but to mine the riches of what has been lost in order to build a more sustainable and equitable future based on the refusal of war. Figes shows that the history of childbirth is intimately linked to a parallel history that records the degradation of the land, and demonstrates that hope for the future and the energy to sustain battles against the forces of destruction is provided by mothers seeking a better world for their children. Here Figes employs the device of the collective protagonist, as the narrator joins with other women to protest the use of the nearby military base. This narrative move into a collective centre suggests a way forward beyond the personal and private spheres in which women have experienced loss of power. In so doing, Figes acknowledges the wider social origins of the problems of female and environmental subordination and implies that the forces of continuity that have structured the novel thus far can only be overcome by women overcoming ideological differences and joining forces.

However, an ecofeminism that demonizes the masculine while valorizing the feminine is constructed on the same dualism as the sexism against which it is fighting. As Plumwood suggests, 'It is not masculine identity pure and simple, but the multiple, complex cultural identity of the 'master' formed in the context of class, race, species, and gender domination, which is at issue.'²⁷ Similarly, Armbruster has warned that 'an unproblematic focus on women's connection with nature can actually reinforce the "master" ideologies of dualism and hierarchy by constructing yet another dualism: an uncomplicated opposition between women's perceived unity with nature and male-

associated culture's alienation from it.'²⁸ In her discussion of women in society in Patriarchal Attitudes, Eva Figes concludes that the system of patriarchy must be changed socially, not on the analyst's couch: 'Now and in the future patriarchal attitudes will benefit no one, least of all the men.'²⁹ Yet the effect of her novel appears to confirm the continuation of essentialized forms of masculinity and femininity through history. The Seven Ages, while reflecting an intensely ecological view of the human as embedded in place as well as time, is nonetheless limited in its vision by a version of ecofeminism constructed within the dualism of woman as procreative, man as destructive, that remains blind to its own limitations.

As Joni Seager puts the problem in her extensive analysis of forms of women's environmental activism, maternalism-based activism that is not informed with a broader feminist analysis 'reinforces the notion that women's most useful and natural role is "bearing and caring," and that women's public activities are primarily appropriate only insofar as they remain rooted in this maternalism.'³⁰ At the same time, Seager demonstrates that no matter what form women's activism takes, gender always comes into play in public perceptions, as when activists from Rachel Carson to Lois Gibbs are characterized as 'hysterical housewives.' This is perhaps further reason to steer clear of associations that explicitly link women to stereotypical womanly activities when fighting environmental battles. In her discussion that analyses the conflation of women with peace and men with war, Susan Oyama examines various biological discourses, noting

²⁷ Val Plumwood, Feminism and the Mastery of Nature (London: Routledge, 1993) 5.

²⁸ Karla Armbruster, 'Buffalo Girls, Won't You Come Out Tonight: A Call for Boundary-Crossing' in Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy, Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy (Urbana and Chicago: Illinois UP, 1998. 97-122) 98.

²⁹ Eva Figes, Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society (New York: Persea, 1970, 1986) 185.

³⁰ Joni Seager, Earth Follies: Coming to Feminist Terms with the World Environmental Crisis

their rhetorical flaws and limitations, and pithily concludes: ‘Men are not a plague, and women are not a cure.’³¹ It is the unfortunate effect of The Seven Ages that Figes’ reconstruction of patriarchal history through the history of childbirth tends to emphasize a continuing duality between the sexes. Yet in focusing on the quasi-oxymoronic conjunction of the figure of ‘wartime babies,’ Figes dramatizes the struggles of women to produce new lives in inhospitable environments: rather than depicting mothers as disempowered piètas, she invokes bodies that, in the words of Stacey Alaimo, form ‘a place of vibrant connection, historical memory and knowledge.’³²

The Seven Ages gestures toward a fiction that is ecological in orientation, not only in its subject matter, but also in its form. Rather than a ‘potted history,’ Eva Figes has created that supremely ecological form, the *composted* history. This is a history that is redolent of the soil, a history formed by and built upon the earth, a palimpsestic site containing the physical remains as well as the ideological remnants of past generations. The plea made by E.M. Forster at the conclusion of Howard’s End— ‘only connect!’— is echoed in this novel so completely, knitting together as it does social history, personal consciousness and a geography intermingled with its political structure, that it makes all the more glaring the sense of disconnection between the men’s and women’s worlds depicted here.

The Seven Ages represents the novel form as a kind of literary gardening, as the persistence of the compost metaphor makes apparent. Figes digs through the rich layers

(New York: Routledge, 1993) 278.

³¹ See Susan Oyama, ‘Essentialism, Women and War’ Evolution’s Eye: A Systems View of the Biology-Culture Divide (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2000) 131-141.

³² Stacey Alaimo, ‘“Skin Dreaming”: The Bodily Transgressions of Fielding Burke, Octavia Butler, and Linda Hogan’ in Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, eds., Ecofeminist Literary

of history to reveal the continuity of women's embodied experience across the ages, and in mixing the discrete layers, indicating here the particularities of one period, and there, continuity despite difference, develops a richer mixture of person, place and history. This awareness forms the ground for collective action based on a new consciousness of what it has meant for women through the ages to bear children that serve as soldiers in the wars that intermittently and unremittingly punctuate history. The conclusion of the novel forms a refusal of the perpetuation of this 'naturalized' history in the ages to come.

Cyborg Possibilities and Reproductive Monstrosity in Fay Weldon's The Cloning of Joanna May

Science, more than any other investigative and descriptive activity, creates and conceals the context from which it arises.¹

The possibilities of pregnancy and biological reproduction are re-examined in a different light by Fay Weldon in her novel that considers abortion, false pregnancy, and the development of the process of cloning. Technoscientific developments enable Weldon to develop new plots, multiply characters, and explore the wide-reaching implications of lives lived under the shadows cast by nuclear and genetic science. In this tale, nuclear disaster, fragmentation, and unbounded experimentation conjoin to produce a world that is both topical and only slightly ahead of its own time. Weldon indicates the extent to which the scientific disasters that are writ large upon the landscape and atmosphere are also inscribed with frightening effect on women's bodies. The ecofeminist premise that I am investigating here is that elements from the personal, bodily sphere have their counterpart on the larger geopolitical canvas of the land; thus I relate the biomedical 'advance' of cloning to the technology of nuclear energy also depicted in the novel. My emphasis here is on the contextual dimensions of the novel, particularly as they relate to cloning and nuclear science in the Britain of the late 1980s. Toxic discourse is employed to denote the anxieties arising from the threats to the female body from biomedicine, and to the larger landscape from nuclear disaster.²

¹ Barbara Duden, Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn Trans. Lee Hoinicki (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1993).

² I am indebted to Lawrence Buell for the use of the term 'toxic discourse.' He defines it as 'expressed anxiety arising from perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by human agency.' See Buell, 'Toxic Discourse' in Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Bellknap Press of Harvard UP, 2001. 30-54) 32.

The plot of Fay Weldon's The Cloning of Joanna May could be expressed in brief as the following tabloid headlines: 'Mad scientist aids angry husband to clone wife!' 'Childless woman discovers her four lost babies!' 'Woman splits into five!' The stuff of tabloid sensationalism is the subject of Fay Weldon's postmodern fiction about technoscience, biomedicine and the place of the individual situated within these spheres.³ Valerie Hartouni asks in her discussion of medical cyborgs from the same period:

What makes these headlines make sense? Why might they seem sensible today when only twenty years ago they would certainly have been preposterous? ...What beliefs, assumptions, and expectations allow them to be coherently rendered, taken seriously, understood as 'fact' rather than 'fiction'? What is the world they simultaneously construct and contain? What are the stories they tell about reproductive possibilities, relations and relationships..., and what is the terrain they occupy and contest in that telling?⁴

As Valerie Hartouni reminds us, the 1980s was a period in which 'public discourse and debate have seemed obsessively preoccupied with women and fetuses.'⁵ Published in 1989, The Cloning of Joanna May envisions a future in which human cloning is possible, if not desirable, and attempts to examine the problematic possibilities of such new reproductive technologies. What may have seemed an improbable tale at its inception has now come well within the realm of possibility. After the cloning of Dolly the sheep by British scientists and the imminent cloning of humans, the realistic possibilities of Weldon's novel are amply apparent.⁶

³ Fay Weldon, The Cloning of Joanna May (Glasgow: Omnia books, 1989, 2000).

⁴ Valerie Hartouni, 'Containing Women: Reproductive Discourse in the 1980s' in Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, Technoculture (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991. 27-56) 28.

⁵ Valerie Hartouni, 'Containing Women,' 33.

⁶ Fay Weldon also wrote an article about cloning Dolly ('But Has Dolly Got a Soul?') for the Mail on Sunday 1997, which is found in her collection of essays, Godless in Eden (London: Flamingo ed., Harper Collins, 2000. 209-212). She writes about the two scientists who created Dolly, the origin of the sheep from an anonymous cell from one sheep and the mammary cell of the other (hence Dolly, from Dolly Parton) and muses about the desirability of such unnatural creatures. She quotes from her novel written eight years earlier as if to illustrate her sibylline powers of prediction. Weldon concludes, 'For all Dolly is a clone,

One of the aspects to be emphasized in this discussion is the fictional context created by Weldon for the staging of this story: the post-nuclear disaster world of Chernobyl. I would like to ask how this particular time and setting, with its emphasis on the global environment and its uncertainties, signifies in the staging of the particular biomedical event of cloning. For, as Donna Haraway asserts, 'stories ... are excruciatingly historically and culturally specific, whether acknowledged as such or not.'⁷ Weldon's account of cloning takes place in the rhetorical shadow cast by the greatest nuclear disaster to date, and thus new techniques of reproductive biomedicine and the language of DNA are imbricated with the technologies and self-justifications of the technoscience of the nuclear power industry.

Lawrence Buell has claimed that the literature of industrialization 'has tended to worry more about determinism than that which has focused on rural scenes.'⁸ The form of determinism that Weldon had previously interrogated in her examination of the 'biological body' in Puffball is transferred in this novel to the terrain of experimental scientific advances in Cloning. Although most approaches to Weldon's novels foreground the fictionality of her work, in this chapter I will emphasize the (environmental) referential aspect of the novel as I take into account the specific historical and cultural context surrounding the fictional events.⁹

she's a most agreeable sheep; one might almost think she had a soul' (Godless, 212).

⁷ Donna Haraway, 'Cyborgs and Symbionts: Living Together in The New World Order' in Chris Hables Gray, Steven Mentor, and Heidi J. Figueroa-Sarriera, eds., The Cyborg Handbook (New York: Routledge, 1995. xi-xx.) xix.

⁸ Buell, Endangered World, 131. Buell ascribes this tendency to 'the force of traditional liberal beliefs in the corruptibility of human institutions relative to natural law and in the countryside as a space of refreshment.' As we have seen, both natural law and the nature of the countryside have been targets of Weldon's earlier fiction.

⁹ For such approaches, see Finuala Dowling, Fay Weldon's Fiction (London: Associated UP, 1998); Lorna Sage, Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists (London: Macmillan, 1992); Patricia Palmer, Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory (New York and London: Wheatsheaf, 1989); and Lucie Armitt, Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic (London: Macmillan, 2000).

The circumstances in which Joanna's husband, a captain of industry, and the head of the Britnuc corporation, undertakes to create clones are extremely suggestive in their implications for the interconnected states of pregnancy and the related roles of paternity and maternity. As the victim of an abusive childhood in which he was confined to a dog kennel and starved of both the material and mental comforts of mothering, Carl May requires Joanna to agree to his condition not to have any children. When she becomes pregnant with a phantom pregnancy, Carl seeks revenge for what he regards as an unforgivable betrayal. Under cover of a pretence to have the embryo terminated, Carl May has an ovum removed which he then clones into four parts with matching chromosomes and identical DNA. It could be said that he is merely obeying the clever dictum dreamed up by Fay Weldon in her earlier incarnation as an advertizing copy writer, 'Go to Work on an Egg.' However, in stealing Joanna's ovum, Carl also joins the company of actual scientific researchers who have used less than transparent methods of obtaining ova for *in vitro* fertilization experiments.¹⁰

The phantom pregnancy, arising out of maternal desire and imagination, suggests a long history of philosophical and medical speculation regarding the role of the mother with respect to foetal life. In Monstrous Imagination, Marie-Helene Huet traces the debates of philosophers from Aristotle through the Enlightenment concerning the maternal contribution to the unborn child. Monstrosity was generally attributed to the mother's unbridled imagination which then imprinted itself upon the unborn baby. Huet points out that, whereas in general the woman's contribution to

¹⁰ See Genoveffa Corea, 'Egg Snatchers' in Rita Arditti, Renate Duelli Klein and Shelley Minden, eds., Test-Tube Women: What Future for Motherhood? (London: Pandora Press, 1984 and 1989) 37-51. Her account of the difficulties of research scientists in obtaining ova for experiments is illuminating. Her questions regarding the motivation of such research are also suggestive: 'Why are men focusing all this technology on women's generative organs—the source of her procreative power? Why are they collecting our eggs? ... Why do men want to control the production of human beings? Why do they talk so often about producing 'perfect' babies?' (45).

generation was never considered equal to that of the male, it was in cases of monstrous births that the mother was seen to exert a significant, and detrimental, influence. The mystery of hereditary resemblance, sometimes favouring the father, at others the mother, was felt to be adequately explained by the role of the maternal imagination, which, as Ambroise Paré wrote in his treatise of 1573, was capable of reproducing the father's form and face because of 'the mother's great ardour and imagination during carnal copulation.'¹¹ Joanna's phantom pregnancy thus bears the suggestion of parthenogenesis, which has been both feared and reviled by men through history.

Joanna's account of her life in the novel, centring on the revelation that she has been cloned, describes a Godless world that comes into being with the deployment of methods used to control reproduction through contraception, abortion, and finally, genetic experimentation. As Joanna puts it, 'And God the Holy Ghost flew off the day Dr. Holly of the Bulstrode clinic, back in the fifties, took one of my ripe eggs out and warmed it, and jiggled it, and irritated it in an amniotic brew until the nucleus split and split again, and then started growing....' (155).¹² The horror of cloning derives not from its creation of new life, but more especially, its replication. It is thus the antithesis of natural birth within the context of evolution and potential change. As Gillian Beer has stated, 'It replicates; it refuses deviance; it is the strongest form of artificial selection yet invented.'¹³ However, even within the pre-determinations of

¹¹ Marie-Helene Huet, Monstrous Imagination (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard UP, 1993) 15.

¹² Val McDermid uses a variation of this idea in her crime novel entitled Blue Genes (London: Harper Collins, 1986). Engaging the new technologies of fertility treatment, artificial insemination, DNA testing and *in vitro* fertilization, McDermid examines the social issues of lesbian motherhood and access to these expensive technologies. Her story involves a physician who substitutes her own ova in fertility treatments, thus implanting and reproducing without pregnancy or marriage. Although this medical fraud raises serious concerns in the novel, the death of another physician is followed by the hope that 'someone, somewhere is making babies with her eggs' (237).

¹³ Gillian Beer, Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983, 2000) xxiii. Beer illustrates

cloning, difference may emerge. Weldon locates this narrow margin and exploits it to the fullest in her depiction of cloning.

The Godless world of the laboratory is a world that could best be described as post-natural: nature has also been excluded from the world created there. Nevertheless, despite the efforts of technocrats such as Carl May, nature returns; dismissed to the margins, it comes back in the form of cataclysms such as the windstorm with which Weldon begins her narrative, the biology of the characters, and the predisposition of radioactive elements to have toxic effects. Weldon's novel thus juggles the 'mothers, monsters and machines' singled out by Braidotti as constituting the nodes of important stories about feminism, science and technology in the late twentieth century. For Braidotti, 'the task of thinking adequately about the historical conditions that affect the medicalization of the maternal function forces upon us the need to reconsider the inextricable interconnection of the bodily with the technological.'¹⁴ This new interconnection of mothers, monsters, and machines also has a positive dimension, arising from the splitting of motherhood into various physiological, social and cultural functions. In staging the birth of clones as cyborgian reproduction, with a mother whose children are simultaneously her siblings and her twins, The Cloning of Joanna May explores various issues, aesthetic, ethical and biological, connected with the replication of human life.

This novel places monstrosity front and centre, and in common with the history of monsters, this figure partakes of contradictory characteristics, containing both the ominous and the exceptional, the monstrous and the miraculous. The monstrous is shown to bear multiple meanings in Jeffrey Cohen's study of the monster as part of

this point with reference to Borges' story about the rewriting, word for word, of Cervantes' Don Quixote. Produced in a new context, the work takes on radically new meanings.

¹⁴ Rosi Braidotti, 'Mothers, Monsters, and Machines' in Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory (New York: Columbia UP, 1994. 75-94) 94.

cultural theory. Cohen indicates that the monster is first and foremost ‘a code or a pattern or a presence or an absence that unsettles what has been constructed to be as natural, as human.’¹⁵ For Cohen, the body of the monster must be read as the product of a determined cultural setting and moment; it always escapes, but returns to particular moments of history, bearing with it ever renewed meanings. Cohen asserts that ‘the monster polices the borders of the possible; every monster is in this way a double narrative, two living stories: one that describes how the monster came to be and another, its testimony, detailing what cultural use the monster serves.’¹⁶ Provocatively for the events of this novel, Cohen suggests that while the feminine has long been regarded as monstrous in patriarchal society, ‘when they threaten to mingle, the entire economy of desire comes under attack.’ The figure of the monster is simultaneously a figure of desire (as in Haraway’s ‘Promises of Monsters’¹⁷) and a source of anxiety; it is this ambiguity and contradiction at its source that makes it such a pregnant figure for interpretation. Finally, the monster is the figure of abjection par excellence: as Kristeva describes it at the outset of Powers of Horror,

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, fascinates desire, which, nonetheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects.... But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.¹⁸

¹⁵ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., ‘Monster Culture (Seven Theses)’ in Monster Theory: Reading Culture (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1996) ix.

¹⁶ Cohen, ‘Monster Theory,’ 15.

¹⁷ Donna Haraway, ‘The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others’ in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds., Cultural Studies (New York: Routledge, 1992. 295-337).

¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection Trans. Léon S. Roudiez. (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 1.

Kristeva's theory of the unassimilable provides an explanatory gloss for Carl May's motivation and Joanna's response to the clones. It is worth bearing in mind that although Weldon's treatment of her topic is comic, her plot includes such dark elements as a staged abortion, two murders and large-scale nuclear 'events'.

The study of teratology, which utilizes monsters to arrive at knowledge into the causes of abnormality, is concerned largely with questions of origins. As the French philosopher Georges Canguilhem asks, 'How can such monstrous creatures be conceived?'¹⁹ As indicated earlier, the role of the maternal imagination, in conjunction with the activities of the devil, was viewed over most of the course of Western European history to be responsible for creating monsters. Thus, in Fay Weldon's novel, it is significant that what propels Carl May to the desperate act of cloning his wife is just such an act of wilful female imagination that culminates in an hysterical pregnancy. Female excess, here represented as pregnancy, is shown as stimulating and inciting male violence. Treating the female body as a problem to be solved by (excessive) reproduction aligns Joanna with the metaphorical image of woman as 'walking womb': she asks, 'Is this the sum of woman then—to be the instrument of reproduction, a walking womb; the pulsing, gurgling, bloody redness inside the whole point of her being?' (200). The refusal of woman's body to respect decent boundaries between itself and another initiates Carl's action. In punishing Joanna for her presumption, Carl reduces his would-be transcendent wife to her biology. Rather than murdering her, a tactic reserved for the transgressive men in the novel, he exacts revenge by exaggerating her reproductivity in a grotesque travesty of her desire. Cloning mimics Joanna's hidden desire for a baby, yet also extrapolates it into monstrous multiple births.

¹⁹ Georges Canguilhem, Le Normal et le pathologique (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966).

Although the biomedical phenomenon of cloning is a recent development, the history of the male fantasy of male-born children dates from the distant past. From the alchemists' efforts to produce the homunculus through Frankenstein's monster to the test-tube babies of today, men of science have tried to imitate and appropriate female processes of procreation. In her essay linking the mother with monsters and machines, Braidotti describes the way in which the study of monsters was transferred in the late eighteenth century to the hospital, or to the newly-established institution of the anatomy clinic. The science of teratology had become an experimental science that would lead to the modern science of embryology, replacing the sense of wonder of the fantastic and the loss of fascination about the organism to a restructuring of categories that differentiated the normal and the pathological. In the twentieth century, the monster, which is derived from the Latin verb *monstra* (meaning to warn, show, or to give sign—now the modern verb *demonstrate*) became reduced to abnormal beings known as freaks whose purpose was to stage difference.²⁰ Leslie Fiedler notes the necessary connection between the commodification of the monster as freak, or object of display, and the twentieth century medicalization of monsters and the scientific grasp of their generative secrets.²¹ Thomson sums it up thus: 'The prodigious monster transforms into the pathological terata.... in brief, wonder becomes error.'²² Thomson briefly outlines a history of the monster, in its transformation from an object of wonder to that of the freak, showing that the

²⁰ Rosi Braidotti, 'Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: On Teratology and Embodied Differences' in Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti, eds., Between Monsters, Goddesses, and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine, and Cyberspace (London and New Jersey: Zed books, 1996. 135-152) 141.

²¹ Fiedler's discussion of the reception of his book Freaks forms a brief cultural history of the monster as perceived by poststructuralist literary criticism and the biomedical profession. He makes the observation that more 'malformed' babies had been allowed to die by what they (euphemistically) call 'removal of life supports from inviable terata' than had been killed by ritual exposure in ancient times. See Fiedler's foreword to Rosemarie Garland Thomson, Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body (New York and London: New York UP, 2000).

²² Thomson, Freakery, 3.

discrete high scientific discourses that now pathologize the extraordinary body—genetics, embryology, anatomy, teratology, and reconstructive surgery—were at one time linked to the carnival display of the freak body. One of the questions to be examined here is the meaning of the figure of the clone in Weldon's novel: dark portent of a godless universe or corporeal joke, a multiplication of the possibilities of the individual?

Whereas the men in Weldon's narrative are engineers, industrialists or research scientists, and are thus aligned with technoscience in creating monsters, whether nuclear or biomedical, the role of mother is depicted here as similarly complicit. Despite her lack of involvement in the cloning process, once she finds out about it, Joanna must choose one of three alternatives: to let Carl kill them (as he has hinted); to intervene to save them, but without becoming involved in their lives; or to assume the role of mother. The issues associated with Joanna's 'motherhood' are complex and intersect in telling ways with problems posed in Frankenstein. Frankenstein's monster argues that the man who created him has a responsibility to be his parent. For Ellen Moers, this is the aspect of Shelley's novel that is 'most interesting, most powerful, and most feminine: ...the motif of revulsion against newborn life, and the drama of guilt, dread and flight surrounding birth and its consequences.'²³

The clones with which Joanna is confronted are far from newborn: they are in their early thirties, their prime, while Joanna is sixty. The revulsion she feels is an intensification of the feelings of jealousy a female parent may have for a younger, more attractive version of herself: the mother archetype represented by the fairy tale of Snow White. Revulsion is also a consequence of the 'unnatural' nature of the clones: as replications of her genetic pool, they threaten the integrity of her selfhood. Not only is Joanna now split five ways, strangely mirrored by her younger selves, but

²³ Ellen Moers, 'The Female Gothic' in Literary Women (New York: Doubleday, 1974) 81.

these monstrous others paradoxically bear the imprint of an uncanny sameness. Her abjection of her other selves thus hinges on the simultaneous difference and sameness of the clones: the horror derives both from the repetition of the original and their otherness. As Carl taunts, 'there are many of you and many of you...and that means there are none of you because you amounted to so little in the first place' (108). If the clones represent repetition of Joanna's very individuality, threatening her sense of self, this self-identity is illusory, for the dividing line between human and posthuman is decisive.

Joanna's passage from her initial revulsion to the desire to know, the epistemophilia that is always concerned with the desire to know origins, places her within the conceptual realm of technoscience:

I felt what it was to be Dr. Holly, to want to find out: I felt the pleasure of it. I felt what it was to be Carl, and want to change the world: I felt the power of it. But most of all, I wanted to see what I would be, born into a newer, more understanding world: one which allowed women choice, freedom and success (202).

Though a victim of malicious experimentation and wilful fraud, Weldon's protagonist recognizes that the desire to know, this unbridled thirst for knowledge, is not restricted to men. However, her longing for knowledge is also of a more intimate kind as it promises revelation of an alternative self, what her life might have been like if only.... This is the knowledge of gods and is potentially dangerous, always transgressive. Yet, if Mary Shelley castigates the creator of the monster for his desire to overreach the gods by undoing mortality, Joanna's desire for knowledge is less culpable. It could be argued that in wishing to see her alternative selves and to acknowledge the various forces upon their lives, she illustrates a different mode of knowing, that of the 'strong objectivity' or 'situated knowledge' called for by feminist scholars of science (the terms are Harding's and Haraway's respectively.)²⁴

²⁴ See Sandra Harding, 'Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques' in Linda

Whereas research science experiments upon others, viewing them as objects in an experiment, Joanna's desire to know suggests an access to knowledge about the self, a self-reflexivity and self-implication that are absent from the standard experimental paradigm. It is this kind of self-implication in the life of his creature that Frankenstein flees in his rejection of the thing he has brought to life.

If Joanna's childlessness has meant a lack of connection with others, the chance to meet her laboratory-created, cyborgian others represents an opportunity for self-renewal and development: as she puts it, 'not devastating, frightening, shocking any more—just how very *interesting* to see how it all turned out. What fun it would be—that rare commodity' (202). Discovery of these new lives rekindles in the deadened Joanna 'pleasure, animation and excitement'—thus the clones that had appeared to threaten her individuality and unique subjectivity are agents in her rebirth as mother, sister, and twin. However, the question that Katherine N. Hayles poses in a different context is germane to this novel, 'Are humans and cyborgs next of kin, or lifeforms alien to each other?'²⁵

Julie, Jane, Gina and Alice. The clones of Joanna signal the changes in kinship in the newly complex world of artificial reproduction, aided by *in vitro* fertilization, gamete *in vitro* fertilization (GIFT), artificial insemination, and cloning. The bodies created by such technologies are at once cyborg, hybrids born of the marriage between high technology and the human organism, and human, born in the usual way and raised by ordinary families. But as Hayles points out,

J. Nicholson, ed., Feminism/Postmodernism (London: Routledge, 1990, 83-106) and Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and Privilege of Partial Perspective,' Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991).

²⁵ See N. Katherine Hayles' provocative discussion of human subjectivity and cyborg identities entitled 'The Life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman' in Chris Hables Gray, Steven Mentor, and Heidi J. Figueroa-Sarriera, eds., The Cyborg Handbook (New York: Routledge, 1995. 321-335) 331.

whereas it is possible to think of humans as natural phenomena, coming to maturity as a species through natural selection and spontaneous genetic mutations, no such illusions are possible with the cyborg. From the beginning, it is constructed, a technobiological object that confounds the dichotomy between natural and unnatural, made and born.’²⁶

For Weldon, though originating in the uncanny process of cloning, which creates multiple doppelgangers and splits the self, these bodies share the problems and personal issues of ordinary people. For the clones, as other humans, the embodied self is tripartite, consisting of bodies viewed as phenomenally experienced, lived individual bodies; social bodies, what anthropologists term a natural symbol for thinking about relationships among nature, society and culture; and bodies politic, artefacts of social and political control.²⁷ It is upon the latter categories that Joanna places her emphasis in seeking to discover the permutations that the culture and society of a different period will have upon her other selves. We may add that Weldon is not only interested in the social and political inscriptions of culture upon the body, but also places emphasis upon the role of economics as a significant force in determining embodied existence. Thus, the middle-class selves Julie, Jane and Alice practise disciplinary regimes such as diet and exercise, while their lower class counterpart Gina, with three children and an abusive husband, is unkempt and overweight.

Although Weldon’s fiction enters into intertextual dialogue with Frankenstein, her story suggests the liberatory potential of such transgressive beings as clones. In contrast to the intensely somatized character Liffey in Puffball who is depicted undergoing the bodily changes wrought by pregnancy, here Joanna is freed from the necessity of bearing the babies herself, yet becomes a mother. The plot of this novel may constitute a reply to Shulamith Firestone’s declaration that ‘pregnancy is

²⁶ Hayles, ‘Life Cycle,’ 321.

²⁷ Adele Clarke, ‘Modernity, Postmodernity & Reproductive Processes ca. 1890-1990, or “Where do Cyborgs Come From Anyway?”’ in Gray, Mentor, and Figueroa-Sarriera, eds., Cyborg Handbook, 140.

barbaric...the temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of the species' and that women should be freed from 'the tyranny of reproduction by every means possible.'²⁸ If test-tube babies are the answer for women, surely the experimentation and control surrounding their production must not remain in the hands of improper patriarchal control. Yet if all technologies are formed by the context out of which they have arisen, the desire for test-tube babies is more likely, as Weldon suggests here, a male desire for the control of reproduction. As one physician has already claimed, 'That's what I do: make babies.'²⁹

Weldon employs the familiar elements of the Frankenstein-like scientist-overreacher (here doubled by the evil technocrat Carl May), but despite the malfeasance involved in their genesis, the clones possess lives of their own that exceed and are not determined by the questionable ethics that created them. These multiple selves provide Weldon the postmodern novelist with the chance to perform identical twin experiments: to tease out the effects of nature and nurture and to conduct her own modest genome experiment. In an age notable for debates characterized by biological determinism, in which unravelling the separate strands of DNA is said to hold out the promise of understanding the deepest elements of our humanity and our particular embodiments as individuals,³⁰ Weldon suggests that nurture has the determining role in developing the future self. The disparate

²⁸ Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution (New York: William Morrow, 1970) 188, 193.

²⁹ See Genoveffa Corea, 'Egg Snatchers' in Rita Arditti, Renate Duelli Klein and Shelley Minden, eds., Test-Tube Women: What Future for Motherhood? (London: Pandora Press, 1984 and 1989) 45. Dr. Richard Levine, a founder of Surrogate parenting, made this claim.

³⁰ For a discussion of the implications of the belief in biological determinism, see especially R.C. Lewontin, The Doctrine of DNA: Biology as Ideology (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1991). Lewontin describes as biological determinism as a theory like an 'all encompassing and usually rather simplistic "discovery" about the secret of human social and psychic existence. It's all sex or money or genes. ...On the other hand, if one's message is that things are complicated, uncertain, messy, that no simple rule or force will explain the past and explain the future of human existence, there are rather fewer ways to get that message across' (vii).

environments in which the four girls were raised determine far more than their genetic heritage their qualities as women. Yet the narrative teases the reader with patterns of similarity and difference between the original and her replicates. Initially figures of monstrosity or horror, the clones augment rather than diminish Joanna, and together, they combine forces to remake the nuclear family and recreate their lives. Weldon suggests that scientific ingenuity cannot wholly determine the product; that there is still space for chance, for wonder, and for self-determination.

Yet to interpret Weldon's clones exclusively in terms of a postmodern sense of liberatory freeplay is to ignore the darker spatio-temporal context within which the story is set. Joanna's discovery takes place in the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster, a specific chronotope that does not refer to a cataclysm 'over there', thousands of kilometres away, but rather one that has important implications for health, safety and well-being in Britain. Not only is Weldon concerned to document the various responses of her characters to the disaster, but she also brings the consequences of the nuclear waste industry closer to home with references to Windscale (later Sellafield) in the form of Carl May's corporation, Britnuc.

Here the perpetrator who has cloned Joanna without her knowledge coincides with the corporate leader responsible for the unsafe conditions within the nuclear waste industry and who is involved with a massive cover-up of the safety hazards there. The ecofeminist claim that patriarchal violence upon the female body is mirrored by large scale despoliation of the natural environment would find confirmation in Weldon's fiction. Parallels could be drawn between Carl's 'termination' of Joanna's hysterical pregnancy through lies and the massive public relations cover-up of the Britnuc accident to manage a similarly 'hysterical' public. The fact that Carl May is exceptionally evil does not rob Weldon's story of wider applicability, for she also notes the interweaving of workers, company and government officials who enable and abet Carl's wrongdoing on a global scale.

Allusions to nuclear power are frequent, almost throw-away references in the novel, as when May's young mistress Bethany is shown reading The Layman's Guide to Nuclear Power. In a fiction that is largely tied up with issues of knowledge and power (viz. May's changing of the Latin tag *Scientia est potentas* [Knowledge is power] to Knowledge is empowerment), Bethany's motive for reading is to understand the industry that pays her way. As Carol Cohn has pointed out, even nuclear resisters must learn the complexities of the language, the acronyms and theories of nuclear power in order to speak at the table.³¹ The disaster at Chernobyl in April and May of 1986 had been long feared, but in the event, seemed strangely inconsequential. The scale of such radioactive exposure was unprecedented, yet the effects would take time to manifest themselves and so would remain abstract, unimaginable. Richard Kerridge discusses the equivocal impact of Chernobyl upon the British public, noting the variety of responses it provoked. Fears that one's worst nightmares had been realised were swiftly followed by news of successful containment. As Kerridge writes,

Everything had gone back to normal. The environmental crisis is elusive like this. Much of it is solidly quantified in statistical reports of pollution levels, global-warming projections, data about health, records of deforestation and lists of endangered species, but the meanings of these items are much less stable. They can grow in significance until they overshadow everything else; they can shrink until they are almost forgotten. Notoriously, environmental issues come and go in public consciousness....³²

This flickering of awareness, resulting in attitudes that alternate between paranoia and forgetfulness in the days following Chernobyl, is well portrayed here. Patterns of denial, dissociation, avoidance and atavism are observed. People go to the beach as usual, but then have second thoughts about its safety; one character leaves a smoky

³¹ Carol Cohn, 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals' Signs 12:4 1987, 687-718.

³² Introduction by Richard Kerridge in Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammels, eds., Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature (London: Zed, 1998. 1-9) 1-2.

waiting room to go outside and sit in the fallout; what to serve for dinner becomes a serious question; a gardener continues to tend his plants despite the new hazard that is represented by 'outside.' Others are described as panicking. The emergency becomes reconfigured as a public relations problem: Chernobyl must be managed in a way to reassure the public about the safety of nuclear power in Britain.

In response to the actual emergency posed by Chernobyl, the British government responded first by reassuring the public about the safety of food consumed, insisting that Chernobyl had not had a significant effect on Britain. Before the extent of contamination became known, the Ministry of the Environment claimed that the effect was negligible: in the words of the headline reporting their findings, 'A lot of fuss about a few millisieverts.'³³ Weeks later hundreds of thousands of sheep and lambs were withheld from the market, a belated but suggestive response. One of the meanings of Chernobyl is that, despite the feared demonstration of the instability of nuclear power plants and the ever-present possibilities of human error, it was framed largely as a Soviet disaster, arising out of cost-cutting, worker incompetence, and faulty materials. This event served to inoculate the public in capitalist countries against the fear of the same event ever occurring in the presence of superior Western management and resources.³⁴ At the same time, it was used to scapegoat findings of radioactivity that were detected near power plants in Britain; since 'the government does not routinely monitor radioactivity around its two most important and controversial installations' elevated findings could be attributed entirely to fallout from Chernobyl.³⁵

³³ Marilynne Robinson, Mother Country: Britain, The Welfare State and Nuclear Pollution (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1989) 177.

³⁴ Marilynne Robinson cites a case in point, in which Walter Marshall, head of the Central Electricity Generating Board, claimed that no such accident could occur in Britain because 'the overriding importance of ensuring safety is so deeply engrained in the culture of the nuclear industry that this will not happen in the U.K.' (Robinson, Mother Country, 162). See 'UKAEA Report Indicts Soviet RBMK Design,' Nuclear News, August 1987, 68.

³⁵ Robinson, Mother Country, 178.

In the novel various public relations stunts are discussed— since ‘the public can’t tell a roentgen from a rad’ (227)— and it is decided to use someone from the commercial sector since the public doesn’t trust officialdom any more. Weldon slyly indicates a reason for the lack of faith in government announcements when she points out that the erstwhile duty engineer at Windscale during the fire of 1957 is now Head of the Nuclear Safety Inspectorate. One might almost accuse Weldon of outrageous exaggeration, but for the fact that this detail is true.³⁶

In a conversation to a Department of Energy official, Carl confirms that there is no additional radioactivity from any outside source at either Britnuc A or B. He adds, ‘...this is hardly surprising since our instrumentation is not designed to pick any up’ (43). Carl May knows that it is not in the Department of Energy’s interests to ensure that they meet stricter standards of safety, and taunts him with the excessive information he provides. Later, when Britnuc has had an accident, faulty instrumentation is one of the causes attributed to it. Again, one might accuse Weldon of wielding too broad a brush in her satirical depiction of the nuclear power industry in eighties Britain except that her details are here too also based on fact.

Sometimes accidents, or events as they are called, do occur without prompting in relation to the fuel rods of the old magnox stations. Such events do happen—it hardly seems to matter much. No one’s going to swim in the pools, are they! What does it matter, if the dials go round a second time, a third time, a tenth time, and no one notices—or in this particular case, cares to notice, gets

³⁶ Dr. John Dunster was health physicist with the UKAEA, which was in charge of the plant at the time. He later became director of the NRPB (National Radiological Protection Board) which is responsible for setting the maximum permissible radiation exposure standards for the public as well as workers in the nuclear industry. For a detailed overview of Sellafield’s chequered history, see Peter Bunyard, ‘The Sellafield Discharges’ in Goldsmith, Edward and Nicholas Hildyard, eds., Green Britain or Industrial Wasteland? (Cambridge: Polity, 1986) 252-266. See also Jim Slater, ‘Dumping Waste at Sea’ in the same collection, 267-272, and Bunyard’s ‘Radiation and Health,’ 273-283. Sandra Steingraber also describes the conditions surrounding Sellafield with special attention to the leukemia cluster at Seascale and the excellent resource of the cancer registry provided by the NHS in Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment (London: Virago, 1999). John May’s The Greenpeace Book of the Nuclear Age (London: Gollancz, 1989) deals with this issue globally and breaks the discussion of Windscale, Sellafield into three parts to correspond to accidents in the 1950s, 1970s and 1980s.

paid to notice, gets paid not to notice; who's to say what goes on, no skin off anyone's nose.... The old-fashioned dial readouts should have been converted to digital display long ago, but if management is mean, mean, whose fault is that? (247).³⁷

The element of gauges that register 'normal' despite actual hazardous contamination again appears unrealistic, even farcical, but in fact refers to the actual event uncovered in February 1979. High-level radioactive waste had been accidentally diverted to a tank in disused building B701 at Sellafield. Although a comprehensive survey had been undertaken in 1976, the fact that the radioactive liquid, in the wrong place, had overflowed the tank and had filled the sump below went unnoticed. Thus, the sump gauge read 'normal,' but was in fact on its second circuit round the dial.³⁸ The truth is indeed stranger than anything Weldon could invent.

Weldon sardonically sets out the problems that have been associated with the British waste management industry, noting the connections between managerial incompetence, information guarded by a wide-sweeping Official Secrets Act, cost-cutting equipment, and insouciant attitudes regarding public safety measures. The episode that causes Carl's death, a leap into the (radioactive) coolant pool mimics a PR event that took place in 1983. After an accident that made the Department of Energy decide to close off beaches 25 km. on either side of the plant, Junior Energy

³⁷ Marilynne Robinson's excoriating attack on the nuclear industry in Britain in Mother Country examines the concern of governments, watchdog committees, and the industry itself with economics above safety issues. Published in the same year as Weldon's novel Cloning, it contains many of the same concerns about the massive cover-ups characteristic of the nuclear power and waste industries. Describing the plant at Sellafield, which removes plutonium from spent rods from the nuclear power plants worldwide and dumps it into the ocean, Robinson translates the official jargon, which uses terms like 'low-level waste' into language that acknowledges its consequences: 'So the effluents from Sellafield, insofar as plutonium is concerned, are low-level and low-activity; that is, widely distributed and with us forever' (145). She writes, 'In Britain Sellafield's profitability is considered a sufficient answer to every objection. The prospect of diminished profitability is sufficient to postpone improvements in the functioning of this old and primitive plant' (28-9). In her discussion of the way in which the British nuclear industry regards every safety hazard or accident chiefly as a public relations problem, she anticipates Weldon's fictional treatment of this phenomenon.

³⁸ See May, Greenpeace Book for detailed accounts of the three major incidents in the history of Sellafield.

Minister Giles Shaw took a swim on a beach near Sellafield 'in order to calm public fears.'³⁹ Witness also Carl's televised drink of a cup of milk to show that it is safe, despite suspected radioactive toxicity in the region, in the same spirit of reassurance and deception.

Sellafield's apotheosis from death trap to tourist mecca is also portrayed in the novel. Carefully landscaped to fit into a setting of natural beauty, Britnuc, 'the focus of a nation's terror, the very fount of paranoia', is transformed into a site that is visited by tourists.⁴⁰ It is in this setting that Carl May stages the PR event that would result in his death by cancer when he leaps into the coolant pool with his photogenic escort. Not content to achieve immortality through his building projects, nuclear plants, and cloning, Carl possesses the hubris of the Greek tragic hero. He is not only eager to manipulate nature and to attempt to perfect it through genetic experimentation, but he also appears to believe that he is beyond the constraints of nature altogether. That this is always an error is shown when Carl's death follows swiftly upon his public demonstration of the safety of the coolant pools.

However, Weldon is not content to be a moralist in the conventional sense, meting out justice to those who overstep human humility. Rather Weldon shows that Carl remains irresistible to women, who are attracted by his money, power, and sheer energy. The clones, like Bethany, wrongly believe that they could manage him better than Joanna, and ultimately, Joanna finds that he is still the man she loves. Carl is thus cloned, Alice gives birth to the baby, and Joanna raises the new 'little Carl'. The loving home and good environment provided for little Carl does not change his fundamental nature as contained in his genes: Carl at three has discovered that he can

³⁹ Jeremy Hall, Real Lives, Half Lives: Tales from the Atomic Wasteland (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996) 171.

⁴⁰ In 1987 Sellafield received 104,000 visits from tourists, and in May 1989 received the Institute of Public Relations' top prize, the Sword of Excellence, for the acclaimed public relations programme entitled 'Restoring Confidence in Sellafield.' See May, Greenpeace, 274. These are ironies that are not lost on Fay Weldon.

terrorize a flock of seagulls. The new generation will have learned nothing from the old, biology will triumph, and once again, non-human nature will cower at the margins to which it has been relegated. Monsters always escape and they always return, albeit in a new form, with new meanings, promises and threats. The conclusion suggests that the loaded questions that The Cloning of Joanna May asks have shifted from whether new reproductive technologies such as cloning are possible and desirable to whether humans will continue to exist in the highly engineered, error-filled physical context of the Sellafields and Chernobyls of the future.

Looking to the nature novel for treatments of the postnatural world may well be a mistake. Urban novels can be a fictional site in which the mechanisms that sell nature while legitimizing despoliation of the environment are laid bare. Here economics and politics are interwoven with psychological, social and aesthetic issues to dramatize fully the ingredients at stake in a commodified world. Weldon suggests the inherent problems with discourse that would use genetic technological advances to subjugate women in new ways, yet at the same time, she shows that people are much more than their biology and can transcend genetic heritage to a certain extent. Yet the novel clearly shows the commercial interests that are implicated within the new technologies and depicts the way in which consciousness lags behind the actual transformation of the environments in which we live.

Weldon's satirical look at cloning reveals the motives of the 'egg-snatchers' to be less admirable than the glorious rhetoric they employ, and at the same time, dramatizes the global consequences of technologies that powerfully alter the nonhuman environment. While not directly espousing the virtues of 'reverence, humility, responsibility and care' that underlie ecocentric attitudes,⁴¹ Weldon does

⁴¹ For a definition of ecocentrism, see Timothy O'Riordan's formulation, cited by Lawrence Buell in The Environmental Imagination (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP) 425.

suggest the consequences of attitudes characterized by arrogance and motivated by commercial profit motives that operate both upon the body and the green world. She also offers a gender critical perspective on the uses and abuses of biomedical and nuclear technologies, suggesting that whereas the perpetrators of these risky technologies are males motivated by 'womb envy,' the victims of their experiments are primarily women. However, as her satire of events that have taken place in the British nuclear industry amply shows, the victims of such large scale environmental abuse are not confined to one sex, one nationality, or even one species. The monsters that emerge in this world cannot simply be dismissed to the Arctic like their earlier avatar Frankenstein's monster: they are huge, ugly and unfortunately, reproductively prolific. The Cloning of Joanna May provides a map of twentieth-century Britain that demarcates areas of danger, where 'here there be monsters.'

The Self-Made Cyborg: Weldon's The Life and Loves of a She-Devil

Women writers such as Fay Weldon and Jeanette Winterson have created gargantuan women as central characters for novels that stage a theatre of cruelty: plots that feature acts of violence unleashed by women who refuse to play according to traditional rules. Monstrosity sets these women apart and becomes an enabling force, a source of new power. These are women who eschew the feminine ideal of modesty, humility, or reticence: women who revolt not only in the domestic sphere, but also in public spaces to battle against injustice, who seek revenge for wrongs committed and rebel against the given laws of both patriarchal culture and nature. *Big Women*.¹ Yet if Weldon employs the framework of the Gothic plot, with its assumption of female victimhood and domestic violence, she does so to dismantle prevailing feminist attitudes toward female virtue and male vice. This chapter will investigate the use of the monstrous body—both as female gargantua and remodelled cyborg—to consider how these forms of embodiment are implicated in the larger questions that Weldon indicates, concerning gender stereotypes, biomedical technology, and environmental practices. As I will show in my discussion, forms of embodiment and landscape are closely linked for Weldon, as the ethics and aesthetics of beautification and land use similarly derive from an ethos of mastery.

¹ Weldon's use of the term 'big women' has a different meaning in her novel of the same title. See *Big Women* (1997; London: Flamingo, 1998). This novel concerns the vicissitudes of feminism from the inception of a feminist press modeled on Virago to what Weldon shows is its fragmentation and gradual demise in a new era.

The Life and Loves of a She-Devil concerns the self-transformation of the outsized protagonist into the ideal woman, as Ruth Patchett redesigns herself in the shape of the woman with whom her husband has fallen in love.² The diametrical opposite of the female figure of our time, the anorectic woman, the big woman is employed as a means of interrogating a politics of the body and disciplines such as diet, cosmetic surgery, and the performance of womanhood as masquerade. If, as it has been often noted, the figure of the woman itself represents a form of monstrous difference (since Aristotle), what are the meanings conveyed by the excessively large woman?³ Weldon deploys this ambivalent figure in She-Devil to explore the social and aesthetic pressures that accompany the performance of womanhood. At the same time, Weldon implies that the ideology of beauty that underlies the use of corrective surgery upon the female body has implications that extend beyond this sphere into the more-than-human environment. The mode of the carnivalesque is further applied not only to the grotesque body of the narrator and the land, but also underlies transformations in the textual conventions of the novel. Weldon foregrounds ways of establishing standards of beauty for women and thereby travesties at the same time the moral certainties of a feminism that would repudiate the importance of beauty for women. A satire that targets not only the components of the beauty myth, but that also attempts to send up the convictions and moral seriousness that would deny its importance, The Life and Loves of a She-Devil draws on the logic of reversals and parody characteristic of Bakhtinian carnival.

² Fay Weldon, The Life and Loves of a She-Devil (London: Sceptre, 1983, 1984). All references are to this edition and will be included in the text in parentheses.

³ See Marie-Helene Huet, Monstrous Imagination (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard UP, 1993). Rosi Braidotti also discusses the lineage of this idea in 'Mothers, Monsters, and Machines' in Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory (New York: Columbia UP, 1994, 75-94) 79.

If Weldon has contested the pastoral impulse that motivates the desire to return to an idealized countryside in Puffball, here she employs the oppositional genre of the picaresque to dramatize the journey of her heroine through various corridors of power. The She-Devil draws on an amoral sense of entitlement to the good life she has been denied because of her abnormal size and features that do not conform to conventional standards of beauty. Rather than attempting to change the attitudes of society, the picara, survivor figure par excellence, readjusts herself physically to existing conventional standards and norms. Here the monstrous lurks at both ends of her personal development: as both natural (gigantic) body and re(de)formed cyborg born of extensive cosmetic surgery. The novel employs what Chris Hables Gray terms a 'cyborg epistemology'; that is, 'thesis, antithesis, synthesis, prosthesis, and again.'⁴ The logic of cyborg reconstruction thus governs the transformation of the protagonist in Weldon's fable centring on an infinitely malleable female body.

If, as Jeffrey Cohen has suggested, 'We live in a time of monsters,' what kind of cultural fears and anxieties do these monsters represent? Cohen asks us to think about what happens when monstrousness is taken seriously, as a mode of cultural discourse: he asserts that 'the monster is the harbinger of category crisis.' He goes on to suggest that 'a genus too large to be encapsulated in any conceptual system, the monster's very existence is a rebuke to boundary and enclosure.'⁵ Yet the paradigm of monstrosity and madness may constitute a dead end, confining women to the paralysing and politically ineffective space of hysteria and freakery. Moreover, we may also question the efficacy, both social

⁴ See Chris Hables Gray, Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age (New York and London: Routledge, 2002) 12.

⁵ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)' in Monster Theory: Reading Culture (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1996) 7.

and political, of texts that bear central images of monstrosity. What kind of work does the monster perform in these works? Does it represent a return to marginality and outsider status for women? What is the nature of the monster as represented here, and how is it to be understood within the idea of the 'Natural'? Furthermore, does the cyborg figuration contain dangers as well as what Donna Haraway has proclaimed as 'the promises of monsters' in her essay discussing the liberatory potential of such figures for a 'regenerative politics'?⁶

I have suggested earlier that the grotesque body outlined by Bakhtin in his discussion of carnival has great potential for an ecological conception of the body. Permeable, not bounded at the edges, and in a continual process of becoming, the grotesque body overturns the classical notion of the hyper-separate, self-contained individual. In its emphasis on the 'lower bodily stratum,' it is obviously particularly pertinent to our discussion of childbearing, lactating womanhood.⁷ The problems associated with this notion, and with Bakhtin's elaboration of the concept of carnival more generally, have been the subject of much discussion within studies of Bakhtin's poetics.⁸ However, my focus here is on the applicability and problems of the figure of

⁶ Donna Haraway, 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others' in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds., Cultural Studies (New York: Routledge, 1992. 295-337).

⁷ Bakhtin's conflation of belly and womb in this formulation is an example of one of the shortcomings that must be rectified for feminist theory. Emerson notes that a translation error accounts for some of the difficulty with the term as found in Rabelais and His World Trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984). Iswolsky renders the Russian term *chrevo* ('belly/womb') as bowels and thus opposes the generalized region of digestion and reproduction as 'bowels' to 'phallus.' Caryl Emerson, 'Carnival: Open-Ended Bodies and Anachronistic Histories' in The First Hundred Years of Bakhtin (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997. 162-206) 164.

⁸ An excellent survey of the reception of Bakhtin's notion of carnival and the grotesque body is also found in Caryl Emerson, 'Carnival,' 162-206. There is a particularly valuable discussion of work that relates Bakhtin's bodily experience of famine and pain to the theory, as well as an assessment of Ryklin's discussion of Bakhtin's 'virtual body' and his theory that the concept of

the grotesque within women's writing, and particularly for a feminist poetics. With a focus on American southern writing, Patricia Yaeger analyses the function of the grotesque in her seminal study of women's fiction in the American South.⁹ She asks why this writing contains such an impressive display of 'misfits, dimwits, giant women, and lunatics.' Yaeger rethinks the grotesque in a way that attends to the specific nature of embodiment, its social and historical context, and its translation into literary form. For Yaeger, the grotesque, first and foremost, is 'inconstant, metamorphic, mutable: its uses vary, even within the same author's texts.'¹⁰ Second, she reads the grotesque both as a figure of speech and a state of mind. Third, the grotesque adds 'an element of the fantastic or the marvellous: a body magic that is fascinating, amorphous and labile—a lability that swings many ways.' And, as she reminds us, the grotesque 'pushes us to explore the ways in which every body mingles dangerously with the world.'¹¹ Her discussion of the grotesque body in a literature that relentlessly somatizes issues of gender, class and race, suggests how the theory of Bakhtin can illuminate new fictional contexts.

Yet, as potent as the grotesque figure may be, it has been suggested that the grotesque may further marginalize identities that are already marginal. Its potential for rewriting lesbian identities in particular would be limited by a use of the grotesque that would reproduce already existing notions of abject identities and freakery. Indeed, the Southern grotesque has often been viewed as conservative in its impact and thus may

the grotesque body is symptomatic of Bakhtin's response to the Stalinist terrors. I will discuss this point in greater detail in the conclusion in my assessment of the grotesque body for ecology.

⁹ Patricia Yaeger, Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990 (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2000).

¹⁰ Yaeger, Dirt and Desire, 222.

¹¹ Yaeger, Dirt and Desire, 223.

limit the creative imagination. This caveat must be kept in mind as we read the deployment of the grotesque in the gargantuan woman created by Weldon.

Weldon begins with the premise that, contrary to the common dictum, size *does* matter. Her use of the un-standardized body lays emphasis on the social forces that construct bodies, and their behaviour, as normal. Weldon shows that for women in particular, the matter of size is crucial to their ability to attract male attention and locates them within the ideology of normative and procreative heterosexuality that 'nature' endorses. Since size is determined and foreordained by nature, with woman placed as the smaller sex, upsetting the norms of 'appropriate' size in turn violates what are commonly termed the 'laws of nature.' The gigantic woman thus constitutes a form of 'outlaw': her excessive size is a violation of norms within patriarchal society, in which men are meant, if not to be masters, at least to be of superior size and strength. Virginia Woolf suggested that women have served as 'looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.'¹² The gigantic not only has obvious repercussions in terms of the sexual and social roles described here, but also, I will argue, in terms of the world of nonhuman nature, of geography and natural landscape. Cultural inscriptions upon the feminine body have corresponding implications for the surrounding physical environments in which the human is placed.

The plot of She-Devil, in which a 'woman achieves feminist goals but then turns herself by means of cosmetic surgery into her husband's mistress' is, as Weldon approvingly notes, nothing if not ideologically unsound from a feminist viewpoint.¹³

¹² Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1929, 1985) 32. Without that power, Woolf goes on to say, 'the earth would still be swamp and jungle.'

¹³ Weldon discusses the translation of her novel into the American film starring Roseanne Barr and Meryl Streep. She notes that producer Susan Seidelman had made the story much more

Weldon has also been at pains to set up for mockery certain aspects of ecofeminism, such as the desire for retreat to an unproblematic nature, and the ideals of sisterhood and goddess worship. In Big Women, she portrays the women of Greenham Common as unattractive lesbians who are suspicious of a woman who eschews dungarees and wears lipstick. Nonetheless, just as in The Cloning of Joanna May the uses of technoscience are shown to operate simultaneously upon the human body and the land, in She-Devil, Weldon juggles the twin technologies of biomedical advances and landscape engineering in ways that have important suggestions for environmental ethics. Weldon's fictional imagination operates consistently to conjoin the living world of nonhuman nature and the human body, as when she compares the hair cuts she has had throughout her life with cutting the lawn.¹⁴ I argue here that such twinned representations of bodily and geographical topographies are characteristic habits of Weldon's thought, as she wrestles with biological, as well as social and economic, determinations of contemporary life.

Size is as meticulously charted in the novel as the geographical locations of the characters: just as Ruth's placing in the suburban compound of Eden Grove is measured in terms of its distance from the urban centre and the amenities of shop and station, so is her body described in absolute physical terms. This is the application of

traditional in order to appeal to American and worldwide audiences, but typically appears to endorse the real politik of such changes: she comments, 'If...your task is to make something which will sell in Gaza as well as Sydney, not to mention these days Tashkent, you had better be as ideologically sound as you can manage' in 'Roseanne Dances' in Godless in Eden: Essays (London: Flamingo, 2000) 181. Weldon wrote this essay before actually viewing the film, however.

¹⁴ In 'Snip Snip' Weldon brings together such themes as cosmetic surgery, biotechnology, unnatural varieties of lawn, disastrous hairdos and the obsessive desire to cut or trim hair and the obsession for trimmed lawns. See Godless in Eden: Essays (London: Flamingo, 2000) 237-242. She also makes comparisons between terrain and treatment of hair, as when she comments on the use of the blow dryer in Melbourne, 'accustomed as they are to the harsh desert winds' and draws an analogy to the use of coarse non-grow grass that doesn't need trimming in L.A. and the use of spare body parts (long fingernails) and Big Hair at the beauty salon.

anthropometry—defined as a technique for the measurement of men, whether living or dead—to a fictional character. As a device for establishing norms and detecting anomalies, the science of anthropometry is an integral part of the techniques of cosmetic surgery, and thus becomes an appropriate narrative strategy in a novel that centrally concerns cosmetic bodily reconstruction. Furthermore, anthropometry is employed for the purposes of delineating concepts of harmony and symmetry that underwrite the notion of what is thought of as the ‘ideal’. Thus, the details of actual size are extremely significant in the novel, serving not only for description but also motivating and initiating a plot that centrally concerns the readjustment of a large woman to ‘normal’ proportions. Ruth Patchett is described as being six foot two to her husband’s lover’s five foot four. However, what is important is not so much the absolute measurements as their relative positions to Ruth’s husband: the fact that Ruth towers over her husband by four inches, whereas Mary is able to look up to Bobbo over an expanse of six inches suggests to readers a corresponding instability in the marital relationship. It is perceived as a natural law that a man should be taller and larger than his wife, and it is this law that Ruth violates at the outset of the novel.¹⁵ It is impossible for Ruth to be tall without at the same time putting her husband’s masculinity at risk; thus, her plot for revenge not only involves such subversive feminist acts as burning down the family home and sending her husband to prison, but also includes the more troubling anti-feminist plan to undergo cosmetic surgery to reduce her size and replicate the body of her husband’s mistress. The

¹⁵ For an interesting discussion of the historical determinations of appropriate partner size, see Sabine Gieske, ‘The Ideal Couple: A Question of Size?’ in Londa Schiebinger, ed., Feminism and the Body (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 375-396. Gieske examines portraits of couples in late eighteenth-century France, when large wigs made women imposing figures, and concludes that the pattern of a short man and a tall woman was socially insignificant in the last third of the

ideological suggestions of this story are disturbing and implicate questions about the nature of femininity, gender roles, and the role of technoscience.

Weldon's central character is an embodiment of the errors of nature, (*errores natura, monstra*). Yet Weldon refuses to naturalize the disgust that this figure inspires. nor does she espouse the naive idealization represented by the feminist/lesbian collective portrayed in the novel, which poses the masculine gaze, and the mirror, as enemy to female self-esteem. If the purpose of the monster is to *demonstrate*, here Ruth's characterization illustrates the pain of being abnormal, and particularly through an abnormality that subverts sexual stereotypes. Not only is Ruth Patchett large and clumsy, she is also depicted as ugly. Weldon is concerned to portray centrally a woman whom the world regards as one of 'the dogs, as they call us' (12). Employing a narrative strategy that alternates between first- and third-person narration, Weldon allows us to empathize with Ruth's plight, while at the same time objectively portraying what is done to her from an external perspective, that of the surgeons. Weldon's protagonist is a woman who recognizes the way she is 'placed' in the world as a result of her physical attributes. For Ruth, escape from the misfortunes of a malformed body also entails escape from the suburbs: she complains, 'And I am fixed here and now, trapped in my body, pinned to one particular spot' (9). Escape for Ruth Patchett is thus to be achieved both by bodily and geographical modifications of her existence: she will attain the body of Mary Fisher and secure a place out of the suburbs, taking over the secluded lighthouse of Mary Fisher's idyllic existence. As Ruth has fully internalized the desired qualities of the perfect woman, she is the ideal candidate for cosmetic surgery.

eighteenth century. This essay is an interesting discussion of the social and cultural effects of being, or more relevantly to Weldon's novel, *becoming* a certain size.

The male gaze that has been located as a central problem by feminist theorists reaches its ultimate development in the art of cosmetic surgery.¹⁶ Here the gaze serves not only to objectify woman and fix her in the agentless position of object of desire as amply described by feminist film theory, but also initiates the reshaping of the physical body in more material ways. As Anne Balsamo indicates, ‘cosmetic surgery is not simply a discursive site for the “construction of images of women,” but a material site at which the physical female body is surgically dissected, stretched, carved, and reconstructed according to cultural and eminently ideological standards of physical appearance.’¹⁷ These processes are set in the foreground of She-Devil in graphic ways, as each aspect of Ruth’s body is systematically measured, analysed, found abnormal, and brought into line with her ideal. Carole Spitzack indicates that cosmetic surgery deploys three overlapping means of cultural control: confession, surveillance and inscription. She describes the physician’s gaze as one that constructs the female figure as pathological, excessive, unruly, and potentially threatening of the dominant order. When a woman internalizes this gaze and fragments her own body into discrete body parts that are regarded as abnormal, whether insufficient or excessive, she transforms each part of the body as a site for ‘repair.’¹⁸ It is this intense fragmentation of the body that Weldon meticulously catalogues in Ruth’s quest for a loveable body. The plot of She-Devil replicates the processes of corrective surgery as the body is fragmented in the narrative

¹⁶ See Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) and Mary Ann Doane, ‘Technology, Representation, and the Feminine,’ in Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth, eds., Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science (New York and London: Routledge, 1990. 170-76).

¹⁷ Anne Balsamo, ed., Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1996) 58.

¹⁸ Carole Spitzack, Confessing Excess: Women and the Politics of Body Reduction (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990) 26.

by focus on one discrete body part after the other in Ruth's quest for perfection. The body of She-Devil is thus a body in parts: the malleable body that has been thus far an object of celebration by contemporary cultural theorists.

The prominence of the malleable body has been noted and deconstructed by Terry Eagleton as constituting a form of blindness that is particularly symptomatic of the present age. Eagleton comments, 'The sheer givenness of the body, slim, pierce, silicone or tattoo it as one might, is also a scandal to the American dream of self-creation.'¹⁹ The postmodern insistence on the body as purely cultural construct, amenable to infinite change and reconstruction, displays the kind of antipathy to nature that is foregrounded in Weldon's work. Yet, as I will argue here, this view of the altered body is embedded within an ironic narrative that takes such reconstruction to exaggerated extremes, locating the malleable body within a carnivalesque mode that is not entirely celebratory.

The initial stage of cosmetic transformation by surgery occurs within the narrative strategy of confession. Within a feminist critique of cosmetic surgery, Spitzack asserts,

The female patient is promised beauty and re-form in exchange for confession, which is predicated on an admission of a diseased appearance that points to a diseased (powerless) character. A failure to confess, in the clinical setting, is equated with a refusal of health; a preference for disease.²⁰

As we have seen earlier in terms of the reproductive body, once medical technologies become available, one's ability to refuse them is diminished. With increasing medicalization of the body, the consumer/patient becomes subject to an increasingly

¹⁹ Terry Eagleton, The Idea of Culture (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 88. Eagleton also describes what he terms the American fascination with the carnivalesque, 'whose sprawling, licentious body represents everything that the buttoned-down puritan body is not' (89). However, this insight is marred by being embedded within a freewheeling diatribe on other aspects of American life, from political correctness to Hillary Clinton's pre-dawn breakfast meetings.

²⁰ Spitzack, Confessing Excess, 58.

numerous array of tests, drugs, and interventions. Though apparently optional, the social opinion of professionals and laypersons alike makes it increasingly difficult to evade new technologies when they are made available. It is important to bear in mind, however, that these technologies are accessible to only a small minority of the world population: as Irene Diamond notes in the context of human fertility, while four fifths of the world struggle to obtain the bare necessities of life such as food and clean water, those in the favoured Western hemisphere are beleaguered by questions deriving from conditions of affluence.²¹ Weldon is attentive to the material conditions necessary for obtaining the surgery, but this awareness stops short of questioning the availability of such technologies or weighing them against more equitable applications of technology.

Weldon demystifies the economic conditions for Ruth's access to surgery, as she carefully documents the activities that enable her to undertake such costly repair. Ironically, and somewhat unrealistically, Ruth earns money for the surgery that will bring about her revenge through the domestic menial labour that constitutes much 'women's work': as Weldon states, 'There is always a living to be earned doing the work that others prefer not to do. Employment can generally be found looking after each other's children, caring for the insane, or guarding imprisoned criminals, cleaning public lavatories, laying out the dead or making beds in cheap hotels' (119). All of this work is generally undertaken by women for little (or within the home, no pay) and helps to ensure that women remain the lower caste that undertakes the polluting dirty work. As Mary Douglas has discussed with regard to the relationship between handling dirt and social

²¹ See Irene Diamond's discussion of the problem of the greater medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth and some of the perplexities it gives rise to in 'Babies, Heroic Experts, and a Poisoned Earth' in Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds., Reweaving the World: the Emergence of Ecofeminism (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1990. 201-210).

role in Purity and Danger, 'Work performed by each caste carries a symbolic load: its says something about the relatively pure status of the caste in question.'²² Just as Ruth's revenge is acted out within the sphere of domestic activities—housekeeping, cleaning and the like—her plan is to make the domestic encroach upon and overtake Mary's pristine world; the lighthouse, situated in a wild area, 'undomesticated ground,' becomes a site of invasion by the domestic. In a blatant dereliction of maternal responsibility, Ruth sends her own children to live there, then has her mother evicted from her rest home on grounds of incontinence so that Mary has to care both for children and the elderly. Mary's home is thus radically transformed from a place of tranquillity and elegance, of canapés and champagne, to one in which children leave dirty marks on the walls and *haute cuisine* is reduced to cans of tuna fish. Ruth transforms the lighthouse from an ivory tower to a place that falls prey to the household dirt, noise, and penny-pinching that are common preoccupations of women who work in the home. She has ousted Mary Fisher from her high caste position as one who does not dirty her hands to make her over into a suburban housewife.

Indeed, She-Devil may be read as a novel in which one woman resents the 'purity' of another of her caste and sets about involving her in such 'polluting' activities as childcare, looking after the elderly, and balancing the budget. Weldon dissects unproblematically affirmative notions of 'sisterhood' and shows the resentment of a suburban housewife to a woman who has achieved independence and transcendence, and thus avoidance of the demeaning tasks of housewife and mother. What Adrienne Rich has termed 'reproductive labour,' that is, all the unremunerative labour that goes into

²² Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) 128.

maintenance and is largely performed by women, is employed as a tool of revenge.

Moreover, Rich brings out the environmental dimension of such labour as follows:

The activity of world-protection, world-preservation, world-repair—the million tiny stitches, the friction of the scrubbing brush, the scouring cloth, the iron across the shirt, the rubbing of cloth against itself to exorcise the stain...the invisible weaving of a frayed and threadbare family life, the cleaning up of the soil and wastes left behind by men and children.²³

This analysis illuminates the hidden environmental significance of women's work and suggests the link that will be made in Weldon's denouement, and in this analysis, between environmental degradation and the triumph of productive labour over the devalued forms of labour performed by women. The implicit analogy to housekeeping and earthkeeping is further extended through the She-Devil's manipulation of the land surrounding the lighthouse at the conclusion of the novel. As Mary's geographical situation mirrors her transcendent position as successful novelist, her transformation is complete when she is forced to move from the lighthouse. This diagrammatic instance of role reversal precedes the actual physical transformation of the protagonist which then illustrates further the logic of reversal and inversion operating throughout the plot.

Within the disciplinary mechanisms at play in the art of cosmetic surgery, confession represents the subject's formal acknowledgement of abnormality. Ruth does confess her desire for a more appealing self—as when she admits, 'I would have preferred to be born with little white pearly [teeth].' However, she submits to other disciplinary regimes only on her own terms: the surveillance performed here occurs with Ruth's full endorsement, and though the inscription of surgery is performed by others, she is the one who has determined the form this figure will take. She follows the time

schedule and the ideal form that she has set herself, and rather than being a passive object under the surgical knife, it is Ruth who determines the nature and the extent of the surgery, even where this contravenes expert advice. Though a victim of cultural norms, Ruth is no passive Cinderella, awaiting the magic of the surgeon's wand. Neither does she greatly resemble the pathetic figure of Frankenstein's monster, who, though admirably articulate and possessing the gifts of reason and eloquence, remains an object of pity. Ruth is both monster and overzealous modifier of Nature. In this she resembles the evil technocrat Carl May of Cloning, who is akin to Ruth in her desire to improve upon God's original idea; as she says, 'To create justice, truth and beauty where He so obviously and lamentably failed' (124). Ruth refuses to accept the laws of Nature, shown as both confining and gendered, as she is told, 'Women don't have lots of time....Unlike men.' Ruth counters that with sufficient time and money, 'Anyone can do anything' (124). That such a philosophy contains ethical problems is not fully illustrated within Weldon's novel, although it is ironically implied throughout. Ruth does succeed in obtaining the surgery she requires to become the image of Mary Fisher, albeit painfully and at great cost. The fine line between mutilation and enhancement or improvement is traced here through the dual discourses of Ruth's declaration of self-improvement and descriptions that reveal how debilitating and extensive these are. Plastic surgery has become another commodity in an increasingly commodified consumer culture, as the following quotation illustrates:

Today medicine encompasses far more than healing, saving and serving. It has become a commodity, and consumer demands beyond reasonable expectations have emerged....Perhaps medicine has overshot its marks; however, little is to be gained by looking back. We are here, practising medicine in an age where the

²³ Adrienne Rich, 'Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women,' Foreword to Sara Ruddick and Pamela Daniel, eds., Working it Out (New York: Pantheon, 1977) xvi.

wonders of technology have put in the hands of physicians what used to be in the hands of fate.²⁴

Although the question of the advisability of much elective surgery is raised here, it is summarily dismissed by a celebratory focus upon the ‘wonders of technology.’ Many of the themes of Weldon’s work are found above, including unreasonable consumer demand, surgery as commodity, the wonders of technology and the hands of fate (for fate, read Nature). Although Ruth does succeed in becoming the ideal woman she had dreamed of being by virtue of having tucks put into her legs, Weldon emphasizes the pain of the journey. A rewriting of the Hans Christian Anderson story of the Little Mermaid (‘Forget Disney!’ as Weldon advises us elsewhere), The Life and Loves of a She-Devil indicates that Ruth will always suffer the pain of walking on knives. Like the Little Mermaid, her new legs are achieved at enormous personal sacrifice; that they are achievable at all only makes the fable a more apt tale for our times. Perhaps the real monster delineated here is the sprawling figure of an unbounded biomedical-industrial complex that operates to standardize the female body.

If, as Balsamo advises us, ‘cosmetic surgery enacts a form of cultural signification where we can examine the literal and material reproduction of ideals of beauty,’ what does the novel suggest about the significance of size and ideal womanhood?²⁵ She-Devil presents us with the appalling spectacle of a woman not merely being hacked down to size, but one who elects to have it done herself. Like the anorectic, a figure of immense cultural significance, Ruth undertakes a form of surgery that will not only make her more beautiful, but one that literally diminishes her size. Reconstruction transforms her from

²⁴ Mary Ruth Wright, in Anne Balsamo, ed., Technologies of the Gendered Body, 66.

²⁵ See Balsamo, Cyborg Women, 58.

the extraordinary to someone who is merely pretty, trivial. Like the dietary regimes that women voluntarily undergo for self-improvement, the cosmetic surgery in the novel effects significant bodily transformation for beauty. It not only represents one of the many forms of self-mutilation undertaken by women, it also affects woman's place, social and cultural in the world. In undergoing this process of self-reduction, Weldon's heroine explicitly enacts the masquerade of femininity that is part of performing womanhood.²⁶ Like the transvestite appearing in drag, this mimicry of feminine behaviour and attributes draws parodic attention to the ideal. By creating a protagonist who achieves her (she) devilish goals through a subversive use of housework and extravagant cosmetic surgery, Weldon creates a horrifying spectacle of woman's socialization. Yet, on the surface, Ruth is merely employing medical technology to serve her own ends and achieve the goal of beauty she had set for herself. Rather than merely being a victim of the patriarchal gaze, Ruth, Weldon makes clear, is a self-made cyborgian woman.

The Frankenstein myth is an obvious intertextual source of reference for this tale, yet Weldon adapts the myth significantly. In Frankenstein technical advances result in the creation of a monster, whereas here, cosmetic surgery is employed to correct a natural 'monstrosity.' However, as Barbara Creed explains in The Monstrous-Feminine: 'The reasons why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience. Woman is always defined in terms

²⁶ See especially Judith Butler for a performative theory of gender in Gender Trouble (New York: Routledge, 1990).

of her sexuality.’²⁷ Moreover, she points out, that while the male body signifies form and integrity, and is clearly differentiated from the world, woman’s body is more permeable and susceptible to division. Although Ruth may be compared to Frankenstein’s monster, and is expected to look like ‘a female version of Frankenstein’s monster...with the plates of her scalp pinned together with iron bolts’ (238), she is in fact something rather more complex and uncanny: a monster made over into the image of ideal woman. She is petite, with a perky nose and upturned mouth: a combination of the Stepford Wives and Doris Day, with an interior boiling over with unrepressed rage. Ruth represents the cyborgian conjunction of body with machine, and the fusion of the rational with the feminine. Although the cyborg figure is generally construed as male with such ultra masculine attributes as the machine-like lack of emotion, enhanced power and violent capabilities, Weldon’s cyborg forms an unstable exception to the stereotype. As Balsamo has stated, ‘cyborgs and men are compatible images which mutually support cultural associations among masculinity, rationality, technology and science.’²⁸ The female cyborg thus destabilizes such associations, particularly when it is a figure of diminished physical power as in Ruth’s self-reconstruction.

Like the Frankenstein myth, the scientists mimic not only the creative ability of God, but also stand in for mothers: ‘...cosmetic surgery was pure. It made the ugly beautiful. To transform the human body, the shell of the soul, was ... the nearest a man could get to motherhood: moulding, shaping, bringing forth in pain and anguish’ (229).

²⁷ Barbara Creed, ‘Alien and the Monstrous-Feminine’ in Gill Kirkup, Linda James, Kathryn Woodward, and Fiona Havenden, eds., The Gendered Cyborg (London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 122-135) 134.

²⁸ Anne Balsamo, ‘Reading Cyborgs, Writing Feminism’ in Jenny Wolmark, ed., Cybersexualities (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999. 145-156) 150.

That the pain and anguish are not his own but his patients' is beside the point for this doctor, a former garage mechanic. (The other surgeon had abandoned a career in gynaecology, as he 'had found the burden of responsibility—the giving and taking away of life itself—too onerous') (185). Weldon's satire of biomedicine and technoscience as forms of male womb envy is further developed in The Cloning of Joanna May six years later. In a parody of the 'birth' scene in Frankenstein, Ruth's operations are accompanied by cataclysms such as an earthquake, and violent electrical storms. Comparisons are also made to Pygmalion, and the nature of the female body in culture is demystified further as the two surgeons shape, tweak, and mould the flexiwax model on which Ruth's ideal figure is based.

However, just as Weldon employs the trope of pollution to raise the spectre of unmanageable technoscience in The Cloning of Joanna May and thereby elicit doubts about the ethics of cloning, in She-Devil the work of cosmetic surgery is set in parallel to landscape engineering. If Ruth's 'improvements' upon the area surrounding the lighthouse are taken at face value, they may be read as Weldon's insistence upon the necessity to control nature. Ruth declares grandiosely, 'Even nature bows to my convenience' (255). The unreliability of the narrator, a woman who has gone to these attempts to ameliorate the landscape more ambiguous, however. So too does the remodelling of the landscape suggest contesting perspectives about modifying and improving nature. Having obtained Mary Fisher's body, Ruth then makes Mary's secluded lighthouse home her goal. However, her life there is not a return to an idealized, untouched nature. Once there, Ruth undertakes a radical transformation of the landscape in which she now resides. This raises questions about aesthetics, engineering

and the 'natural': she installs artificial copses and granite-fountained fish ponds that others find distasteful. Weldon includes alternative viewpoints to undermine the value of the narrator's treatment of the land: 'Some people say I've ruined it...but I like it' (256). The narrator claims, 'Nature gets away with far too much. It needs controlling' (256). The pathology that motivates the central character to re(de)form herself is also shown to be operational on the larger canvas of the nonhuman natural world, Weldon does not fully articulate at what cost .

Similarly, another representative of wild nature in the novel, the polar bear that is exhibited at the cosmetic surgeon's party escapes and is finally slaughtered on the clinic's grounds. Ironically, the bear is imperilled by the desire of a wildlife activist (a member of the Save-the-Bear society) to display it at her fundraising party. The landscape in which the bear is found is a strikingly artificial construct. It is a place where 'herbicides, fertilizers, insecticides and pumped water, stolen from Colorado, had created an oasis of lush and stunning green, where the facelift patients most loved to raise their bruised countenances to the dappled sun' (247). Fittingly, within the fictional world created by Weldon, the bear, as representative of the wild, or untrammelled nature, cannot escape.

Weldon shows that Nature is a site of resistance precisely because it is interwoven with issues of female identity such as procreation, body image, and politically-determined sex roles. In her analysis of feminism and nature in Undomesticated Ground, Alaimo notes 'how extraordinarily difficult it is for feminism to affirm, promote, or take refuge in nature.'²⁹ For Weldon, Nature is both a discourse

²⁹ Stacey Alaimo, Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2000) 144.

and material reality to be controlled and mastered if women are to achieve freedom from social and biological constraints.

In Cloning, the conjunction of technoscience with the landscape in the form of Chernobyl and Britnuc undermines the liberatory, transgressive potential of cloning. In She-Devil, the correspondence between body and land has the inverse relationship: the suffering visited upon the body in the form of the biomedical advances of cosmetic surgery delivers a darker meaning to the ‘improvements’ made upon the land in the form of landscape engineering. Though the narrator repeatedly admonishes us to control Nature, Weldon has constructed an unreliable voice of authority, for who would rely upon the word of the woman who was once six foot two, with tucks in her legs, ‘a comic turn, turned serious’ (256). Yet, as the novel concludes, the work of architects and builders, carpenters, plasterers, bricklayers and plumbers, constructional engineers and landscape gardeners have worked together to ensure the safety of the lighthouse against the effects of weather. This is the ultimate threshold after all: although cosmetic surgery can undermine the effects of age and gravity, the superior forces of nature remain at the margins of what technology can control. Having conquered the difficulties of ugliness, excessive weight and height—characteristics partially determined by nature in the form of heredity—Ruth takes on nonhuman nature and adjusts the very angle at which the waves beat upon her shore and the wind upon her windows. Weldon has declined to view the human in the light of evolutionary and ecological models that would constrain their freedom in any way.

This novel appears to suggest that feminism, which is fundamentally hostile towards biological constructs of human behaviour, may also be inimical to

environmentalist views that situate the human within nature in weaker anthropocentric terms. In her fiction Weldon repeatedly warns against a 'pro-nature' stance which may valorize procreation, gendered divisions of labour, and have a negative impact upon women, and the conclusion suggests that, just as the human body may be modified to suit our desires, so too may the outer landscape and built environment wholly conform, not to natural laws or specifications, but to our own needs and fantasies. Weldon imagines a woman, who being powerless to change a sexist and appearance-oriented society, simply remakes herself. In so demonstrating, Weldon emphasizes the constructedness of the body, and the extent to which it is inscribed by society and culture. Outer nature, defined as that which is given or created by God, is often viewed as a prediscursive reality, a morally privileged zone of non-intervention. The figure of the She-Devil outrageously contests the natural givens of her existence, and on one level, commentates and performs her own (feminist) liberation. At the same time, Weldon has constructed a novel based on a dialogue between the assertions made by her character and the subtext of a plot which illustrates the disastrous effect of these assertions. The instability between these positions is what makes She-Devil so significant and unsettling a novel. Though in no way espousing a philosophy that would explicitly question discourses of mastery and domination, Weldon has created a disturbing cyborg figure that enacts with ruthless rationality and faultless logic the logical outcomes of these destructive contemporary discourses. Against deeply embedded forms of cultural and personal repression, the most effective tool is humour. Embodying the doubly monstrous body of the gigantic and subsequently, the altered body of the surgically made-over woman, Ruth Patchett forms a ruthless commentary on certain feminist and environmentalist views that regard the

'natural' as inert matter susceptible to infinite correction, 'patching' and improvement. Further implications of the grotesque female body will be explored with regard to the hybrid figure of the Dogwoman within Winterson's novel Sexing the Cherry.

The Gigantic and the Miniature: Embodying Resistance in Winterson's Sexing the Cherry

The trope of the gigantic woman is similarly a salient figure of grotesque female embodiment in Jeanette Winterson's 1989 novel, Sexing the Cherry.¹ Unlike Ruth Patchett, however, the Dog-Woman (a metonymic appellation derived from the numbers of dogs that surround her) exerts her superior strength and power exultantly. Non-conformist in body as well as mind, this figure belongs to the seventeenth-century world of the Puritan revolt and Civil War. However, she returns in the form of a new character in the twentieth century, and the question of the purpose served by this grotesque figure in Winterson's narrative world will be the focus of this chapter. Here, the monstrous is not subject to remediation, but constitutes the physical form and non-conformity necessary to effect significant changes in recalcitrant political spheres. Here I will examine the rhetorical work performed by this emphasis on materiality, in alternation with the register of the ideal and transcendent, for a novel that interweaves exploration and conceptions of womanhood with toxic discourse.

It is important to bear in mind the warning that Mary Russo issues in her analysis of the female grotesque that 'There are especial dangers for women and other excluded or marginalized groups within carnival' and that what may look like revolutionary energy may be contained within the essentially conservative structure of carnival, which Russo

¹ Jeanette Winterson, Sexing the Cherry (London: Vintage, 1989, 2001).

characterizes as employing temporary reversal and a constant return to the status quo afterward.² Alongside the female grotesque, the notion of strength and superior physical health also circulates through the text through the image of ‘grafting,’ a horticultural image that refers both to gardening practices and the body. These dual concerns are signalled by the polyvalent title.

In common with The Life and Loves of a She Devil, Sexing the Cherry takes the form of a picaresque novel relating the travel and adventures of the central female figure, with the addition here of an adopted son, Jordan, as a central protagonist. Yet to characterize the novel as picaresque perhaps gives undue emphasis to the intensely physicalized episodes in the life of the Dog-Woman without taking into account the meditative, expository quality of the sections that focus on Jordan. Split between masculine and feminine sensibilities, the text seems to encode the anxieties that arise as a result of this cleavage. The dual perspectives of (foster) mother and son alternate throughout the novel in narrative passages that are signalled by the then recently-discovered exotic fruits, the banana and pineapple. Jeanette Winterson destabilizes the fixed biological categories of sex by signalling the viewpoint of each gender with emblems generally encoded in the reverse manner for the opposite sex: that is, the banana denotes the Dog-Woman; the pineapple, Jordan, thus forming a reversal of conventional semiotics based on the representation of sex difference. The dichotomy between male

² Mary Russo, ‘Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory,’ in Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury, eds., Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory (New York: Columbia UP, 1997. 318-336) 320.

and female is the first of a proliferating series of divisions in the text: between past and present, gigantic and miniature, Puritan and Royalist, fabulist and realist fiction that undergo metamorphosis, often through reversals and abrupt transformations. The novel is constructed upon oscillations between the two perspectives, which not only reflect different modes of seeing, but also distinctive physical scales. Whereas the Dog-Woman's tale focuses on the gigantic, Jordan's tale revolves around a quest for his ideal love, a creature in miniature. It is my contention that these scales with their respective emphases on material or transcendent worldviews have repercussions for ways of conceiving gender identities and also environments.

In a narrative that is largely concerned with the nature of time and space, the most highly-charged imaginative dimension is extension in time. N. Katherine Hayles has noted that in the 'life cycle narrative,' concerned with adolescence, sexual maturity and reproduction, such stories assume prominence in times of anxiety. Hayles asserts, 'As the sense of its mortality grows, humankind looks for its successor and heir, harbouring the secret hope that the heir can somehow be enfolded back into the self.'³ As we shall see, one of the realist contexts of the action is a world that is simultaneously threatened by pollution and the apathy of the general public. Winterson's novel is predicated upon polarized gender identities of masculine and feminine viewpoints which the narrative teases apart and breaks down; similarly, the temporal structure, which hinges upon

³ N. Katherine Hayles, 'The Life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman' in Chris Hables Gray, Steven Mentor, and Heidi J. Figueroa-Sarriera, eds., The Cyborg Handbook (New York: Routledge, 1995. 321-335) 334.

divergent periods of the past and present, is violated by time travellers who do not respect the absolute boundaries of time. Here spatial structure is posited not so much upon discrete spaces as a logic of fractal spatialization, in which entities re-emerge into new spatio-temporal constructs.⁴ The notion of fractals brings into focus the random, obsessively recurrent quality of the discrete chronotopes of the novel. As defined by their creator, Benoit Mandelbrot, 'fractals are geometrical shapes that, contrary to those of Euclid, are not regular at all.' The term 'fractal' was coined from the Latin word *fractus* to denote a broken stone, fragmented and irregular. To explain the term in greater detail, Mandelbrot continues, 'First, they are irregular all over. Secondly, they have the same degree of irregularity on all scales. The rules governing growth ensure that small-scale features become translated into large-scale ones.'⁵ This emphasis on reiteration amid fragmentation, and repetition on a variety of scales is the aspect that concerns us in this chapter. As N. Katherine Hayles has shown, chaos theory provides a way to think about order, 'conceptualizing it not as a totalized condition but as the replication of symmetries that also allows for asymmetries and unpredictabilities.' Here, she finds that it is akin to poststructuralism,

where the structuralist penchant for replicating symmetries is modified by the postmodern turn towards fragmentation, rupture and discontinuity. The science of

⁴ I am indebted to Katherine Hayles for the term 'fractal spatialization,' which aptly describes new configurations that occur randomly, yet in accordance with a given logic, or mathematical equation. Hayles uses this term with reference to narratives dealing with cyborgs, or the 'posthuman,' but it is equally applicable here to Winterson's postmodern fiction. N. Katherine Hayles, 'The Life Cycle of Cyborgs,' 321-335.

⁵ See Harriett Hawkins, Strange Attractors: Literature, culture and chaos theory (New York and London: Prentice Hall, 1995) 79.

chaos is like other postmodern theories also in recognizing the importance of scale.’⁶

What Winterson is writing here is a new form of natural history that is congruent with recent discoveries of physical laws that govern time and space in seemingly chaotic and unpredictable ways. At the same time, the novel is governed by a logic of toxic consciousness that not only provides a theme and motif of the action, but actually motivates the manner of its representation.

Winterson’s novel employs her memorable creation of the gigantic Dog-Woman to embody a certain way of seeing and experiencing the world. The perspective of the Dog-Woman is the mode of the grotesque, in which the body and bodily experience such as eating, drinking, sex and death are prominently displayed. Like the medal that the Dog-Woman gives to Jordan, ‘Remember the rock from whence ye are hewn and the pit from whence ye are digged’ (100), the mode of the grotesque enjoins us to remember bodily origins and experience. Jordan’s spatio-temporal world, or chronotope in Bakhtin’s terminology, is, by contrast, an idealized world of the mind, in which speculations about the nature of time, travel, love, and sexual identity take place.⁷

⁶ N. Katherine Hayles, ed., Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science (Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1991) 10-11. See also her monograph, Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science (Ithaca, New York: Columbia UP, 1990).

⁷ Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope conflates ‘time’ and ‘space’ into one term that structures them as a relationship between two fixed terms. It is derived from Einstein’s theory of relativity and is defined as ‘the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relations that are artistically expressed in literature.’ See ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics’ in Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, Michael Holquist, ed. Trans. C. Emerson. and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas P, 1981) 84. Bakhtin states

This contrast between grotesque realism and the ideal is contained in the representative figures of each domain: the gigantic body of the Dog-Woman for the former, and the idealized, miniature form of Fortunata, the love of Jordan's life, for the latter. The gigantic and the miniature occupy two distinct chronotopes and two modes of knowing and experiencing the world. It would be difficult to imagine the two coexisting, so divergent are the worlds described. The contrasting tendencies of these modes of knowledge are summarized thus by Susan Stewart:

Grotesque realism is emblematic of the body's knowledge of itself, a knowledge of pieces and parts, of disassociated limbs and an absent centre. The realism of the ideal is emblematic of the body's knowledge of the other, a knowledge of façades, of two dimensions.⁸

The point that Stewart goes on to make is highly suggestive for Winterson's text, which is divided into two dichotomous perspectives based on these modes. Stewart suggests, 'Only in the embrace is the other's body known as one's own, in parts. Perhaps this is why the grotesque has become the domain of lived sexuality, while the ideal has tended toward the domain of the voyeur and the pornographer.'⁹ That the former is representative of the female viewpoint while the latter is assigned to the male indicates that Winterson is employing stereotypically gendered perspectives here. The female perspective occurs under the sign of 'nature,' while the male perspective is emphatically that of 'culture,' cerebral, philosophical and speculative. The narrative consists of a

that its meaning within Einstein's theory is not relevant to his use of it as metaphor for literary theory.

⁸ Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1993) 115.

⁹ Stewart, On Longing, 115.

complex interaction between the visual and the corporeal; the male narrator's seeing and thinking is continuously contrasted with the feeling and sensing world of the Dog-Woman. One way to think about this difference is the way in which, as Mark Seltzer describes it, 'the subject of realism is formed from the outside in—filled, as it were, with the social' while the opposing mode of representation is that of the fable or philosophical speculation, proceeding from the inside out.¹⁰ However, although the male and female viewpoints are rendered in stereotypical ways, the characters themselves embody troubled forms of masculinity and femininity.

Jordan, as foster child of the outsized the Dog-Woman, is an androgynous figure searching for heroic manhood. Overwhelmed by the dimensions of his mother, he finds it difficult to become a man; that is, one who, by convention if not definition, is taller, larger and stronger than a woman. He finds heroism in the figure of the Royal horticulturist Tradescant, an explorer who travels to the ends of the known world in search of new botanical specimens to present to the King. Characteristically, in Jordan's narrative opening to the book, he states 'This is the first thing I saw' (9). Intensely visual, his narrative is at the same time visionary, depicting events that could only occur in dreams, as when he describes encountering himself, and tracing the lineaments of his own face opposite him. Jordan's account largely concerns mapping, both external, in his

¹⁰ See Mark Seltzer's discussion of realism with regard to the naturalist text in Bodies and Machines (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) 94.

explorations of the world, and internal, in his quest for self—his narrative conjoins landscape with mindscape.

Jordan's narrative is informed by the epigraph that precedes the story: 'Matter, that thing the most solid and the well-known, which you are holding in your hands and which makes up your body, is now known to be mostly empty space. Empty space and points of light. What does this say about the reality of the world?' (8). Winterson thus employs the perspective of quantum physics to import a new form of realism to the novel. It is no coincidence that the woman of Jordan's dreams is herself an example of anti-matter, so light that she floats and nearly altogether insubstantial. Fortunata's tale is contained within Winterson's revision of 'The Twelve Dancing Princesses,' a collection of tales that form parables about the many-faceted nature of love and marriage. Most of the tales describe the escape of the princesses from the compact of compulsory heterosexuality represented by marriage, and Fortunata is no exception. Her escape from marriage at the altar encapsulates the elusive quality that is the main component of her character, and though Jordan finally meets her after a protracted quest, she is a woman who will always escape permanent bonds. By contrast, Jordan describes his mother as 'like a mathematical equation, always there and impossible to disprove' (79). Winterson employs the two figures of the miniature and the gargantuan to suggest the analogous modes of thought that are part of their representation: the miniature corresponds to the ideal and the metaphysical, while the gigantic ushers in the world of the grotesque, of the (overly) natural.

The Dog-Woman introduces herself in the text through first-person narration and thus can give no adequate description of herself; however, the ingenuous descriptions of her effect upon others is highly comic. She poses the question: 'How hideous am I?' and the description given, while hyperbolic, appears barely adequate to the reality of her appearance. Such details as smallpox scars described as caves in which fleas may hide, or that she held Jordan in the palm of her hand when he was little, belong to the genre of the tall tale, and within its conventions of exaggeration amid factual historical information, the Dog-Woman relates her larger-than-life adventures in English history. Her tale is conveyed not only through visual imagery, but partakes of the wider realm of the senses, relating smells, touch, and sound to grotesque effect. The Dog-Woman's narrative is at once fantastic and highly empirical in order to make the unbelievable conditions of her existence credible. She partakes of the general history of the monstrous in that she was nearly sold by her father to a circus to earn her living as a freak.¹¹ Within the particular historical context assigned to her in Winterson's narrative, taking place between 1630 and 1666, this giant embodies the qualities that were abhorred by the Puritans. As Stewart points out, 'the gigantic appeared as a symbol of surplus and licentiousness, of overabundance and unlimited consumption.'¹² As celebratory sign of excess and joyful bodily existence, the Dog-Woman targets the hypocritical, life-denying

¹¹ For a history of the changing uses of the freak in history see Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000). Thomson charts the change from the idea of the 'monstrous' to the 'freak,' describing the commercial interests behind what she terms 'enfreakment.' While the idea of the monstrous contained an element of wonder, the response to the freak, on the other hand, was simple curiosity or voyeurism.

practices of the Puritans in combats both verbal and physical. As Winterson argues in her journalism, size matters, not just as a physical reality but as psychological effect: she writes,

Women are encouraged to take up less space than men. Observe the body language in any public place and you will find that while men are expansive, women are contained. Do I mean restrained? Physical space is an extension of psychic space. If you feel like a nobody, you don't need much room.¹³

The character she has invented in the Dog-Woman has nothing of the nobody about her, and unlike the figure of hulking shame embodied by Weldon's large female character, the Dog-Woman is unselfconsciously large and powerful.

The giant is conventionally depicted as a devourer, and as part of nature, as part of that which surrounds us. The Dog-Woman's role in Sexing the Cherry derives in part from this aspect of her nature. The activities signalled by Bakhtin as being particularly pertinent to the grotesque body, that is, eating, drinking, sexual activity and the like, are those in which boundaries between the self and other are dissolved. Not only grotesque then, by virtue of her size, she is transgressive in her refusal of containment. In one comic scene she snaps off a male member by biting it as one would a snap pea: here sexual activity is grotesquely transformed into literal ingestion. She dismantles the hypocritical appearances of Puritan society and exposes its inconsistencies for what they

¹² Stewart, On Longing, 80.

¹³ See 'Short Arms' in The Guardian, April 17, 2001. Winterson mocks the tactics undertaken by The Telegraph to find more women readers by making their paper smaller to make it easier for women to handle. Winterson slyly suggests that the lack of interest of women readers in this publication is due rather to the content and coverage of the paper, and goes on to examine uses of public space by men and women.

are, often by physically dismembering her opponents. The Dog-Woman accomplishes through her actions what has origins in the conceptual realm, as Puritan thinking already 'dismembered' certain parts of the body by exclusion: as in the example given in the novel of a couple making love through a hole in a sheet. If the Puritans bracket off sexual activity from visibility, even in the private domain, the Dog-Woman embodies bodily realities that force themselves into view. As Patricia Yaeger demonstrates with regard to the female grotesque, 'this [giant's] flesh is disturbing, excessive; her gigantism insists on the bodily equality of bowels, blood and breasts.'¹⁴ The Dog-Woman's grotesquely large body parts are catalogued and foregrounded in the narrative, as when she attempts to have sex for the first time and literally engulfs her partner, who needs to be pulled out with a crowbar. As Bakhtin suggests, in the mode of the grotesque, 'Those productive and reproductive organs which are its focus come to live an independent life of their own. The parading of the grotesque is often the isolation and display of the exaggerated part.'¹⁵ Thus, the Dog-Woman's private parts are likened not to the cherry of conventional slang discourse, but to an orange, in a scene that forms one allusion to the title. Here 'sexing the cherry' denotes an activity that is physically impossible, due to the giant's excessive size. As Yaeger shows, 'this excess will move us toward a rereading of class and gender hardship, toward an exploration of the excesses of a ...political system' that inhibits and confines women as well as men.

¹⁴ Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire*, 129.

¹⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 105.

Though one critic takes Winterson to task for abandoning the material realities of lesbian existence in her fabular writings, I would like to suggest that by cloaking this figure in the dress of the giant, Winterson dramatizes the joys and sorrows of deviant sexuality.¹⁶ Like the 'unnatural' figure of the lesbian, the Dog-Woman is not felt to be her parents' rightful child. As David Williams observes with reference to medieval giants, monstrosity was thought to be produced by the commingling of 'natures' that Nature meant to keep apart. He states,

the giants are intensely monstrous, for theirs is a nature produced by the forbidden mixture, not of two natures, but of three. The Judeo-Christian giant, then, is a figure whose deformation signifies the breaking of the confines of genus as container of being and the transgression of the separating limits of animal, human, and divine.¹⁷

Similarly, the figure of the lesbian, once dubbed the 'third sex,' disrupts the binary of heteronormative sexuality and is symbol of what has been construed as 'unnatural.' The Dog-Woman's hybrid animal nature is suggested by her name, which makes her strongly redolent of animality. At the same time, the power she deploys is little less than divine, as her superior strength enables her to settle scores efficiently and with force. Her father's attempt to sell her to a one-legged man, invoking the code of compulsory heterosexuality, culminates in her first murder: significantly, a parricide. The Dog-Woman's description of her childhood might well have come from Winterson's first

¹⁶ Lynne Pearce surveys the various reactions of lesbian readers and critics to Winterson's work in her discussion of Bakhtinian theory in Reading Dialogics. See 'Gendering the Chronotope: Readings of Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Cherry and Toni Morrison's Beloved' in Reading Dialogics (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1994) 172-173.

¹⁷ David Williams, Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought

novel about coming of age as a lesbian: 'I have forgotten my childhood, not just because of my father but because it was a bleak and unnecessary time, full of longing and lost hope' (108).¹⁸ When the Dog-Woman writes about love, she describes it as something she has never experienced firsthand: she says, 'I am too huge for love. No one, male or female, has ever dared to approach me. They are afraid to scale mountains' (34). She is not only the very figure of the *femme castatrice* rightly feared by men, she is also sexually insatiable, as befits her nature as giant. However, we need to ask whether the grotesqueness of the Dog-Woman merely renders her a fearful and memorable spectacle, or can it also be a means to convey political potency?

As Susan Stewart has argued, gigantism is often employed to bring about social change:

The giant is represented through movement, through being in time. Even in the ascription of the still landscape to the giant, it is the activities of the giant, his or her legendary actions, that have resulted in the observable trace. In contrast to the still and perfect universe of the miniature, the gigantic represents the order and disorder of historical forces.¹⁹

In like manner, the Dog-Woman acts like a scourge upon the forces of Puritanical revolt, dealing with these diseased members of the social body by dismembering and killing them. As Mary Russo comments, 'The reintroduction of the body and categories of the body (in the case of carnival, the grotesque body) into the realm of what is called the

and Literature (London: U of Exeter P, 1996) 116.

¹⁸ Jeanette Winterson, Oranges are not the Only Fruit (London: Fontana, 1985). Winterson's account of growing up 'deviant' in a puritanical religious family suggests parallels for her use of the giant as freak in her later novel.

¹⁹ Stewart, On Longing, 86.

political has been a central concern of feminism.’²⁰ In her discussion of the novel, Pearce cautions the reader against considering the Dog-Woman as a protofeminist and stresses that she employs her energies against the revolution of the time; however, I believe that such a reading imports external criteria of values to the text in a way that fails to appreciate the specific contours of the Dog-Woman’s world. Though a Royalist and thus conservative, she battles the forces of religious conservatism, claiming that ‘For myself, I would rather live with sins of excess than sins of denial’ (67). The puritanical system that the Dog-Woman attempts to dismantle robs the world of its drama, colour and freedom, proposing in its place a façade of religious respectability and obligatory conformity to narrow sectarian rules. As giant, the Dog-Woman possesses the transgressive energy adequate to the task of undoing the new order. Emphatically literal in her thinking, she actually carries out the impassioned rhetorical plea to remove the eyes and teeth of her enemies and staggers those who took the frenzied speeches for what they were, simply talk. What the giant performs in the narrative is the literalization of the battle against fundamentalism, achieving in reality what the others merely talk about. She also acts as a purifying force, removing the city of plague disease by fire, when she is instrumental in causing the Great Fire of London. Here again the giant is assigned a transformative role as a powerful agent in English history and her effects are visited not only upon people but are visible on the landscape as a whole.

²⁰ Russo, ‘Female Grotesques,’ 319.

The principle of grafting appears in the text as horticultural practice, but also appertains to the narrative method. As apprentice to the great horticulturist Tradescant, Jordan learns to graft different species together. This activity of creating new hybrids stands in opposition to the pruning, or dismembering, activities of the Dog-Woman in the human sphere. This newly discovered technical sleight of hand enables a weaker species to be supported by a stronger one, in a model that illustrates supportive complementarity. As Jordan defines it, 'grafting is the means whereby a plant, perhaps tender or uncertain, is fused into a hardier member of its strain, and so the two take advantage of each other and produce a third kind, without seed or parent' (78). We should bear in mind what Zoë Sofia has claimed about technology, that 'Every technology is a reproductive technology.'²¹ Haraway refines the term 'reproductive' to 'generative'; that is, not duplicating the same as in reproduction, but producing something new in a way that has more polymorphous possibilities.²² That the Church condemns this practice as 'unnatural, holding that the Lord who made the world made its flora as he wished and in no other way' signals Winterson's use of this metaphor to suggest sexual inversion, or what was once called the third sex, similarly condemned as unnatural by the church. This point is made clearer when the new cherry is branded a monster by the Dog-Woman—

²¹ Zoë Sofia, 'Exterminating Fetuses: abortion, disarmament, and the sexo-semiotics of extra-terrestrialism.' *Diacritics* 14 (2) (1984:47-59) 48.

²² Donna Haraway, 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others' in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 295. Haraway's description of her article in which she discusses the potential of monsters mirrors Winterson's fictional work in that it proposes to be 'a mapping exercise and travelogue through mindscapes and landscapes of what may count as nature in certain local/global struggles' (295). The conjunction of ideas about mapping imaginary as well

‘Such things had no gender and were a confusion to themselves’— but though it does not have conventional origins from seed, it is nevertheless female, a hybrid monstrosity that forms a new, stronger variety with endless possibilities in the future. The process of grafting inaugurates, in Donna Haraway’s phrase, ‘a biopolitics of artifactual reproduction’ and ushers in a debate regarding ‘what may count as nature.’²³ That we no longer regard grafting as a dangerous trespass into a separate realm of the natural suggests a similarly unproblematic future for the way in which such supposedly ‘unnatural’ creatures as the lesbian or homosexual will be regarded in the future.

For Jordan, grafting would be a valuable psychological means of shoring up his weak sense of self with the heroism of such figures as the Dog-Woman or Tradescant. He regards his explorations as a way of running away from ‘uncertainty and confusion, but most of all running away from [himself]’ (80). His hope to become someone else in time, ‘grafted on to something better and stronger,’ is fulfilled when his future self seeks out the woman who is a later counterpart of the Dog-Woman. Thus, although Jordan seeks his ideal love in a miniature form of woman as befits his deficient sense of masculinity, his twentieth-century self, Nicholas Jordan, seeks his complement in a strong woman figure.

In Part Two of the novel, the Dog-Woman and Jordan are paired by twentieth-century versions of themselves. The abundance of force and energy embodied by the giant is precisely what is sought by the Dog-Woman’s incarnation in the twentieth

as physical landscapes thus forms a highly appropriate way of reading the novel.

century, a woman who imagines herself gargantuan. Here, the Dog-Woman is transformed into an environmental activist of ordinary size and abilities, yet with an imagination of grandeur: she states,

I am a woman going mad. I am a woman hallucinating. I imagine I am huge, raw, a giant. When I am a giant I go out with my sleeves rolled up and my skirts swirling round me like a whirlpool (121).

For her the giant represents the possibility of combating the apparently omnipotent forces of multinational corporations and international bodies, such as the World Bank and the Pentagon. The activist invokes the spirit of her gargantuan kindred spirit/ancestor:

I had an alter ego who was huge and powerful, a woman whose only morality was her own and whose loyalties were fierce and few. She was my patron saint, the one I called on when I felt myself dwindling away through cracks in the floor or slowly fading in the street. Whenever I called on her I felt my muscles swell and laughter fill up my throat (125).

Size is empowering, even when it remains only in the mind. Note that imaginary gigantism is accompanied by the liberatory comic force of laughter, as Bakhtin has suggested forms part of the spirit of carnivalization.²⁴ This enabling hallucination is attributed to the distorting toxicity of the mercury in the river that the activist is camped nearby to protest. Thus, the origin of the fantastic aspect of the novel derives precisely from the toxic substance dumped illegally into the river that this character is camped

²³ Haraway, 'Promises,' 295.

²⁴ One could well enquire into the validity of the cheerful force for good that Bakhtin attributes to laughter. Where is the cruel force of humiliating laughter or the snide, cynical laughter that may be employed by those in power? For a discussion of this point, see Caryl Emerson, 'Carnival: Open-Ended Bodies and Anachronistic Histories' in The First Hundred Years of

alongside. Winterson's narrative is thus linked to and wholly determined by an environmental toxin, the mercury that shapes the narrator's hallucinations.

Though of ordinary size, the activist differs in kind from her parents: 'My parents found me difficult, not the child they had wanted. I was too intense, too physically awkward and too quiet for them. ... Parents want to see themselves passed on in their children' (124). Claiming for herself the appellation of 'monster' this character echoes the words of the Adrienne Rich poem in which monster and woman are conflated: 'A woman in the of a monster/ a monster in the shape of a woman.'²⁵ She imagines herself as a Micromegas, 200 miles high, thus extending her (excessive) feeling into space. Like the Dog-Woman, she lives alone, though not necessarily by choice, for, as she comments, 'Who'd want to live with a monster? I may not look like a monster any more but I couldn't hide it for long' (127). Being a monster entails the refusal to put up with what others submit to without complaint: her monstrosity is a consequence of the passive acceptance of environmental damage by ordinary citizens. As she puts it, 'The trouble is that when most people are apathetic ordinary people like me have to go too far, have to ruin their lives and be made an object of scorn just to get the point across' (123). Monstrosity functions as the refusal to disappear into apathy in the face of demanding environmental problems that are simultaneously physical, social and political in nature.

In her discussion of gigantism and female monstrosity in literature, Yaeger suggests that giant bodies serve quasi-political ends during crises in the social milieu:

Bakhtin (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997) 162-206.

'We have seen that when the social hierarchy is threatened, when the margins of power start to shift, the body not only becomes prominent, it becomes a site for mapping social change.'²⁶ Winterson's work illustrates a different use of the giant: it is at periods when the structures of power appear so absolute that the giant becomes necessary to shift them. When there is no model for effective political action among ordinary citizens, characterized as passive and complacent, the activist locates a suitable container for her rage in the gargantuan, tireless physicality of the giant.

In a novel that is largely concerned with the forms and nature of heroism, it is significant that a woman embodies this ideal in Winterson's novel, as this entails a redefinition of what it means to be heroic. For Nicholas Jordan, heroism is a special dispensation that grants one immunity from the usual demands of society:

If you're a hero you can be an idiot, behave badly, ruin your personal life, have any number of mistresses and talk about yourself all the time, and nobody minds. Heroes are immune. They have wide shoulders and plenty of hair and wherever they go a crowd gathers. Mostly they enjoy the company of other men, although attractive women are part of their reward (118).

Winterson mocks the homosocial basis of traditional, exclusively male institutions such as the army and navy and suggests their basis in insecure masculinity. Jordan's search for heroism will take him beyond the male only/lone male heroic stereotype of his father's generation to the lone environmental protester, seeing in her dogged encampment by a polluted river a new form of heroism. He is able to do this because his past self

²⁵ Adrienne Rich, 'Planetarium' in The Fact of a Door Frame (New York: Norton, 1984).

cross-dressed, entered the world of women, and came to understand their perspective on men, a deeply transformative experience. The activist, however, has a contrasting version of what male heroism would be: 'I don't hate men, I just wish they'd try harder. They all want to be heroes and all we want is for them to stay at home and help with the housework and the kids. That's not the kind of heroism they enjoy' (127). In contrast to the image of the male hero, who is granted greater latitude within society, this version of heroism looks for a socially responsible and accountable engagement, not outside but within the structures of everyday life.

Thus, the encounter between the twentieth-century avatar of the giant and the questing explorer figure bears the promise of new gender relations, in which men are allowed doubts about their traditional role and women are permitted to be 'big,' without necessarily undermining or humiliating their male companions. Such writing is termed by Rachel Blau Duplessis a way of 'writing beyond the ending': writing that redefines the traditional stereotypes within a new narrative form. This is a view which not only goes beyond conventional visions of male and female, but which also interrogates contemporary anxieties about women going too far, getting beyond themselves, and destroying the men and boys in their midst, as both Fay Weldon and Rosalind Coward have suggested in recent books.²⁷ Coward claims, 'Women had been the leading political

²⁶ Yeager, Dirt and Desire, 127.

²⁷ See Fay Weldon's Godless in Eden and Rosalind Coward's Sacred Cows.

subjects of the 1970s, men became the political problem of the 1990s.’²⁸ Sexing the Cherry is a novel that goes to the heart of this problem to look critically and often empathetically at the difficult area of arriving at a new form of masculinity that is not constituted by belittling women.

Here, Winterson’s novel employs the figure of grotesque giantism to challenge conventional ideas of femininity, and rather than converting her to the miniature that forms the feminine ideal as Weldon does, however ironically, in The Life and Loves of a She-Devil, she portrays a hero whose quest for self entails a search for a new version of womanhood. In her revision of gender roles, not merely creating an empowered monster as many feminists have done, but in creating a context in which such a monster does not need to be tamed, cured or diminished, Winterson has created a powerful vision of what gender relations might be. To the question, ‘But when we’ve been everywhere, and it’s only a matter of time, where will we go next, when there are no more wildernesses?’ this novel suggests that the new frontier will involve conquering new territories for the inner self, with a sense of wonder for the marvellous new beings that may lie ahead. Like the banana and pineapple in the seventeenth century, harbingers of strange new worlds that lie beyond the ken of ordinary people, the giant and her consort constitute new forms of gender that extend our vision of what masculinity and femininity may be, even as they

²⁸ Coward, Sacred Cows, 9.

enact 'a regenerative politics for inappropriate/d others.'²⁹ This revised sexual politics, undoing old forms of domination and mastery, also forms a potential basis for planetary survival.

Winterson revises the Enlightenment figures of exploration of the seventeenth century to propose a hero who may well be feminine, and whose search for the new goes beyond a resourcist ethic to ensure the survival of life in a resuscitated habitat. Winterson deploys the figure of the female grotesque to express not only the joyful physicality that is at the root of human experience, but also its entanglement with social and external natural forces. The embattled image of the lone woman by a polluted river suggests a powerful emblem of the search for political change that may motivate the endangered bodies of the future. Yet the image of a solitary protester cannot but suggest an image of futility of such activism against powerful conglomerates and global corporate interests. Maggie Gee takes up these concerns in her evocation of a world in an imagined future in her fictional evocation of toxicity, infertility and climate change. Here, however, the female protagonist is represented as multiplying her power and effectiveness through collective action in Gee's satirical rendition of ecofeminist power politics.

²⁹ This term belongs to Donna Haraway, from the title of her paper on monsters. Her article suggests that monstrous new forms may be frightening but also carry the promise that we will extend our view of what is 'natural' and desirable. See Haraway, 'The Promises of Monsters'.

Cyborgs, Bodies and Machines in The Ice People by Maggie Gee

Reinhabitation presupposes voluntary commitment to place; but not all are free to choose. Indeed, toxic discourse claims the opposite: you are more entrapped than you think in a place more dangerous than you think. Lawrence Buell.¹

Like Winterson, Maggie Gee employs the SF convention of time travel in order to explore the consequences of current issues within a different time period; however, rather than revisiting the past, Gee situates her story within the framework of an alternative future. The concerns of Maggie Gee's earlier novel Lost Children—infertility, marital difficulties, and homelessness—are intensified in The Ice People (1998) within the troubled setting of a dystopian future.² Like Winterson's project in Sexing the Cherry, The Ice People also investigates the social instabilities deriving from problematic gender identities and sexual politics and demonstrates the effect of such problems upon a severely toxic landscape.

The commingling of the hard and the soft suggested by the title inaugurates the theme of bodies and machines in the novel. The bodies that Gee creates here are, emphatically artefactual, historically-made bodies that are portrayed in terms of their responses to the discrete historical and climactic conditions of the near future. The machines consist of those that emerge out of the specific consumer-led demands of a future in which natural generation through childbirth is threatened and the sexes lead lives that are increasingly separate from each other. The boundaries of the natural and

¹ Lawrence Buell, Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001) 129.

² Maggie Gee, The Ice People (London: Richard Cohen, 1998). All subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

the artificial are largely destabilized in this fictional world in which the operations of Nature no longer work according to plan. Maggie Gee sets earth-loving women against machine-obsessed men in internecine conflict that erupts as a result of the increasing segregation of the sexes. Yet the fixity of the binary oppositions of male and female, and bodies and machine, is broken down with the introduction of a third term, the cyborg figure that dissolves the boundaries between the sexes and human and man made. Maggie Gee has imagined powerful new figurations in the form of domestic robots and androgynous cyborg children that challenge simplistic hopes of 'better living through science.' At the same time, her depiction of a naive form of ecofeminist politics indicates its political weaknesses and potential for exacerbating gender troubles.

The arenas in which relations between mothers and machines are worked out are the clinic and the factory, with their complementary operations of reproduction and production. Gee depicts a world in which human generation becomes dominated by production, and in a common plot twist of futuristic narratives, machines take over the process of their own production by replication. Gee's focus on the conjunction of mothers, bodies, machines and cyborgs asks us to think about the boundaries between the natural and the artificial in new ways, and in her depiction of the impasse caused by the proliferation of technology in an emphatically cataclysmic world she demonstrates the ideological foundations of the environmental crisis. At the same time, in her portrayal of environmental catastrophe, there is further blurring of the boundaries between nature and culture. The problem of global warming is initially outlined in detail to show the consequences of overproduction, but this problem is succeeded by the onset of a new ice

age, demonstrating the force of an unvanquished Nature. In this chapter I want to analyse the representation of environmental disasters within narrative time frames that are capable of portraying both gradual change and dramatic effects. Here too the significance of the 'natural' body, the machine and the cyborg interact with the environmental setting in complex and intricate ways.

The novel opens with the declaration of the narrator in tones that announce an archaic, tribal future common to fictions that posit the future as post-apocalyptic. With his opening words, Saul places himself in relation to his story, history, and nature: 'I, Saul, Teller of Tales, Keeper of Doves, Slayer of Wolves, shall tell the story of my times. Of the best of days, and the end of days. Of the new white world that has come upon us. For whoever will read it. For whoever can read' (p. 3). The masculine role of hunter and keeper of animals suggests an archaic form of heroism enabled by the social breakdown accompanying the drastic climate changes of the future, the coming of the 'white world' Saul mentions. At the same time, it records a voice attempting to insert itself into an epic history, one that is based on the actions of heroes and relates memorable feats. Yet this role is immediately problematized by the fact that not only is he recording the end of history, he cannot depend on any form of readership. Moreover, the hint of the ancient role of man as steward of the animals ('keeper of Doves') is overturned when the reader learns that the Doves referred to are not birds, but machines. Such instabilities and ambiguities hint at the various uncertainties contained in the narrative.

Unlike the novels of pregnancy and childbirth in part one, The Ice People features a male narrator so that his 'epic of conception' as he later terms it, is focalized through a masculine viewpoint. This use of a male narrator to record the tumultuous changes that

occur within the time period of the novel foregrounds the anxieties and misunderstandings surrounding masculinity in contemporary Britain, as gender roles shift in ways that reverberate through the family, society and politics.³ The device of an unreliable narrator renders masculine perplexity and impercipient to both comic and ironic effect. The novel provides an account of (eco)feminist politics coming to power, from the outside, from the vantage point of a far from disinterested, often hostile, observer.

This narrative constitutes a life-cycle narrative that emphasizes the difficulties of reproduction in a post-natural world. This form documents the conception of the child (with the help of technology) through pregnancy and childbirth to suggest the precariousness of life in a post-global warming, ice-age world. The child who is meant to represent the next generation is endangered by numerous features of Gee's imagined world in ways that underscore the difficulties surrounding the survival of the species as a whole. The biomedical advances Advanced Reproductive Technology (ART) that enable Luke's conception and finally, the (re)production and subsequent take-over of the machines suggest the potent effect that such technologies may have.⁴ This discussion of the novel will focus on analysis of the complementary figures of the body, the cyborg and the machine, tropes that suggest new combinations of the human, the cybernetic

³ See Rosalind Coward, Sacred Cows (London: Harper Collins, 1999) and Fay Weldon, Godless in Eden (London: Flamingo ed. Harper Collins, 2000) for views about troubled masculinity in Britain at the close of the millennium.

⁴ The term 'ART' is one that is used within marketing to designate IVF and other reproductive technologies. Although Gee does not employ this term, it usefully encapsulates the blurring between cultural categories (Art) and technology. See Steven Mentor for a discussion of the rhetoric involved in such technologies: 'Witches, Nurses, Midwives, and Cyborgs: IVF, ART and Complex Agency in the World of Technobirth' in Robbie Davis-Floyd and Joseph Dumit, eds., Cyborg Babies: From Techno-Sex to Techno-Tots (New York and London: Routledge, 1998) 67-89.

organism, and the mechanical to examine the ways in which reproductive/productive discourses intersect to couple machines and bodies in dangerous ways.

As we have already seen in our discussion of novels that dramatize pregnancy and childbirth, the feminist position on 'unnatural' new reproductive technologies encompasses a wide spectrum of views, from viewpoints that construe 'artificial reproduction' as inherently liberatory, as Firestone suggests, or that reduce it to an instance of transcultural domination of nature-coded-as-female (Corea) to indicate just two contrasting perspectives.⁵ Such techniques as mechanical insemination, *in vitro* fertilization, and surrogacy have variously been castigated as 'against' or contrary to nature, and thus deserving of reprobation, or due to their ability to simulate, correct, or even replace the natural, viewed as novel and promising.⁶ As we have seen with regard to discourses relating to 'natural childbirth,' we are fully aware that as David Horn puts it, 'There is nothing 'natural' about the least alienated practices of reproduction, ... these are always culturally mediated, and in some sense, *artifice*.'⁷ The central questions to be explored here concern Maggie Gee's depiction of the advanced technologies of the future, and the ways in which they involve renegotiation of gender roles, race and citizenship in an imperilled world.

The world of the novel is that of the near future, an innovation that bears many analogies with the world of the present: this category of the *novum* (novelty or

⁵ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: William Morrow, 1970) and Gina Corea, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

⁶ Valerie Hartouni, 'Containing Women: Reproductive Discourse in the 1980s' in Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, eds., *Technoculture* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991) 27-56.

⁷ David Horn, 'Unnatural Acts: procreation and the genealogy of artifice' in Jennifer Terry and Melodie Calvert, eds., *Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in Everyday Life* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) 146.

innovation) is the necessary condition of science fiction, according to Darko Suvin. Suvin suggests that SF can be distinguished from other genres 'by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional 'novum'...validated by cognitive logic.'⁸ Thus, rather than focusing on the scientific *content* or data of the novel to determine its affiliation with SF, Suvin locates the use of a 'novelty by scientifically methodical cognition into which the reader is inexorably led' as the sufficient condition for a work of Science Fiction. If The Ice People is placed squarely within the conventions of science fiction, it is clear that the novel manipulates science and technology to share affinities with other technophobic works of the genre.

However, to situate a work within the genre of science fiction immediately begs questions about the quality of the work, so great is the connection for many readers between the genre and that of pulp fiction. Science fiction is often underestimated, and often misread. One critic points out, 'So ingrained is the assumption that science fiction is about special effects, space travel and futuristic gadgetry that many British critics seem quite ill at ease with the genre, and rarely capable of seeing what its creative writers and producers are showing them.'⁹ For some writers, being relegated to the underworld of science fiction has meant that their work has often been viewed as second-class literature. One critic, noting that this generic classification denotes literary inferiority, re-classifies feminist SF as 'feminist fabulation,' a category which emphasizes the postmodern aspects of the work.¹⁰ Yet, as Jenny Wolmark argues, 'the erosion of the boundary

⁸ Darko Suvin, Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979) 63.

⁹ Dave Hinton, 'Jurassic Park and the Generic Paradox in Science Fiction Film' in Derek Littlewood and Peter Stockwell, Impossibility Fiction: Alternativity—Extrapolation—Speculation (Amsterdam and Atlanta, Ga: Rodopi, 1996) 177.

¹⁰ Marlene Barr, Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction (Iowa City: U of Iowa P,

between high art and popular culture results in the production of texts that are undoubtedly contradictory, but this does not negate their utopian and radical possibilities.’¹¹ Although the affiliation with SF may have presented problems for women writers in the past, since it is a genre notable for its exclusion of women, both as writers and characters, it has, as Jenny Wolmark, notes, ‘become a terrain for the ideological contestation of the politics of gender.’¹² Indeed, Donna Haraway has signalled the way in which ‘science fiction is generically concerned with the interpenetration of boundaries between problematic selves and unexpected others and with the exploration of possible worlds in a context structured by transnational technoscience.’¹³ The conjunction of global interests amid a world that is emphatically technologically advanced, and the disruption of boundaries noted by Haraway are in fact salient elements of The Ice People.

Maggie Gee’s novel employs the novum of the world of the near future, one that is characterized by the breakdown in boundaries between the human and the machine both in the form of the cyborg and the demonic household gadget, the Dove. The cognitive logic of Gee’s future rests upon the scientific framework of the epigraphs cited at the beginning of the novel, all of which announce a future Ice Age as a plausible future. Rather than a strategy of alternativity, ‘whereby elements and processes from our apparent reality are worked out in another domain,’ the strategy employed here is based upon ‘the metonymical extension of the ends of reality’: that is, a strategy of

1992).

¹¹ Jenny Wolmark, Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994) 11.

¹² Wolmark, Aliens and Others, 2.

¹³ Donna Haraway, ‘The Promises of Monsters: A regenerative politics for inappropriate/d others,’ in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, eds., Cultural Studies (New York

extrapolation. Like many texts based on extrapolation, ‘typically satirical, political, wearing their critiques of our apparent reality explicitly’, The Ice People satirically exploits the possibilities of the extended use of machines and cyborgs, within a spatio-temporal world devastated by a war between the sexes.¹⁴ Unlike earlier texts of science fiction, which tended to posit the existence of a mad scientist or evil politician, Peter Stockwell contends that these have been more realistically replaced by ‘a more collective responsibility for environmental disasters.’¹⁵

Race and gender are significantly deployed in The Ice People to suggest the socio-historical conditions that underlie the novum. Saul is biracial—termed ‘beek’ from the French ‘bicolore’ in one of the neologisms that announce a discrete spatio-temporal universe of the novel. Ironically he is ignorant of his African heritage for much of his childhood, and espouses the racist beliefs of his peers, hating foreigners and wishing they would return to their own countries. Saul’s announcement that he hates black people leads to a world-rocking discovery when his mother replies, ‘*Haven’t you noticed your father’s black?*’ (8). This scene serves the function of alerting the reader to the narrator’s faults as the ideal observer to the events of the novel. Further, Saul’s mixed heritage works to his advantage as Sarah is attracted by the suggestion of otherness — ‘I’m very interested in all that. It was part of my Ethnicities diploma course’ (16). Later, when Gee reverses the flood of immigrants from South to North when Europe becomes too

and London: Routledge, 1992) 300.

¹⁴ Peter Stockwell, in Derek Littlewood and Peter Stockwell, eds., Impossibility Fiction: Alternativity, Extrapolation, Speculation (Amsterdam and Atlanta, Ga: Rodopi, 1996) 5.

¹⁵ Peter Stockwell, The Poetics of Science Fiction (New York and London: Longman, 2000) 216. Interestingly, he notes that in British Science Fictional apocalypses, many focus on exceptionally bad weather—could the same evidence be provided for American SF scenarios that focus on environmental degradation? Ballard’s The Drought focuses on lack of rain; The Drowned World, flood; Elton’s Stark, on global warming, and the nuclear blasts in Hine’s

cold to sustain life, the option of escape to Africa is permitted only to those with African roots.

Similarly, growing up during a time of gender instability, Saul is also perplexed about being male in an increasingly segregated ('segged,' in the future speak of the novel) social world. Sarah represents the desirable form of womanhood authorized by the government to promote better social interaction between men and women. Her position as Role Support Officer is a form of social technology introduced by the government to teach boys and girls 'to get on together' as a response to declining fertility figures and an upcoming election that requires some form of action. Sarah's mimicry of exaggerated femininity enables Saul, who is unfashionably masculine and excessively hairy, to be seen as manly rather than freakish, at a time when the majority of men appear androgynous. The two thus embody pronounced forms of polarized gender that have become outmoded in an androgynous age. In depicting gender identities during a time of change, Gee reminds us how much they are contingent upon specific social realities; as Teresa de Lauretis states, 'Gender is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings, ...it is the product and process of various social technologies, institutional discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life.'¹⁶ Such technologies of gender assume greater importance in Gee's satiric rendition of the mother-making industries of biomedical science.¹⁷

What the narrator dubs their 'epic of conception,' that is, ten years of repeated attempts to conceive despite continuous failure, relates the pain and feelings of

Threads cause a nuclear winter.

¹⁶ Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 2.

¹⁷ For an interesting account of these procedures within British society, see Sarah Franklin,

inadequacy, frustration and perplexity that accompany infertility. Moreover, as Haraway asserts, the application of highly technological procedures to the female body is a highly contested area for feminists:

Biomedicine—where postnatal people, machines, fetuses, health beliefs, diagnostic procedures, and bodily fluids are enrolled together in potent configurations—is the arena of conflict. Biomedicine is where freedom, justice, and citizenship [are] at stake.¹⁸

The issue of infertility that Gee has treated in Lost Children is re-set here in a new frame, one that emphasizes the connection of reproductive health with a sound environment. Infertility thus becomes more broadly symbolic of an impaired society that has lost its ability to survive. Yet, as Irene Diamond argues in her ecofeminist analysis of reproductive technology within a global context, in most discussions of infertility ‘the threat that environmental contamination poses for the entire process of regeneration is simply not an issue in this system of microcontrol.’¹⁹ Ruth Hubbard has also noted the tendency to concentrate on the hazards that lurk within rather than look at frightening causes of pollution, accidents and nuclear war: she states,

The more we focus on the fertility problems of humans and ignore the ways in which humans are poisoning the earth, the more we move toward a world where the complete and total control of baby-making by heroic experts is considered prudent and wise.²⁰

Another facet of the problems surrounding infertility is the question of access and

Embodied Progress: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception (London: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁸ Donna Haraway, Modest Witness @Second Millennium: FemaleMan© Meets OncoMouse™ (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) 190.

¹⁹ Irene Diamond, ‘Babies, Heroic Experts, and a Poisoned Earth’ in Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds., Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1990. 201-210) 210.

availability to new technologies. Gee brings to the fore the differential treatment that is granted to clients according to income. She indicates the way in which emphasis on quantifiable factors based on measurable, material means leads to the concept of difference in quality, to the concept of the 'best baby.'²¹ Sociologist Ann Oakley notes the lack of discussion regarding the allocation of funds to expensive reproductive technologies in a global context in which the majority do not have the basic prerequisites to survival such as immunization and clean water.²² She comments, 'On a global level, every IVF programme is a human choice not to do other things.' She also asserts, 'instead of seeing motherhood as a machine, and mothers as insignificant, we need to take the metaphor of motherhood as unfragmented connection and experience, and apply it to our understanding of the world itself.' This insistence on connection is the salient characteristic of ecofeminist philosophy, and one that sharply distinguishes it from the reductive perspective inherent in Western science.

The fears, frustrations, and endless tests involved in fertility treatments are well documented here. Suddenly, biology becomes paramount as women are reconfigured as ovulating egg carriers and their partners are transformed into tappable sperm banks. Gee

²⁰ Ruth Hubbard, 'Personal courage is not enough: some hazards of childbearing in the 1980s' in Rita Arditti, Renate Duelli and Shelley Minden, eds., Test-Tube Women: What Future for Motherhood? (London: Pandora Press, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984. 331-355) 202.

²¹ See Adele Clarke for a discussion of the shift in reproductive technology from quantity control, through contraception and population control, to the emphasis on quality through gene engineering and new biomedical technologies. This shift accompanies the change from the modern body to the post-modern body. 'Modernity, Postmodernity & Reproductive Processes ca. 1890-1990, or "Where do Cyborgs Come From Anyway?"' in Chris Hables Gray, Steven Mentor, and Heidi J. Figueroa-Sarriera, eds., The Cyborg Handbook (New York: Routledge, 1995) 139-155.

²² Ann Oakley, Women, Medicine and Health (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) 187. Oakley links these technologies of procreation to the 'death of nature' and notes the inequities ignored by ethical discussions of infertility.

emphasizes the commodification inherent in this process by transforming her characters into body parts: men and women are elided, as eggs and sperm become all important:

If the doctors told us they needed us, if eggs could be harvested or sperm donated or any other bits of us removed and twizzled.... We'd held out too long, and now we yielded our bodies completely, our private parts, our selves, our money' (34).²³

The medical god in whose hands they have placed themselves is aptly named Dr. Zeuss, amalgam of the Greek ruler of the universe and the icon of children's storytelling. The disadvantages of assisted reproduction are underlined in this account: the risks of failure are much higher than they are told, there are disquieting stories of mix-ups of eggs or sperm or fetuses, and the product of the 'techfix,' the techfix baby, is often abnormally weak and prone to illness. Gee portrays not only the hopes, fears and beliefs caught up in these processes of biomedicine, but also indicates the extent to which these are intertwined with political, social, and environmental forces.

Unlike the novels dealing with pregnancy and childbirth in the first section, however, this novel is narrated from the vantage point of the male partner rather than the woman more directly involved in the process. The strange conjunctions of bodies and machines are aptly described by the narrator in ways that are amplified in the following discussion by a male critic discussing reproductive technologies. The 'primal scene' of

²³ Steven Mentor, 'Witches' discusses the transformation of fertile bodies into machines in his article that analyses the processes of reproductive technologies from the perspective of a father. His analysis of strategies of legitimization and naturalization of these processes is fascinating in its discussion of 'the always/ already constructed nature of birth as well as its cyborgian transformations under way' (69). He juxtaposes 'the quintessential 90's baby artefact, Baby's First Ultrasound' to other pictures that will never be shown, such as the laparoscopic view of his wife's ova follicles. He comments, 'These pictures side by side in the wallet would show the ghosts in the machinery of reproduction: behind the organic coherent body, an entire techno-journey through the interior before conception, the endometrial lining as jungle/future cultivated land' (67).

IVF (*in vitro* fertilization) combines bodies and machines in disturbing ways: as Steven Mentor describes it, at one point he is standing over his wife's body, making jokes with the various doctors as they work on her, and the scene is suddenly transformed into a garage, 'and my wife is the car and these are the grease monkeys, down to the bad radio blaring and the power tools.'²⁴ In this scenario the human body becomes a machine with 'machines and humans making humans by turning humans into machines.'²⁵ This perspective also highlights the difference in perspective that tends to objectify the female body: 'the view from above' or from outside tends to favour a mechanistic perspective in which experts gather to fix the machine.

Maggie Gee further underscores the boundary crossing taking place in her depiction of futuristic conception by setting the narrator to work on nanomachines that self-replicate, so that scenes describing baby-making are paralleled by scenes in which machines reproduce: Saul writes,

I would sit there sometimes, half-asleep, looking through the electron microscope at tiny machines performing tiny tasks, their incredible completeness, the way they could self-replicate and grow, and it satisfied me at some deep level, made me feel life was still all right, that men were still in command of things, masters of a friendly universe (35).

The managerial ethic of domination underwriting the creation of a machine that performs the monstrous activity of reproduction by replication is emphasized here by the narrator's desire that men remain in command, 'masters of a friendly universe.' It is thus doubly significant that Gee locates in this attitude and its transgressive machinery the source of the social and environmental destruction that will devastate her fictional world.

²⁴ Mentor, 'Witches,' 69.

²⁵ Mentor, 'Witches,' 68.

As Maggie Gee emphasizes throughout the novel, the babies born as a result of advanced reproductive technologies, or 'techfix,' are themselves known as 'techfix babies.' This term foregrounds the fact that the method that makes their existence possible also determines their hybrid identity, their nature as cybernetic organisms, or cyborgs. For Donna Haraway, cyborgs may help us to remember that appeals to the natural, figured as primordial, innocent or whole, are a form of romanticism. Yet she is also wary of a phallogocentric 'productionism,' in which man is viewed as creating everything. The cyborg represents a figure of human and nature relations: there is no discontinuity between the human organism and what we have constructed. Although the construction of the cyborg merely reflects the extent to which human bodily existence is already modified by machines such as pacemakers and prostheses, or pharmaceutical products such as mood-altering drugs, anti-malarial medications or insulin, within the novel the term is used to denote the product of a highly technological form of procreation and childbirth.

As cyborg, the 'techfix' baby does not let us forget its origins in the laboratory, nor its status as a commodity.²⁶ The name that Gee gives to the elderly also places emphasis on their status as cyborgs held together with replacement parts: the elderly are known as 'bits.'²⁷ The ways in which body parts are becoming re-conceptualized as 'widgets'; that is, 'standardized items to replace as needed—or desired,' has been noted

²⁶ As Adele Clark points out, however, this is not a new characteristic unique to the cyborg baby: in the past, children were also seen as commodities, as a form of labour or security for old age etc. For Clarke, it would be better to use the term 're-commoditized' to help remind us of this fact. See Clarke, 'Modernity,' 139-155.

²⁷ For Maria Mies, the postmodern body is characterized by this transition from an autonomous being to one that is marked precisely by its divisibility. See her article, 'From the Individual to the Dividual: In the supermarket of 'Reproductive Alternatives'' Reproductive and Genetic Engineering (1:3 1988). Di-viduals are made up of sellable parts: wombs (for rent, synthesizable),

by Adele Clarke.²⁸ Cyborgs are significant actors in the novel, yet they are not viewed by Gee as the joyful, liberatory, boundary-crossing figure envisioned by Haraway in her 'Cyborg Manifesto': fully embodied, rather than rhetorical figures, these cyborg babies suggest some of the problems with identity that ensue in an intensely gender-separated world. Gee portrays these unnatural offspring of technology and human biology as sickly, confused beings that must attempt to find a place in a world that is increasingly polluted and further endangered by domestic and political battles between men and women. The cyborg itself appears to reject its origins in the conflation of machine and body for a 'natural' existence, as is seen when Luke escapes at the end of the novel to join the wild children: the cyborg performs a gesture towards naturalization.

To emphasize the role of separate technologies involved in the processes of contraception, delivery, and post-partum wellness, Gee multiplies the different doctors involved in each aspect of procreation. Here the cyborg is viewed as fundamentally unnatural, artificial, and even dysfunctional. If, from one point of view, the message of the cyborg birth is that technology is better than nature, and colludes with market forces to sell new equipment and expertise that has not always been seen as necessary, the other view is to focus on the cyborg as mutilator, an omen of the dangers of technoscientific practices and reliance. But is there a third way to think about this figure?

Haraway's use of the cyborg is metaphorical, and here, as Floyd-Davis argues, 'the notion of the cyborg serves to diagnose the present and to disrupt the very idea of "natural reproduction" as a kind of no-longer-useful and perhaps dangerous

embryonic tissue for research, eggs.

²⁸ See Clarke, 'Modernity,' 147.

assumption.’²⁹ As Steven Mentor questions the process of IVF and assisted reproduction he asks, ‘I could tell you stories. But is IVF a comedy or a tragedy? Romance of miracle technology or farce of Frankenstein human reproductive and genetic engineering?’³⁰ Mentor refuses to choose either possibility: as seeing ART as simply providing more choices, or the alternative view of seeing it simply as patriarchal eugenics, or even technoapocalypse. His point is persuasive: that a notion of ‘cyborg competencies’ highlights the complex ways in which humans are intimately connected with technologies, including textual and representational technologies. Our decisions must be based, as Maggie Gee suggests in her account of assisted birth, on acute awareness of such issues as availability, cost, marketing rhetoric, and the environmental causes that make reproductive dysfunction an increasingly significant part of the social and medical landscape.

If one form of the future is manifested in the figure of Gee’s cyborg, the other, its complementary double, is the figure of the machine. Haraway suggests that the machine is an intimate part of our dreams: ‘The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshipped and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment.’³¹ As extensions of the human body, machines reflect our fears, our frustrations, our limitations and our desires. It is not surprising that in this future, which is portrayed as increasingly troubled by the segregation of men and women, the question of who is to look after the housework becomes insistent. Furthermore, in a society in which children become more and more rare, nor is it coincidental that the miracle machine invented to look after

²⁹ See Robbie Davis-Floyd and Joeseph Dumit, eds., Cyborg Babies, 11.

³⁰ Mentor, ‘Witches,’ 68.

household chores is given a childish appearance, thus forming a logical answer to the social vacuum left by children. Maggie Gee's Doves, machines designed to 'DO Very' simple tasks, are machines that dovetail perfectly with consumer needs and desires.

One approach to investigating technology is to regard it strictly in terms of objects, such as tools, machines and appliances, thus 'implying fundamental (but ultimately illusory) distinctions between the technology, its designer, and its user.'³² However, it is clear that the Doves cannot be severed from the discrete socio-historical context out of which they emerge. Gee stresses the fact that such technoscientists as the narrator are not only largely responsible for creating the machines and their design specifications, but are also their most enthusiastic consumers and users. Although the narrator maintains his innocence regarding the machines and their destructive powers, it is clear that he is complicit in their creation and is accountable, if only indirectly, for the course of events that take place. Analysing the machine within society, Calvert and Terry argue that machines must be defined in terms of the machine/human interface:

that is, in terms of how particular machines and mechanisms accomplish tasks of configuring, effecting, mediating, and embodying social relations. In this definition, machines do not necessarily determine social relations, but are situated in networked social relations, subject to uses and creative misuses by the human (and other machines) that surround them.³³

This definition of technology as interface opens up space for discussion of why machines are designed by people in specific historical, political, economic, and social

³¹ Donna Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York, Routledge, 1991) 180.

³² Terry and Calvert, eds., Processed Lives, 3.

³³ Terry and Calvert, eds., Processed Lives, 4.

circumstances—an approach that is amply supported by the fictional context of The Ice People in which the Doves are significant players.

As mentioned above, this machine emerges from the vacuum created by the retreat of men and women into separate communities. However, even during the period in which they live together, the question of housework is a recurrent and insoluble element of their home life. Saul's persistent ignorance of the basic everyday realities of keeping house is no trivial problem; rather it is symptomatic of his lack of perception with regard to his wife, and eventually gives rise to serious marital problems. Sarah's brand of feminism as perceived by Saul is notably the movement that can say 'No.'³⁴ As depicted by Saul, Sarah is a harridan who is continually negative, saying 'No' to sweets, screen spin-off T-shirts, and even to helpful new technology. Taken singly, Sarah's complaints are indeed trivial, but taken together, they add up to a home life in which very unequal burdens of housework are allocated. Though seemingly inconsequential, the problem of who does the 'dirty work' has symbolic as well as practical significance, as Mary Douglas has demonstrated in her anthropological treatise Purity and Danger.³⁵ On the days that Saul looks after the child when he is sick, Sarah returns to find 'the floor scattered with crumpled clothes and toys and half-eaten plates of nursery food' and the

³⁴ In an article dealing with women and the environment, Luce Irigaray argues that saying 'no' to dangerous technologies is the action that must be pursued by women: she states, 'Women suffer more grievously from the rupture with cosmic checks and balances. Therefore it is up to women to say no. Without a yes from women the world of men cannot continue and develop.' Luce Irigaray, Sexes and Genealogies Trans. Gillian C. Gill. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993) 201. However, Stacey Alaimo counters that such a position, far from being effective political action, merely 'calcifies conservative gender roles (women are always supposed to say no) and deepens the nature/culture divide.' See Stacey Alaimo, Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2000) 8.

³⁵ Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.) Douglas finds that the work involving polluting activities is

'boys' asleep in front of the television (50). Hiring a 'manny'— one of the new breed of male childcarers—appears to present a solution to the problem of dual careers, housework, and a fragile child, but Sarah chooses to leave anyway. This, then is the context out of which the Doves emerge, and the place they fill not only in the home, but also in the family.

An essential component of Gee's satire is the anatomizing of the social desires that will the new machines into being, and their physical specifications as visible manifestations of those yearnings. This universe comprises not only the inventors of the machine, since Frankenstein an important focus of the genre, but also the various consumers of the new commodity. The first generation of domestic 'animats' or 'mobots' are described as 'robot friends'—but though designed to clean the house, they are marketed as much more than that, and indeed take on a plethora of social as well as merely domestic roles. For Saul, the robot is more than a way of solving the battles about housework; it fulfils a dream of peaceful co-existence with machines: 'For decades we had been promised this, robots to live with as friends...' (65). Its design further clarifies its true social function:

It sat there...a robust, short creature around a metre tall, a little less, perhaps, than a three-year-old child. Its head was huge, childlike or birdlike, a baby bird's head in terms of its proportions, its most notable feature two big lidded "eyes," which were currently turned down on the ground giving a winning effect of shy good manners (66).

Moving with the gait of a drunken toddler, the Dove fills a niche in a society with too few children. The designers, inspired by Disney characters like Mickey Mouse, invent a form of off-screen animation that people can live with even more closely than the characters

generally given to lower caste workers in order to maintain the 'purity' and intact boundaries of

found on television. Women are not as enchanted by the new machines as the men, however; the multiple-users are found in the men's clubs, such as the Gay Scientists (after Nietzsche's Gaia Scientia) that the narrator frequents. In addition, the Doves have been invented to respond to the needs of a world suffering from intense pollution and habitat destruction: they refuel by eating any organic matter, and are thus the perfect answer to a consumerist society overflowing in waste.

As Jennifer Terry indicates in her discussion of technology, understanding technology as, by definition, contiguous with human activity, can allow one to see 'how machines and systems are appropriated differently than their original design intended, and creatively extended or subverted by particular users' under particular conditions.³⁶ For even as it becomes a familiar object about the house, the Dove is susceptible to application for other uses as well. Men do not stop buying them despite widespread reports of the machine eating cats, dogs and babies:

Dove ownership ran at an amazing sixty per cent of the male population of Britain, which when you consider that at least a third of the population was homeless and without buying power, meant a hundred per cent of the male market (112).

No longer a luxury, the Doves comprise an essential emotional component of emotionally-empty male lives. The narrator likens their owners to proud fathers, 'laughing, shouting, swapping anecdotes about their Doves' achievements.' At home, the Doves become likeable pets, kids, or wives: 'their docility, their friendliness, the way they served us and seemed to like us, the way they quietly accepted love,

those who are constituted as superior to such work.

³⁶ Terry and Calvert, Processed Lives, 4.

whereas women had rejected us....' (112). Gee's dystopian view creates a future in which women pursue separate lives, out of patience with having to nurture and look after men, as well as deal with careers and children, and depicts men as unhappily replacing their wives with machines. This is a satire that goes to the root of technological advances, charting the subtle ways in which they emerge from the dynamics of social psychodramas, and at the same time, determine the ways in which people live, at the most personal and intimate level.

Maggie Gee analyses the psychological place the machine occupies for various people, according to their gender and age. For the child, the Dove is a much-needed sibling and playmate; for the adults, too, much more than a household appliance. In retrospect, the narrator comments, 'We wanted them to be cuter, cleverer, livelier. We longed for them, really, to be alive. We wanted to be gods, we wanted to be parents' (78). Although the Doves are meant to feed on organic material given them by their owners, the realisation that they can feed themselves when necessary gives a glimpse of their destructive force. New models of the machine breach the boundary between inanimate and animate even more completely: they are warm, with 'strokey-feely' panels, and are able to reproduce themselves, thus proving superior to the humanity in their midst. New models proliferate: Culture Vultures, that play music and movies; Warmbots, for warmth at night; Hawks, a kind of avian guard dog; and the self-explanatory Sexbots. Such marketing encouraged men to subvert their original use by taking the lifelike machine to bed with them as a replacement for their wives. Indeed, the scene in which the narrator is found in bed with his Dove marks the turning point in an already troubled marriage.

...when Sarah and Luke arrived, I was lying unconscious on the bed, “with a smouldering cigar on the bloody bedspread” (though if I were unconscious, how could it be smouldering? Even I can’t smoke a cigar in my sleep), “buck naked” (a phrase that’s always made me uneasy; I was only naked because it was hot) and “that bloody disgusting thing on top of you”—hold on, if she were on top of me, she had fallen over (stability was never a strong point with Doves), and she wasn’t disgusting, Dora, ever, even Sarah must have seen that my Dodo was sweet—(94).

This passage illustrates the source of the mordant satirical tone of the novel derived from the use of a double perspective that is incorporated into the narrator’s partial, and evidently biased, vision. Sarah’s remarks are reported verbatim to indicate her viewpoint, one that is contested by the guilty narrator. The Doves are thus seen through a double lens—simultaneously ‘disgusting’ object and an intimate, nearly animate being. An invention that emerges from the trivial problem of housework thus takes over the female function in the home, providing conversation and warmth, as well as housework. It is significant that this literary invention of the ideal solution to both household dirt and waste expands to include problems of human loneliness and needs for information, warmth, and company: this is a machine that not only aids, but ultimately replaces humans altogether.

Gee dramatizes the increased separation of the social spheres of men and women in her creation of collective protagonists: the women flock to Wicca World, which constellates around the few children that are left, while the separatist male group the Scientists gather around their machines. The device of the collective protagonist is a central formal and thematic feature of speculative fiction. As Rachel Blau Duplessis notes, such fiction

replaces individual heroes or sealed couples with groups, which have a sense of purpose and identity, and whose growth occurs in mutual collaboration. The use of a collective protagonist may imply that problems or issues that we see as

individually based are in fact social in cause and in cure.³⁷

Wicca, which appeals to the yearning for a defeated natural world, creates an advertising campaign to make known its political platform. This film is shown as mediated through the eyes of the antipathetic outcast males. Gee stages a pastiche of a certain form of ecofeminist desire as well as its opposition in this passage:

Radiant, kindly, well-favoured women...dancing in a caring ring, in green fields, around a herd of blonde children. The voiceover spoke about "revaluing nature," "nurturing the future": "the future is green." We would "bloom again" with the "cooling earth." We would "give thanks to the Goddess" for water (some footage of flowing rivers with laughing women drinking from them), clean air (shots of blue sky, and clouds) and earth (a troop of women digging with spades, old-fashioned twentieth-century spades, in rich, black earth, among red-berried bushes. They looked very cheerful. Had they just buried their husbands? (100)

The reader is given access to two viewpoints simultaneously: the depiction of the women's dream as a filmed narrative and its repudiation by cynical observers. The viewpoint of the men is best encapsulated by Kaja Silverman's phrase, 'male subjectivity at the margins', as it indicates the positioning outside the political centre of an insecure masculinity. I will take up this point further below.³⁸

What this campaign prominently records is the desire for a natural world that is gone and nostalgia for a way of life that has some meaningful relationship with the earth. The film promotes an ethic of interconnectedness very different from the instrumental ethic dominant in the culture that Gee has created here, that assumes that the vulnerabilities of the body can be conquered and all problems have technological solutions. The form of ecofeminism portrayed by Gee here in the Wicca circle has been

³⁷ Rachel Blau Duplessis, Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Writers (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985) 179.

³⁸ Kaja Silverman, Male Subjectivity at the Margins (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

widely criticized by feminists, and particularly from a social feminist standpoint. Cecile Jackson has described the discourse of ecofeminist platforms as involving 'the rejection of self-determination, scientism and instrumentalism [and] the promotion of sexual essentialism, myth-making and the prescription of subsistence utopias.' Jackson asks the question, 'Is ecofeminism a social movement to empower the dispossessed?'³⁹ Invoking the tradition of the Goddess, the women of Wicca have found in traditional earth-centred religions a way of thinking and acting that promises hope for the future.⁴⁰ That this vision depends on magical thinking does not make it any less persuasive; it contains an image of life centred on procreation, cultivation and natural beauty and attempts to 'recover a sense of humanity in tune with nature.'⁴¹

³⁹ Cecile Jackson, 'Radical Environmental Myths: A Gender Perspective' in Mary Evans, ed., Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies (Vol. III. London and New York: Routledge, 2001, 282-299) 284.

⁴⁰ The image of the Goddess and its problems for ecofeminist philosophy have been analysed and deconstructed by other ecofeminist critics and philosophers employing more sophisticated critical theory. See Stacey Alaimo, Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2000); Janet Biehl, 'What is Social Ecofeminism?' Green Perspectives 11. (1988: 1-8); Donna Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991); Val Plumwood, Feminism and the Mastery of Nature (London: Routledge, 1993); Catriona Sandilands, The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1999), and Noël Sturgeon, Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action (New York and London: Routledge, 1997). However, others claim that ecofeminism 'is the bridge between political theory and the goddess spirituality movements' as Greta Gaard notes in 'Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures: Pushing the Limits of Cultural Imperialism?' in Greta Gaard, ed., Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993). See for example, Carol Christ, 'Why Women Need the Goddess' and 'Rethinking Theology and Nature' in Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds., Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1990. 58-69) Charlene Spretnak, The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement (New York: Anchor books, 1982); Starhawk, The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988). There is also an even-handed account of the divide between ecofeminists on this issue in Andrew Ross, The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature's Debt to Society (London and New York: Verso, 1994) 222-230.

⁴¹ See Ariel Salleh, 'Nature, Woman, Labor, Capital: Living the Deepest Contradiction,' Capitalism, Nature, Socialism 6:1 (March 1995) 33. Noel Sturgeon, Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action (New York: Routledge, 1998) 11.

It is outside the scope of this chapter to analyse extensively the ways in which Gee's rendition of a certain ecofeminist moment reflects ecofeminist philosophies; however, suffice it to say, that broadly speaking, this form of essentialist positioning of women with nature reflects an early moment in ecofeminist philosophy that has been critiqued and redeveloped by later theorists. It is unfortunately true that ecofeminism is still regarded by many contemporary feminists as being dependent upon biological determinism or essentialism, such as the position expressed by Ariel Salleh in 1995: 'What is undeniably given is the fact that women and men do have existentially different relationships to "nature" because they have different kinds of body organs.' Salleh's later work departs from such essentialist formulations. However, Noel Sturgeon also cautions critics to be more aware of the distinct and significant purposes served by such essentialist moments in ecofeminism, suggesting that 'the radically democratic movement structures...destabilize essentialist feminist formulations' and thus, contextual understanding is important.

The film portrayed in the novel also makes use of what Micaela di Leonardo has called the 'Moral Mother' position: 'nurturant, compassionate and politically correct—the sovereign, instinctive spokeswoman for all that is living and vulnerable... [the] Moral Mother represents the vision of women as innately pacifist, and men as innately warmongering.'⁴² As Chaia Heller argues, such a romantic ecology is often predicated on the desire for purity. This desire carries within it a yearning to destroy all that is corrupt within society, as well as that which threatens the integrity of 'nature'. Choosing their own dragon of choice to bear the blame for ecological corruption, each

⁴² Micaela di Leonardo, 'Morals, Mothers, and Militarism: Antimilitarism and Feminist Theory,' *Feminist Studies* 11: 599-617, 604.

yearns for a romanticized time, place and people of the past whom they deem as having been idyllic.⁴³

Such images are potent portraits of a desire for what has been lost, or more accurately perhaps, what has often been imagined of the past. The image of the goddess can provide an empowering metaphor for effective womanhood. However, what is the place of men within such a vision? The portrayal of men by Wicca—‘a shot of Michelangelo’s ‘David’, his penis looking smaller and milder than usual, and another shot of Jesus, surrounded by children, with big kind eyes and flowing hair’ (101)—indicates Wicca’s hidden motivation to take power by emasculating and domesticating men.⁴⁴ Given the metaphorical significance of the penis/phallus for patriarchal power, it is not surprising that here it appears diminished or reduced to the narrator’s eye. As noted above, a male subjectivity that feels marginalized attaches great importance to this anatomical sign, which in times of feminist or gay liberation may appear endangered. Silverman claims that our society’s entire reality depends upon the maintenance of the equation of penis and phallus ‘as a privileged site for the investment of collective belief’ and thus, when it appears to be threatened, much more than dismemberment is at stake.⁴⁵ It is perhaps worth noting that whereas the narrator may joke about the women and their spades being used to bury husbands, the visible reduction of male power through symbolic castration is nothing to joke about.

⁴³ Chaia Heller, Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature (Montreal: Black Rose, 1999) 19. Heller further notes the tendency of this form of ecologism to depict the rural past and village life in idyllic terms as a past golden age.

⁴⁴ That this is indeed the intention of the women of Wicca is seen when Juno, Dr. Zeuss’s counterpart as the leader of Wicca World, makes the decision to keep Luke’s voice from changing by giving him female hormones and socializing him as a girl.

⁴⁵ Kaja Silverman, Male Subjectivity, 8.

Gee indicates that, not surprisingly, this ecofeminist vision appeals exclusively to women and increases the gap between the sexes. Although this campaign attempts to renegotiate the place of humans within nature and signals the importance of participatory democracy, it promulgates a regressive politics in which women only are identified with nature (and the forces of procreation), while men who are not attracted to the effeminate version of manhood promoted by Wicca, remain outside the system.⁴⁶ Gee shows that when Wicca attempts to portray a political platform that is multicultural and diverse, a portrait of environmental justice politics, it alienates the men, who identify themselves even further with machines and twenty-first century technology. Gee offers an important critical view of a form of ecofeminism that depends on stereotypical ideas about gender roles and suggests that such a nostalgic vision would be an insufficient solution to complex social, political and environmental problems. It also suggests the difficulties that an anti-technological stand may have in appealing to male voters.

If the domestic spaces of the novel contain increasing numbers of Doves, at the same time, the outer setting in which the story is placed becomes endangered not by global warming, but ironically, by a disaster that is not man made. In giving the story this surprising turn, Gee reminds us that we are not the sole pilots and authors of our destiny, as apocalyptic environmental disaster stories may suggest. Gee has created an environment made up of diverse actors and voices, one of whom, and perhaps the most significant finally, is non-human; that climate can be altered by human means, but is represented in The Ice People as a larger and more potent force than is often

⁴⁶ Andrew Ross discusses the reaction of men to the new, more sensitive man that is seemingly demanded by women's movements in his analysis of the politics of Men's movements as (over)reactions to ecofeminist evocations of matriarchal societies with Goddess worship. See Ross, 'Wet, Dark and Low, Eco-Man Evolves from Eco-Woman' in The Chicago Gangster

acknowledged, shows the extent to which the vision of the novel is a biocentric one. While making a critique of the social forces in place that create a society obsessed by new machines and ever more complicated technology, Gee at the same time offers a vision of a world that includes other actors and recalls our place within natural forces over which we have little control. Haraway has indicated the importance of thinking about science and technology in ways that acknowledge the many players at work:

The fantastic and the ordinary commingle promiscuously. Boundary lines and rosters of actors—human and nonhuman—remain permanently contingent, full of history, open to change. To be meaningful, the universe must be built out of humans and non-humans. The relations of democracy and knowledge are up for materialized refiguring at every level of the union of doing technoscience, not just after all the serious epistemological action is over.⁴⁷

In the future of Gee's novel, machines created by men reflect male desire to achieve reproduction by mechanical means, and it is this transgressive desire that is punished when the self-replicating machines mutate and endanger human life. For the men, the Doves replace people. The sustained satire culminates in the scene when the narrator, having lost the fifteen-year-old son he had abducted from Wicca World, offers his wife the Dove that has recorded Luke's voice as a replacement. Her bitter comment about the machine encapsulates the divide between technological culture and (corporeal) human life: 'They were the children of our brains, not our bodies' (238).

Yet, in the wider context of the setting, the climate change that takes place has nothing to do with the social, political or technological spheres of human life. It is indifferent to human actions and takes place in a way that suggests the obliviousness of planetary forces to the actions of human beings. It is significant too, that while human

Theory of Life, 202-236.

⁴⁷ Donna Haraway, Modest Witness, 68.

life is endangered by this dramatic change in weather patterns, other forms of life flourish and fill in the niches left by extinct life forms. Gee's novel is predicated on a particular form of ecological awareness that holds that human survival is not synonymous with the survival of the planet.⁴⁸

The novel consists of a dual perspective: focused at close range upon the problem of the machine gone wrong, it also consists of the distant, the long-range view, that is represented both by climate change and astronomy. Gee suggests that this is the dimension that is utterly ignored by a perspective that is blinkered by an anthropocentric focus on the social and the 'man-made.' The narrator has moments of realisation that pinpoint their lack of awareness of the enormous forces surrounding them:

Blindly, blindly through life's night. Missing the landmarks. Missing the stars. Now at last I see the importance of the stars, as the sun climbs up with that effortless strength above our wasted black horizon. Burning bright, unbearable. Its massive power, so far away.... (108).

The shift to the perspective of astronomy provides a powerful corrective to the human sense of self-importance and significance.

What is the importance of story-telling in an age of disaster? The use of the unreliable narrator enables Gee to construct a dual narrative: a surface narrative that attempts to present the narrator's personal history in a heroic light, one that consistently

⁴⁸ See Margulis and Sagan for a corrective to a human-centred perspective encoded in certain expressions such as 'Saving the Earth.' Margulis, who has provided experimental evidence for Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, quite rightly reminds us that the planet will survive in the form of more durable lifeforms, even if human existence is eliminated. Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan, The Symbiotic Planet (New York: Basic Books, 1998). The Gaian perspective, which is extremely biocentric if not antihumanist, is criticized by Andrew Ross in his survey of environmentalisms in The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life, 1-20. Ross notes that the appeal of this scientific view offers a premodern paradigm of unity-in-nature, but which can also 'represent very well the tendency that would sacrifice human and social judgements at the altar of some higher, superbiological entity' (14).

swerves toward failure, and a shadow narrative that suggests a more critical point of view of the events. An example of this technique is the use of the intertextual referent of the pass of Roncevalles, alluding to the place in the heroic history of the Chanson de Roland where the hero signals for help. Here, Briony, the weapons officer of Wicca World, meets her death while attempting to save Saul and his son. Her call for help sets up a parodic inversion of the epic story, as the narrator escapes with his son, leaving Briony not only to be shot, but also presumably, eaten. The narrative voice is largely one that constantly tries to salvage the narrator's integrity, despite the appearances to the contrary, and it is this shadow narrative that implies an alternative feminist perspective of the events. At the same time, the narrative conjoins the voices of the experiencing, would-be heroic self, and the wiser, retrospective voice of the narrator in the present. He realises, 'But now, when I am so much older and colder, I see I wasn't a hero, or a villain, or any of the things they say in stories—but merely one tiny unit of biology, stopping at nothing to save his genes' (208). It is significant that behaviour that requires much justification can be excused, even endorsed, by this reframing within a biological-determinist view evoked by the 'selfish gene'. Yet, this view of the human as embedded within a natural selection narrative that emphasizes the survival of the fittest is perhaps appropriate within a framework that suggests imminent human extinction.

The narrator asks himself what purpose his story serves, wondering '...but does anything matter? Except whether you and your seed survive? It's as if the game were extremely simple, yet we kept on attempting impossible moves, stupidly intelligent' (59). Within this endgame perspective, men are increasingly seen as obsolete, with seed that is no longer fertile and that no longer contributes to the continuation of the human race.

However, at a time when physical survival is endangered, the story becomes a substitute for the narrator's near infertility: his story will become a record for the future. Storytelling also literally provides the narrator with the means of staying alive from day to day: in a gender inversion appropriate to this society in which men are particularly endangered, he is a latter-day Scheherazade, who is permitted to live as long as he has a gift to interest the wild boys among whom he lives at the conclusion. The story enables his search for meaning in a universe that challenges any ideas of human significance.

The novel must be considered within the frame of the life-cycle narrative, a form that Hayles reminds us becomes prominent in times when survival is imperilled.⁴⁹ The narrator muses, 'now the old are dead, and the young know nothing—you tell me, what is the point of us? What was ever the point of us, our struggling, quarrelling, suffering species, getting and spending, wasting, grieving?' (165). If the point was man's ability to love, he reasons, we did it so badly. He suggests, perhaps we were meant to be 'recording angels. Ringing the earth with consciousness. Mirroring it in our net of signs. Solar singers, messengers...' (165). If such indeed is the case, the novel delivers the further irony of the fact that these messengers are all too unconscious of the dimensions of the world in which they live.

We are now in a position to appreciate the suggestiveness and irony of the title. The Ice People interpellates human life into relation with its geographical setting and environment, and does so in a way that overturns common expectations of the future as an age of global warming. Maggie Gee creates a narrative in which Nature is both transcendent and determines human life in compellingly forceful ways. In so doing, Gee depicts Nature as an active subject that is finally impervious to human inventions such as

nanotechnology and the like. The Ice People presents a consistent vision of the future that locates the source of environmental problems not only in the realm of the technological or the scientific, but also in the gender relations and habits of everyday life. The simultaneous co-existence of human bodies, cyborgs, and machines in ever-shifting combinations suggests the ways in which human life is already deeply inscribed by the cultural and mechanical, and the ways in which machines bear the imprint of human hopes and desires. The Ice People presents a mirror of our attempts to address environmental degradation through ever-new forms of 'techfixes,' and envision all forms of life as subject to human reform and influence. The trajectory of the story traces a downward spiral toward extinction, a point that is emphasized by the death of the narrator at the end, but holds out a dim promise through the figure of the escaped cyborg.

Luke's move to join the wild children sketches an atavistic move towards the organic body and natural ways, hunting and foraging, that are longed for by the women in the novel. That Luke appears able to have his own children suggests that a rejection of the monstrous unity of man and machine can lead to survival. It is also a rewriting of the Frankenstein monster myth, in which the monster suffers from his inability to find a mate and reproduce. Yet the enmeshment of the technological problems of the future within embattled gender relations indicates that survival depends not on the balance between entities termed nature or culture, or on our choice of less harmful technologies, but on the flourishing of relations between men and women. The Ice People forms a satirical cautionary tale that locates the basis of environmental disaster in a society that is fundamentally unable to cope with sexual difference. The monsters created out of the

⁴⁹ Hayles, 'Life Cycle of Cyborgs', 321-335.

desire for mastery and immortality are further investigated in the next chapter with Zadie Smith's creation of oncomouse.

Mouse as Muse: Narrating Chance, Inheritance, and FutureMouse© in Zadie Smith's White Teeth

Can one then hope to find in the modern literature works that neither end in a state of ironic detachment about the prospects of ethical extension nor, if they do press forward, commit themselves to a self-limiting embrace of environmental justice to the exclusion of ecological ethics, or vice versa?¹

In Zadie Smith's fiction the strands of moral extensionist thought that seek to include members of diverse communities, both human and animal, within discourses of rights, or at least sympathy, come together. The perspective of the environmental justice movement, concerned to combat the inequity of environmental risk that poor, often urban, minority groups experience, can be discerned in the themes of the novel White Teeth. Though largely renowned for its portrayal of a new kind of hybrid Britishness, one that accommodates immigrants from the Caribbean, from Bangladesh, and the English of various classes and ethnicities, Smith's first novel comes to a climax over the body of a small brown mouse.² Thus, animal rights, as well as the problems of minority groups and women, are brought sharply into focus. Lawrence Buell has argued that the gap between the anthropocentrism of the environmental justice movement and the biocentrism of animal rights environmentalism has widened in contemporary environmentalism, reaching an either/or impasse. Buell suggests that writing about these concerns tends to be located in different genres, such as the naturalist urban novel for the plight of the labouring poor, or nature writing and animal

¹ Lawrence Buell, Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 2001) 236.

² Zadie Smith, White Teeth (London: Hamish Hamilton 2000; Harmondsworth, Penguin Books,

stories to depict the lives of nonhuman others.³ My claim that White Teeth properly belongs to the genre of environmental justice writing may appear paradoxical, given that there is so little of what is generally concerned 'environmental,' or even 'natural,' in the novel. Yet, as Giovanna di Chiro suggests,

The environmental justice movement challenges dominant meanings of environmentalism and produces new forms of environmental theory and action. The term "environmental justice"...questions popular notions of "environment" and "nature" and attempts to produce something different.⁴

Environment, as di Chiro explains, is redefined as 'the place you work, the place you live, the place you play.'⁵ This definition effectively breaks down the dichotomy between nature and culture, the urban and the rural, to render it an intimate element of concern for all. With an emphasis on the inequities generated by racism and oppressive social practices, the environmental justice movement claims that exposure to environmental risks is much greater for the poor and members of minority populations.⁶ Yet if the focus of the environmental justice perspective has widened and

2001). All references are to the latter edition and will be set henceforth in parentheses in the text.

³ Buell, Endangered World, 229-230. Buell also notes that traditional nature writing has often shown little interest or sympathy in the misery of human subaltern groups.

⁴ Giovanna di Chiro, 'Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice' in William Cronon, ed., Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1995, 1996. 298-320) 300. This essay is a particularly good starting point for examining the environmental justice perspective as developed in the United States since it reprints the seventeen tenets developed by the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991. In Britain, this perspective may appear in such fields as sociology or political science. See for example, Cynthia Cockburn, 'When Women Get Involved in Community Action' in Marjorie Mayo, ed., Women in the Community (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).

⁵ Di Chiro, 'Nature as Community,' 300.

⁶ Such an awareness of the importance of social justice as part of Green politics has been understated, if not wholly omitted, within British environmentalism. It is often found in the offhand claim that, of course, diversity and inclusiveness are important elements of sustainability, but there has been little focus in this area. One collection that rectifies this omission is Andrew Dobson, ed., Fairness and Futurity: Essays on Environmental Sustainability and Social Justice (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1999). Dobson states, 'too little attention has been paid to the relationship of environmental sustainability and other political objectives such as deepening

increased the inclusiveness of the environmental movement, it often privileges an anthropocentric viewpoint to the detriment of other species. On the other hand, such biocentric perspectives as deep ecology are biased in the opposite direction, so that species extinction and habitat degradation are favoured as concerns over human poverty and immiseration. A novel that appears to balance both concerns is thus a considerable rarity and merits careful consideration for its attempt to negotiate this minefield. White Teeth accomplishes this task by virtue of being an extraordinarily rich polyphonic fiction that expresses a wide range of thought and feeling on the central dilemma concerning transgenic experimentation. 'Nature' for Smith is the arena of genes and genetic research, and 'environment' is thus largely confined to the bodies upon whom new techniques are tested.

Stories that range over the family histories and genealogies going back one hundred and fifty years in a variety of locales culminate in the millennial event celebrating the scientific use of a mouse for genetic research; here, longings for a disappeared past are joined with yearnings for a future perfect, as Smith reminds us of the dual desire to escape the past and the longing for a better future in her dictum, 'past tense, future perfect.' The eschatological mixes with the nostalgic desire for times and places that have been left behind and widens the purview beyond English landscapes to include the Third World countries of origin of the immigrant characters. Interest

democracy and securing social justice' (1). However, there, the notion that environmental risks are unfairly distributed is identified with an American environmental justice perspective and is not applied to the situation in Great Britain. George Monbiot consistently indicates a consciousness of race, class and global international factors associated with environmental issues in Britain, as well as in the developing world. See George Monbiot, Poisoned Arrows: An Investigative Journey through Indonesia (London: Michael Joseph, 1989); Amazon Watershed: The New Environmental Investigation (London: Michael Joseph, 1991); Captive State: The

centres on the monstrous figure of a grotesquely disfigured rodent that bears in its distorted body hopes for a cancer-free future. In a novel that is largely concerned with the search for origins and the meaning of inheritance, the figure of the experimental laboratory mouse brings into play the languages of genetics, eugenics and Darwinian biology to suggest the ramifications of such cybernetic organisms for humanity. My focus here will be on the use of polyphony within the novel as a device that enables the proliferation of different viewpoints within a text that articulates an environmental justice perspective.

Bakhtin's notion of polyphony as presented in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics includes reference to the following features of the text: its status as a site of interaction between a number of independent voices and its subsequent resistance to closure; its tendency towards simultaneity and coexistence rather than sequence and development; and its use of double-voiced speech.⁷ The possibilities of Bakhtinian theory for ecocriticism have already been signalled in an earlier chapter that focused on the device of carnivalisation, and ecocritics such as Patrick Murphy have indicated the promise of Bakhtin for locating the human subject in nature in a more ecologically congruent way.⁸ As Michael Holquist has claimed, 'dialogism's fundamental a priori that nothing is in itself' has wide-reaching consequences for its potential as an ecological worldview as well as a form of literary criticism. For Bakhtin, 'existence [entails] the event of co-being; it is a vast web of interconnections each and all of

Corporate Takeover of Britain (London: Pan, 2001) and The Age of Consent: A Manifesto for a New World Order (London: Flamingo, 2003).

⁷ Here I draw on Lynne Pearce's summary of the polyphonic features of a text found in Reading Dialogics (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1994). See also Michael Holquist, Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World (London and New York: Routledge, 1990, 2002).

⁸ See Patrick D. Murphy, Literature, Nature, Other: Ecofeminist Critiques (Albany: State U of

which are linked as participants in an event whose totality is so immense that no single one of us can ever know it.’⁹ Zadie Smith’s novel forms just such a web, spanning decades and ranging over three continents with a large cast of diverse characters. In this universe conceived as endless semiosis, the meanings and counter-meanings of the central figure of a genetically-modified, cancer-bearing laboratory mouse are set into play and debated through various rhetorical positions.

The meeting of Samad Iqbal with Archie Jones during World War II, and their subsequent friendship over the next fifty years, also brings together their wives, Clara Bowden, of Jamaican descent, and the traditional Bengali wife, Alsana, and finally, their three children, Irie and the twins Millat and Magid. Samad decides to send one of his sons back to Bangladesh to absorb traditional values, and thus Zadie Smith performs an identical twin experiment to sort out the roles of genetic inheritance and environment. In London, Millat and Irie, caught in delinquent behaviour at school, become frequent visitors to the home of the Chalfens, who welcome the exotic difference of what Joyce calls the ‘brown strangers,’ and proceed to steer the children’s behaviour and career paths. The discourses of biology assume prominence here as Joyce employs botanical analogies to human behaviour, while Marcus is engaged in research into transgenic animals. Marcus’s creation of a miniature murine Frankenstein monster captures the attention of media and various interest groups: representatives of Muslim and Christian religious fundamentalists, animal rights groups and members of the general public assemble for the New Year’s event publicizing the wondrous new

New York P, 1995).

⁹ Holquist, *Dialogism*, 41.

mouse. This representative of a nature ‘enterprised up,’ to use Donna Haraway’s term, is unveiled at the outset of the new millennium, as not only a literal, biological entity, but also as richly symbolic of the practices of the age to come.

Promise of the fruitful union between science and nature or diabolical harbinger of new practices that endanger a) animal rights, b) religion, or c) racial diversity, the FutureMouse© is made to carry a heavy freight of symbolic meaning in the novel. The contradictory meanings of the mouse are contested by a diverse range of activist groups and ordinary members of the public. Though but one aspect of Zadie Smith’s rich tapestry of contemporary life in Britain, it encapsulates many of the themes running through the novel, so that detailed analysis of this figure will draw together the threads of biology, human nature, genetics, race and history that are interwoven through it.

The questions posed by Noël Sturgeon within her informative discussions of the various forms of ecofeminism are germane to this discussion and will orient the focus of inquiry in this chapter. She asks

How can we understand social movements in ways that capture their contradictions, their deployment of theory-in-practice, their contextual sensibility? What are the processes of creating political subjectivities in oppositional movements? What are the costs and what are the advantages of deploying collective identities?¹⁰

In considering the intersection of the personal with the social and political, there is no form that promises more fruitful and complex analysis than the novel. The answers to her questions may be staged in the novel, within a form that in focusing attention upon

¹⁰ Noël Sturgeon, Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) 3.

personality reacting to change in specific social and historical contexts may provide more insight into human behaviours, origins, and quirks than could any sociological treatise. At the same time, the novel exceeds this brief by dramatizing actions and speech, and endowing them with symbolic significance and textual interest, so that the drama and description become an end in themselves. Zadie Smith's account of the reception of FutureMouse© is attentive to the multiple interpretations and claims that are made about it; her inquiry stages the process of a constant interrogation, inquiry and rebuttal. Rather than shutting down such questioning, the novel sets in motion a process that will extend beyond the end of the novel, when the mouse escapes. Smith reminds us that the questions are not only scientific, technical ones relating to its application for humanity, but they also range over diverse fields of inquiry encompassing the ethical, the philosophical, and the religious. The mouse escapes beyond the range of the story to pose the puzzle of its existence to the reader extratextually: What is the meaning of such new technoscientific inventions, and how desirable are they? What does Smith's manipulation of the possibilities of genetic engineering suggest for us as humans, as women, as raced, classed, and gendered creatures? In attempting to formulate answers to these questions, I will necessarily focus on the multiple meanings of the mouse as they are staged and disputed dialogically within the novel.

Once again, this figure pertains to the world of the grotesque, or the freakish. The ordinary body of the laboratory mouse has been supplemented and modified by the insertion of an extra gene that causes cancer: as Chalfen explains it, 'so that specific

cancers are expressed in specific tissues at predetermined times in the mouse's development' (340). The mouse no longer represents nature, but forms part of that category that combines the organism with cybernetic invention: it constitutes a cyborg identity, characterized by its ability to straddle boundaries between the animal and the machine, between nature and culture. In Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto,' this entity is proposed as a rhetorical figure that can perform essential work for environmentalists and philosophers. Rather than siding with an essential, primordial nature as set against the forces of culture and technoscience, a cyborg politics takes note of the way that 'the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other.'¹¹ For thinking about distinctions between the human and the animal, the cyborg usefully appears 'in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed.'¹² When the cyborg invites us to think about the positioning of the human in a post-natural world, one in which human life is often sustained and extended by an array of chemical and mechanical biomedical props or prostheses, the figure of the cyborg takes us beyond archaic figurations of the human to something that resembles more closely our lives today. Yet when used to describe genetically-modified animals that are subject to laboratory research, the very elements that enable the animal to cross over into the machine world are those that may constitute acts of cruelty and callousness. Is the metaphor of the cyborg sufficient for thinking through unexplored areas of ethics and morality, as well as issues of race, gender, and class? I would like to think with and against Haraway's work, considering

¹¹ Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' in Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991) 151.

¹² Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs,' 152.

it in terms of both its promise and its pitfalls for ecofeminist criticism and for the perspective it brings to bear on the laboratory mouse in White Teeth.¹³

Ecocritics as well as feminists have tended to find in Haraway's formulation of the cyborg a route out of the impasse of essentialist positions, such as those predicated on the figure of woman as closer to nature, the goddess as a figure that brings spirituality, gender and politics together, or an environmentalism based upon technophobia and nostalgia for an nonexistent past. Closing the gap between nature and culture, the machine and the human, the cyborg metaphorically inhabits this troublesome boundary, suggesting new ways to think about these old dichotomies. Ecocritics such as Patrick Murphy, Stacey Alaimo, Karla Armbruster and Rachel Stein have indicated the usefulness of a cyborg consciousness for ecocritical theory.¹⁴ However, others, such as Jhan Hochman and Jane Bennett, have suggested the limitations of this perspective for political transformation.¹⁵ Haraway states that, without either wholly natural or technological origins, cyborgs

¹³ The figure of the cyborg as liberatory boundary-crosser was first proposed in Haraway's essay 'The Cyborg Manifesto' which appeared in 1985, and reappeared in the collection of essays entitled Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature in 1991. This idea was further elaborated and developed in 'The Promises of Monsters' in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds., Cultural Studies (New York: Routledge, 1992) 295-337. In its latest reincarnation, the cyborg is discussed in the form of Oncomouse™ in Modest Witness@Second Millennium: FemaleMan@Meets OncoMouse™ (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁴ Murphy, Literature, Nature, Other; Rachel Stein, Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' Revisions of Nature, Gender and Race (Charlottesville and London: Virginia UP, 1997); Karla Armbruster, 'Buffalo Girls, Won't You Come Out Tonight: A Call for Boundary-Crossing in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism' in Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, eds., Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois UP, 1998) 97-122; and Stacey Alaimo, Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2000).

¹⁵ See Jhan Hochman 'Green Cultural Studies' in Laurence Coupe, ed., The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism (London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 187-192) and Jane Bennett, 'Primate Visions and Alter-Tales' in Jane Bennett and William Chaloupka, eds., In the Nature of Things: Language, Politics and the Environment (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1993) 250-265.

are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point.¹⁶

This fragmentary identity is perhaps more disturbing from the human standpoint than one that would simply oppose itself to technology in favour of a unified entity called 'nature.' To acknowledge that humanity in the early twenty-first century is part and parcel of a universe that is not only composed of organic lifeforms but also prominently features technological transformations to these, however ill-suited they may be, is also to attempt to come to grips with the difficulties and desires of an environmentalism that is uncomfortably aware of the intersections of capitalism, technology, nature and humanity.

In an article that attempts to challenge Haraway's formulation of the nature/culture interface, Hochman asks what the consequences of Haraway's suggestion that 'technology is a particular production of nature' might be, and suggests that such arguments have already been co-opted by developers, scientists and technophiles. However, rather than the exercise in naturalisation that he outlines in his article, in which the car is made to appear as either part of the landscape or as an animal (as in discourses already employed by advertising), this argument could on the contrary, highlight the materials out of which the car is made, emphasising that in being made out of iron, petroleum oil products, and other natural materials, the car is indeed part of nature. Such an argument is demonstrated effectively by Jennifer Price in her study entitled Flight Maps, in which, as well as deconstructing car advertisements, she

¹⁶ Donna Haraway, *Manifesto for Cyborgs*, 154.

looks for nature at the shopping mall.¹⁷ Castigating Haraway for ‘stupidly making worldnature [Hochman’s term] into an appendage of culture,’ Hochman proposes instead that ‘green cultural studies ... to be an effective politico-cultural tool in the service of nature and culture,... will need to study not only how to “become” nature, how to attempt a merging with the real or imagined subjectivity of a plant, animal, or mineral, of air, water, earth, and fire’ (192)—rhetoric that constitutes a cardinal example of the tendency to mystify the relations of the human within nature. He completes his proposal thus—‘it will also need to pull back and grant these beings and entities unromanticised difference, an autonomy apart from humans’: a position that fails to acknowledge the ways in which these entities no longer possess complete autonomy free of human intervention. A desire for an untrammelled nature rather than an acknowledgement of the status of the world as indeed post-natural, according to Bill McKibben’s concept, this is a statement of a certain form of romanticisation.¹⁸ Rather than attempting to ‘merge with the subjectivity of a plant, animal or mineral,’ ecocriticism needs to look critically at the realities of life as it is constituted by both technology and nature in the world in which we live.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jennifer Price, Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

¹⁸ Bill McKibben’s argument in The End of Nature (New York and London: Doubleday, 1989) states that since we have altered such systems as the weather itself by changing the structure of the ozone layer, there is no longer a discrete region we can call nature. McKibben’s argument suffers from his dependence on a concept of nature as wholly independent from humanity; this model relies upon concepts like ‘wilderness’ conceived as pristine and apart from humanity. As William Cronon, among others, has shown this recurrent idea about nature is riddled with problems, not the least of which is a deficient notion of history. However, McKibben’s emphasis on the ways that technology has altered nature can also be a corrective to thinking about nature as a world apart, if from a particularly dismal perspective.

¹⁹ See Hochman ‘Green Cultural Studies,’ 187-192.

Jane Bennett's critique of Haraway derives from a position that largely concurs with her ideas, but questions their practical application for achieving political transformation.²⁰ Bennett suggests that temporary forgetfulness can operate strategically to create actors with attachments and loyalties to certain beliefs: what is important is not the constant activity of destabilisation, but a way of alternating between identification and destabilisation. As Bennett reminds us, in Haraway's work 'disruptive skepticism coexists in the text with another voice, one deeply committed to a set of political claims.'²¹ Bennett stresses Haraway's belief that there is a need for stabilising practices, such as those outlined in her 'Cyborg Manifesto'; she asserts that the boundary-blasting cyborg must nevertheless carefully preserve the 'permanent and fruitful' tension between problematization and identification. Moreover, Haraway suggests that destabilization alone cannot form the basis for a cyborg politics, but that subversive politics require coalitions, compromises, and allegiances. Bennett suggests that the impetus behind 'identification' comes from activity that does more than question identities and blur boundaries, 'it must also affirm values that in some way resonate with the hearer; it must evoke sentiments, dreams, and convictions that are in some way familiar; it must somehow inspire.'²² Thus, while not disagreeing with the substance of Haraway's cyborg myth, Bennett does suggest ways of thinking and rhetorical strategies that might be more conducive to political action; as she concludes, 'Haraway's cyborg tale provides a superb countermyth through which to engage prevailing interpretations. If it needs adjustment, it is... in the balances it achieves between forgetfulness and the problematization of itself.' What Bennett locates as the

²⁰ Bennett, 'Primate Visions and Alter-Tales,' 258.

²¹ Bennett, 'Primate Visions and Alter-Tales,' 257.

productive power of myth can be found in fiction, where, as well as exposing false origin stories and deconstructing discourses, we may also discover what for Bennett is indispensable, 'politically indispensable identifications and the ethical imagination inspired by wonder.'²³ Here I will analyse Smith's attempt to destabilize myths about her genetically-modified mouse, while noting at the same time, points of 'identification' and places that induce 'forgetfulness' of the constructedness of her tale. I will also consider Haraway's extension of the cyborg figure in her discussion of the semiotic systems surrounding Oncomouse™ in Modest Witness (1997) with comparison to Zadie Smith's FutureMouse© .

The transgenic mouse in Smith's novel comprises the ambiguous centre of a constellation of varying discourses. The novel dramatizes the possibilities represented by Haraway's notion of 'Situated Knowledges'; that is, knowledge that recognises the difficulties posed by the idea of a non-problematic scientific objectivity. As opposed to the radical social constructionist position that would reduce all forms of knowledge to the play of signs in which 'all truths become warp speed effects in a hyper-real space of simulations,' Haraway attempts to posit a form of objectivity that would acknowledge its own perspective and situatedness: hence, 'situated knowledge.'²⁴ While Smith's characters are rarely sufficiently self-aware to question critically their own objectivity, they do embody fascinating and brilliantly characterized partial perspectives with regard to the new scientific invention. For Mickey-Abdul, the mouse promises to tell him something about the skin disease that plagues him and his family; for the

²² Bennett, 'Primate Visions and Alter Tales,' 258.

²³ Bennett, 'Primate Visions and Alter Tales,' 262.

²⁴ See Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges' in Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991. 183-201) 184.

Jehovah's Witnesses, it proclaims human presumptuousness over God's creation; for the Muslim fundamentalists, it represents Western imperialism and arrogance; for the animal rights activists, it embodies the cruelty and domination over animals practised in scientific laboratories. If all of this makes it difficult to approach the mouse itself, this is the nature of Zadie Smith's postmodern narrative strategy.

'What is socially peripheral may be symbolically central.'²⁵ The mouse conflates categories of high and low, scientific enterprise with rodent, and forms a monstrous hybrid existence of the two. This figure of the grotesque merits further exploration. As Stallybrass and White point out,

There are two quite distinct forms of the 'grotesque,' the grotesque of the 'Other' of the defining group or self, and the grotesque as a boundary phenomenon of hybridisation or inmixing, in which self and other become enmeshed in an inclusive heterogenous, dangerously unstable zone. What starts as a *simple* repulsion or rejection of symbolic matter foreign to the self inaugurates a process of introjection and negation which is always *complex* in its effects.²⁶

The latter form of the grotesque is an effect of the fundamental mechanism of identity formation whereby the second, hybrid grotesque is produced by the very struggle to exclude the first. The struggle to achieve self-identity thus appears as a special dialogism, 'an agon of voices—sometimes even an *argument*—within the shared Imaginary of the class in question.'²⁷ In a novel that mobilizes discourses about multiculturalism and diverse cultural identities, the hybridity of the mouse reflects wider social concerns.

²⁵ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (London: Methuen, 1986) 23.

²⁶ Stallybrass and White, Politics and Poetics, 193-4.

²⁷ Stallybrass and White, Politics and Poetics, 193-4.

Moreover, most of the characters in the novel constitute distinctively hybrid identities of various origins. Even the family viewed by Irie as a bastion of middle-class values, the Chalfens, are in fact Jewish of Eastern European origin, an irony that is further deployed in the dénouement, in which it is revealed that the originator of the cloning technique is in fact a Nazi. Irie herself, though perceived largely as Black by others, blends White and Afro-Caribbean ancestry, not only through the partnership of her parents, but dating back to her great-grandfather's time. The twins Magid and Millat dramatically demonstrate the human ability to transcend both environmental and genetic factors, or more accurately, the paradoxical effect upon these upon human character. Though of Bengali origin, they take up contrasting versions of social identity, reflecting the intricate dance between social context, familial and political pressures, and identity. The twin sent to the homeland to embody traditional values and culture in fact assumes an English identity, or in fact, a 'more-English-than-the-English' identity, while the twin who remains in Britain incorporates the radical Muslim values that signal the struggle of the new Briton to maintain a discrete cultural identity. The process that Stallybrass and White describe as always 'complex in its effects' is thus reflected throughout the characterization of the novel, through the representation of ethnic identities that are complex and shifting. These forms of identity underline the point made by Stuart Hall that

in black popular culture, strictly speaking, ethnographically speaking, there are no pure forms at all. Always these forms are the product of partial synchronization, of engagement across cultural boundaries, of the confluence of more than one cultural tradition, of the negotiations of dominant and subordinate positions, of the subterranean strategies of recoding and transcoding, of critical signification, of a vernacular base. Always these forms

are impure, to some degree hybridized from a vernacular base.²⁸

If cultural hybridity is the keynote of characterization in the novel, it reaches its most dramatic form in the trope of the cyborg—that hybrid form that declares the incorporation of political, economic and biomedical motivations within its body.

The mouse constitutes a Chinese box of varying interpretations, as Magid suggests. Once box after box has been opened, at the centre is an empty space in which we may place the literal, biological figure of the mouse; however, we cannot get at that absolute centre directly, without approaching it through the contesting discourses that mediate it. To begin with, let us examine the mouse that has been genetically re-designed by the scientist as he introduces it to Irie, moving out from the inner circle of the Chalfens and ‘Chalfenism’ to arrive at the peripheries represented by the various fringe groups in the novel. Marcus’s work is reflected through the prism of his children’s imaginations when they chorus “FutureMouse!” imagining an anthropomorphic rodent in red shorts’ each time it is mentioned (312). For the children, the mouse is a figure with immense imaginative potential; for the scientist, it is also the marvel of biotechnology described by Marcus: ‘You see, embryo cells are all very well, they help us to understand the genetic elements that may contribute to cancer, but what you really want to know is how a tumour progresses in living tissue. I mean, you can’t approximate that in a culture, not really’ (339). Zadie Smith gives these remarks an ironic turn by juxtaposing conversations in which he demonstrates his lack of curiosity regarding living beings such as his black assistant Irie (asking her

²⁸ Stuart Hall, ‘What is the ‘black’ in black popular culture?’ in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies (London and New York:

questions about herself and then ‘immediately uninterested in his own question’ turning to his files) and his fascination, on the other hand, with living tissue in the form of his invention. He elaborates the changes he has introduced:

This mouse, the one you’re looking at, is a unique mouse, Irie. I plant a cancer and a cancer turns up precisely when I expect it. Fifteen months into the development. Its genetic code is *new*. New breed. No better argument for a patent, if you ask me. Or at least some kind of royalties deal: 80 per cent God, 20 per cent me. Or the other way around, depending on how good my lawyer is... I’m not interested in the patent personally. I’m interested in the *science* (340-41).

The sly intermingling of disinterested, objective Science, with financial interests and arrogant claims to outdo God, signals Zadie Smith’s intention to deconstruct some of the scientific claims to lack of bias and purity of motive. The aspect of property and copyright law is also notably at issue in Haraway’s discussion of the transgenic mice in Modest Witness: for Oncomouse™ being property is an essential component of its existence.²⁹

Vandana Shiva explores more fully the neo-colonisation at work in the concepts of intellectual property and property rights as applied to genetic research. She describes the annexing of indigenous knowledge and seeds, medicinal plants and genes as an extension of the logic that enabled Columbus to appropriate land and native peoples. She notes, ‘in continuity with conquest by naturalization, biodiversity is being defined as nature—the cultural and intellectual contributions of non-Western knowledge systems are being systemically erased.’³⁰ For Shiva, now that capital has already exploited the land, forests, rivers, oceans and the atmosphere, it has to look for

Routledge, 1996. 465-475) 471.

²⁹ Haraway, Modest Witness, 120.

new colonies to invade and exploit: 'These new colonies are ... the interior spaces of the bodies of women, plants, and animals.'³¹ For Shiva, as Smith's novel also suggests, the struggle to allow diverse species freedom to evolve has implications at the same time for cultural diversity and the autonomy of subaltern groups. Further, the disruption of cultural diversity also has ecological implications, since monocultures are not ecologically sustainable: as Shiva demonstrates, 'sustainability is ecologically linked to diversity.'³² The environmental justice position that whereas environmental ills may be widely distributed, their effects may not in fact be democratically inflected is germane here: minorities and less powerful groups such as animals, women, and Third World populations are unequally adversely affected.

Haraway appeals to us to consider the innovation of genetically-modified animals, not as monsters or freaks, but as siblings. She contends,

...we have been commercially, biologically, textually, and politically interpellated into the same public and private family networks. Members of a transgenic clan, these commercially branded figures highlight questions of intellectual property rights, originals and substitutes, authorship, invention, capitalism in postmodernity, its relays between subject and object, and the struggle for a transformed commons in technoscience.³³

Conflating the genetically transformed animal with the human, Haraway asks us to think of ourselves as deeply implicated in the issues at stake, and not only as subjects of knowledge, but also as objects subject to many of the same forces too. However, the mouse is not only an experimental boundary object but also a social actor. This

³⁰ Vandana Shiva, Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge (Dartington, Totnes: Green books, 1998) 10.

³¹ Shiva, Biopiracy, 11.

³² See the chapter 'Making Peace with Diversity' in Shiva, Biopiracy, (103-118) 104. Here, the use of the agricultural term 'monoculture' is extended to the wider social questions surrounding cultural viability.

viewpoint, one that takes the animal seriously as a 'material semiotic actor' (one of Haraway's terms for 'nature'), can be compared to the way in which Irie thinks of the mouse.

Invited to scrutinize a valuable object of research, what Irie sees is something very different. In the place of object, Irie sees a knowing, ironic subject::

Its mouth was unnaturally extended, by the prostrate position, into a cry of agony. but not genuine agony, Irie thought, more like theatrical agony. More like a mouse who was making a big show of something. A ham-mouse. A luvvie-mouse. There was something sarcastic about it (339).

To Marcus's extensive claims are counterpoised the knowing expressions of the mouse, that are filled with 'a mouse-cunning...a mouse-smirk played about its mouse-lips. *Terminal disease?* (the mouse said to Irie) *What terminal disease?*' (339) Sticking out his little mouse tongue and giving something like a wink, a crafty mouse-wink, the FutureMouse© is far from awed by his creator's explanation of its purpose. Here the mouse appears to discount the grand narrative related by the scientist. But if Marcus is motivated by the transgressive intention to contest God in his act of rival creation, what is Irie's motivation for her oppositional view of the mouse?

Like the mouse, Irie is perceived as a creature of lower status, without the cultural advantages that accrue to those with a family history like the Chalfens. Irie's position in the Chalfen family is analogous to that of the mouse. She forms part of an experiment, an intervention into the laws of genetics to illustrate the benefits of the kind of environment, middle class, rationalist, and scientific, that the Chalfens can provide. This view of Irie is best exemplified by the way in which Marcus perceives her: rather than being a waste of his time, Marcus enjoys watching the effect of

³³ Haraway, *Modest Witness*, 69.

Chalfenism upon Irie, 'like watching a blind man feeling out the contours of a new object, maybe. Or a laboratory rat making sense of a maze' (335). Embodying the object in this nature-nurture experiment, Irie also manifests cynicism about their partial perceptions of her and their biased assumptions about her life. Her empathetic identification with the mouse derives from this perception not of its uniqueness, but of its similarity to herself.

Here the significance of race is an important ingredient to be added to that of class and gender. Note that, as Stuart Hall has pointed out, the fact that 'race' is not a valid scientific category does not 'in any way undermine its symbolic and social effectuality.'³⁴ Certainly, the persistence of colour-conscious vocabulary in the novel highlights its significance as a social factor. Haraway has illustrated the operations of this triple code [gender/science/race] in Western narratives about primates and the research stories that emerge from the science of primatology. She asserts that both women and animals are set up as body

With depressing regularity in the mind/body binarism in story fields, including scientific ones. The man/animal binarism is crosscut by two others which structure the narrative possibilities: mind/body and light/dark. White women mediate between 'man' and 'animal' in power-charged historical fields. Colored women are often so closely held by the category animal that they can barely function as mediators in texts produced within white culture. In those cultural fields, colored women densely code sex, animal, dark, dangerous, fecund, pathological.³⁵

That Irie occupies just such a precarious borderline position is signalled both by her subordinate positioning within the Chalfen household and her empathetic response to the mouse. Additionally, the fact that the mouse will change colour in the later stages

³⁴ Stuart Hall, foreword to Allon White, Carnival, Hysteria and Writing (Oxford, Clarendon, 1993) 23.

of cancer, altering from brown to white, cannot be without significance for this narrative.

The suspicions raised by this detail of genetic programming relate to the precarious position of the new Britons in the novel, who face cultural obliteration within mainstream English society. Smith repeatedly underscores the hidden assumptions and preoccupations with race that are buried within so-called liberal discourse and middle-class perspectives. The racist foundations of eugenics, with its historic links to Nazi and American segregationist ideologies, are also implied in this phase of the transgenic process. This element of the experiment forms a fitting correlative for the anxiety felt by Smith's minority group characters who face cultural and racial dissolution in the face of the dominant culture. Here an incipient environmental justice perspective is implied by Smith's critique of genetic determinist discourses that have much more to do with social and cultural issues impacting minority groups than may be readily apparent. That Smith's tactic is to mock the pretensions of biomedical discourse through irony does not render the thrust of her work less forceful. As I have argued throughout this project, comedy and the indirect force of irony contain enormous potential for aiding in reconceptualizing the problems instigated by deterministic discourses. And rather than duplicating the high seriousness and lack of humility conveyed by such discourses, humour has the ability to explode such attitudes.

What are the ethical consequences of the animal experimentation represented by Oncomouse™? This is a question that is scarcely raised by Haraway's work, though she does acknowledge the cruelty that must be involved and supposes that animal life is

³⁵ Donna Haraway, Primate Visions, 153-54.

capable of suffering just as humans are.³⁶ Haraway's discussion of transgenic mice also raises the point that they may save the lives of thousands of women who die yearly as a result of breast cancer. Thus, the question of animal suffering is weighed against its salvational possibilities for women. To the assumed imputation of cruelty in causing a mouse to suffer from cancer, Marcus raises the objection: 'One mouse sacrificed for 5.3 humans. Hardly mouse apocalypse. Not too much to ask' (341). Chalfen's 'modest proposal,' however, enrages both animal rights groups and religious fundamentalists who take issue with the appropriation of animal life to re-design lifeforms.

Zadie Smith deploys these dissenting voices within a wide range of fully embodied, historically motivated characters enmeshed within specific relationships and positioned by gender, sexuality, race, and class. The essence of the novel form for Bakhtin is its ability to deploy the complexities of relation—social, historical, personal, discursive and textual. As Michael Holoquist states, 'heteroglossia is a plurality of relations, not just a cacophony of different voices.'³⁷ The animal rights perspective is one of a kaleidoscopic set of perspectives that collide at the conclusion of White Teeth,

³⁶ Haraway raises this point and discusses it briefly. In a text that foregrounds its quasi-encyclopaedic range, including discourses of science, politics, cybernetics, anthropology, feminism, queer studies, science fiction, and philosophy in its purview, this gap is a significant one and suggests some of the limitations of Haraway's approach. Though passionately engaged with the interplay of semantic meanings and rhetoric, the ethical areas that are suggested by the issues she raises are often inadequately addressed. For example, highlighting the figurative role of the transgenic laboratory mouse and its containment within secular salvational discourses, she states that 'her figure invites those who inhabit this book to take up and reconfigure technoscientific tools and tropes in order to practice the grammar of a mutated experimental way of life that does not issue in the New World Order, Inc.' (47). While stating the problems of such a figure, Haraway's call for readers to 'reconfigure tropes and tools' is highly abstract. Though fiercely politically engaged, Haraway's writing in this book also exemplifies the tendency to metaphorize real entities so that their existential nature is obscured.

³⁷ Michael Holquist, Dialogism, 89.

a set that includes the self-reflexive category of presumptuous novelists such as Smith herself. Zadie Smith voices the viewpoint of a radical activist animal rights group in her creation of FATE, an acronym that satirically echoes the animal rights group PETA. The moral extensionist position that would grant animals greater status and rights within mechanistic Western science is thus illustrated by this group. As FATE (Fighting Animal Torture and Exploitation) aims to shut down experiments that use laboratory animals, it is portrayed in its search for the best rhetorical means to persuade the public. Discussions thus involve strategic political planning, focusing on the use of language and the most effective manipulation of public opinion through the media. The founders of FATE, the charismatic Crispin and his wife, beautiful Joely, are portrayed primarily as political animals in need of a cause. Their animal rights activism derives from their disillusionment with various leftist organisations: 'They grew tired of speaking up for this species of ours who will so often organise a coup, bitch behind your back, choose another representative and throw it all back in your face. Instead they turned their attention to our mute animal friends' (478). Smith slyly suggests the hidden misanthropy often attributed to animal rights activism.

With impeccable extremist credentials and a brief 'so broad and fanatical (any animal in any level of discomfort)' (479), life for FATE members is difficult and dangerous. The heady cocktail of charismatic leadership, a serious mission, and imminent danger holds many attractions for Joshua Chalfen, so that it is difficult to judge which is the more important motivation, his (oedipal) desire to attack his father's work or his sexual attraction to one of the leaders. Joshua's conversion to the cause occurs while he gazes at Joely's breasts through her thin T-shirt and he suddenly

realises that ‘the largest community on earth, the animal kingdom, were oppressed, imprisoned and murdered on a daily basis with the full knowledge and support with every government in the world’ (481). Smith sets out a satirical portrait of engaged activists, deflating their importance by juxtaposing heroic attitudes motored by generational revolt to their trivial political activities. The sustained mockery to which Smith subjects her radical animal rights activists greatly undercuts the validity of their viewpoint.

The depiction of this perspective does raise the ethical question, however, of whether the mouse should be regarded merely a symbol of a certain way of conceptualizing and treating animals or whether it should rather be seen as a literal, biological fact. In raising this question, I hope to address the discrepancy that has already been noted in Haraway’s work between the important symbolic work of the animal and the relative unimportance of its status as a lifeform with the inherent right to be unmolested. FATE sets out this viewpoint by positing the equivalence of animal and human life: ‘If this were a man trapped in a little glass box for six years, he wouldn’t be a symbol, you know? And I don’t know about you, but there’s no difference between mice and men, you know, in my opinion’ (484). Although the members of FATE concur, (‘because this was the kind of sentiment to which they routinely murmured assent’) this viewpoint fails to persuade.

The way in which the general public focuses on the biological fact of the mouse— ‘the mouseness of the mouse’— bewilders Chalfen. As he reflects,

No other work he had been involved with seemed to catch the public imagination like his mice. To determine a mouse’s future stirred people up. Precisely because people saw it that way: it wasn’t determining the future of a

cancer, or a reproductive cycle, or the capacity to age. It was determining the future of the *mouse*' (419).

If the scientist regrets the failure of the public to think of the animal 'as a site, a biological site for experimentation into heredity, into disease, into mortality' (419), the novel as a whole suggests that the mouse exceeds this material meaning of its existence to embody a host of other symbolic freight.

The question of eugenics is repeatedly raised by the public. Smith ironically orchestrates the revelation that Chalfen's mentor is none other than the Nazi Archie failed to kill in WWII, Dr. Marc-Pierre Perret. But if the dangers of eugenics can be contained within the peripheral figure of a remnant Nazism, it does not pose as complex nor as likely a difficulty for the future. The association of eugenics with Nazi politics retains a vivid historical association for the public, yet it is also a charge that is relatively easy to dismiss, and indicates a shortcoming in Smith's portrayal of the institutional backings of such research. Steven Mentor contends,

The sexist, racist, classist element of eugenics are alive and well... but they will look different, be narrated differently. A parallel: those Nazis in the film *Indiana Jones* with their uniforms and leather and swastikas make a certain fascism visible but make another kind—a more contemporary version—invisible. Today's evil does not wear the face of Nazi eugenics, but is rather linked to niche marketing and consumer choice.³⁸

Similarly, the strength of Haraway's argument is to note the intricacy of the interconnections of science with commerce, industry, informatics and the military complex to indicate to what extent it operates now within this complicated web of discrete fields. While Smith does acknowledge the commercial forces behind the

³⁸ Steven Mentor, 'Witches, Nurses, Midwives, and Cyborgs: IVF, ART, and Complex Agency in the World of Technobirth' in Robbie Davis-Floyd and Joseph Dumit, eds., Cyborg Babies:

millennial FutureMouse© project, these are obscured by the more memorable figure of the Nazi Perret, the man who weeps tears of blood. Since whatever depth of knowledge Marcus possesses in the field of genetics is not balanced by any insight into the workings of politics or history that might make him conscious of the anti-social applications of his work, despite his own Jewish heritage, his perspective is supplemented in the novel by others that contest its ethical implications.

A salient aspect of the radical fringe featured in White Teeth is the fundamentalist Muslim group Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation—KEVIN for short. After Samad's son Millat joins this Muslim splinter group he struggles to give up the vices of marijuana, drink, and blonde women for his new faith. What this ascetic existence offers him is the possibility to develop an alternative identity to one that would fully assimilate and disappear into white Britain. For Millat, KEVIN offers an alternative to the prospect of 'merging with the oneness of this greenandpleasantlibertarianlandofthefree,' a place otherwise dubbed Happy Multicultural Land.³⁹ Yet, as Smith demonstrates, the burdens of a colonial past persist well into the second generation, as they are constantly interpellated as foreigners within their native land. The way in which Joyce asks them where they are from, persisting in asking despite their claim to be from London, exemplifies this difficulty. At the same

From Techno-Sex to Techno-Tots (New York and London: Routledge, 1998) 86.

³⁹ Such an image is evoked in the photograph accompanying a review of White Teeth in The Observer. It shows two people, one black, one white, with wide smiles (and white teeth!) dressed in festive clothing to celebrate Carnival. Under the photograph reads the edifying comment, 'Britain has perennially sought to define herself by defining others.' While it may be true that such events as the Notting Hill Carnival largely exemplify peaceful and fruitful alliances between various racial groups, the more pressing questions of adequate political representation and positions within the world of work are left unanswered by such representations. See Caryl Phillips, 'Mixed and Matched' The Observer, 9 January 2000: 11.

time, discourses of genealogy, genes, and family backgrounds and environments combine to suggest that their backgrounds are considered less than desirable by the members of the middle class who control these modes of speech.

Within the range of personal psychodramas that are shown to form the basis of each character's activism, scientific activity or choice of career, Millat's motive for engaging in a battle against Marcus's work is also shown to be personal in nature. It appears to be fuelled by the fact that his older twin Magid is employed by Marcus to develop the legal basis for the patent rights of the mouse. Smith deftly foregrounds the move made by scientists to remove the transgenic animal from the realm of nature, placing it instead within property and patent laws by virtue of the modifications that have been made to it. Such a move seeks to sidestep the kinds of arguments that could be developed regarding the treatment of animals by stressing their status as objects within technoscientific enterprise. The charge made by KEVIN of its nature as 'a new animal that has no name but is simply an abomination' (475) misses the significant point that though not named by Adam, the animal not only has a name, but a brand name with a copyright attached to it. In their attack on Western science, this group is launching a counter-attack on the society that has waged war on them in both overt and covert racist threats and violence. The fundamentalist preacher correctly identifies the battle to be fought as a war of words—'we are being indoctrinated, fooled, and brainwashed, my Brothers! So I will try to elucidate, explain and expound....' (467). The actual plan of attack, however, falls far short of their original intentions, and involves the farcical plan of standing up and reading from the Qur'an. Guerrilla warfare is comically reduced to textual arguments regarding the best translation to use

so that, as Millat observes, these supposed fanatic fundamentalists resemble nothing more than an editorial meeting at the London Review of Books.

Another form of protest is staged by Irie's grandmother with her group of Jehovah's Witnesses, which adds to the already potent mix of languages that jostle for power within the polyphonic structure of the novel. Here biblical language inflected with the Caribbean dialect of Irie's grandmother is employed to contest the validity of genetic experimentation. Although the substance of their critique overlaps to a great extent with the Muslim fundamentalist group, what is important here is the specific flavour of the heteroglossia that comes into play. The apocalyptic timing of the staged event dovetails perfectly with the end-of-the-world message of this group, and it is this perhaps, more than the content of their critique, that motivates their protest. Biblical touchstones such as 'He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow' employ the language of ethical certainty and divine authority in their criticism of presumptuous genetic research (507). This thread amplifies the viewpoint of the Muslim fundamentalists of scientific (Promethean) presumption to perform work that should be God's alone.

Magid, perhaps more than any other single character, voices the thematic concerns of the novel embodied by the mouse when he reflects on the meaning of its existence:

No potluck. No random factors. ... No mysteries lying in wait. ...No question of a journey, no question of greener grass, for wherever this mouse went, its life would be precisely the same. No other roads, no missed opportunities, no parallel possibilities. No second-guessing, no what-ifs, no might-have-beens. Just certainty. Just certainty in its purest form. ...what more God is *that*? (490).

Like the Muslim preacher of KEVIN who never uses one adjective where three would do, Magid's thought forms a highly repetitive catalogue of the events foreclosed by genetic alteration. For Magid, the mouse repeats a trajectory of pure negation of contingency; by its genetically-engineered nature, it will always embody the inner transgenic identity programmed for it. The implications of such engineering for the form of the novel are clear: with elimination of the random, the chance events that take place in White Teeth could not occur. The universe would be a wholly more orderly, predictable, and thus less endlessly interesting and comic a place. The existentialist gesture of tossing a coin would have no meaning there.

Irie's decision to challenge fate, 'that four-letter F word,' by having unprotected sex with both of the twins is another instance of the gamble, an action that challenges the novel's discourses of biological determinism championed in different ways by both of the Chalfens. In a gesture that will set her child free from the heavy weight of paternity, and thus history with its endless genealogies and genetic determinations, Irie will never know which twin is the father of her child. It is to be fatherless, 'free as Pinocchio, a puppet clipped of paternal strings' (541). Yet the grandfather of the child will no less certainly be Samad Iqbal of the heroic forebear of Indian history, and the entanglement of the Iqbals with the Joneses will be still more pronounced. The decision of who is to be father for her baby is left up to her body, however, in a way that reinstates the very determinism she is at pains to escape. Discourses that reify competitive sperm, ambitiously jostling for the gamete are contained within her decision to leave the choice of father to chance, to Nature itself. It is worth noting that Irie's embattled body, literally felt to be 'out of place' with its Caribbean dimensions

and shape, is used as a significant actor within the plot. Irie plays out her fate by submitting herself to the determinations of biology, a biology that is untrammelled by the authoritative discourses of others. Interpellated primarily *as* body by the prejudices of society, Irie performs her protest within the range of activity to which she has been assigned. Thus, her body is set up to talk back to the social expectations of others. Like the mouse, she enacts her destiny with a knowing wink and a smile for those who believe she is confined to the programmes of biological determinations. Smith offers an alternative ending with a gesture that acknowledges the desire of the reader for closure, and suggests that this ending might be one that a demographic of young professional women aged eighteen to thirty-two might like: one that offers Joshua Chalfen as surrogate father to the child, thus satisfying simultaneously reader desires for romance, a happy ending, and reintroducing a father into Irie's original story that had written one out.

In staging a plot that revolves around the figure of a mouse, and giving it such centrality within the story, Zadie Smith is challenging some of the intrinsic rules of the novel. The novel is primarily an anthropocentric form, one that focuses almost exclusively upon human nature.⁴⁰ Works that do focus on animals largely do so by anthropomorphising them, dressing them up in human clothes and giving them human language, thought and behaviour. In terms of bodies, it goes without saying that the subject at issue is always the human subject: the 'bodies that matter,' to use Judith Butler's expression, are inevitably human. The exception to this tendency is found in

⁴⁰ See Dominic Head for a discussion of the challenges posed by the novel form for ecocritical analysis in 'Ecocriticism and the Novel' in Lawrence Coupe, ed., The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism (London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 235-241) and 'The (Im)Possibility of Ecocriticism' in Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells, eds., Writing the

discussions of animal rights, either within philosophy or ecofeminism, and these forums of discussion may shed light on the conventions and limitations for considering animals and animal bodies in writing.

Rather than replicating dualist models that ask us to think about whether we want cancer-free lives or transgenic experimentation, an argument that often comes down to ‘your daughter or your dog?’ as Deborah Slicer has put it, and the rhetoric of consumer choice and free markets, the cyborg figure can help us to think through these problems in new ways.⁴¹ As Steven Mentor states,

If the cyborg figure helps us see the always already constructed nature of medical and reproductive bodies, then perhaps it will allow us to assemble wider discursive networks, networks that include more voices (women’s in particular) in a wider discussion of bioethics and socially responsible science.⁴²

Zadie Smith’s polyphonic novel is such a means of accomplishing the difficult task of thinking through the thorny problems of genetics, history, inheritance, and chance within the frameworks of commercial institutions, religion, science and popular culture. The novel not only represents oppositional voices of many ideological persuasions, but constantly makes the attempt to bring these into dialogue with each other.

Ethical questions are raised to be dismissed by characters like Irie who have ‘no answers for [them], nor any stomach’ for questions like ‘Should living organisms be patented? Is it right to plant pathogens in animals?’ (426), yet these questions are not closed down, but are put into relation with each other by the polarised perspectives

Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature (London: Zed, 1998: 27-39).

⁴¹ Deborah Slicer, ‘Your Daughter or Your Dog? A Feminist Assessment of the Animal Research Issue,’ in Karen J. Warren, ed., Ecological Feminist Philosophies (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996) 97-113.

⁴² Mentor, ‘Witches, Nurses, Midwives, and Cyborgs’, 86.

presented in the novel. Rather, much like the various texts that are discussed in the novel— bus tickets, a signature on a park bench, a notice of a changed train schedule, translations of the Qur'an or a media release about FutureMouse© — the body of the mouse is likewise a text to be scrutinized, analysed, and its various meanings elicited and contested.

The escape of the mouse at the end of the novel begs a number of questions that are ultimately indeterminable. Is there any real escape for the mouse, or will it simply undergo the future it has been programmed, going from one stage of cancer to the next and turning from brown to white outside the scientific gaze? Or will it, on the contrary, poke out its tongue and defy the programmes that have been written upon it, declaring ‘Terminal disease? What terminal disease?’ This chance is a slim one, for the technoscientific procedure that has created FutureMouse© appears to have determined almost completely the course of its existence. But like its precursor Frankenstein’s monster, the mouse emerges from the laboratory only to escape and enjoin the reader to ‘Remember me!’ Since the plot does not follow a linear progress, but instead installs a circular plot in which history repeats itself, and the entanglements of one generation continue inextricably into the next, certainties about the progress of the mouse’s disease are similarly destabilized. Zadie Smith reminds us to ask ourselves where our gaze is directed, on the man or on the mouse? If we have read attentively, perhaps the reader can attempt the difficult, but not impossible task, of trying to look at both man and mouse at the same time. Both are significant actors interwoven into the texts of our problematic future.

In White Teeth Smith has juggled the dual concerns of animal and human rights, and unusually within environmentalist debates that tend to fall on one side or the other, she emphasises the necessity for considering both as equally important. Although traditional environmental issues remain outside of the scope of the novel, Smith does place stress on the bodily concerns that come into focus with new forms of genetic experimentation. The hallmarks of environmental justice literature, that is, a focus on 'social justice, multicultural perspectives and a diversity of voices,' are evident in this novel, despite its apparent lack of emphasis on setting and environment, as the term is generally employed.⁴³ Unlike other novels that have been shown to reflect an environmental justice viewpoint, White Teeth accomplishes the difficult task of awakening consciousness not through moral seriousness or political correctness, but through the indirection of irony.⁴⁴ This provides greater scope for the reader to enter the debate to provide another perspective to the multiplicity of voices found within the novel, so that the dialogical process within the novel continues extratextually. The endangerment and risks that Smith represents as particularly important are located outside the body, as in most environmental ills, but concern the most intimate realm of human life. At the same time, Smith suggests, these risks are differentially distributed, so that the peripheral populations of non-White citizens, and possibly women more than men, will receive greater damage. It is this element of the novel that paradoxically

⁴³ Annie Merrill Ingram, 'Telling News of the Tainted Land: Environmental Justice Fiction by Women' in Thomas S. Edwards and Elizabeth A. De Wolfe, eds., Such News of the Land: U.S. Women Nature Writers (Hanover and London: U of New England P, 2001. 227-238) 238.

⁴⁴ Compare with the more overtly political novels discussed by Ingram: Barbara Kingsolver's Animal Dreams (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), Linda Hogan's Solar Storms (New York: Scribner, 1995) and Ana Castillo's So Far From God (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993).

announces its membership within a movement that attempts to reunite environmental
with social justice issues.

III Mortal Bodies

Landscapes of Memory: Time, Space and the Contextualised Body in Penelope Lively's Moon Tiger

Thus far I have focused on material bodies evoked through descriptions of sexual encounters, pregnancy, and monstrosity and paid attention to the ways in which embodied perspectives may determine particular viewpoints of the environment in its broadest sense. I have looked at altered bodies that reflect the particularity of being female, as these have important repercussions for the way in which nature and environment are conceptualized. Thus, narratives that concern illness or disease may hold the promise of foregrounding states of being that underline the experience of living within a frail body. Despite the fact that illness is a common constituent of human experience, it occupies a remarkably small terrain in literature. Virginia Woolf reflects on this fact in her essay 'On Being Ill,' commenting that

with a few exceptions ... literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear, and, ... is null, and negligible and non-existent.¹

Woolf describes the way in which 'the world has changed its shape' for the ill observer: how the sky, for example, may be examined at leisure to reveal aspects of nature that the hurried able-bodied person fails to notice. Woolf notes that to write of such experience

¹ Virginia Woolf, 'On Being Ill' The Crowded Dance of Modern Life (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993. 43-53) 43.

‘would need the courage of a lion tamer; a robust philosophy; a reason rooted in the bowels of the earth.’²

Narratives of the dying body paradoxically constitute a fundamental denial of death, as writing, or here the remembering mind, forms a symptom of not dying. Death causes a disorder to all stability by ‘marking out moments of ambivalence, disruption or duplicity and their eradication.’³ The personal experience of death, rather than its nature as a philosophical entity, forms the ultimate challenge, a scandal, to life. This chapter will consider narratives that involve illness, death and dying and will think about the resonances of these experiences of frailty and how they have consequences for the ways in which identity, body, disease, and environment are considered. In this chapter I postulate that discourses about illness are fundamentally epistemophilic: that is, they express and explore a deep-seated curiosity about the origins of the deformed or anomalous body. To what extent are the origins of illness perceived to be linked to environment, history and biological identity? How do altered bodies affect one’s place in the world and sense of surroundings?

American ecofeminist writers such as Terry Tempest Williams, Gretel Ehrlich, Kathleen Norris and Leslie Marmon Silko have written about the linkages between the female body, environment and death in provocative and influential ways.⁴ Jane Smiley’s A Thousand Acres also links women, animals and the land within an economy that is relentlessly shown as circumscribed by the masculine gaze and patriarchal structures of

² Woolf, ‘On Being Ill’, 44.

³ Jackie Stacey, Teratologies: A Cultural Study of Cancer (N.Y.: Routledge, 1997) 240.

⁴ See Terry Tempest Williams, Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place (New York: Pantheon, 1991); Kathleen Norris, Dakota: A Spiritual Geography (New York and Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993); Gretel Ehrlich, The Solace of Open Spaces (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985); Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony (New York: New American Library, 1977).

ownership within a retelling of *King Lear*.⁵ Smiley also documents the interconnections between agricultural chemicals and the high incidence of cancer that occurs within a countryside that is gradually revealed to be toxic. For these writers, the environmental imagination necessarily involves consciousness of a bodily environmentalism, in which the perception that the body is intricately linked to the well being or degradation of the ecosystem of which the human is but one part. Here the biography of the self records the intimate interrelationship of the innermost embodiment of the person with planetary forces. As has been mentioned earlier with regard to Weldon's evocation of the countryside in *Puffball*, the English countryside constitutes a problematic location for women, and further, it may be said that following Raymond Williams, the nature of English Nature is far from simple. Since Hardy, though one could trace this consciousness of class within English landscapes to much earlier sources, English nature is ridden with class and gender conflicts and cannot constitute an unproblematic source of rest and healing. Though it would be an oversimplification to read American ecofeminist novels as regarding nature and wilderness as primarily forms of solace, as havens of escape from the problems of twentieth-century life, there is nevertheless a strong strain of nature appreciation within these texts that is continually contested within novels by contemporary English women writers.

Such issues are relevant to a reading of Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger*, awarded the 1987 Booker-McConnell Prize for Fiction, as it stages the memories of a dying historian, going back over the various strata of times and places that have formed the defining moments of her life.⁶ Here Penelope Lively explores the twin preoccupations

⁵ Jane Smiley, *A Thousand Acres* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1991).

⁶ Penelope Lively, *Moon Tiger* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1987). All references are to this

that have formed the subjects of earlier works: Passing On and Going Back. In Moon Tiger a return to a place visited earlier is made in order to rethink the protagonist's relationship with a soldier who died during World War II. In her last days as she is dying of cancer, Claudia Hampton engages in her final work, grandiosely conceived as 'a history of the world.' The particular nature of this final narrative, which rambles in a non-linear and non-chronological order, is very much determined by the conditions of Claudia's life as a patient: confined to bed, interrupted by visits of family and friends or the interventions of the medical staff, dying is not merely a vantage point, but very much an embodied experience that is reflected in the structure of the narrative itself. How are the realities of the material body reflected and constructed in this first-person narrative of death and dying, and in what ways does the disabled body determine ways of thinking about the past, place and identity?

It is a common experience that it is only in sickness that we fully appreciate how much our ability to function in the world depends upon wellness, upon the absence of awareness of our bodies. What disease does is alert us to our non-transcendence of physicality and impinge upon thought, emotion, and bodily feeling in extremely tangible ways. Some theorists have considered disease not merely as physical malfunction, but have placed it within communication theory that signals the change in the sense of self that occurs as a result of illness.

Disease is a subspecies of information malfunction or communications pathology; disease is a process of misrecognition or transgression of the boundaries of a strategic assemblage called self. ...What counts as a 'unit', a one, is highly problematic, not a permanent given. Individuality is a strategic defense problem.⁷

edition.

⁷ Donna Haraway, 'Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies' in Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds., Feminist Theory and the Body (New York: Routledge, 1999) 211. Emily Martin employs a similar perspective in her work on AIDS in Flexible in Bodies: The Role of Immunity in

Rather than considering disease wholly within an account of the organic body with essential properties and laws of growth, Haraway places it within a strategic system that is intimately linked with notions of self and identity. Further, to underline the point that has been made earlier,

Bodies have become cyborgs—cybernetic organisms—compounds of hybrid techno-organics of embodiment and textuality. The cyborg is text, machine, body, and metaphor—all theorized and engaged in practice in terms of communications (211).

The hospitalized body in particular foregrounds the relevance of such a conception of the natural body as it is connected dually to systems of resuscitative technology and human communication systems constituted by a hierarchy of hospital staff and visitors. Here the body forms the nexus of these differentially constituted systems, and the self becomes an embattled entity attempting to maintain some sense of normalcy or to retain traces of its former identity as an individual. Although the notion of the body as cyborg comes to the fore in the hospital scenes that form the frame for each past episode in the novel, it is not the only configuration of the body offered by the narrative.

An alternative way to think about the body contains the same emphasis on exchange between the self and surroundings, yet situates this relationship within the parameters of ecology rather than information or discourse theory. Paul Shepard explicates this view of the self as an entity in constant communication with its physical context:

In one aspect the self is an arrangement of organs, feelings and thought—a ‘me’—surrounded by a hard body boundary: skin, clothes, and insular habits. ...The alternative is a self as a centre of organization, constantly drawing on and influencing the surroundings, whose skin and behavior are soft zones containing the world rather than excluding it . . . not a shell so much as a delicate interpenetration.⁸

Shepard’s metaphor of the skin as shell, and his modification of the idea, is particularly apt for this novel, in which shells figure both as fossils and as the psychological barrier erected by the narrator to protect her from the pain of certain experiences in the past. Lively emphasises the embeddedness of the human within geological and natural settings, using the metaphor of the fossil to delineate the intimate relationship of the human within its setting. Through the use of the fossil metaphor, Lively also gestures at a wider understanding of time than that employed by her narrator, who undertakes to describe a particular form of historical perspective. These conflicting frames of understanding time, the historical and the geological, suggest the fissure between culture and nature that is a salient aspect of conventional understanding. The tensions between historical and geological time produce a wider perspective that resembles what Barbara Adam has termed a timescape perspective.

Adam has developed the idea of ‘timescape’ to supplement the spatial understanding of place contained in the idea of landscape: that is, as ‘a story of immanent forces, of interdependent, contingent interactions that have given rise to its existence.’⁹ Necessarily, the idea of landscape cannot be separated from the presence of an observer, whose landscape is a product of prior knowledge, their power of deduction and

⁸ Paul Shepard and D. McKinley eds. Introduction to The Subversive Science (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1969) iii.

⁹ Barbara Adam, Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazard (London: Routledge, 1998) 54.

imagination. Adam suggests an analogous view of place that includes the awareness of time: she seeks to achieve an extension of the landscape perspective, that is, 'to develop an analogous receptiveness to temporal interdependencies and absences, and to grasp environmental phenomena as complex temporal, contextually specific wholes.'¹⁰ This shift from space to time entails a shift to that which is invisible and outside the capacity of the senses. This approach is specifically ecological in its emphasis on the connectedness and the interactions between various elements in place, and for its emphasis on absences, latencies and immanent forces, thus recognizing the nature of indeterminacy in many situations that occur within one time frame but have repercussions over a much larger time scale. Within Lively's novel, the appeal to geological and archaeological forms of knowledge provides such a timescape perspective that destabilizes the nature of the history she relates.

With regard to the spatial axis of the novel, tensions are also produced between notions of 'space' and 'place,' as the competing occupations of historian and economist produce different accounts of the time periods that the narrator lives through. These disciplinary knowledges produce distinctive ways of knowing the places that Claudia Hampton, as historian, and her brother Gordon, an economist, are involved with. Lively illustrates the way in which each discipline produces radically different places as well as competing perspectives about them.

In a different context, David Harvey elaborates the kinds of conflicts that would occur in a conversation between a geologist and an economist regarding space and time considerations in the optimal exploitation of a mineral resource. Whereas the geologist may be guided by a conception of time that extends over hundreds of thousands of years

¹⁰ Adam, Timescapes of Modernity, 54.

into the past and presumes an equally long extension of time into the future and thus brings future generations into consideration, the economist will largely be guided by a time horizon set by the interest rate and market price. Following the Keynesian maxim that 'in the long run we are all dead,' and that 'the short-run is the only reasonable time horizon over which to operationalize economic and political decisions,' the economist has a radically different view of time than that of other professions.¹¹ This is far from an academic point in Moon Tiger, for throughout the novel Claudia and her brother engage in lively discussions to contest their divergent accounts of the world.

The novel is constructed as a series of reminiscences made by Claudia as she reflects on her past. Though the frame accounts of her situation in the hospital draw attention to the various problems that plague the elderly, such as the occasional lapse of language ability or loss of control of the body, Claudia's narrative, though non-chronological, is orderly and often poetically rendered. Claudia claims that a kaleidoscopic view of events has its advantages over standard chronologies. Searching for a beginning point to the story, she begins not just at her own personal childhood, but at the birth of time, a time preceding man's tenure on earth. She considers telling the story from the viewpoint of one of man's precursors: '...have one of those drifting floating feathery crustaceans narrate. Or an ammonite?' (3). Though unconventionally biocentric, such a perspective would hardly enable Claudia to sift through the meanings of the events in her life.

¹¹ David Harvey, Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 229.

The solipsism that would otherwise characterise Claudia's mental memoir is overcome by Lively's use of multiple viewpoints to supplement the first-person perspective of the events she relates. For example, while Claudia has always viewed her excessively ordinary daughter dismissively, finding little in her to attract serious interest, we learn that Lisa, far from being the conventional matron centred on the life of her sons her mother thinks she is, is actually engaged in an extra-marital affair that her mother will never learn about. This narrative device means that, although Claudia learns little about herself that she had not previously thought during the process of reviewing her life, the reader is given the material to piece together these multiple viewpoints to arrive at a new whole, and a fresh assessment of the central character.¹²

Lively employs a central metaphor for the processes of living that emphasizes the dimensions of time and space in the figure of the fossil. The fossils found by the young Claudia and her brother in Dorset suggest the way in which bodies are constrained by particular locations and eventually become part of those external structures. The fossil exemplifies a view of existence that stresses a lack of differentiation between the self and its surroundings, the body and the environment. This notion of the body is characteristic of all living entities, for as Prigogyne and Stengers have indicated, the ability to capture diffuse energy or information flows and assemble them into complex but well-ordered forms is a vital property of all biological systems.¹³ As David Harvey notes in his discussion of the body as an accumulation strategy in Spaces of Hope, the body is not

¹² For one critic the fact that 'Claudia learns nothing in the process of her dying' is grounds for a negative assessment of the novel, and suggests that Lively is guided by a conservative view of history: 'The subjectivity of the historian affects what is chosen for observation, but does not affect the thing observed.' See Sara Maitland, 'The History Woman,' in New Statesman, (vol. 113, No. 2928, May 8, 1987) 23-4.

¹³ I. Prigogyne and I. Stengers, Order Out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature (New

simply a passive object to be inscribed by the diverse forces of social and cultural forces.

Rather,

as a “desiring machine” capable of creating order not only within itself but also in its environs, the human body is active and transformative in relation to the forces that produce, sustain, and dissolve it. Thus, bodily persons endowed with semiotic capacities and morals will make their bodies foundational elements in what we have long called the “body politic.”

As Harvey elaborates further, ‘to conceptualize the body (the individual and the self) as porous in relation to the environment frames “self-other” relations (including the relation to nature) in a particular way.’¹⁴ Along the same lines, Barbara Adam proposes the term ‘incorporation’ to be used in preference to the term ‘inscription’ often favoured by philosophers and literary critics.¹⁵ The former suggests the porousness of the human body, that rather than merely being ‘written upon,’ actually exchanges elements with its surroundings.

As well as foregrounding the notion of a porous body, at the same time, the fossil is an emblem of a radically different scale of time than the human time represented by history, and signals the fact that our conventional time scales are both anthropocentric and limited. Such a conception of time scales that affect not just the length of a human life, such as the concept of lifespan, but the entirety of life on earth, forms a significant way to reconfigure ideas about culture and nature, as well as time and space. Claudia’s first reminiscence concerns the struggle between herself and her brother to seize the best fossil specimens. This fossil is emblematic of a certain form of relationship with the

York: 1984.)

¹⁴ David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000) 99.

¹⁵ Adam, *Timescapes*, 3-19. Adam notes that she is in pursuit of a theory that is generated from a ‘contextual, ‘earthed’, embodied position’ (7).

environment, and is kept throughout her life as a paperweight on her desk that also functions as a *memento mori*.

Years later, in the central section of the novel dealing with her wartime experience in Egypt and the loss of the man she loved in World War II, the discovery of a fossil in the desert further suggests the alternative reality of geologic time that provides a corrective to the exclusive focus on historical political events. The fossil symbolizes not the changeless eternity of Egypt so beloved by travel writers, but rather the greatness and scope of changes that have occurred in this setting. The shock of discovering a sea animal amid the desert is a forceful reminder of the ongoing flux and processes of change that take place even in environments that may be construed as eternal or timeless. Tom's gift of a fossil to Claudia, that of a starfish, is a dramatic reminder of a much greater timescale, which as Tom remarks, 'somehow puts one in one's place' (93). Human life is radically decentred by such a realisation. This awareness of a greater timescale also has the effect of continually challenging the significance of the battles that take place in the desert: Claudia cannot help seeing that the battlefield that has taken the lives of several hundred men is already starting to digest the aftermath, so that in a few years' time it will all have vanished. Maps too are seen for the human constructs they are: the markings on them are arbitrary, for 'the sand has no boundaries, no frontiers, no perimeters' (96). As well as stressing the fictional nature of such maps, a point which comes to the fore with regard to landscapes such as the desert, Lively is also concerned to signal the 'timelessness of maps,' as well as the 'spacelessness of history.'¹⁶ Her own idiosyncratic history emphasises the changing nature of the places she visits, change that is derived not

¹⁶ I am indebted to Rod Giblett for these terms. See Rod Giblett, Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology (Edinburgh: Uof Edinburgh P, 1996) 4.

only from the passage of time, but also in the changes that have taken place in herself as an observer.

If the image of the fossil provides one way to think about the human condition as essentially embedded within the land, paradoxically, Claudia's desire is for an altogether different version of the human-nature interface. What she terms 'a neat image for the relation of man to the physical world' (13) is remarkable for the way in which man is erased from the picture entirely. This trope is found in a picture taken in 1868 that shows the village street of Thetford, in which can be discerned a grocer's shop, a blacksmiths', a stationary cart and a great spreading tree, but not a single human figure. Due to the long exposure of the photograph over a period of 60 minutes, people walking down the street passed through it without leaving a trace: 'Not even so much of a mark as those primordial worms that passed through the Cambrian mud of northern Scotland and left the empty passage in the rock' (13). In a wartime world in which man is viewed primarily as tampering with the physical world, it is not difficult to see why such an image would be a desirable one. However, the ethic of man's proper relationship with the physical world as one primarily to 'leave no traces' is most often associated with urban dwellers and precludes more positive ways of envisioning interactions with place.¹⁷ Within the novel there is a constant dialectic between two different ways of conceptualizing history: one that is anthropocentric and conforms to standard historical accounts, and the other, biocentric and geological. Lively holds these conflicting perspectives of nature and culture in dynamic tension within her history of the world: a totalizing, yet resolutely personal, account of the time she has lived through.

The central portion of Claudia's mental memoir, and as we later discover, containing the most significant episodes in her life, concerns her sojourn in Egypt as a war correspondent. Lively draws on her childhood memories of life in Egypt as a child to recreate the episodes in which Claudia first encounters the country while at war and subsequently rediscovers it twenty years later. Lively's depiction of Egypt forms a rich tapestry of an Egypt constituted of various strata: of the imagination, of myth and history, of tourist pleasures, and finally, a deeper personal acquaintance with its beauty and possibilities. Lively illustrates an Egypt that is constructed differently by British and French foreign nationals, noting the presence of everyday racism in colonial attitudes, and hints at the presence of an alternative Egypt lived by its people from which Claudia is completely excluded. The novel describes how Egypt shifts in Claudia's mind from a picturesque backdrop to a place that engages her senses more fully when she falls in love with a British officer. What Lawrence Buell terms 'the activation of place-sense' seems to derive here from Claudia's sexual awakening, a change that brings about greater sensual awareness and sense of place.¹⁷ Lively contrasts this awareness of Egypt as a place with characteristic sounds, smells, textures, and sights to the placelessness of the desert in which the war is fought: as Tom suggests, it has no more physical reality than a chessboard, a place that foreign armies move over and occupy without really being part of. The Egypt evoked by Claudia is not so much a place of the past, though this was its primary signification before going there, as a force of continual death and renewal. Lively evokes the forces of nature over which man has no control in her portrait: 'The

¹⁷ Cronon, Uncommon Ground and Adam, Timescapes.

¹⁸ See Lawrence Buell, The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995).

sun rising from the desert of the east to sink into the desert of the west, the spring surge of the river, the regeneration of creatures—the egrets and herons and wildfowl, the beasts of burden, the enduring peasantry' (81). One might note the way in which the peasantry is firmly placed within the realm of the nature she describes, a viewpoint symptomatic of an orientalist attitude. When Claudia revisits Egypt, the country has been re-peopled in her mind with the absences of the soldiers she knew, among which Tom Southern is the most significant loss, and is foremost a necropolis.

Egypt thus becomes a means for a dying woman to meditate upon ways of dealing with death. Memphis is a cardinal example of a certain form of cultural means to achieve transcendence, known for its widespread practice of mummification. Lively records the irony that of the lives of its citizens there are no traces whatsoever, 'though of their deaths plenty. Pyramids, mastabas, tombs, sarcophagi, funerary monuments that litter the landscape—a people obsessed with mortality. All their beliefs are centred around the desperate flight from extinction' (114). This setting thus enables consideration of the way in which different cultures handle death: by denial, by transforming it into something more palatable, or by sequestering it, but rarely by full admission of human mortality.

Tom's death is the central emotional trauma in Claudia's life and forms a core of vibrant feeling that she walls over in her efforts to survive. The egocentric and unfeeling narrator that so many critics appear to dislike may be seen as a self that has been constructed in response to Tom's death and the subsequent death of their child by miscarriage. If she is dreadfully inadequate as a mother, a fact which even she acknowledges, albeit with complacency, this lack of feeling can be seen to originate in her traumatic experience of loss during the war. Claudia puts it this way: 'It is like

travel. You journey from the event and as it becomes more distant it becomes less potent and more poignant, like a remembered home. As the weeks go by the knife turns differently' (130). The contrast between the later self that can describe the process of recovery, and the experiencing self, described as undergoing endless sleepless nights, is an indicator of the means Claudia has used to recover from her grief. The cool tone that compares recovering from intense grief to travel has successfully buried the suffering self, and fossilized a shell over the pain, but at what cost to her emotional life is suggested by her relationships to a subsequent lover and her daughter.

Claudia's reflections on death primarily concern the disjunction between nature, that promises the complete dissolution of the self, and culture, which attempts to shore up individuality in the face of the inescapable. Yet in the experience of her miscarriage, she also records the way in which Nature is invoked as a force to justify the social status quo. Nature is cited as a disciplinary force by the hospital matron when Claudia is undergoing a miscarriage as an unmarried pregnant woman. Told that 'Nature has a way of taking its course, in these cases,' a veiled reference to her unmarried status, Claudia insists that she wants the baby. Seemingly denied fecundity by Nature itself, who acts as an enforcer of contemporary values, Claudia rebels against the assumption that only married women should bear children. This episode leaves emotional scar tissue, so that later, when she does have a child, she is unable to care very much about it. The miscarriage is never forgotten and is relived by the dying woman as she lies in the hospital, not quite *compos mentis*.

Though it provides a motivation for the reminiscences in the novel, Claudia's physical situation as she dies of cancer is briefly alluded to rather than described. In a

reflection on her condition in a hospital bed, subject to the constant monitoring of nurses and physicians, Claudia compares her situation to that of Prometheus chained to a rock while an eagle pecks out his liver. Myth, Claudia affirms, has much that history lacks: form, logic, a message (7). It also enlarges a common experience and endows it with heroic meaning: Claudia shackled to the twentieth century, her rock a particular context and time. The contrast between the nursing staff's assessment of her and her own knowingly grandiose view illustrates the way in which ageing has removed much of her personhood along with her beauty and reputation. A chart is consulted to see whether Claudia was in fact 'somebody' and it yields the physical details that will be fleshed out by the history that follows. In itself, it does not reveal very much:

She does seem to have been someone evidently she's written books and newspaper articles and...um...been in the Middle East at one time...typhoid, malaria...unmarried (one miscarriage, one child he sees but does not say)...yes the records do suggest she was someone, probably (2).

The story told by exotic diseases, the scars due to a car crash, and two pregnancies suggests an alternative story that is recorded in the flesh and inscribed upon her body. Yet without an inner apprehension of the meaning of the events that have caused these medical episodes, there would be no story. Claudia's narrative can be seen as a way of contesting the biomedical account of her life in favour of one that provides details about emotion, sense of place, and historical setting. The metaphor of the 'moon tiger,' a Chinese brand of mosquito coil widely used in Egypt, suggests the structural logic of the story which slowly meanders in a spiral fashion around the central core events of her life. Just as the coil comes to an end, leaving nothing but a pile of ash, likewise Claudia expires at the end of the novel, leaving ultimately only a trace physical presence behind.

Yet if Claudia confronts the knowledge that death is total absence, at the same time, her narrative affirms the fact that memory preserves the dead in ways that mummification cannot. She muses on the fact that she has preserved in memory the figure of Tom, somewhat absurdly, as he is now forty years younger than she is. The manner of his death is revealed to her many years later when his diary comes to light. The diary speaks to her vividly of his first-person impressions and reflections of war, though the war has been over for some forty years. This communication uncannily represents a way of talking with the dead, of reviving not only his memory but his voice. As Margaret Atwood comments in her discussion of writing entitled Negotiating with the Dead,

Most societies assign the dead to an abode.... Societies also have a way of devising rules and procedures—'superstitions'—they're now called—for ensuring that the dead stay in their place and the living in theirs, and the communication between the two spheres will take place only when we want it to. Having the dead return when not expected can be a hair-raising experience, especially if they are feeling slighted and needy, or worse, angry.¹⁹

Atwood speculates that 'perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down by a fear of and a fascination with mortality—by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead.' Moon Tiger constitutes an obvious example of such motivation on the part of the narrator, who relates a tale that meanders slowly to the dangerous centre of her encounter with her lost lover. The narrative constitutes an archeological dig, in which the early chapters serve to lift off strata by strata the material that separates the narrator from the body in question. The diary, unlike the mummified remains of Egypt, forms a means of preservation that conserves

¹⁹ Margaret Atwood, Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing (Cambridge: Cambridge

the voice and thoughts of the person who has passed away and serves to reveal the secret surrounding Tom's death. The incongruity of his death occurring on a routine mission to locate necessary car parts, rather than in one of the spectacular battles of the war, suggests the essential chaos of not only war, but life.

The oft-quoted statement of man's mortality, 'from ashes to ashes and dust to dust,' is but one part of the equation: Penelope Lively holds the dialectic of absolute extinction that occurs in nature and the preservation of identity through memory in a narrative that tries to grasp the twin realities of dissolution and survival that are the hallmark of what it means to be human. The disjunction between historical accounts that take in global economic and political forces with that of lived experience is tremendous, and it is this latter reality that Lively attempts to add to the big picture. As Claudia rightly says, 'Because unless I am a part of everything I am nothing' (207). Thus the personal is conjoined with the historical in a way that adds an ecological dimension to the narrative: the body is situated within the context not only of history, but also of place, and that marked with an extended awareness of its situation within geological earthly time. The ancient symbol of the spiral suggested by the figure of a slowly diminishing mosquito coil places the event of death within a cyclical perspective, in which the dead expire and become part of the womb of the earth. Yet a narrative centrally concerned with the dissolution of the main character also paradoxically suggests the ways in which the human persists beyond death: in their offspring, the memory of others and their narratives. The problem of survival in an

endangered environment will be addressed within a still more emphatically ecological perspective in the next novel, Man or Mango?

An Unnatural History of Person and Place: Lucy Ellmann's Man or Mango? A Lament

Our project must be to locate nature within rather than without history, for only by doing so can we find human communities which are inside rather than outside nature.

William Cronon¹

At first view Lucy Ellmann's novel appears to inscribe itself within the contemporary genre of the 'Aga saga' written by such writers as Katie Fforde or Joanna Trollope, with their evocations of modern life led by women in bucolic settings. As Fay Weldon has suggested in Puffball, however, the countryside represents a problematic location for women in a number of ways, and more broadly, the pastoral idyll poses a conceptual trap, often forming an escape from modern life into a rural Neverland that has never existed. In this novel, the protagonist does have the requisite Tudor cottage, complete with Aga, dark beams, flagstoned floors, rose bushes and leaded windows; however, there the resemblance ends. Ellmann manipulates these elements self-consciously to re-write the Thoreauvian renunciation of society, interrogating its presuppositions and pretensions. A narrative constructed largely of lists and citations from various natural history sources, alternating with first-person accounts by a number of narrators, Man or Mango? comprises a collage that attempts to effect the absence of the author from the novel.² These fragments form a postmodern narrative that not only

¹ William Cronon, ed., Foreword, Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1995, 1996. 19-22) 22.

² See Lucy Ellmann's first novel, Sweet Desserts, for self-referential reflections on the use of collage for the disappearance of the artist. In this novel, Ellmann's protagonist is writing a Fine Arts dissertation entitled, 'The Withdrawal Method: The Absence of the Artist's Touch in Collages and Ready-Mades' which includes the following abstract: 'This study will trace the theme of the artist's non-participation in the art-making process, through his/her use of borrowed materials, often merely stuck onto the canvas with glue. The spectator is left to await the artist's return like a bewildered dog at a graveside: hence the claim that Art is dead' (36). There is recurrent parody of art criticism, inflected with the comic sense of the narrator, as in her comment

thematizes loss, lack of coherence, and fragmentation, but also embodies them in its form. At the same time, the dialectic of history, human-centred and concerned with particular periods of time, contrasts with the descriptions of place evoked by the genre of objective natural history and nature writing. The effect of this interweaving is to insert the more-than-human voices commonly absent from an anthropocentric perspective of history and conversely, to bring historical considerations to bear upon the universalizing, scientific observations of natural history, thus enabling an ecological perspective that thinks differently about the person in place. In the strand of literature that I have identified as constituting an emergent ecological consciousness, Man or Mango? is notable not only for its sustained critique of anthropocentrism, and the rationalism that supports it conceptually, but also provides a fresh perspective on English nature.

Self-consciously reflecting upon its position in history as a post-Holocaust novel, Man or Mango? evinces the problems of writing history in a period when, as Steven Connor has claimed, 'history has become enigmatic, broken and in a certain sense resistant to being imagined.' For Connor, the novel of history is in part 'the investigation of its own possibility, the possibility of conferring sequence, direction and narratability upon the past and on the present in relation to that past.'³ Ellmann's novel is also concerned with the consciousness of a parallel natural history, the ecological dimension of the human experience not only of time, but also of space, and particular places. Concerned with apocalyptic endings, the novel itself gives evidence of the difficulty to represent such events, and concludes not at the end of the narrative action, but in a culmination of appendices and reference notes, as if to prolong the refusal to demarcate an endpoint.

that 'the artist is, like most plumbers, nowhere to be found when you need him' (85). See Lucy Ellmann, Sweet Desserts (London: Virago, 1988, 1998).

³ See Steven Connor, The Novel in History, 1950-1995 (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 199.

My description of Man or Mango? as ‘an unnatural history of place’ links this novel to an earlier hybrid work by the American natural history writer Terry Tempest Williams.⁴ Although Refuge has often been used to exemplify an ecofeminist version of history, natural history, and place, I believe that the contrasts between the two are instructive, and will help to signal Ellmann’s innovations in this area. Refuge represents an admirable attempt to think about place in terms that foreground natural history, especially the linkage of avian life to the situation of the Salt Lake that forms their habitat. In this work human history interrupts the narrative at the conclusion to bring the narrator to a new consciousness of the connection between the high incidence of cancer in her family and the nuclear testing that had occurred in the area during the early 50s. This revelation galvanizes the narrator to undertake political action in the form of protest at the nearby military base, a conclusion that greatly resembles The Seven Ages, which has been discussed earlier. Like The Seven Ages too, Refuge emphasizes an ideology of separate spheres, in which male interests are aligned with technology and development and female interests coincide with housekeeping and peacekeeping. In a telling scene, Williams foregrounds two different sculptures that have been placed in the area: the male artist’s work is thrusting and vertical, whereas the female artist’s work is circular and appears more congruent with the landscape in which it is set. For Williams, these contrasting approaches suggest their derivation from anatomical differences and delimit two distinctive cultures and contrasting orientations toward nature.

Ecofeminist philosophy undergirds not only the subject matter of Refuge, but also the narrative construction of the work, as Cheryll Glotfelty has demonstrated in her discussion of the novel.⁵ My comparison of Man or Mango? with a work that explicitly

⁴ Terry Tempest Williams, Refuge: An Unnatural History of Place (New York: Pantheon, 1991).

⁵ Cheryll Glotfelty, ‘Flooding the Boundaries of Form: Terry Tempest Williams’s Unnatural History’ in Laurence Coupe, ed., The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism (New York and London: Routledge, 2000) 293-298.

employs the conventions of natural history writing only to form a departure from its norms will signal the significance of Ellmann's citation of numerous natural history sources in order to interrogate further their presuppositions and perspectives. At the same time, Ellmann embeds her ecofeminist critique within a pastiche that forms a *mise en abîme* of the concerns of the novel as a whole. I will argue that such techniques aid in destabilizing the gender polarization that tends to reinstate women within an unproblematic nature. This novel forms a new kind of natural history that inserts the human voice and viewpoint into nature, as well as voicing the more-than-human others within its confines.

In contrast to Refuge's privileging of a natural history perspective, Man or Mango? sets out to critique the deeply possessive specimen-collecting gaze of natural history and to incorporate an intense awareness of world history within the mundane events of the novel. Here the mode of natural history is seen as representative of a certain worldview: one that in fact enables both small cruelties—that is, carried out on the bodies of non-human actors such as ants—and genocide on a large scale. It situates both characters and readers as those who continue to live after the atrocities of the Holocaust in a state of historical amnesia. The context of the novel is thus established as a reappraisal of Nazism that links the rationalistic, dualistic perspective with its characteristic habits of thought and procedures, one of which is list-making: 'The Nazis didn't invent annihilation—nature exults in it—but they were the best list-makers' (11).⁶

Lists in the novel vary from the tragic to the trivial—inventories such as the valuables handed over to the Nazis by their Jewish victims are contrasted to the

⁶ Val Plumwood uses the term 'rationalism' in contradistinction to 'the rational' to refer to a form of thinking that is hyper-rational, that fetishizes one mode of thinking over another. She claims that 'rationalism and human/nature dualism have helped create ideals of culture and human identity that promote human distance from, control of and ruthlessness towards the sphere of nature as the Other, while minimizing non-human claims to the earth and to elements of mind, reason and ethical consideration.' See Val Plumwood, Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 4.

household inventory kept by one of the characters, or to the absurd: a list in which the elements comprising 'the world as we know it' are itemized. This list significantly dislodges the human element from its superior place in the Great Chain of Being by placing humanity last: 'and humans, who make it all hell' (15). Located lower in this catalogue than the insect or mineral, humans are radically decentred by a list that serves to inaugurate a markedly biocentrally-ordered novelistic world.

The use of lists within the novel indicates a stretching of conventional fictional parameters towards an encyclopaedic grasp of reality. The novel is preceded by two epigraphs, one referring to the encyclopaedic novel Moby Dick, one from the jazz singer Dizzy Gillespie. The former source echoes Melville's concern with documenting the natural world through non-fictional, natural history notations, and in Ellmann's novel, re-employing them toward a thorough-going critique of the ethic of domination, such as is represented by the hunt undertaken by the megalomaniac Captain Ahab. The latter citation of Dizzy Gillespie imports the mode of jazz which 'samples' personal, colloquial, and non-serious voices to renovate musical form.

In addition to pertaining to the novel's formal concerns, these lists can also be viewed as a marker of mood of its particular time, as a novel written in a period preoccupied with millennial preoccupations. In his literary history of the modern English novel, Malcolm Bradbury has noted that 'the year 1999' was a year for the making of lists. The twentieth century, 'inventive, modernizing, terrible, was coming to an end.'⁷ The list enables a turn toward stock-taking: the rational ordering of events in order to

⁷ Malcolm Bradbury, The Modern British Novel (London: Penguin, [1993, 1994] 2001). 502. In a gesture that echoes this millennial urge, Bradbury continues with a list that evokes the apocalyptic consciousness of the age: 'Apocalyptic signs abounded: plagues (AIDS and drugs) and earthquakes seemed to spread, weather patterns shifted, cities decayed. Human pleasures were human pains: food and drinks, sex and smoking, all came with health warnings. New visions arose of the technological wilderness, the age of dreck, crime-ridden, drug-crazed cities, wasted landscapes, ethnic cleansing, modern genocide, tribal slaughters, rising seas, shrinking ice caps, urban surveillance, genetic interference, human cloning, cyberspace. Sensations of transition, anxiety and uncontrollable energies and disorders had always haunted the ends of centuries; this one was no exception' (510).

perceive a kind of order in randomness. It appertains to the world of science: it foregrounds the attempt by language to sort out and deal with discrete realities, from the nature of an anthill to the composition of the earth. It can also aid in bringing the rational to the more amorphous realm of feeling, as when George attempts to sort out Eloïse's good points and bad points in an effort to bring thought to bear on emotion. At the same time, it belongs to the world of the everyday, the mundane and domestic: the stereotypically feminine realm of things to do, groceries to buy, cleaning to pick up and the like. The list, by its very nature a fragmented form that is static and contextual, constitutes a post-modern device for juxtaposing a variety of historical moments and persons while effacing the author. It constitutes a static grid in contrast to the sequence of ongoing narration. Furthermore, as Dominic Head has pointed out in his discussion of the novel, Ellmann's use of collage 'can displace the human, and take the significance of her novel away from her various narrators.'⁸ For Head, this device enables Ellmann to 'mitigate the (inevitable) human centredness of narrative fiction and gesture toward something ecocentric.'⁹ Yet the use of the list to efface the human perspective and to install an objective rational consciousness also makes it suspect as a form of documentation: Ellmann explores this tendency through such personally-inflected lists as one noting damaging encounters and their recovery periods (32-4), or a list of the elements involved in Psychological Phenomenon of Falling in Love with One's Mover ('Transference') (50-1). The author thus employs the list, an ordering device, to inject into it the personal, even the plaintive, in order to deconstruct 'the un-situated view from nowhere' that characterizes its use as an instrument of scientific objectivity.¹⁰ Lists

⁸ Dominic Head, The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 207.

⁹ Head, Modern British Fiction, 207.

¹⁰ This phrase is Donna Haraway's from her essay 'Situated Knowledges' in Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991) 184.

frequently punctuate the narrative, indicating by contrast their lack of centre, of hierarchy, and especially, their absolute stasis, their hostility to the flow of story.

The trajectory of the novel describes a movement from antisocial retreat toward community, although this comic thrust is challenged by the dénouement. In her retreat Eloïse reenacts the Romantic withdrawal from the world carried out by a Wordsworth, a Thoreau, or even the poet Emily Dickinson.¹¹ In installing herself in the role of a hermit, Eloïse raises the issue of the 'naturalness' for a woman to occupy such a role and feel 'at home' in the countryside. Ellmann's hermit has much in common with certain deep ecological perspectives on the world. The misanthropic attitudes that are often masked by the expression of more positive or socially acceptable biocentric views are common to both Eloïse and many deep ecologists, who locate the blame for the ills of environmental degradation on humanity itself, and over-population. It is often a short step from anti-anthropocentrism to misanthropy and scarcely veiled racist, colonialist politics, as Catriona Sandilands argues in her critique of population management in environmentalist discourses.¹² In her retreat Eloïse rejects

boring human busy-ness, human requirements, human bodies...she had tired of her species. So she set off to construct for herself the illusion of a less populated world, in which no one knew or cared who or what she was and she in turn was free to care about no one (22).

Here rural nature fails to provide the much promised peace and solace of Wordsworthian sonnets and travel brochures. Ellmann describes a demystified countryside that 'is just one big battleground' with 'a pitiless revenge being wreaked upon it by electricity' (76). The desire for pastoral retreat is rendered suspect, and finally unavailable.

The landscape is portrayed as inextricably linked with Eloïse's sense of bodily self. There is little separation between the world Eloïse observes and the self constituted

¹¹ Indeed, the letters of complaint written compulsively by Eloïse to any and all recipients resemble Dickinson's poem, 'These are my letters to the world that never wrote to me.'

¹² Catriona Sandilands, 'Sex at the Limits' in Eric Darier, ed., Discourses of the Environment (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) 79-94.

by her body, so that boundaries become indistinct and the traditional role of observer-scientist cannot be maintained. She reports, 'The landscape seems to sag, flop, like me. It's not sturdy' (104). We may discern here a reaching toward the kind of ethic that has been sought by ecofeminists in the form of a contextualized discourse that emphasizes continuity between the body and landscape: Jim Cheney claims that this breaching of subject and object is at the heart of a postmodern environmental ethic. In arguing for a contextualist ethic to replace our androcentric land ethic, Cheney writes that 'for a genuinely contextualist ethic to include the land, the land must speak to us; we must stand in relation to it; it must define us, and we it.'¹³ Cheney asserts, and Ellmann implies, that a phallogocentric language and philosophy have privileged ways of thinking and seeing that are incompatible with the relationship-making that needs to happen between humans and others. Cheney calls for a kind of story-making which begins with 'the inscribing of the nervous system *in* the landscape.' This Ellmann achieves, and like Cheney, her narrative indicates that 'the body is the instrument of our knowledge in the world.'¹⁴ The implications of imprinting the body upon the landscape so that humans are embedded in the natural world are far-reaching, as much for narrative as for environmental ethics. The self/other relationship created out of what Plumwood terms 'rationalism' is thus renewed in ways that emphasize the blending of the two.

However, if Eloïse's excursions into the countryside reveal a desire to engage with nature, and to perform activities authorized by the discourse of natural history upon her environment, what she chiefly reveals is a suspicious, paranoid attitude that projects itself upon the world she visits. Ellmann uses the continuity of self with the world to challenge the integrity of the self in humorous ways. The term employed by James Krasner to refer to the style of Darwin's natural history writings could well be used here,

¹³ Jim Cheney, 'Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bioregional Narrative' in *Environmental Ethics* 11. 1989 (117-134) 129.

¹⁴ Cheney, 'Postmodern Environmental Ethics,' 130.

as 'perceptual chaos' aptly captures the random quality of the objects caught up in Eloïse's perceptual field.¹⁵ Her personal crisis is projected upon the world outside her in ways that create a sense of imminent apocalyptic environmental crisis, and thus her observations of nature become instead a jeremiad, or as the subtitle of the novel indicates, a lament. Yet if Eloïse is the means for a sustained ecofeminist critique of the male domination of both women and the world, it is significant that she does so immersed within the story, in a way that does not allow her to take the 'higher ground' of much feminist protest. Jane Marcus notes about this tendency,

Feminists, like other avant-gardes of intellectuals, artists and social critics in history, are always scrambling for the high ground. They wish to separate themselves from the enemy, and often the best position from which to pontificate against error seems to be above.¹⁶

What is important here is that whereas Ellmann's character takes refuge in articulating her self-exclusion from what she criticizes, the author does not. The ironic discrepancy between the position of the implied author and the character is what gives this dramatized ecofeminist denunciation of patriarchal attitudes of domination much of its force, and humour.

The novel reinvents the hermit beloved to nature writing, the figure such as Henry David Thoreau (self-reliant, observant, at ease with the natural world) or Emily Dickinson (rhapsodic, lyrical, more at ease with nature than people). Although the protagonist enacts a narrative of relinquishment, confining herself to a thatched roof house in the country, the nature she encounters there is hostile and threatening, the villagers overly friendly and destructive of her solitude. There is no solace in this

¹⁵ See James Krasner, The Entangled Eye: Visual Perception and the Representation of Nature in Post-Darwinian Narrative (New York: Oxford UP, 1992) 36-37.

¹⁶ Jane Marcus has made this observation regarding the particular spatial tendencies of much feminist criticism. She notes the predilection of the feminist speaker for 'taking higher ground.' See Jane Marcus, 'Registering Objections: Grounding Feminist Alibis' in Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton, Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1994) 171-193.

performance of 'voluntary simplicity,' and the countryside is far from conducive to peace of mind, as the following quotation illustrates: 'Eloïse knew nothing about country life except that gates must be kept shut and dock leaves sometimes cure nettle stings. She stood eating soup in her overgrown garden, looking up at stars she could not name' (31). In contrast to the natural history observer who is at ease with nature, partly because it is all recognisable and familiar, Eloïse is amid the unfamiliar, 'bewildered' in the (imagined) wilderness located outside her home. The idea of 'wilderness,' as David Mazel points out, derives from this very feeling:

It is said to produce a certain mood or feeling, but of course this action of 'bewildering' cannot be said to originate in the landscape, which again lacks genuine agency; instead it reflects a historically contingent mood of the speaker that has been projected back onto nature. Just as 'environment' misnames an imperial penetration as a landscape, so 'wilderness' misnames a cultural anxiety as a geography.¹⁷

Yet if lack of familiarity produces feelings of anxiety, of not knowing what one is looking at, too much knowledge can also engender a similar effect.

John Fowles comments that the danger of the legacy left by Linnaeus and other scientists that have established particular scientific methodologies, is that our scientific tools—'from the simplest word to the most advanced space probe, are disturbers and rearrangers of primordial nature and reality'—so that in consequence we look for purpose in everything external to us. He continues, 'Nature suffers particularly in this, and our indifference and hostility to it is closely connected with the fact that its only purpose appears to be being and surviving.'¹⁸ Moreover, Fowles' critique of the rationalistic mind set exemplified by the impetus to collect and label nature is germane to Ellmann's deconstruction of the mode of natural history.

¹⁷ David Mazel, ' "A beautiful and thrilling specimen": George Catlin, the Death of Wilderness, and the Birth of the National Subject' in Michael P. Branch, Rochelle Johnson, Daniel Patterson, and Scott Slovic eds., Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and the Environment (Moscow, Idaho: U of Idaho P, 1998, 129-143) 133.

¹⁸ John Fowles, The Tree (Seattle: Nature Company Classics, Marquand Books, 1994) 45.

The sense of estrangement Ellmann notes here is a consequence of urban attitudes to nature, that wish to parcel it off as a tourist venue, view it from a moving vehicle, or merely retain it to service the city, without feeling implicated in its processes. The anxiety that Mazel identifies with regard to the notion of wilderness takes the form of bewilderment in response to this location:

To be 'bewildered' is to find oneself without the means to choose between a confusing array of 'conflicting situations, objects or statements,' and the danger of bewilderment—the danger that echoes through the early etymology of wilderness—is the possibility that, lacking proper guidance, one might stray (from Old English, *wilder*) from the proper path.¹⁹

The fact that the countryside represented here is the tame, domesticated locale of the English countryside intensifies the humour of Eloïse's reaction, yet the anxiety conveyed here is a more general one, representative of contemporary urban attitudes to the natural world.

A structural feature common to nature writing, the excursion forms a significant ordering feature of this novel, yet here it is represented parodically. Eloïse is the natural history observer who feels implicated in what she observes, who cannot feel at ease in her environment because she is intensely aware of its reciprocal demands upon her:

Never did anyone walk through an empty field with more self-consciousness. Eloïse always felt she was being watched. Trees seemed to whisper behind her back and small creatures made kissing sounds in mockery of her. Lynxes, panthers and psychopaths were said to lurk in the English countryside (ex-pets grown too big for the parlour), and Eloïse had once been chased through a small meadow by about fifty merry young bullocks. But she was more worried about being talked to than being killed (31).

Man or Mango? documents the natural history observations of a displaced person, one at odds with the natural world: as a woman, she feels endangered by it, taking on the role of prey rather than the more predatory observational stance of the male. Contrast, for example, the citations made throughout the text by Pryce-Jones on the nature of bees.

¹⁹ David Mazel, 'Wilderness,' 133.

His presence is routinely erased from the notations made, yet suggested obliquely, as when it is suggested that one should not breathe upon the bees, but rather through the sides of one's mouth. The two modes of observation are contrasted by the oppositional genres of natural history and first-person narrative, and significantly, these are gendered in the novel as male and female modes, respectively.²⁰ As Peter Fritzell has argued, most nature writers in American writing 'have tended to generalize (and even abstract the 'personal' and the 'subjective' in their engagements with nonhuman nature, to render themselves and their environments soundly customary, scientifically and aesthetically clean, and most often morally pure.'²¹ He notes the apparent contradiction that while maintaining the fiction that they do not have bodies, their desires, sexuality and experience are projected onto the landscape. By contrast, here the narrator dramatizes the perspective of the desiring female body, one that cannot *not* take into account its desires to connect somehow with something or someone outside itself: 'There were days when she was alive to the sexiness of every tree trunk, days when her cunt protruded beyond its accustomed zone searching for its counterpart, days when all men seemed sweet' (47). The necessity for a sense of an 'expanded self' that would merge with the universe as called for by deep ecologists is here met and exceeded by Eloïse's libidinal body, a body that is notable for its desire for, and simultaneously, fear of, connection. This description is profoundly ecological in its implications, for it assigns to the human body a zone or territory, as in the lives of animals. Yet more significant, perhaps, than this idea is the mode in which Ellmann conveys human weakness as simultaneously comic and pathetic.

²⁰ Here the term 'first-person narrative' is inadequate for Ellmann's narrative strategy which shifts from Eloïse's self-talk in the first person to a third-person narrative focalized through Eloïse.

²¹ Peter Fritzell, Nature Writing and America: Essays Upon a Cultural Type (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State UP, 1990) 28.

As has been mentioned earlier in connection with the comic novels of Fay Weldon and Kathy Lette, the comic mode may have important repercussions for environmental literature. In contradistinction to the tragic worldview which elevates human suffering as being of ultimate importance, and often centres on the single, isolated individual to the exclusion of the social network, comedy has the opposite tendency, stressing the community over the individual, connectedness over isolation, and survival over such values as recognition, consciousness of failure, and the like. For Don Elgin, comedy may help to provide narratives that correct the human tendency to aggrandize human life. He states,

Comedy does not care about love, honor, glory, heroism, courage, justice, or any other virtue which occupies the center of tragedy's attention. It cares only about life itself, not the eternal spiritual life, but the physical life of the individual human animal.²²

This emphasis on physicality over spirituality, and life 'itself' as opposed to its moral significance, suggests the way in which a certain conception of narrative dovetails with notions of human embodiment and embeddedness. Elgin characterizes comedy as providing a mirror in which humans see themselves as they are, not as they would like themselves to be. 'They may be fat, skinny, slightly misshapen, smelly, stupid and weak, but regardless of what they are, they are human, and a part of the animal kingdom.'²³ Thus, the grotesque body, with its laughable and embarrassing moments, points toward reconceiving the human as part of the larger animal world. The leaky body alluded to by postmodern theorists may enable the task of both reinserting humanity within animality, and celebrating the kinship that such a readjustment may bring about.

²² Don Elgin, The Comedy of the Fantastic: Ecological Perspectives on the Fantasy Novel (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1985) 16.

²³ Elgin, Comedy, 17.

Ellmann also makes the vegetable kingdom significant within the world of the novel. The eponymous mango forms an appropriate objective correlative for the female body. Eloïse becomes obsessed with collecting mangoes, putting them on the windowsills twenty at a time and revelling 'in these slowly softening spheres, each its own sunset, and in each a flat skeletal stone to gnaw on' (48). In the following description her body itself manifests the state of lovelessness that is such a salient feature of her emotional life: 'Sizzled lips from sucking mangoes, heart pounding from sorrow and stagnation, nausea from eating standing up, piles from? sitting around?, spotty back from no hugging, atrophied cunt from no fucking, strange feeling in her throat from not speaking for days at a time' (48) and so on. While her body bears the stigmata of the rejected woman, at the same time, her fears are projected upon her environment, as she becomes intensely aware of the toxins around her: 'Toxic shock syndrome, *e. coli* bacteria, toxoplasmosis, salmonella, radioactivity from smoke detectors and tetanus (from being outside)' (48). The awakening of this toxic consciousness is less a response to the nature of contemporary life than a neurotic reaction to the absence of any significant foreign bodies in her life.

Terry Gifford provocatively suggests that 'For many post-pastoral Ecofeminist writers, Arcadia might be located within the body, were "the body's world" less damaged, environmentally and socially.'²⁴ Such a move has been discussed earlier with reference to Deborah Slicer's position paper on 'The Body as Bioregion,' which illuminates the links between politics, social practices, environment and gender, and proposes that recognizing the body as one's primary habitat might mean to take hold of the environmental realities that impinge upon our physical selves in meaningful ways.²⁵

However, like other calls for bioregional thinking, this philosophy too may result in an overly-reified concept of the self, one that overemphasizes the physical and

²⁴ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 166.

²⁵ Deborah Slicer, 'The Body as Bioregion' in Branch et al., *Reading the Earth*, 107-118.

personal to the detriment of equally important political and cultural factors. Moreover, to apply such a concept to Eloïse and her sense of embodiment may highlight the pitfalls of such an approach, for where is the sense of comfort that might be supposed to derive from a notion such as 'body as bioregion'? The suspicion and alienation that Eloïse experiences in the world outside are equally prevalent with respect to her feelings about her own body, such are the disciplinary forces exerted by culture and society upon the female body, and policed by women upon each other and themselves.²⁶

Yet if Eloïse is profoundly suspicious about nonhuman nature, she is also portrayed as sensually responsive to such elements of nature as the wind and the trees: on a walk, 'the wind encircled her, opened her coat, licked her tears' (49). This sense of nature as an actant in its own right, even a social actor, such as the social-material semiotic actor outlined by Donna Haraway, signals what is so innovative and profoundly ecological in Ellmann's novel. Nature here means much more than the common appreciation of what Barbara Adam distinguishes as *natura naturata*; that is, nature as represented by its products. There is also a thoroughgoing apprehension of nature as composed of dynamic forces, or *natura naturans*. Adams notes that there is a significant division between the ways in which urban and rural dwellers apprehend Nature. Not only are city dwellers and rural inhabitants distinguished by their belief in one or the other of these forms of nature respectively, but these oppositional views also determine the extent to which they believe that nature can be controlled by human techniques and mastery. While it is common for urban populations to decry the ways that modern life is destroying the natural environment, overestimating the extent to which we control nature, rural inhabitants, on the other hand, are much more aware of the ways in which nature holds the upper hand, and as a set of dynamic forces of enormous magnitude, can never

²⁶ See Susan Bordo for a discussion of these processes in Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body (Berkeley, Ca.: U of California P, 1993).

finally be controlled by human technologies.²⁷ The notion of ‘mastery’ over nature is thus a more common theme of discourse among people who live in cities. While portraying many attitudes about nature that display the estrangement and alienation characteristic of contemporary urban life, Ellmann undercuts this limited view by her deployment of the large-scale natural events that occur in the setting at the conclusion of the novel.

A pastiche of a certain form of natural history is made by George’s absent student in her attempt to anatomize the being she terms the ‘Autonomous Rogue Female.’ This passage amplifies Eloïse’s plight as an unmarried, solitary, single white female. In this anatomy of the ‘sexually frustrated woman,’ there is an attempt to document a life history, notable identifying features, and internal biological characteristics, such as hormonal activity and the like. Denied sex and attention, this woman has become ‘a nervous, fretful companion with nothing to say for herself, prone to hysterical outbursts and the sudden poignant disclosure of irrelevancies’—in short, an Autonomous Rogue Female (71). Viewed as belonging to this general sub-set of women, Eloïse’s condition is viewed as external to her own history and failings and placed within the biological subset of this hitherto unrecognized group. Personal history is thus re-written as natural history; the subjective is transposed into the objective, and the human is drawn into a continuum with primates.

Other forms of neurosis are also depicted as aberrant ways to relate to nature. Ellmann’s character Ed manipulates Nature’s products to arrive at the largest, heaviest, and most exaggerated forms of their vegetable existences. Ed thus exhibits the senseless

²⁷ See Barbara Adam, Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards

drive to make everything bigger at all costs and is exemplary of a certain form of aggression that is shown as entirely compatible with cultivation. He enters a contest for people like himself who concentrate all scientific know-how in converting sun, soil and water into exaggerated vegetable giants. Ed, described as one of the leading names in the giant-vegetable-growing world, not only verbally threatens the crops that are not making sufficient progress, he goes so far as to bludgeon the unsuccessful ones: 'Plant lessons must be kept simple' (123). Buoyed by his past successes, consisting of a 108-pound cabbage, a five-foot celery, and a lettuce measuring 3 feet across and weighing 29 pounds, Ed directs his technical expertise toward the rearing of giant pumpkins. At the same time, Ed is a social failure; more, he is a dangerous psychopath. His desperate attempts to engage with other people include burglary, making obscene phone calls, and sending letter bombs to women in the news. Thus, his success at de-naturing vegetables—amateur efforts at biotechnology and agricultural engineering—reveal a more general mindset and misogynistic orientation toward domination that are interrogated through exaggeration and humour in the narrative.

If in many ways, Man or Mango? reflects the anti-pastoral impetus that is the hallmark of much British fiction, there are nevertheless indications that it should be considered as a post-pastoral novel, according to the criteria established by Terry Gifford in his study of the pastoral. It conforms to most of the criteria established by Gifford, with one telling difference, and one that indicates more a problem with this view of the post-pastoral rather than any lack in the conception of the novel. A brief perusal of the post-pastoral checklist will reveal just how closely Man or Mango? conforms to Gifford's

(London: Routledge, 1998) pp. 30-33.

profile of this genre.²⁸ What presents a stumbling block here is the first criteria: that the attitude toward nature be one of awe and humility. This is one area of the post-pastoral that may indicate problems with such conceptions of nature writing in general, for whereas most of the other features of the genre as outlined here suggest areas of awareness or knowledge, this point prescribes an attitude toward nature. For some critics, this feature constitutes one of the weaknesses of nature writing as a genre, in which the viewpoint of the writer conforms predictably to a certain mode. Sylvia Bowerbank notes that

Nature writing is a distinctive form of testimony in which the subject bears witness to mutuality between the subject and self-willing nature. An intense moment of ecstatic mutuality with wild otherness structured as an epiphany, as a rhetorical and spiritual high point in the text. It is a convention that is easy to poke fun at.²⁹

Indeed, Bowerbank goes on to cite D.L. Rawlings' critique of the way in which nature writers strive for the 'luminous hindsight [in which] sitting at the desk with PowerBook, herb tea, and a stack of index cards, one suddenly realises that upon reaching that farthest, highest peak, instead of eating a sandwich, one in fact saw God.' This form of bad faith permeates the genre as a whole, making it unappealing to contemporary readers, and ultimately reducing its potential effectiveness for communicating transformative insights about the natural world.

²⁸ See Gifford, *Pastoral*, 152-62. Terry Gifford identifies these points as constituting the post-pastoral: 1. Fundamental to post-pastoral literature is an attitude of awe in attention to the natural world this positioning of the self towards nature leads inevitably to a humbling that is a necessary requirement of the shift from the anthropocentric position of the pastoral to the ecocentric view of the post-pastoral. 2. The representation of a creative-destructive universe equally in balance in a continuous balance of birth and death, death and rebirth, growth and decay, ecstasy and dissolution ; 3. A recognition that the inner is also the workings of the outer, that our inner human nature can be understood in relation to external nature; 4. The awareness of nature as culture and culture as nature; 5. Consciousness is translated into conscience; 6. The ecofeminist realisation that exploitation of the planet is the same mindset as exploitation of women and minorities; awareness of both environmental and social exploitation.

Other means of awakening the reader's awareness of nature may be more effective. Ellmann's narrative strategies of understatement, humour, and exaggeration substitute surprise for awe, defamiliarization for humility. The method employed in Man or Mango? is diametrically opposed to straining after epiphanic effects and awakening awe in the reader, yet it is all the more emotionally compelling, for the satirical depictions of her characters and their often misguided efforts to connect in meaningful ways with each other and the world challenge habitual perspectives in memorable ways. Within the historically-situated, geologically-active universe created by Ellmann, humans are humbled, shown to be not necessarily the only significant players in the universe, yet, rather than arousing awe, there is instead the sense of aesthetic pleasure that comes from appropriate connections made and a revelation of the intricate interworkings of the whole. Ellmann revises the story of human ventures so that the earth not only has an active part, re-ordering the lives of the human characters, but also a speaking role.

Man or Mango? employs multiple voices that include both human and non-human actors in a truly polyphonic text. The form of the novel itself constitutes an open body that displays prominently the criss-crossing and interpenetration of a variety of texts. Just as the grotesque body is open to the world and emphasizes the points of connection between self and other, incorporating parts of the outer material world into its own body, so does the carnivalesque text flourish through borrowing from the diverse sources that constitute its literary context. The Bakhtinian notion of intertextuality, contained in his work and developed more fully by Julia Kristeva, places emphasis on the embeddedness

²⁹ Sylvia Bowerbank, 'Nature Writing as Self-Technology' in Eric Darier, ed., Discourses of the Environment (163-178) 173.

of utterances and texts within a web of discourse. The perspectives and timescales too incorporate both human and more-than-human scales, moving between the perceptual extremes of magnification and telescoping. Thus, Eloïse's perspective of relentless self-examination and quotidian activities is supplemented by the frame perspective that sets her life within the historical context of a twentieth-century woman living after the Holocaust, after the unthinkable acts committed by a rational, highly-educated society. As David Orr has pointed out, the Holocaust was enabled by a certain form of education that is perfectly consistent with the cruel treatment of those designated outside the privileged group and thus enables the kind and degree of ecological damage that takes place within the parameters of scientific management.³⁰ Thus, the discourses of knowledge, self-improvement, and certainly, rationalism itself are put into question by this event of genocide on a massive scale.³¹ Juxtaposed with this large-scale historic event, and with the genocidal event of the Irish Potato Famine of 1848, are various citations from natural history. The sudden shifts in perspective from the historical telescopic view to the microscopic perspective of natural history share the common thread of rational scientific investigation, so that lists comprising the effects of Jewish Holocaust victims are set beside experiments in natural history, such as that conducted by Sir John Lubbock in 1876 in which he observes the behaviour of a half-drowned ant and the members of its nest. There is little to distinguish the method of inquiry of this experiment from the description of sterilization experiments to be carried out by radiation

³⁰ See David Orr, Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World (Albany, N.Y.: NY State UP, 1992).

³¹ See also Plumwood, Environmental Culture for a thorough-going critique of rationality, in opposition to rationalism, which she defines as follows: 'We should not mistake rationality for reason—rather it is a cult of reason that elevates to extreme supremacy a particular narrow form

on a population of European Jews cited from Holocaust documents (213). In addition, small-scale insects such as ants and bees are employed metaphorically throughout the text to contrast, as well as set up linkages, with human society, so as to interrogate the hyperseparation of the insect, animal and human domains.

The earth, in Lucy Ellmann's version, does not inspire awe so much as compassion or sympathy:

The earth has embarrassing incidents of its own that keep it humble. It is not in total control of itself. It must make the most of gravity, tides, eruptions, winds, and weather. The sun and moon too have some say. At any given moment on the earth an unforgiving river of molten lava, orange against a twilight sky, clots like menstrual blood as it stretches down a mountainside' (211).

Eloïse has railed against men as constituting beings that transcend bodily reality—'the arrogance of people who don't menstruate (you can't be that proud of yourself if you run the risk of leaking bodily fluids in public every month)' (111). She has even made one memorable list entitled 'HOW EVERYTHING WRONG WITH THE WORLD IS MEN'S FAULT' (114-115). However, in contrast, the earth belongs to that hapless sphere of leaky bodies that is rather to be pitied than revered. Yet this anthropomorphic depiction of the earth recognizes the scale and nonhuman magnitude of the forces that govern it in an intensely ecological portrayal of a terrestrial body that is also governed by outside forces from immeasurable distances and of great size. When the earth shifts due to the motion of tectonic plates and is 'torn asunder by fissures a foot wide,' we are briefly given a glimpse of what might be the perspective of the earth:

The earth is so quiet, so reluctant to offend. What if it merely felt like breathing? What if it were merely to swell and, out of the blue, to sigh? The diaphragm opens, the ribs crack with disuse, air rushes in where angels fear to tread: an earthquake (217).

of reason and correspondingly devalues the contrasted and reduced sphere of nature and embodiment' (4).

When one cataclysm is followed by its natural aftermath in the tsunami that kills most of the main characters, we are made to see these horrifying events from a perspective that has been enlarged to include the dimensions of the earth with its mysterious time scales and forces. So that when the sea erupts in a tidal wave that devastates whales, sheep and human lives alike, one is perhaps moved to acquiesce with the narrative voice that enjoins us to think differently: 'It is only the sea, it doesn't have malice, it is merely itself, has to be' (221). Perhaps there is an element of awe in this perception, but as it is derived from the abrupt decentring of the way in which we generally view life, nature, human death, and tragedy, there is much that pertains to the carnivalesque and the grotesque in its execution.

At the same time, 'natural' cataclysms such as the Irish Potato Famine of 1848 are denaturalized and revealed to have largely cultural causes due to the amplification of the effects of blight through the social and political arenas of England. Moreover, such genocidal cultural events as the Holocaust are linked throughout Man or Mango? with the experimental method and often-cruel perspective expressed in natural history writing. Ellmann conveys an intense awareness of the ecofeminist realisation that the subjugation of women and minorities are conceptually linked to environmental degradation, however humorously this perspective is rendered in the novel, and she urges us to become

The Nazi *and* the Jew, man and woman, the burglar and the burgled, colonizer, colonized—simultaneously. You must embrace your present and your past, embrace all cruelty, the arrogance, the damn-fool mistakes, the Industrial Revolution! You must hold all this in your hand (212).

In so doing, she dissolves the categories of oppressor and oppressed into one massive undifferentiated whole of humanity, such that there are no superior vantage points for anyone: no privileged position of victim, of exempt observer, and certainly no special chair for the nature writer who has perceived these interconnections. Ellmann employs satire and comedy to ends that the post-pastoral desperately requires if it is to be a form

that is palatable to readers today. The high moral seriousness of much environmentally-aware writing is overturned by Ellmann's ludic sensibility, so that her pleas for consciousness and conscience persuade in ways that much contemporary nature writing does not. Both highly comic and emotionally resonant in its hyperbole, Man or Mango? expresses a commitment to being self-critically human, a humanity that takes full account of both the destructive and creative impulses of our race and our place on the earth.

Man or Mango? employs multiple voices that include both human and non-human actors, a stage on which the earth also has a speaking part. The perspectives and timescales too incorporate both human and more-than-human scales, moving between the perceptual extremes of magnification and telescoping. Significantly, Man or Mango? preceded the new millennium and draws on some of the apocalyptic feeling of the period. As Lawrence Buell has claimed, 'Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal.'³² Yet, the novel employs apocalyptic thinking to analyse a certain mind set, a rhetoric of disaster, and a genre predicated on the representation of the end of the world. Ellmann explicitly locates her narrative as post-apocalyptic, as occupying that time period after the end of the world that has already taken place through the Final Solution rhetoric and death camps of Nazi Germany. People are identified as those cruel beings that dream of the end of the world: 'Nature is cruel but the cruellest seam runs through us: we dream of apocalypse' (15). Indeed, it is Eloïse's wish for the world to end with her joyful embrace of her lost lover that brings about the climax: her unstated wish, 'If only it could end now' (219), is thus a performative statement that brings about a change in her outer world. The editorial comment on this wish extends it beyond the world of the novel to demonstrate a more general ethical posture: 'Unable to save the world, she toys with its destruction' (219). The tendency of environmental apocalypticism, as Garrard and others have noted,

³² Buell, Environmental Imagination, 285.

is to employ a rhetoric of imminent disaster to generate a sense of urgency about the state of the natural world; however, this viewpoint is problematic for a number of reasons, not only for its lack of effectiveness in communicating with an audience that has become satiated with such imagery, but also for its tendency to take for granted a certain negative set of events and conditions.³³ Ecocritic Richard Kerridge comments on the tendency of novels dealing with environmental issues to construct what he terms 'narratives of resignation.' He locates the cause of the problem in the nature of narrative and plotting itself: 'In part, the problem is that conventional plot structures require forms of solution and closure that seem absurdly evasive when applied to ecological questions with their extremes of timescale and complexities of interdependency.'³⁴ Moreover, nature writer Linda Hogan warns about the apocalyptic perspective thus:

Without deep reflection, we have taken on the story of endings, assumed the story of extinction, and have believed that it is the certain outcome of our presence here. From this position, fear, bereavement, and denial keep us in the state of estrangement from our natural connection with the land.

We need new stories, new terms and conditions that are relevant to the love of land, a new narrative that would imagine another way, to learn the infinite mystery and movement at work in the world.³⁵

However, whereas Hogan's work forms part of a sub-set of the nature-writing genre in which spiritual connections between human life and the natural world are sought out, and a form of healing is enacted throughout the writing, Ellmann's narrative sketches a variant, highly ironic, trajectory through this territory.³⁶ Again, the difference of mode,

³³ See Greg Garrard, 'Environmentalism and the Apocalyptic Tradition' in Green Letters, no. 3 (Autumn 2001) 27-68.

³⁴ See Richard Kerridge, 'Narratives of Resignation: Environmentalism in Recent Fiction' in John Parham ed., The Environmental Tradition in English Literature (Aldershot, Hamps, Ashgate, 2002. 87-99) 99.

³⁵ Linda Hogan, Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World (New York: Touchstone, 1995) 94.

³⁶ For other examples of this genre, see Kathleen Norris, Dakota: A Spiritual Geography (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993); Terry Tempest Williams, Refuge: An Unnatural History (New York: Pantheon, 1991) and Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony (New York: Penguin books, 1977). An important distinction that must be made here is that while the above texts focus on spiritual and psychological healing within place, the latter is the only novel. The

mood and genre indicate a more general contrast between American and British sensibilities with regard to nature.³⁷

The sensibility suggested by Man or Mango? is reflected best in its title: interrogative in spirit, connecting the human with vegetable existence, the question it poses is finally irresolvable. From a human perspective, the question is almost meaningless, yet in forcibly yoking the human to nonhuman nature, this conceit gestures at the method employed by Ellmann in her investigation of life at the end of the twentieth century. A narrative composed of lists, pictures, and quotations from a wide variety of sources, Man or Mango? underlines a postmodern refusal to resolve binaries and somehow arrive at a unified truth. Here it departs from Gifford's suggestion that the post-pastoral demonstrates consciousness giving way to conscience, as Terry Tempest William's text does, when the writer mans the barricades at the end of the book to protest against the proliferation of military weaponry near her home. The concluding action of George, one of the few survivors of the random earthquake and subsequent tidal wave, appears to be without any redeeming consciousness of what the earth has revealed to him, as he sets off to have it off with 'the wasted women of England' (225). Yet, as Gillian Beer has demonstrated with reference to Thomas Hardy, 'the emphasis on systems more

others are autobiographical narratives that relate experiences of the authors in nature in particular settings.

³⁷ Whereas the narrative of self-disclosure and healing is undergoing a renaissance in American nature-writing, examples to be found set in a British setting are few, if indeed there are any at all. There are various reasons for this, ranging from the general tendency of reticence on the part of writers in Britain (although memoirs such as Elisa Segrave, The Diary of a Breast (London: Picador, 1997) and Gillian Rose's powerful memoir Love's Work (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995) form exceptions to the rule), to the lack of significance setting is held to have in contemporary fiction. Derek Jarman's seclusion in his fisherman's hut in Dungeness, and his efforts to build a garden on land located close to the burning salts of the sea and within the possibly radioactive area of a nuclear power plant, represents one of the few attempts in British nature writing to link illness, nature and sexuality. Jarman's attempt to write himself upon this endangered landscape while assaulted by the various illnesses associated with AIDS resembles Ellmann's in its irreverent refusal to accept certain traditional designations of the countryside as the territory of certain classes and conventionally-sexualized bodies. See Derek Jarman, Modern Nature (London: Vintage, 1992).

extensive than the life span of the individual and little according to his needs' forms a way of underscoring that 'even those recuperative energies... are there primarily to serve the longer needs of the race and are part of a procreative energy designed to combat extinction, not the death of any individual.'³⁸ This impulse in fact forms an appropriately life-affirming coda within the context of the novel, in which human life is set within a continuum of 'bugs, slugs, snails.... sharks, spiders, mammals' within the context of survival; the imperative of the continuation of the species is the only possible reply to cataclysm.

Ellmann suggests a similar ethic of inclusiveness in requiring the reader to understand a wider view of nature, realign our position in the universe, and comprehend the existence of forces that are much greater than ourselves, that we could never have control over, no matter how much we may speak of 'saving the earth' or the reverse. Man or Mango? radically decentres human life, criticizing the blindness of individuals for whom 'every I is an I-land,' to quote from George's ice hockey epic, and the earth is merely the setting for more significant human activities. Buell's caution with respect to the 'bleakness of renouncing anthropocentrism' is transformed here into a joyous affirmation of the nature of things, as when Eloïse reflects, 'the apathy of the earth has been mine, and will *remain* mine, for ever' (206). That she in fact dies soon afterward does not entirely lessen the force of this realisation.

In Ellmann's world, the earth is the only game in town, though it is connected at every point to our own lives and that of the moon and stars. From the infinitesimally small to the unimaginably great, Ellmann redesigns the map of the world that is our home and signals the importance of the other living beings that compose our world. This is a badly-needed corrective, for as Eloïse claims, '[Men] are miniaturists! So bogged down in trivia they never see the whole picture' (112). By extending the frame around the

³⁸ Gillian Beer, Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 2000) 240.

British landscape, in both directions, to the miniscule as well as the mighty, and making of it a timescape terrain that reflects natural, as well as human history, Ellmann remaps the territory of Britain, and in so doing remakes the world of English nature. Man or Mango? breaks the sequence of much environmental writing and disrupts the anthropocentric focus on human tragedy to open up a life-cycle story that acknowledges the continuity of life amid death. As I have suggested here, the use of the grotesque body, an emphasis on intertextuality and the comic form are salient constituents of a narrative strategy that enables the overturning of habitual perspectives on women, nature, and death. The novel concludes with a section focalized through the perspective of the earth. Though it finally ends with the final words The End, in fact the novel continues beyond this point with three appendices and a list of references. This novel can be considered as part of a significant strand of female literature that insists not only on the difficulty of ending, but also on the necessity and possibility of considering human death within a wider frame, that conceives of it in ecological terms. Amid the difficulties of its own ending, this terminal narrative sketches the various possibilities for continuation, renewal and survival.

(His)Storied Nature: Buried Pasts and Multiple Presents in Kate Atkinson's Human Croquet

The fear of annihilation that arises with the evocation of the tragi-comic events of natural cataclysm in Man or Mango? is given a more specifically feminist thrust in Human Croquet. Kate Atkinson's 1998 novel melds the Gothic, a traditional site of female fear, with the green world of its setting to unsettle any notions of Mother Nature as a sanctuary for women. If Ellmann's concern is to reconnect humanity generally with a demythologized nature, here Kate Atkinson uses the emplotment of Gothic conventions as well as the thematics of Greek myth to draw connections between woman, nature and murder. The thematics of the Gothic tradition lay stress on the sexual politics that underlie the victimisation of women, often in their own homes and by the men who are closest to them. The question of what it means to be a specifically female embodied subject has been an integral part of Gothic form and convention from its outset and persisting in its deployment by contemporary writers.¹ The thematics of what one critic terms 'femicidal fears' relate centrally to the plot of Human Croquet, in which the narrator loses her mother to murder.² Of particular interest in this chapter is the way in

¹ See Suzanne Becker, Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1999). Becker is concerned with theorizing the Gothic within Canadian literature and discusses Atwood's Lady Oracle among other novels. Lucie Armitt also notes the importance of the Gothic within her discussion of the fantastic in writing by Fay Weldon, Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson, among others, in Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic (London: Macmillan, 2000). David Punter discusses the expansion of the Gothic beyond the novel in contemporary culture, reaching into fashion, film, and music. See David Punter, The Literature of Terror: The Modern Gothic (London and New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1996).

² Helene Meyers, Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience (New York: State U of New York P, 2001). A cogent analysis of the revisions of 'victim' feminism is found

which the vulnerabilities of both women and the natural world are seamlessly interwoven within the novel.

The world of the forest is evoked lovingly, its varieties of trees permeating the text metaphorically, greening the literary context of the stories that take place within. Portraying the 'green and laughing world' of the poem by Leigh Hunt cited as an epigraph, Atkinson fills the narrative of Human Croquet with the presence of trees, of leaves both green and golden, and the forest setting nearby.³ Yet this evocation of nature in the form of the tree and the forest contains shifting significations within the text, as the forest is depicted both as a sanctuary and a site of violence. Similarly, the meanings of 'home' are not essentialized as the ideal setting of memory, but shift between a site of discord and violence and an (imagined) place of comfort and safety. Violence visited upon women in the novel is also shown to occur on the macrocosmic level of outer nature, as both the body and the land are represented as endangered by patriarchal structures of ownership and domination. The recurrent motif of women mythically transformed into trees for refuge begs the question of how safe this sanctuary can be in a novelistic world also punctuated by the chop! chop! of woodcutters with ever greater powers to decimate the natural world. Atkinson extends the domestic plot beyond the personal and the family, and beyond the gendered identities of husbands and wives, to the wider plot of the widespread abuse of the bodies of women and nature. The endangered

in the chapter entitled 'Feminist Gothic/Gothic Feminism' 1-24. Meyers relates the mode of Gothic to critiques of 'victim feminism' or alternatively, 'Gothic feminism' by third wave Feminists; that is, largely the group born post 1964. There is no doubt that a feminism that relies upon 'horror stories' relating to victimhood and oppression is limited both in its scope and appeal to young women, yet it is equally true that it is difficult to talk about such topics as the low wages, rape and murder of women without acknowledging the existence of oppression.

³ Kate Atkinson, Human Croquet (London and New York: Doubleday, 1997). All subsequent references are to this edition and will be placed in parentheses in the text.

bodies that are the focus of this project—women and nature—are shown to have vulnerabilities that are closely linked due to the interconnections between power, and conceptions of property and ownership that are common to the areas of both the domestic and nature.

The first-person narrative of Human Croquet appropriates diverse intertextual voices to form a novel that submits events from various time periods to a number of contrasting perspectives. In the opening chapter of Human Croquet, the narrator attempts to emulate the tone of Biblical omniscience, installing a totalizing consciousness which is expressed by such locutions as ‘Before the beginning is the void and the void belongs in neither time nor space and is therefore beyond our imagination’ (1). The narrative voice proclaims itself as the ‘alpha and omega’ of narrators, setting itself up as an authority to rival the stories of both Genesis and Revelations, as the novel challenges the fictions of the Bible to replace them with stories that create new versions of the human within nature. Yet the ‘God-trick’ of omniscient vision represented by this textual strategy is undermined by the parodic use of various intertexts and allusions, and the revelation that the narrator is a high school student of sixteen. Thus the inaugural imperative, ‘Call me Isobel,’ with its echoes of Melville’s hybrid narrative, is immediately undercut by the comic parenthesis ‘(It’s my name.)’ The time of the narrative is not restricted to human history, but reaches toward an understanding of time that begins with the birth of the planet, and a nature that is not a world set apart from human activities, but is rather moulded and shaped by it. This expansion of the novelistic world imbues the setting of the novel with a precise history and locates it within a determinate time period that is

shown to be a result of socially-conditioned attitudes towards a nature perceived in terms of natural resources.

Atkinson collapses millions of years of planetary history and thousands of years of human history into the opening two pages. Here Roman mythology is juxtaposed to geophysical science, as when amber is said to originate in the tears of Phaeton and the natural history of trees is briefly related. Atkinson's novel is the fictional counterpart of the cultural history of forests by Robert Pogue Harrison, a wide-ranging source investigating the mythological, historical and cultural significance of the forest in Western culture.⁴ Note that in Atkinson's novel the trees are given agency: 'Eventually the trees crawl out of the swamps onto the dry land' (12). In this passage too, the forests are said to sail 'the oceans of the world, found new lands full of wilderness and more forests waiting to be cut down' (12). This personification of the trees revivifies the sense of setting, so that the great oak dubbed the Lady Oak is readily perceived not so much as mere landmark as an incipient character in its own right. The narrator describes the plundering of the forests and the earth, the denuding of the planet of its foliage and minerals, in order to situate the present setting within a world of loss, one that extends beyond the loss of the protagonist's mother, yet is intensified and personalized by it.

Just as Hardy's world of the forest is deeply permeated by the human determinants of class and gender, so Atkinson's 'streets of trees', and what little remains of the great forest of Lythe in the form of Boscrambe Wood, are depicted as an ideal of a much earlier time. Thus, the Arden of the novel denotes not the forest, nor an escape into a pastoral setting, but rather the suburban ideal of a twentieth-century builder, the

showpiece home of the garden city built upon the remains of the Elizabethan manor house that had belonged to an ancestor of the Fairfax family.

The trees of the novel represent the urban nature that formed the ideal setting of a historically-specified period: nature surrounding the 'modern, comfortable housing for the post-war, post-servant world of small families. Streets of detached and semi-detached houses with neat front gardens and large back gardens where children could play' (18). Yet these streets are depicted lyrically, anthropomorphically, as they might have appeared in an earlier age:

Streets with broad pavements and trees, lots of trees—a canopy of trees over the tarmac, a mantle of green around the houses and their happy occupants. Trees that would give pleasure, that could be observed in bud and new leaf, unfurling their green fingers on the streets of houses, raising their sheltering leafy arms over the dwellers within (18-19).

The sensibility of the narrating consciousness is congruent with such a vision, for despite the ugliness, pettiness and discord of life inside these suburban homes, the nature without forms a counterpoint of beauty and inspiration. The seasonal colours of green and gold derived from the spring or autumn leaves continually alternate throughout the text in patterns found both indoors and out.

Trees are evoked through myths, both Scandinavian and Classical, through poetry and aesthetic description, and also through Isobel's growing knowledge of science. Noting the autumn colours, she reflects,

There's more to photosynthesis than meets the eye really, isn't there? ... It's the basic alchemy of all life—the gold of the sun transmuting into the green of life. And back again—for the trees of Chestnut Avenue have turned to autumn gold, a treasure of leaves drifting down on the pavements. Everything in the world seems capable of turning into something else (140).

⁴ Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992). Harrison argues that deforestation results not merely in habitat loss, biodiversity, and ecosystemic damage, but also causes the loss of cultural memory. Atkinson's novel dramatises this point.

Learning about leaves conduces to an ecological perception of the interrelatedness of all things, and the fact that death does not mean only absence, but rather dissolution and transformation into another substance. This ecological understanding of her mother's disappearance is what endows the forest and the Lady Oak with such power for Isobel. The forest is thus not only the location of a disappearance, but also becomes the locus of the transformation of woman into tree. Isobel also dreams of escape into unfeeling vegetation. In an imagined scene in which she must escape the unwanted fumbings of drunken boys at a party, Isobel portrays her own magical transformation into a tree, as in the story of Daphne.

However, if the domestic is portrayed as a site of drabness, discord, and hidden violence, the forest represents a potential world of escape throughout the various time levels of the narrative. Within the distant past, in the world of Elizabethan England suggested by the initials W.S. inscribed upon the Lady Oak in the forest near Isobel's house and attributed by the narrator to Shakespeare, the original Lady Fairfax sought refuge in the forest outside the corrupt court of her husband. Here the forest becomes a space of alternative values contrasting courtly corruption and civilisation that masks depravity:

I was often in the forest, it was the only place in my lord's domain where peace still reigned, for there was no peace to be had in the sty that was my lord's house. I was not mistress there, the lord of misrule had sway. In the forest, I could imagine myself to be mistress of all the trees, they bowed their branches in obeisance, rustled their leaves in a murmur of fealty' (329).

This mythical ancestor of the past represents a kind of Green Woman, an amalgam of the human with the sylvan form of the trees, persisting into the present in the form of the

great forest ancestor, the Lady Oak.⁵ When she disappears, running away with her husband's chief steward, it is believed that she has disappeared from underneath the Lady Oak, fading away 'until her green brocade dress was indistinguishable from the surrounding trees' (16). Yet this image of nature as sanctuary envisioned by the narrator is undermined by the continually recurring narratives of entrapment, violation and violence that occur outside the home.

The Lady Oak provides a constant reference point for Isobel, located as it is just outside her own home in the remaining woods of the Forest of Lythe. It becomes a site of memory, which provides access to a past that has been lost in the heart of the forest. Toni Morrison calls this work of investigating a site through memory 'a kind of literary archaeology: on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply.'⁶ The tree suggests the presence of an ancestor who has been displaced from the land by violence. The narrator struggles to reposition her identity within contradictory versions of the past: told that her mother has run away and that her father is dead, she discovers seven years later that the converse is true. The discovery of lies that have formed the foundation of her childhood enables new fictions that give recognition to buried secrets and alternative pasts.

⁵ William Anderson points out in his work on the archetype of the Green Man that representations of a Green Woman are rare, though the presence of the Green Goddess necessarily underlies his existence. The lack of the female archetype of the Green Woman is thus remedied by Kate Atkinson's creation of a character that blends woman and tree, and is linked throughout her work to Greek or Roman mythology in which women transform into trees. See William Anderson, The Green Man: The Archetype of our Oneness with the Earth (London and San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990).

⁶ Toni Morrison, 'The Site of Memory' in William Zinsser ed., Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) 112.

The narrative of the novel consists of alternations between various time periods of the past, (multiple) presents and futures imagined by the narrator as she lies in a comatose state in the hospital. The hallucinatory effects of the narrative portray the dynamic of memory, so that the past is not simply a remembered past, but one that is continually constructed and reconstructed. bell hooks has described the nature of memory as active remembering as she calls the 'struggle of memory' against forgetting 'a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present.'⁷ Atkinson's narrative amalgamates conventions of SF with its moments of time travel and disruptions of the time-space continuum with the uncanny Doppelgangers and ghosts of the Gothic, and opens up a textual space in which the past can be confronted, reconstructed and transformed.

The notion of home is implicated within this act of remembering, in that hooks construes 'home [as] no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference' (148). For hooks, home may be 'the creation of spaces where one is able to reclaim and redeem the past, legacies of pain, suffering, and triumph in ways that transform the present reality' (145). Such is the enabling work of memory in Human Croquet that childhood memories and perceptions are thus revisited and re-evaluated in ways that accommodate more mature and fully-rounded versions of events that have taken place in the past. Such a revaluation occurs as the narrator shifts her terms of reference with each replay of the past, just as the trope of

⁷ bell hooks, 'Choosing the Margin' in Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990) 147.

'moon illusion,' in which the moon is seen to be far larger in relation to other visual objects, is revealed to occur as a result of visual referents that give a false idea of the moon's size. The moon illusion signifies 'the way the brain is capable of misinterpreting the phenomenal world' (49). Over time the phantom of Isobel's dead mother is allowed to diminish and assume the human proportions of other parts of the narrator's past.

The nature of home constitutes a puzzle that the narrator works at throughout her childhood in a home that is filled with the quarrelling of her mother with her husband's mother, then is suddenly bereft of both mother and father. Isobel finds an ideal mother in her cake-baking neighbour, though there are hints of father-daughter incest and wife beating in the less than ideal household next door. The title is derived from a party game in which both croquet hoops and balls are formed by the players, and taken from her neighbour's bible, The Home Entertainer, with its cosy suggestions of creative pastimes and wholesome fun.

Isobel's mother's murder during a family picnic in the wood nearby the house fixes her remains and her memory within that place. As one critic has claimed, 'like species that function within ecological niches, ghosts are inseparably linked to place.'⁸ This is the secret in the heart of the forest that has been suppressed by family fictions of her mother's escape and her father's death: a narrative that precisely reverses what has actually occurred. Thus, the location of her mother's remains becomes overlapped metonymically by the presence of the Lady Oak, so that the forest becomes not just an

⁸ Lee Rozelle, 'Biocentric Sublimity in Barry Lopez's Field Notes and Wendell Berry's A Timbered Choir' ISLE (8.2, Summer 2001: 131-140) 133.

area to play or to relax, but a significant site of memory in her ‘unnatural family history.’⁹ The murder at the heart of the forest forms part of the narrator’s inheritance, a legacy that will be repeated when the Lady Oak itself is chopped down, leaving no remains but an absence where it once stood.

Implicit in the narrator’s exploration of the past in a hypnagogic state is the chronotope of the journey to the underworld. Margaret Atwood makes the claim in Negotiating with the Dead that ‘not just some, but all writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all writing, is motivated deep down, by a fear of and fascination with mortality—by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead.’¹⁰ While texts such as Virgil’s Aeneid, Dante’s Inferno, and Rilke’s Sonnets to Orpheus provide obvious support for this hypothesis, Atwood demonstrates that all texts seek not only to learn from their literary antecedents but also from ancestors in all their forms. The act of writing necessarily involves a voyage from the here and now to where the stories are kept:

All must take care not to be captured and held immobile by the past. And all must commit acts of larceny or else of reclamation, depending on how you look at it. The dead may guard the treasure, but it’s useless treasure unless it can be brought back into the land of the living and allowed to enter time once more—which means to enter the realm of the audience, the realm of the readers, the realm of change.¹¹

Though for Atwood, this journey to the underworld is the matrix for all narratives, Atkinson’s novel is explicitly concerned with the attempts by Isobel and her older brother

⁹ I am using the term that Terry Tempest Williams employs for her own family history in which a potent secret is similarly suppressed and rediscovered by the narrator. See Terry Tempest Williams, Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place (New York: Vintage, 1991).

¹⁰ Margaret Atwood, Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 156.

¹¹ Atwood, Negotiating, 178-179.

to reconcile themselves to their mother's death, which resulted in her sudden, unexplained disappearance from their lives. That they have seen her lying dead with their own eyes does not make them more certain about what has happened to her, since the story they are given by their grandmother contradicts what they have seen. They are told that their mother has run away with a lover, and are later told that their father has died. When he returns from the dead seven years later, it is not surprising that for the children the nature of death appears less than final. The search for mementos of Eliza's existence, such as locks of hair, cosmetics, photographs, anything that could prove that she had actually existed, is a futile attempt to locate the magical objects that might suggest an life ongoing elsewhere. As Atwood points out, where there are taboos prohibiting mention of the dead, such as those that exist in Isobel's household, their absence takes on a very strong presence: the narrator notes, 'Absence of Eliza has shaped our lives' (27).

It may be supposed that in a text centred on the absence of the dead mother, the eventual finding of her remains would provide significant evidence of a truth that has been long buried. The popularity of modern stories about forensic pathologists derives, as Margaret Atwood suggests, from the premise that 'dead bodies can talk if you know how to listen to them, and they want to talk, and they want us to sit down beside them and hear their sad stories.'¹² Although the finding of the bones, and the ring that proves Eliza's identity, confirms the fact of her murder in the forest, there is little more to be learned from this empirical proof. The finding of the bones when Isobel is much older, a passage set in the future, is strangely inconsequential. Not only does the science of forensic pathology reveal little about the body and the circumstances of its death, but

there is also a sense in which the story in the narrator's imagination is the more significant tale to be told. Through the process of literary archaeology, the narrator has unearthed the person who was her mother such that a scientific version of the story would not reveal much more of interest. In any case, the narrator refuses to accept the finality of the physical evidence, preferring her own version of the story, for she has never thought of her mother as dead. At the same time, the Fairfax jewel also surfaces as an artefact that lends credence to Isobel's version of the distant past.

The passages evoking the Elizabethan ancestors of the modern Fairfax family rehearse the story of a tyrannical, brutish husband and a wife who escapes into the forest with her lover. In this story, the theme of incest, which is repeated through various layers of the novel, and domestic violence are examined through the lens of the Gothic and from the safe distance of the past. Here the original Lady Fairfax is reconstituted as a form of Green Lady, who merges indistinguishably with the landscape in her patterned green brocade dresses, seeking refuge in the leafy sanctuary of the forest. Isobel identifies this ancestor with the Lady Oak, so that tree and woman, landmark and mother, are merged into this symbol of the human interrelationship with nature. When Isobel hugs the tree in a loving embrace, nature and human connect through both family and natural histories, the tree an emblem of the mother lost long ago that allows Isobel to re-establish the lost bond to the maternal.

The world of loss and environmental degradation evoked at the outset of Human Croquet is reprised in an epilogue set in a future time that emphasizes the environmental implications of the novel. Here Isobel's daughter Imogen takes to the trees as an environmental activist, 'one of a self-styled tribe of tree people' protesting against the

¹² Atwood, Negotiating, 163.

imminent destruction of what remains of the woods. The protesters are jailed to clear the way for developers, and 'the trees that had stood for hundreds of years were felled in an afternoon' (340). The novel thus reveals a post-pastoral positioning in which 'consciousness gives way to conscience,' in Terry Gifford's description of the genre.¹³ The definition of environmental writing offered by David Gilchrist also emphasizes its essentially political nature. He describes it as

Work which moves beyond mere environmental mimesis, offering instead an understanding of a global ecology conditioned by environmental stress, which is itself the product of a particular non-organic and mechanistic world view, and which articulates the possibilities for radical transformation in our relationship to the more-than-human world.

This definition stresses that environmental writing is necessarily remedial, hence political.¹⁴ In contrast to arguments based on aesthetic or practical utility, Atkinson's novel takes place in a world in which the human and the arboreal are thoroughly interlaced and interpenetrated, so that a loss of one part will mean a diminishment of the other. Interestingly, it is only when the forest is chopped down that the secret of Eliza's skeleton, and shortly afterward, other lost things are found. When the protagonist becomes a grandmother, this plotting emphasizes the forces that enable life to continue against the odds of destruction, environmental despoliation and political losses and failure.

Thinking about endings, Atkinson reworks Frost's meditation on the ending of the world in his poem 'Fire and Ice' and revises the binary possibilities of fire or ice: she

¹³ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 153.

¹⁴ David W. Gilchrist, 'Rhetorical Redemption, Environmental Poetics, and the Curse of the Camperdown Elm' in *ISLE* (vol. 8.2, Summer 2001: 169- 180) 169. Gilchrist examines the occasional ode written by Marianne Moore to rescue a historical tree. He finds that Moore is

introduces a third possibility, and with it, hope for a different, and more challenging ending, one that doesn't end in disaster, but that imagines a renewed nature that requires care.

How does the world end? In fire? Or in green? Imagine the wood at the end of time. A great green ocean of peace. A riot of trees, birch, Scotch pine and aspen, English elm and wych elm, hazel, oak and holly, bird cherry, crab apple and hornbeam, the ash and the beech and the field maple. The blackthorn, the guelder rose and twined all about—ivy, mistletoe and the pale honeysuckle where the dormouse nests. And finally the wolves come back (342-3).

The lyrical beauty and texture of the alternative pleasure that Atkinson evokes here derive from the apprehension of the ecological concept of succession; she elicits not the familiar dread in the face of a drastic horrorscape or ecodisaster of global warming or a future ice age, but the possibility of restoration and renewal, a possibility that requires a different and political response—behaviours motivated by commitment, responsibility, and stewardship. This ending calls upon more demanding social and political involvements. It really *is* easier to dream about end times, as Lucy Ellmann has suggested. Both Atkinson and Ellmann have isolated one of the most dangerous threats to the health of the planet—apocalyptic thinking—and locate it within the narratives we tell ourselves. They also tell new stories, giving substance to dreams that have more positive outcomes.

The forest that is frequently evoked in the novel serves not only as setting but also to foreground the ecological motif of succession that operates as both theme and structure throughout both human and nonhuman levels of the text in the form of inheritance and recovery. The slashing of the forest at various periods of history alluded to in the text,

guilty of arguing that the tree should be saved because of its aesthetic utility, and asks whether we need to sin (rhetorically) in order to save the world we love.

and the eventual chopping down of the Lady Oak, closely parallel the violence central to the text in the murder of Isobel's mother, as well as the violence within the *mise en abîme* story of Lady Fairfax. However, Atkinson also suggests the possible recovery of the fallen trees through the ecological motif of succession, as her final chapter reconfigures the lost woods as reemerging in a more benign future. Similarly, inheritance, particularly through the genetic transfer of traits to the next generation, echoes the possible positive outcome of violence in the survival of the next generation.

Atkinson's conclusion is informed by an ecological perspective that focuses not only on the mega flora of the arboreal landscape, but also on the microscopic components of the ecosystem comprised by 'the invisible life, the amoeba and bacteria cleaning up and recycling' (342). This idyllic scene is disrupted by the reminder that 'Autumn must come. *Et in Arcadia ego*. ... In the beginning was the word, but at the end there is only silence' (343). Inviting the reader to imagine different alternatives and more promising futures, Atkinson disturbs the notion that the countryside is necessarily a site of exclusion, class and privilege irrelevant to the lives we lead today. Atkinson's nature bears the specific traces left by moments of history, a nature crafted as much by culture as by natural forces. She recovers the forest as a locus of mystery, a natural site that is not set apart from humanity, but that rather encapsulates the hidden lives of the past that continue to bear meaning for our lives in the present. Here the human is perceived as necessarily embedded within nature, both physically and culturally, through storytelling, history, and other cultural practices. The sense of place that is such a significant part of Human Croquet is revealed, however, not to be an easily attained relationship of person to their physical setting, but one that is disrupted and dislocated through disturbances in

the use of time. Thus, through narrative strategies that employ wit as well as the tactic of discontinuity, the nature of place is not essentialized as fixed with a unitary meaning in the novel, but is shown to be in constant evolution in response to individual and historic constructions, and disturbed by the physics of chaos and fragmented time. Atkinson employs the femicidal plot of Gothic convention to focus on endangerment, a theme which is then more broadly applied to human life more generally, and the ecosystems which we inhabit. These concerns are taken up further in the discussion of Margaret Drabble's intertwining of the themes of a (lost) mother, genetics, inheritance, and the reclamation and rehabilitation of the past in contemporary Britain in The Peppered Moth.

Darwin meets DNA: Patterns of Variation and Stability in Margaret Drabble's The Peppered Moth

Margaret Drabble's novel The Peppered Moth employs the discourses of both evolutionary and genetic theory to inquire into what have become persistent concerns throughout her extended writing career; that is, thinking about nature in its broadest sense, including questions about what is innate character, human and animal biological processes, and the natural physical world. In this novel questions about what is innate and what is environmental are addressed through the chronicling of four generations of a family originating in northern England.¹ The biological discourses that animate thinking in the late nineteenth century at the outset of the novel, reflecting the Darwinian revolution that reconfigured the place of humans in the natural world, are contested by recent late twentieth-century views involving genetic research within the context of the Human Genome Project. The characters of the novel are thus embedded within two different biological paradigms that contain multiple repercussions for the formulations of laws in social, political and scientific spheres.

As Evelyn Fox Keller points out in her work on the discourses of genetic research, the Darwinian revolution of the nineteenth century set the living world in a world of time with its occupants and relational structure reconfigured as products of evolutionary history.² As Darwin sought to discover the mechanism for the origin and transformation of species, which he theorized as natural selection acting upon individual

¹ Margaret Drabble, The Peppered Moth (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2001). All subsequent references to this text will be placed in parentheses and included in the text.

variation, his theory focuses primarily upon the mechanisms of change, adaptation and survival. With an emphasis on transformation, his theory is silent about stability; that is, the persistence of particular individual features from generation to generation of the clearly recognisable family resemblances that are passed on from parents to offspring. This gap is supplemented by the discovery of the double helix by Watson and Crick in 1953 and the mechanism of the self-replicating DNA. Contemporary genetic research focuses on the mechanisms of stability, with the full sequencing of human DNA as the focus of the Human Genome Project. Whereas Darwinian discourse inserted the human into a continuum of animal life, and was denounced for the ways in which it appeared to debase the special status of humanity, the Genome Project, on the other hand, employs a discourse of triumphalism, in which the ills that plague mankind are viewed as subject to imminent remediation by science. A new discourse of man's perfectibility is thus suggested by certain aspects of the Genome Project, so that eugenics promises to eradicate certain diseases contained in the genes. In popular media renditions of the project, the successful sequencing of the nucleotides that make up DNA promises to reveal the 'secret of life' itself.³ As Andrew Ross has noted, 'the resurgent biologism

² Evelyn Fox Keller, *The Century of the Gene* (Cambridge, Mass and London, England: Harvard UP, 2000). See especially Chapter Two, 'Motors of Stasis and Change: The Regulation of Genetic Stability.'

³ Fox-Keller discusses such early optimism about what sequencing would reveal, a mainstay of the popular press in the 1990s, and shows that whereas at one time, the research stressed the simplicity of life, now we must marvel rather at its complexity. Fox-Keller states, 'It is a rare and wonderful moment when success teaches us humility, and this I argue, is precisely the moment at which we find ourselves at the end of the twentieth century... confident that we could find the 'secret of life' we were confident that if we could decode the message in the DNA sequence of nucleotides, we would understand the 'program' that makes an organism what it is...But now in the call for a functional genomics, we can read at least an acknowledgement of how large the gap between genetic 'information' and biological meaning really is' (7-8).

that has accompanied the gene boom in recent years is a major feature of the new politics of nature.’⁴

The Peppered Moth forms a complex tapestry that seeks to reestablish the human within the rest of nature— geological, vegetative and animal. As in Drabble’s earlier novel, The Realms of Gold, archaeology features as a trope that reunites the geological with the historical, the natural with the cultural and human. Here, the human is featured as intensely embodied, with Drabble’s characters performing their inner landscapes through the language of the body. At the outset of the novel, Drabble convenes a public meeting in Yorkshire and exhorts us to ‘cast your eye around, and see if you can discern a pattern amongst these descendants. Can you tell from whom they may descend, can you discern the form of their common ancestor?’ (2). In a text that is deeply concerned with origins, inheritance and survival, this novel further raises other questions that lie at the heart of Drabble’s fiction: What is the nature of the body’s interaction with the environment? How do biological discourses inflect expectations of continuity and change across time? How do cultural attitudes about stability, adaptation and survival change in response to new biological discourses? These questions engage some of the liveliest scientific debates of our time, as seen in the discussions between adherents of genetic reductionism versus interactionism, and their articulation in the novel poses formal problems to be solved in new ways. The advent of genomic research has given Drabble a new language and perspective within which to consider the contrasting forces of stasis and change, determinism and freedom, and provoked the development of a new blueprint for discussing these dialectically in the form of the novel.

⁴ Andrew Ross, ‘Superbiology’ in The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life (New York and London: Verso, 1994) 237-273.

As has been seen in an earlier chapter in the discussion of Margaret Drabble's 1965 novel The Millstone, the body represents an essential form of connection for the human with the natural physical world. Yet as for many ecocritics the return to nature meant a problematic return to the certainties of realism and the referential axis of writing, so has return to the long absent topic of the body in sociological and literary study often represented a return to fixity. As Lynda Birke cautions in Feminism and the Biological Body, "the biological" always seems to be foundational, the ever-present bedrock to our theorizing.⁵ She warns against essentialism in response to what has long been the academic flight from the body. Yet if the body has appeared to be absent from much theory, in fact it has rather been submerged or buried, and thus Drabble's novelistic task primarily involves the work of excavation.

Within Drabble's work corporeal form is generally portrayed as inflected by gender, social class, age and race, with the social determinations of gender assuming a central role. Yet the role of biology, as inescapably and inevitably a significant part of human life, also plays a salient role in her work. The nature of 'nature' as well as the built environment that surrounds and engulfs the human is explored as essential determinants of the human experience. Nor is the boundary between the world outside and that of the body as fixed and firm as it may appear, as she states in The Waterfall, 'So liquid we are, inside our stiff bodies, so easily resolved to other elements' (229). Focusing on the corporeal realities of pregnancy at a time when such topics were not addressed in novels, Drabble defended her attention to such realities of female life: 'There is no point in sneering at women writers for writing of problems of sexual

⁵ Lynda Birke, Feminism and the Biological Body (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 2.

behaviour, of maternity, of gynaecology; those who feel the need to do so are actively engaged in creating a new pattern, a new blueprint'.⁶ Although Drabble views the human being as forming part of an animal and geological continuum, and biology can be a source of psychic health and even moral authority, she nevertheless shows the pitfalls that submission to biological processes may bring about. The tension described in The Millstone due to the situation of being pregnant, raising a child as a single mother and continuing with an autonomous lifestyle and academic career derives precisely from the conflict between biological processes and their enactment within a given society. It is the achievement of her early novel that she is able to imagine and successfully portray her protagonist's submission to biology as well as its transcendence. The Peppered Moth is not the first of her novels to present her characters within an evolutionary light, but due to its positioning within contemporary genetic discourse, it is the first to contrast this perspective with an equally compelling alternative story.

In philosophy, social constructivist theories of the body are being contested by a call to a return to the biological roots of the body. Rosi Braidotti has called this move by thinkers such as Elizabeth Grosz 'crucial to feminist theory in the third millennium.'⁷ The question that Grosz sets in her work on Darwin is germane to this inquiry: 'What are the virtualities, the potentialities, within biological existence that enable cultural, social and historical forces to work with and actively transform that existence?'⁸ This agenda admirably sums up the central concerns of Drabble within The Peppered Moth. The turn

⁶ Mary Hurley Moran, Margaret Drabble: Existing Within Structures (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1983) 3.

⁷ Rosi Braidotti, Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) 137.

⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, 'Darwin and Feminism: preliminary investigations for a possible alliance' Australian Feminist Studies 14 (29, 1999: 31-45) 32.

in philosophy toward biological theory that takes into account the radical immanence of the human is a powerful corrective of the Cartesian categories that have held sway over Western thinking, yet as Braidotti indicates, it may be less skeptical of the claims of Darwinism than research fields such as science studies which have taken evolutionary theory as central to their agendas. Scholars such as Hilary and Steven Rose have traced the misogyny and imperialistic tendencies of evolutionary theories and also note their profound interconnectedness with commercial and industrial interests.⁹ In reading Drabble's evolutionary narrative, I will read her with the critiques of science and a resurgent socio-biological determinism in mind. At the same time, I hope to be attentive to the ways in which such biological discourses enable Drabble to resituate the person in particular places marked by historical and social conditions.

The narrative concerning Bessie Bawtry's life as a child and adolescent in South Yorkshire in the early years of the twentieth century is characterized by slowness, filth and inertia. The point of convergence between this ancestor and those of our common primeval past is made repeatedly with expressions that denote clambering out of the slime or escaping from one medium into another. Although this past is characterized most strongly by its slowness in contrast to the present, and by the corresponding physical mechanism of inertia, Bessie, being a gifted child, does succeed in escaping the environment that would thwart her development by entering university at Cambridge.

The scourge of the time, the Spanish flu, occurs in this history as a reminder of the extent to which the mind is dependent upon that frail vessel the body. Drabble thus presents the paradox that while many able-bodied men failed to resist the illness which

⁹ Hilary and Steven Rose, eds., Alas Poor Darwin: Arguments against Evolutionary Psychology (London: Vintage 2001).

killed more people than the four years of the Great War, Bessie, despite a tendency to succumb to every passing illness, survived. However, being interestingly bed-ridden provides Bessie with the script to which she would return repeatedly during her life, taking to her bed with hysterical illnesses. Even when she reads the word 'hypochondriac' upside down in her medical chart, she appears to be impervious to insight into the neurotic behaviour that drives her.

In an afterword describing her mother, upon whom the portrait of Bessie Bawtry is modelled, as a 'highly intelligent, angry, deeply disappointed and manipulative woman,' Drabble also discusses the difficulty of finding a tone for such a person, one who seems to 'teeter on the brink of appearing as a figure from an Alan Bennett comedy' (390). That her mother pertains also to the drab world of the Edwardian English industrial north depicted by Arnold Bennett is no less true. Bessie is shown as very much the creature of her time, who, though given opportunities for advancement, also shrinks from the increased responsibilities and pressures that these entail. Like many women during World War II, she takes on the dual role of working outside the home and looking after her family, but abandons her work as a teacher with the return of her husband. Bessie provides a dichotomous portrait of survival and adaptation: though she succeeds in leaving the environment that would limit her growth, and adapts to a certain extent to her new environment, she is dogged by the hysterical behaviours enacted as a child and persisting throughout her life.

Her husband, Joe Barron, and his sister also exemplify mobility and the desire to advance beyond their narrow world; they depart for Surrey and Australia respectively. Here, however, the hazards of their early environment are shown to be inescapable, as

both die from asbestosis contracted while playing on the playgrounds of their coal-blackened industrial town. Thus, the pronouncement by the genetic scientist in the novel that 'where we come *from* is the most interesting thing that we can know about ourselves' (67) appears to receive Drabble's endorsement and is illustrated in her plot. The impossibility of escape from one's origins is written upon the body and underscored by disease and death. Joe's disease goes undetected, as no one would expect a lawyer living in Surrey to have such a disease. The determinations of the physical world of air, soil and climate must be submitted to. Drabble thus dramatizes the kind of ecological awareness at issue in Sandra Steingraber's Living Downstream of the multiple hazards and risks posed by industrial chemicals that seep into the air, water and soil of our habitats, and eventually become part of our bodies.¹⁰ Environment is thus portrayed less as mere surroundings than as an integral constituent part of what makes up the human body. The submission of the human to the natural world emphasizes the fact that we are not wholly free agents, however much we may believe we are able to determine our own lives.

The world of Bessie's childhood is criss-crossed by a variety of strata: geological as well as social and economic. As Drabble puts it, 'The very earth was mined. Beneath the streets, a mile down, toiled the employees of Bednerby Main, in dark tunnels supported by wooden pit props. The ground might give at any moment and let one down into the darkness' (15). This verticalized topography is mirrored by the social strata of people who live in the town, so that Bessie is suspended somewhere between the scum

¹⁰ Sandra Steingraber, Living Downstream : An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment (London: Virago, 1999). Steingraber's work investigates the widespread use of untested hazardous chemicals and attempts to examine the consequences of these upon human health and our ecosystems.

and the dregs: 'Do not rise with the scum, do not sink with the dregs. Stay safe. Stay where you are. Keep your mean place' (15). Darwinian advancement is depicted socially as Bessie attempts to transcend her limited setting and social class. That Bessie successfully battles the inertia that appears to have been part of the family makeup and is able to leave the hated town of her childhood testifies to the Darwinian imperative of struggle and competition. In her story the mechanism of natural selection by variation is shown in Bessie's mixed success in refusing to heed the rules that have guided her ancestors.

The main motif for Darwinian natural selection, however, is represented by the eponymous peppered moth. This natural history anecdote of the change in pigmentation of a moth to better suit its surroundings constitutes one type of response to environmental change. The Manchester moth, *Biston betularia*, exemplifies the way species modify in response to changed environments: the black pigmented moth, *carbonaria*, flourished in the years before the Clean Air Act due to industrial melanism, but subsequently decreased in number due to cleaner conditions, so that the lighter version of the moth, *typica*, prevailed. How it changed is vigorously debated by Bessie's grand-daughter Faro, who as a science writer had previously written about it in her thesis. For Faro's former boyfriend Sebastian, the moth is a symbol of the Lamarckian ability to transform itself in response to inhospitable conditions.¹¹ Seb's perverse desire to champion this outmoded, disproven theory is characteristic of the hold that morbid, Gothic tastes have over his

¹¹ Interestingly, one of Drabble's reviewers appears to follow Sebastian's ascription of this phenomena to the moth 'willing its own darkness', as she applies this example to the mother's hypochondria. Frost describes the process more fully as follows: 'These survivors are the result of years and years of selection during which white moths grew darker to evade predators in an

thinking. In his theatre of self-dramatization, only Lamarckian self-transformation has the power to suggest the hubristic ability of man to fully determine his own life. Death-seeking, Seb wishes to flout the laws of nature, and to entice the wary Faro into such a position as well, exhorting her to 'Descend with me!' Characteristically, his taste for Gothic horror leads him to feign a fatal illness: once again, the body becomes a stage for performing bodily hysteria. And just as Bessie's hypochondria was an emblem for a particular gendered social situation and impasse of an age, perhaps Seb's gothic male morbidity constitutes the characteristic enactment of a certain form of fin-de-siècle male hysteria.

If the early years of the twentieth century are described in terms of stagnation, inertia and slowness, the period at the outset of the new millennium is portrayed in terms of speed that goes beyond human physical capabilities and comprehension. Drabble collapses two hundred years of human life into two paragraphs describing how changes in technologies have changed our lives and thus that of the earth: 'No need now to stay stuck in the same valley for centuries, for millennia. You could clamber out now, however steep the sides....The day was dawning when our astral bodies would flap wearily behind speeding jumbo jets, never able to catch up with ourselves' (60). Parallel to discussions about nature, human and otherwise, Drabble depicts what Paul Virilio terms 'grey ecology' in his work on speed, technology and environment. He argues that the study of temporal modifications brought about by machinery and other technologies is intrinsic to the study of environment: 'The science of the human environment deprives itself deliberately, it would seem, of its connection with psychological time.

environment of dirty air and oily black soot.' See Eileen Frost, 'Culture Watch.' <http://www.seniorwomen.com/cult070401.html>.

....Ecology does not really question the man-machine dialogue, the close correlation between different regimes of perception and the collective practices of communication and telecommunication. In a word, ecology as a discipline does not sufficiently register the impact of machine time upon the environment, leaving this concern to ergonomics, indeed to "politics" alone.¹² Virilio suggests that a 'grey ecology' should be set alongside the green: 'an ecology that would be concerned not only with the air and noise pollution of the big cities but, first and foremost, the sudden eruption of the "world-city," totally dependent on telecommunications, that is being put in place at the end of the millennium' (59). Drabble's concern with these very effects, the effect of speed upon landscape, the ways in which the body is hooked up into networks of telecommunications as well as genealogical networks, and the effects of these upon the body makes Virilio's work relevant here.¹³ His proposal of a form of ecology that would critique the effects of telecommunications, transplantations, and the ubiquity of 'the law of least effort' finds an echo in Drabble's description of history that increasingly speeds up the closer it gets to the present day. No longer merely submerged in the atmospheric conditions described at the outset of the novel, where dirt and soiled air constitute a problematic setting, the characters are additionally embedded within inescapable networks of technology and communication.

¹² Paul Virilio, *Open Sky* Trans. Julie Rose. (London and New York: Verso, 1997) 23.

¹³ Though Virilio's work closely examines the nature of human life in terms of cyborgian transformations, that is man's embeddedness in communication systems and technology, interestingly, he repudiates this metaphor for the boundary-crossing nature of twentieth-century man. Although he considers 'cyberfeminism' one of the most important theoretical developments in the past decade with regard to our understanding of the human body, he critiques Haraway's well-known statement that she 'would rather be a cyborg than a goddess' with the reply, 'I want neither to be a God nor a cyborg! I want to be a man. It suffices to be a man—or a woman.' See John Armitage, 'Interview with Paul Virilio' in John Armitage, ed., *Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond*, (London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000) 51.

The meeting that opens the novel provides an arena for the competing ideologies, rhythms and natural laws that govern the two polarities of the novel. Drabble sets the encounter between these worlds of time in the meeting place of an earlier age, the church hall, in which a meeting takes place among the Cudworth Single Name Society, members of the public, and the scientist performing genetic research in the area. Emblems of contrasting forms of technology battle it out on the walls: analogue versus digital time, maps and photographs versus computer screens, cross-stitch and tapestry versus computer-generated banners. Early forms of genealogical research are exemplified by endless paperwork, by archives, even by microfiche, yet this is all superseded by the almost instant genetic research of the computer age.

Excavation forms the controlling trope of the novel, governing acts of memory, the retrieval of the past, and here, the literal exhumation of the bones of a Stone Age ancestor. The miracle of DNA, those busy strands of molecules and double helices, is thus brought to the backwater of Breaseborough, a town in which they still serve iced buns. At the same time, the potentially uncanny valence of exhumation, delivering to the present day the remains of a body dating from the sixth century B.C., is continually undermined by the sensibility of the character who makes its discovery. Steve Nieman, who discovers the body while climbing around in one of the hazardous areas of the reclamation project, literally drops into the cave in which Cotterhall Man has been comfortably seated for the past two millennia. Steven cannot resist patting him on the head, inadvertently almost knocking it off. Yet unlike the scientists, for whom the skeletal remains is of exclusively scientific interest, Steven shows respect for what is also a deceased human being. Alternative views of thinking about the dead are suggested by

Sebastian's fascination with Egyptian burial customs—he wishes his own organs to be placed in canopic jars after his death—and by Dora's harrowing dreams involving skulls and skeletons, as her dreams reflect her growing proximity to death. Steve embodies a kind of muscular environmentalism that keeps such morbidity at bay; his is the view that guides the reader toward a form of commonsense acknowledgement of the embeddedness of the human within history and within the land. The novel sets into play a number of contesting perspectives for thinking about the dead, but the matter-of-fact tone employed by Steven undercuts the uncanny Gothic possibilities of the remains in order to reinsert it into a recognition of the interpenetration of humanity with habitat, of body within a storied land. The paradoxes of bodily dissolution and persistence amply suggest the reciprocal markings of history and the land upon the human.

Funerals occur at regular intervals during the novel, as if to gauge the level of civilization by the way in which particular societies treat their dead. When Bessie Bawtry fails to return home to attend her mother's funeral, Drabble enjoins the reader to judge such behaviour harshly. In one of the frequent addresses to the reader, a postmodern technique that continually has the effect of unravelling the fictional realities she has worked together and distancing the reader from the story, the narrator makes the following comments:

What are we to make of these dreadful people? Is there any point in trying to make any sense of their affectless, unnatural, subnormal behaviour? ...Put our foot down on the accelerator, jab our finger on to Fast Forward, and scroll on down to join Dr. Hawthorn in the electronic age? The next generation can surely bury this lot, and forget all about them. There is no need to grieve for them. They could not help their stony lives (212).

Yet it is clear that what is buried and forgotten, the submerged past, will eventually surface despite the longings of a future generation to leave it behind. Chrissie, the child of the next generation, repudiates her mother and the safe field of English literature by choosing Archaeology and Anthropology: 'She thought she was breaking with the past by choosing the past' (213). An authorial intervention informs the reader that 'she didn't yet know it but she was programmed to follow in her parents' footsteps. Most people are. It takes a lot of effort to break the pattern' (213). . The emphasis of an earlier age on struggle for existence, natural selection and variation has given way to the rhetoric of genetic determinism. To what extent does Drabble endorse this overly simplistic programme? If the rhetoric of determinism recurs frequently throughout the novel, yet the formal patterning of the novel into discrete time periods and generational groups, different topographies and social environments, motifs of variation as well as stability, complicates the picture more than the above statement would suggest.

Drabble refers to the apparent freedoms of certain forms of fiction, relating the problem of determinism not just to physical, genetic, or even social determinants, but to the limitations of fiction, and the imagination, itself. Considering the trajectory of Chrissie's history, she comments that the story could have

In theory, gone in many different directions. But in practice the options are as limited as they are in computerized, apparently open-ended works of interactive fiction. The imagination fails to supply the necessary freedom. It loops back on itself, it repeats itself, it returns to its own obsessions, it provides dull solutions, for it too is a creature of habit, it cannot really initiate, its routes are determined' (214).

In opposition to the Romantic theory of imagination as a transcendent force that allows one to leave terrestrial realities behind, Drabble's metaphor resembles recent cognitive

theory that indicates possibilities for early development in many different areas and ways, but which with habit, become foreclosed as neural pathways become more and more fixed. However, these recent theories, while indicating the extent to which habit and use dictate future development, also suggest that more growth is possible into old age than had been hitherto believed. Perhaps the paths of the imagination are similarly not as fixed and intransigent as it may appear. For Chrissie to break away from her mother's past, she requires a potent Other. Nick Gaulden, unpredictable by nature, is the required element to undo the determinism of the path set before her.

In order to analyse the role the discourse of genetic determinism plays in the novel, let us inquire in the words of Evelyn Fox Keller, 'What is gene talk *for*?'¹⁴ A point that Drabble underscores in the novel is the use of gene talk for persuasion, its rhetorical power pressed into service not only for securing funds and research agendas, but also for marketing and commercial exploitation of the research. Drabble's portrait of Dr. Hawthorn, with its portrayal of enthusiasm that verges on hucksterism, suggests the lures of prestige and economic rewards that await the successful scientist in this field. However, Fox-Keller also points out the enormous amount of work that the term 'gene' is made to do: one single entity is taken to be the guarantor of intergenerational stability, the factor responsible for individual traits, and, at the same time, the agent directing the organism's development. She suggests the dangers of such over-simplification for biological research and urges that if not for biologists, who are aware of the complexity implied in this word, then 'for the lay reader, for whom it misleads as often as it informs', (148) that it be considered a relic of an earlier stage of scientific research.

¹⁴ Evelyn Fox Keller, The Century of the Gene (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000) 143.

Gene talk in the novel introduces the theme of determinism and stability, of futures that inevitably and inexorably replicate the past. And, as R.C. Lewontin points out,

The claim that all of human existence is controlled by our DNA is a popular one [and] has the effect of legitimizing the structure of society in which we live because it does not stop with the assertion that the differences in temperament, ability, and physical and mental health between us are coded in our genes. It also claims that the political structures of society—the competitive, entrepreneurial, hierarchical society in which we live and which differentially rewards different temperaments, different cognitive abilities and different mental attitudes—is also determined by our DNA, and that it is, therefore, unchangeable.¹⁵

Such larger social concerns are peripheral to the fictional world of Drabble's novel, although there is mention of the commercial abuse of such technology through piracy. Yet, contrasting this biological discourse, is the opposite trend of variation; that is, evolution as a motor of change.

One of the means of escape of the past is suggested by the choice of migration as a strategy for seeking a different future than the one embodied in one's relatives and familial place. Musing about the difficulties of leaving Yorkshire for the New World of Canada or the U.S., Faro reflects,

Human beings were opaque, amazing, in their leaps, their motivations. And yet there were links, reaching backwards into the cavernous recesses of time itself, into the limestone, into the potholes, into the caverns. How could one begin to follow the leaps? Did families remain static for centuries, then suddenly, in an instant, in a generation, mutate? (159)

The contrasting circumstances of the Jewish side of her family with the Yorkshire branch helps to suggest the convergence of history with genes, of larger stories that influence

¹⁵ R.C. Lewontin, The Doctrine of DNA: Biology as Ideology (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991) 87.

and determine the outcome of individual histories. Drabble thus supplements the impoverished scientific language of adaptation and change with the motivating force of social and historical mechanisms.

Interestingly, the gene research that employs female mitochondrial DNA places a new emphasis on the matrilineal lines that had been obscured by the patriarchal practice of naming based on the male line. Female histories that had been obscured and rendered invisible by conventional historiography are thus set in relief by the new genetic research. The excavation of Cotterhall Man reveals that all of the female line through Ellen Bawtry, Bessie Barron and Chrissie Sinclair to Faro Gaulden are related to this Stone Age ancestor: Faro thus learns that 'her genes had dwelled in Hammervale since the end of the Ice Age' (358). The discovery of this ancestral skeleton thus has the paradoxical effect of undoing the strivings and migrations of later generations, reinserting Faro into the land of her genetic origins.

Excavation is a powerful trope in the novel for reexamination of family histories and submerged pasts. It suggests the need to exhume the dead figuratively in order to come to an understanding of their lives before accomplishing the second burial that will eventually bring about a reconciliation of history and memory and thus end the haunting of the present by a persistent presence of the past.¹⁶ The after-life of Bessie Bawtry continues to haunt her descendents long after she has passed away, uncharacteristically peacefully and undemandingly, at sea during an ocean cruise. The way she is preserved for the duration of the voyage for her later burial in England resembles the work of Drabble's historical fiction as a form of literary archaeology, in which the past is mined,

as Toni Morrison puts it, 'to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply.'¹⁷ The work of second burial, as when Bessie is finally laid to rest in England, is the necessary work of the author in not only reconstructing a past, but dealing symbolically with the burden of memory. Drabble feelingly describes the difficulty of the task that has motivated this novel, in which the figure of her mother must be faithfully evoked within the context of her place and age in order to achieve the final burial that will free her descendants of the legacy of disappointment, complaint, and persistent unhappiness.

When, at the conclusion of the novel, Bessie's descendant Faro sifts through the remains of her great-aunt's life, consigning much of it to the rubbish bin, but finding much of incidental interest along the way, we are reminded of the author undertaking a similar task in her reassessment of her mother's life. To merely dispose of much of it as valueless would be not only lacking in respect for the life of a distinctive human being, but also to miss the opportunity to discern the tracings of environment, of family, and of genetic heritage, as well as history, both personal and social, upon human life. What is consigned to amnesia may well threaten to reemerge in the present, so in bringing back the dead, Drabble attempts to mine the underworld of a forgotten age so that it may be better understood in the light of the present.

The resurrection of the mining town of Hammervale provides a telling parallel of this process, in which the world of the past, toxic, polluted in ways that left its mark upon

¹⁶ These issues are discussed with reference to anthropological theory and multicultural American literature by Kathleen Brogan in Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Toni Morrison, 'The Site of Memory' in William Zinsser, ed., Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987:101-24) 112.

the lives, and early deaths, of its inhabitants, and riddled with dangerous mines and caverns, is nonetheless reclaimed in ways that bring back forms of life in a potent image of environmental recovery. Drabble poses the rhetorical question, 'If land and air may be reclaimed, may the dead live again?' (293) The work of recovery depends on recognition of the forces that have rendered it toxic, just as Drabble's historical reconstruction attempts to understand the ways that Bessie's life has disappointed and thwarted her, leaving her crippled emotionally, a joyless and self-centred wife and mother. The difficult journey to the underworld is made not only in the service of the dead, though this is an important part of its function, but in freeing the dead from bondage, it also offers hope for those who survive, and who risk continuing the legacy if it is not finally reburied in a ceremony that not only commemorates it but also consigns it to the past. Drabble's description of her visit to the underworld recalls precisely the terms employed by Margaret Atwood in Negotiating with the Dead in an earlier chapter: Drabble refers to a myth in which a woman who wanted to enter hell to find her loved one had to make herself like the dead to go there. Rubbing herself with dead rat water in order to make herself smell of the dead, she was able to disguise herself and thus pass before the guardians of the dead. Drabble's comment alludes to the perils of such a task: 'I feel in writing this, that I have made myself smell of dead rat, and I am not sure how to get rid of the smell,' (392). Yet, Drabble concludes the afterword of her novel, 'I cannot sing, my mother could not sing, and her mother before her could not sing. But Faro can sing, and her clear voice floods the valley' (392).

The achievement of The Peppered Moth derives in part from Drabble's ability to consider simultaneously the personal amid the historical, and the dialectical forces of

stasis and change. The contrasting theories of evolution, which emphasizes mechanisms of adaptation and mutation, and that of genetic heredity, which places stress upon the motors of stability, provide a language within which to discuss the polarities of continuity and change. The language of biology evokes not bedrock foundationalism, but the tension between constructed and received pasts. Thus, Drabble sets the novel within the dramatic timescale of evolution, making the extent of what is almost unimaginably great palpable to the reader. The postmodern technique of authorial intervention, suggesting the perspective of an omniscient narrator, is thus a formal requirement for the depiction of more than human timescales, from the imperceptibly slow to the mind-numbingly rapid speed of present-day life. Moreover, in employing a setting that is neither merely historical nor exclusively natural, human bodies that are both historied and biological, and a time period that partakes of the both extremely slow and the blurringly rapid, Margaret Drabble has succeeded in portraying the human within a tangibly ecological framework. The hope held out by the reclamation of Hammervale, once a zone of notable toxicity and hazardous landforms, acknowledges the extent to which capitalist interests bent on 'greenwashing' its other activities, may be nonetheless employed in redeeming the past and creating a better future.¹⁸ The Earth Project at Hammervale is part public relations, part industrial waste dump, and part site of a restored 'second' nature; however, what this adds up to is far from utopian fantasy. When fire breaks out at the site as a result of the gases contained in the landfill, the hazards are blamed on the ancient poisons of the past that had inadvertently escaped. Storage on the site of two drums of

¹⁸ Timothy W. Luke, 'Green Consumerism: Ecology and the Ruse of Recycling' Ecocritique: Contesting the Politics of Nature, Economy and Culture (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1997. 115-132). The suspect politics behind becoming an 'anti-consumer

depleted uranium is hushed up by the Environmental Agency. This reclamation site provides a highly ambivalent sign of progress, where a banished nature has indeed returned, only to be endangered by corrupt contemporary business interests. Links between environmental justice and environment, between political corruption and hazards, are thus compellingly set in the foreground.

However, in making this zone a place where the past is not irrevocably buried, but may be exhumed for reexamination, Drabble emphasizes that where there is understanding of the past, and its errors and excesses are considered, there is hope for a better future, one based on understanding of the complexities of not only a more-than-human nature, but also a more-than-human history in which it is embedded. Drabble employs discourse that personifies the gene, granting it agency and working within the framework of biologism to decentre the human subject, yet this perspective is supplemented by language that reinstates the body and the human mind as actors in the novel. Rejecting language that portrays human life exclusively within the reductionist, determinist frame of certain forms of sociobiology and genetics or within the progressivist framework of a social Darwinism, Drabble shows that the interplay of adaptation and change and stasis based on inheritance is a potent behavioural determinant that may provide the mechanisms of not only of internecine competition and greed, but also of future survival.¹⁹ To conclude, I want to cite Rosi Braidotti, writing about necessity for thought that is embodied, that makes use of figurations to rethink the past:

Becoming is a question of undoing the structures of domination by careful, patient revisitations, re-adjustments, micro-changes. A long apprenticeship to minute

consumer' are also addressed by Jennifer Price, Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America (New York: Basic books, 1999) 198-99.

¹⁹ It is an interesting feature of much genetic discourse that negative aspects of humanity are stressed, while such qualities as altruism are greatly underemphasized.

transformations, through endless repetitions, will replace the illusion of a royal road to the revolution or of one single point of resistance, and assert instead the constant flows of met(r)amorphoses. Becoming is a nomadic kind of revisitation or remembering which traces empowering transversal lines that cut across the staticity of sedimented memory, activating it by de-programming it out of the dominant mode.

Such is the work of Margaret Drabble in the novel The Peppered Moth, a revisitation that commemorates a buried, sedimented past; as Braidotti claims, ‘the kind of refrain that sticks and keeps on returning: the sort of thing that one, quite simply, forgot to forget.’²⁰ Drabble imagines humanity as it undergoes the transformations and metamorphoses brought about not only by environment, but also by the very technologies that have been invented to escape the multiple determinations of heredity, stability and place.

²⁰ Rosi Braidotti, Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2002) 116.

Conclusion

The world outside was no longer of interest to most of the people in England that day, but later that evening it suddenly grew interesting, soon it became the one thing that mattered, that night as they lay there, intensely afraid, they knew that the skin was artificial, that no one was safe, there was no 'inside', nothing to keep the world 'outside', there was only one infinitely powerful world, one tremendous, unpredictable story in which all the characters were playing dwarfs, and had no words because nothing would help them.¹

The above passage encapsulates many of the themes that recur throughout the fiction that comprises this project: lack of interest in the world outside, an event that evokes a sense of danger, whether as a result of industrial or natural disaster, and the sense that one is no longer bounded at the skin, but vulnerable to such external events. Environmentalism is often centrally concerned with making issues that are 'no longer of interest,' such as the 'outside,' matter, become interesting. In a related area of concern, Martin Amis asks why so few writers have tackled the subject of nuclear power and weaponry: 'It is astonishing how little the mainstream has had to say about the nuclear destiny—a destiny that does not want for complication, inclusiveness, pattern, paradox, that does not want for *interest*.'² As Amis has pointed out with regard to the menace of nuclear warfare, environmental questions are perhaps too large to be attacked frontally.³ Though there are a number of works in sub-literary genres such as the thriller and detective fiction that involve environmental questions more centrally, within the novels of this study, it features as

¹ Maggie Gee, Grace (London: Heinemann, 1988) 168-9.

² Martin Amis, Einstein's Monsters (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 18.

³ Amis, Einstein's Monsters, 19.

a significant background, one that makes itself felt as a foreground.⁴ Though perhaps peripheral to many of the novels examined here, the environmental crisis is not depicted as negligible, but as something so large scale, and so indeterminate in scope and origins, as to demand a radically different treatment. This is accomplished through narrative strategies that reorient the reader within geological or astronomical time scales and within casts of characters that include not only humans but also members of the insect and animal kingdoms. Thus, the old narrative (of heroic mastery) and its leading characters identified at the outset of this study as ‘a key part of the problem’ in the search for environmental solutions have been shown to be renovated in significant and potentially transformative ways. The notion of a weaker anthropocentrism proposed by Andrew Dobson can thus be accomplished within a gradual evolution of narrative strategies that enable us to think beyond human life spans, to envision the infinitely small and the unimaginably great, and to enlarge our conception of the human beyond the individual.⁵ Such tasks are being taken on by contemporary British women novelists, who employ the novel form for the re-examination and revivification of the significance of everyday lives set within a broader canvas.

This study has outlined the emergence of an ecofeminist canon of British writers. Though none of these writers explicitly identify themselves as ecofeminist, their concerns, nonetheless, are to engage with constructions of woman and gender

⁴ For an interesting discussion of thrillers that feature environmental crisis, see Richard Kerridge, ‘Ecothrillers: Environmental Cliffhangers’ in Lawrence Coupe, ed., The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism (London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 242-249).

⁵ Andrew Dobson, Green Political Thought (3rd ed.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1990, 1995, 2000).

amid significant backdrops involving crucial environmental questions. By situating themselves at the intersection of such vigorously contested discursive fields as biomedicine, technology, science and nature, the writers treated here offer important contributions to thinking about what is at stake in British second nature. As I have argued above, contributing new narratives to stereotyped public discourses about environmental problems constitutes a potentially effective means of altering consciousness in these areas. At the same time, these writers have not only paid attention to topics of ecological concern, but have forged the means of treating these ideas in their form, creating narratives that break down barriers between dichotomized fields of experience, such as the bodily and the mental, the historical and the natural, science and culture.

Whereas the ecofeminist canon in American Literature largely comprises writers that evoke pastoral or wilderness landscapes in attempts to describe what is often construed as First Nature, unspoiled places that may offer 'refuge', solace or healing, writers in Britain, by contrast, view nature as 'always already' imbricated by social, gender and class structures that render it problematic.⁶ At the same time, the English countryside, though a place of surpassing beauty and apparent integrity, is rarely sought by these writers as a place within which to retreat, and they tend to

⁶ I refer here to works that have already been mentioned, such as Terry Tempest Williams' Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place (New York, Pantheon, 1991) and Kathleen Norris' Dakota: A Spiritual Geography (New York and Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993) as encapsulating this kind of rhetorical gesture. Gretel Ehrlich's The Solace of Open Spaces (New York: Penguin, 1985) is also a work that employs an autobiographical voice that describes the search for healing from nature; here, the open spaces of Wyoming. Of course, Refuge finally recognizes the impossibility of its own escape attempts, and there is also a growing body of works that considers environmental justice issues with regard to natural settings. See for a discussion of these works, Giovanna Di Chiro, 'Nature as Community: The Convergence of

record the desire to do so as suspect. Rather, it is generally envisioned as not only a place of endangerment (viz. Maggie Gee's stark futuristic landscape or Winterson's toxic river), but it is also a place in which archaic gender scenarios may be enacted, as in Weldon's Puffball or Lette's country houses. Thus, the site of nature is itself a location of considerable ambiguity within these works. Though there is evidence here of a range of perspectives toward English nature, in general one might characterize it as an attitude that is often infused with a sense of irony: the sense of the sublime that may be located in American ecofeminist writing (even if finally overcome in the end by new knowledge that makes it untenable) is largely absent in these narratives. A.S. Byatt attributes this tendency to 'English style': 'English *style* is fatally mocking—we can only have the Sublime, it seems, if we include the grotesque as a safeguard.'⁷ Not only is the grotesque a means of dismantling the boundaries that delimit the human body, but it is also a style that enables serious matters to be thought without undue seriousness.

The site that constitutes 'nature' in these novels is brought closer to human concerns by being a complex site of modified bodily nature, such as the female body as it becomes 'cyborged' through such means as fertilization procedures, reconstructive plastic surgery, or life support systems. These endangered bodies form a nexus of natural, cultural, social, political and economic concerns that highlight the complexity of environmental questions at the outset of a new millennium. The foregrounding of endangered bodies within significant landscapes

Environment and Social Justice' in William Cronon, ed., Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1995, 1996) 298-320.

⁷ A.S. Byatt, A Whistling Woman (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002) 233.

embeds the human within nature in ways that provide new metaphors for our time.

As Stuart Hall has asserted,

There are many different metaphors in which our thinking about cultural change takes place. These metaphors themselves change. Those which grip our imagination, and for a time, govern our thinking about scenarios and possibilities of cultural transformation, give way to new metaphors, which make us think about these difficult questions in new forms.⁸

For Hall, the crucial question here is whether such transformative metaphors not only provide ways of imagining the overthrow of dominant cultural values, but also provide analytical value: that is, 'provide ways of thinking about the relation between the social and symbolic domains in this process of transformation' (1). For Hall, the Bakhtinian shift from the metaphor of the dialectic, with its either/or binarism, to the more complex terrain of the dialogic inserts ambiguity and ambivalence into philosophical language. It records the positionalities, locations and the articulations between various speakers within dialogue, representing the shifts in accent and differing usage of many of the common terms. Similarly, the disruptive force of the grotesque body in its many forms is deployed by British women writers to emphasize the much neglected dimension of lived corporeal existence that connects human life to the biological life of the planet. The figure of the grotesque body escapes from the symbolic areas from which it has been excluded to emerge as a deeply significant trope for the excessive physicality that mainstream thought and culture tends to erase. 'What is socially peripheral may be symbolically central': located at the margins of society and discourse, the grotesque body invades the terrains that would deny it admittance in order to lay stress upon its

⁸ Stuart Hall, 'Metaphors of Transformation' Foreword to Allon White, Carnival, Hysteria and Writing (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993. 1-25) 1.

exorbitant physicality and the material realities that challenge its existence.⁹ The memorable figures created within these novels of mothers, monsters and machines engage new explorations into the conditions of postmodern life, in which the boundaries between these categories have been breached and survival depends upon the apprehension of the rapid changes that the human, the natural and the technological have been undergoing. The consciousness that we are connected to the planetary through our innermost forms of embodiment is the significant contribution made by contemporary British women novelists thinking through the conundrums presented by the discourses of science, technology, biomedicine and nature. They suggest that the ecology of everyday life cannot be separated from social issues and the technologies of gender and race; rather, they continually illustrate the persistence of gender within the wider concerns of environmental and planetary health.

Twentieth-century science has given birth to a wide range of new theories, technologies and inventions. Among these feature prominently such neonates as the atomic bomb, cloning, nuclear power, GM foods and crops, to name only a few of the more remarkable manifestations. Margaret Drabble's own list stresses the Promethean motivations of these innovations: 'Cloning, genetic engineering, spare-part surgery, xenografts, then immortality.'¹⁰ Consequently, the findings and failures of contemporary science have raised more questions and issues than can be resolved within biomedical, genetic or technological forums alone, thus instigating literary inquiries into both the most inevitable conditions of human life, birth and death, and the new horizons that beckon. These new forms and conditions of life, including

⁹ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (London: Methuen, 1986) 193-4.

cyborg subjectivities, cataclysmic climate change, and dangerous new technologies, have provoked enquiry into chance, inheritance and future survival, giving rise to new stories and new literary forms in which to tell them.

Many of the novels written by contemporary women British writers reflect the centrality of science and nature in various ways as a means of understanding our lives and our futures. These novels thematize or otherwise incorporate scientific discourses, whether by the use of scientist-protagonists, describing scientific experiments and inventions, or citing scientific theory or jargon. Although the discourses of science do not form the central area of interest in my investigation of the deployment of female bodies in the British novel, they do employ languages and theories that are used to exacerbate and provoke rethinking the problem of 'becoming woman' within endangered environments. In this project I have asked the question, How do contemporary writers represent the human being with emphasis on the body in place?

This question focuses on contemporary ideas regarding the human and the environment to indicate innovations that are taking place in narrative techniques, metaphor and characterization in the contemporary novel. I have examined the relation between body and place in terms of plot, theme, and other constituents of narrative structure, and develop its implications for understanding texts, metaphors and the process of interpretation itself. Rather than employing ecocriticism to examine texts that focus on nature, such as nature writing or the nature novel, I have engaged ecocritical perspectives to bring out the implications of the human and environment in contemporary novels often set in urban or suburban settings. In

¹⁰ Margaret Drabble, *The Peppered Moth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001) 156.

seeking for Nature in the contemporary novel by women writers, I have found that small-n-nature emerges as the significant thread that links these works. Questions relating to biology, to innate characteristics, and genes accompany the tropes relating to the reproductive, monstrous and moribund bodies that are found in these novels. This is not particularly surprising, given the prominence of genetic and socio-biological discourses in the present age; however, what is more significant is the ways in which these critiques are linked to wider concerns involving environmental and social justice issues that are conceived as necessary consequences of certain ways of thinking. Thus, pregnancy is linked to the notion of pastoral and its critique; the monstrous body is tied to nuclear or other forms of pollution; and death is also reconceived in ways that take it beyond an individual, contingent event to tie it into the larger canvas of domestic violence and oppression, war, and natural disaster. My readings have applied the dual perspective of ecofeminist theory and Bakhtinian poetics centring on dialogism and carnivalization. Here I would like to evaluate these theories and indicate some of the problems as well as the possibilities provided by these frameworks for interpreting literature and for thinking about ecologism.

The first section discussed novels centring on the maternal body, placed within a wider setting formed by society, politics and nature. The notion of dialogism emerged as a significant feature of these texts as women confronted conflicting discourses that served to police or otherwise discipline their pregnant bodies. I view these plots involving pregnancy and childbirth as textual attempts to write 'beyond the ending' of the traditional heterosexual plot of compulsory courtship and marriage. The teleological plot line of pregnancy which emphasizes ending, in the outcome of

childbirth, often suggests simultaneously the possibility of a different sense of time, one that is sensory, cyclical and more in consonance with natural bodily rhythms. At the same time, the fragmented subjectivity of the pregnant woman, both self and Other within a single body, becomes a means of voicing the Other, as when the narrator of Puffball listens to the voice of her unborn baby. The changing socio-historical conditions of the novels indicate a trajectory of increased control over pregnancy as it comes under ever-greater social surveillance: woman is thus transformed into a 'maternal environment' to be assessed by outsiders.

The tension between notions of a 'timeless' biological and thus wholly natural state represented by pregnancy and the cultural conditions that are inscribed upon the bodies of pregnant women is reflected in various ways in each of the novels examined here. In focusing on biology and the malleable female body, these authors depict women as enmeshed in natural processes and at the same time, they describe the ways in which these processes are mediated by social forces that determine the contexts and meanings of the pregnant female body. Retrogressive tropes and epithets for womanhood are cited and contested in this writing to both foreground the dangers of associating woman with an abjected nature and liberate her from this restrictive definition, either by refuting it, as in The Millstone, parody as in Weldon's Puffball and Lette's Mad Cows, or by re-situating female corporeality within history, as does Eva Figes in The Seven Ages.

Next, the form of the monster in Section Two provided a figure for the 'unnatural' as a significant actor that embodies cultural fears and anxieties. Many of the monsters examined here are cybernetic organisms, or cyborgs, such as the clone,

Futuremouse©, or the 'techfix' baby, while others are hybrid beings like the She-Devil or the Dogwoman. Analysis of these characters allows a focus not only on forms of characterization, but also on the specific chronotopes that foster the creation and development of such diverse beings. Monsters have something particular to show or tell us: their function is to embody and to demonstrate certain problems and impasses. Texts that house monsters may also evolve distinctive narrative strategies of containment and display. In examining the machines that often accompany these monsters, either creating them or accompanying them as a form of parallel development, I have tried to examine these in terms of the social desires they represent, rather than seeing them as merely dangerous or otherwise undesirable. Many of these novels also evince awareness of environmental crisis: they indicate that certain ways of conceptualizing embodiment may have implications not only for human lives but also for the worlds in which they are set.

In the final section I have explored the topos of the abject body of death, an area that emphasizes an aspect of life that we increasingly attempt to ignore, suppress or otherwise erase.¹¹ The novels of this section examine the individual in relation to history and also to particular places that are portrayed with an emphasis on time and both natural and human history. Memories are 're-placed' as the protagonists explore historical events with regard to particular places revisited and reconfigured with reference to the deaths that have taken place there. Novels that reanimate the dead, as do Penelope Lively's Moon Tiger, Kate Atkinson's Human Croquet or Margaret Drabble's The Peppered Moth, are texts that structure themselves around absent

centres that are carefully negotiated to reveal their meanings in the context of a later time. These are texts that articulate trauma in the representation of grieving and loss, or the more ambivalent feelings that arise in circumstances that make grieving problematic, as when death is denied or relief is intermingled with sorrow. The narration of death by natural disaster resituates human significance within an emphatically natural frame and stresses the imperative of survival.

Each of these texts could be termed environmentally-oriented works, according to Buell's terminology, as they show 'human history [as] implicated in natural history.'¹² I have argued that equally important is their emphasis on the fact (not mentioned by Buell) that nature conversely contains human history, as do these accounts of a historically-contingent and variable nature. Although other aspects of Buell's checklist for an environmental text are less emphasized in these novels, such as the realisation that human interest is not the only legitimate interest or the suggestion of human accountability to the environment, what is stressed in these texts, and I believe necessarily accompanies the retrieval of the dead through memory, is the awareness of the environment as a *process* rather than a given.

The possibility of envisioning human lives as being an integral part of place is evoked through myriad metaphors derived from natural processes, such as fossilization, decomposition, natural selection, photosynthesis, and seismic activity. Metaphors that denote nature in the form of *natura naturata*, as products, are also deployed through texts that present prominent images of trees or insects, such as

¹¹ See Philippe Ariès for a history of the treatment of the dead body. His central thesis concerns the increasing invisibility of death in Western culture. Philippe Ariès, Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990).

¹² Buell, Environmental Imagination, 7.

bees, ants or moths. Discourses of genetic science as well as natural history provide differing means for thinking through and contesting deterministic biological theories of inheritance, survival and humanity. I argue that these figures drawn from natural history enable the comprehension of a process for which we lack both the language and the psychological wherewithal: thus, novels that prominently feature deaths and reincorporate them within a natural scheme enable the reader to rethink what it means to be human in a way that incorporates both objectivity and feeling, and most importantly, resituates the human subject within a natural world.

Next, I want to reconsider and evaluate the possibilities offered by Bakhtin's poetics for ecocritical readings of the novel. In my analysis of these novels, I have drawn attention to the ecological potential of Bakhtinian theory, not only in terms of its linguistic and textual content through such concepts as dialogism, the chronotope, heteroglossia and intertextuality, but also in his theoretical concept of carnivalization, which introduces that of the cosmic, or grotesque body. Bakhtin's discourse theory of the novel has been largely absorbed into contemporary critical practice.¹³ Ecocritics have also championed Bakhtinian theory for ecocriticism with good reason; however, there is as yet no ecocritical work that draws on his concept of the grotesque body as a model for reformulating human/nature categories.¹⁴ I have

¹³ Certainly the concepts of intertextuality and dialogism have become part and parcel of critical theoretical repertoire, and the latter concept, largely signalled through the prevalence of the terms 'competing' and 'contesting' voices, has become a critical commonplace. Although the term 'dialogism' does not originate with Bakhtin, it has been used to describe a theory that emphasizes the role of the addressee, and the status of the word as a 'territory' between speaker and listener. Lynne Pearce has discussed the reception of Bakhtinian theory in *Reading Dialogics* (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1994) 1-17.

¹⁴ Patrick D. Murphy, *Literature, Nature, Other: Ecofeminist Critiques* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1995) and Malcolm J. McDowell, 'The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight'

shown that such a concept and its concomitant linguistic theory of the effects of carnivalization are particularly applicable in understanding the deployment of the low, the impolite, and the bodily in fiction. This theory has provided a way to place emphasis on regions of the body, material life, and thus forms of thought, that are often transcended in philosophy and literature.

Yet Bakhtin's theory of an ever-fecund body appropriates the female body without acknowledging the existence of woman per se, thus erasing woman from his universalistic theory. The objections of feminist critics to such areas of misogyny are fully justified, yet some feminists have found it possible to rehabilitate a theory of the grotesque based on consciousness of the role of gender.¹⁵ I have also examined the criticism of carnivalization as an inherently conservative mechanism that serves to relieve the tensions in social and political systems that are highly hierarchical and fixed.¹⁶ I have not yet devoted attention to an area that presents potentially more serious problems with particular relevance to an ecological concept of the body. In Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin introduces the idea of the grotesque as a 'cosmic' body that joins itself to the earth through its very bodiliness: its various openings—all designated repeatedly by name by Bakhtin—enable individuals to join others in a joyous, bacchanalian dance of love, procreating, eating, drinking, defecating, and

in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (Athens, Ga.: U of Georgia P, 1996) 371-391.

¹⁵ See especially Patricia Yaeger, Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing 1930-1990 (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2000) and Mary Russo, 'Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory' in Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury, eds. Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory (New York: Columbia UP, 1997) 318-336. See Sue Vice for a more general overview of this problem in Introducing Bakhtin (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1997).

¹⁶ See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (London: Methuen, 1986).

dying. Even in death, the grotesque body is not finished, for it reunites cosmically with the universe, becoming part of the soil that nourishes our food and enables further life. Bakhtin's figure of the dying woman giving birth is one such example of the joyous connectedness of human beings. I have already signalled the potent misogyny of this particular example.

The notion of death as inherently ecological removes it from a tragic context to place it within the cyclical framework of comedy. This revision is profoundly anti-anthropocentric and merits examination of its possibilities for more biocentric ways of conceptualizing human life. Such too, is the theory of Meeker's ecological theory of comedy, and the significance of a comic consciousness for narrative environmentalism.¹⁷ It is important to point out, however, that Bakhtin's theory is not motivated by an ecological perspective, despite its reliance on organic imagery and its expression of social desire and connectedness. Nor was it conceived in a historical vacuum, but emerged out of a time of great upheaval, social dislocation, and specifically, widespread human tragedy. The theory of the grotesque body and carnivalization, which attests to human resilience and survival, owes its origins to the Stalinist terrors, as critic Mikhail Ryklin points out in his reassessment of Bakhtin within the Soviet context. Ryklin characterizes Rabelais and his World as 'a self-therapeutic text, related more to some biographical trauma than to the object under discussion.'¹⁸ He locates this trauma in the 'unthinkable' situation of being a

¹⁷ Joseph Meeker, The Comedy of Survival : Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic (Tucson, Arizona: U of Arizona P, 1997). For an application of Meeker's theory within English literature, see Don Elgin, The Comedy of the Fantastic: Ecological Perspectives on the Fantasy Novel (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1985).

¹⁸ Mikhail K. Ryklin, 'Bodies of Terror: Theses Toward a Logic of Violence' Trans. Molly and Donald Wesling, New Literary History, (no. 24. 1993: 51-74) 51.

member of the intelligentsia amid the increasing dominance of a social collective and undergoing the Stalinist Terror. Ryklin imposes upon Bakhtin a Bakhtinian reading, noting the way in which the work emerged as a response to 'topical events and topical thoughts and moods,' as Bakhtin asserts in his study of Rabelais. Bakhtin identifies the historical situation in which Pantagruel was composed as the following:

planned and written during the time of *natural calamities* [emphasis in original] which fell upon France in 1532...Pantagruel was to a remarkable degree a merry rejoinder to the cosmic fear aroused by the natural calamities...this is the warlike response to topical events and topical thoughts and moods from that historic moment.¹⁹

For Bakhtin, as well as Rabelais, death is thus reconfigured as a brief interlude in the celebration of humankind, 'a moment necessary for their rejuvenation and completion.'²⁰ Ryklin is quite right in pointing out the way in which the grotesque body becomes 'the ideally replaceable, synthetic body.'²¹ The theory of a fecund collective body is itself infused with melancholy in response to the senseless loss of human life, but this mood is denied and overlaid with a remorseless cheerfulness, to depict what Ryklin terms a 'pathos of eternally returning beginnings.'²² The repressed subtext of Bakhtin's exuberant theory has obvious implications for this and other non-tragic conceptions of bodily existence and death within an ecological frame. Critics who are drawn to this account of the cosmic or grotesque body similarly need to inquire into their own motivations and displacements in seeking a comic view of human mortality. Is there not something profoundly disturbing, even misanthropic, in a view that continually stresses the collective at the expense of the

¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World Trans. Helene Iswolsky. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 368.

²⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais, 369. (Italics in original).

²¹ Mikhail Ryklin, 'Bodies of Terror,' 54.

individual, the moment of renewal rather than the fact of death, of survival over extinction? Just as Bakhtin may have derived solace from his jubilant account of the popular body, so too may environmentalists find deceptive solace amid the despair in such 'ecological' accounts of the survival of species amid individual deaths.

Yet if we compare this attitude of relative indifference toward individual human deaths to the biocentrism of an ecological theory such as the Gaia hypothesis, which holds that the earth is a self-regulating mechanism that is largely indifferent to the fate of humankind, we may find that Bakhtin's theory also enables such a worldview. At times it appears that the Gaia hypothesis is also indifferent to any remedies that may be sought for planetary problems such as global warming, since the model provides evidence that various organisms will adapt, or not, to the changes that occur worldwide. Supporters of the Gaia hypothesis such as Dorian Sagan and Lynn Margulis point out that whether or not human life survives, bacterial lifeforms certainly will.²³ The motivation for achieving positive environmental change within such a fatalistic framework is difficult to sustain. Similarly, within the Bakhtinian carnivalesque of eternal transformation, individual lives do not appear to be of much consequence.

If this theory forms part of a larger framework, however, in which the lower bodily stratum, and life and death are placed within a comic worldview, as Meeker has suggested, other ecological values can supplement the primacy of inversion and reversal so prominent in the world of the carnival. Here, a comic worldview incorporates the carnivalesque, yet adds to it the social and political values of the

²² Mikhail Ryklin, 'Bodies of Terror,' 54.

collectivity, the surrounding social world of community. The emphasis in comedy of the reunion and incorporation of the individual within the social group may in fact provide a pragmatic, as well as idealistic, representation of the kinds of action necessary for environmental remediation. The comic also engages its audience with humour, as well as scripting new endings that are not wholly pessimistic responses to the problems of the present. Not only is this genre palatable for a readership satiated with the imagery of environmental disaster, but it may also suggest new ways forward for the future, forming the new stories that are so urgently required.

In addition to the thematics of the Bakhtinian grotesque, some of the work toward an ecological conception of the body may be formulated within the idea of postmodern subjectivity: as Holliday and Hassard assert,

The postmodern subject with its fuzzy boundaries and interdependent subjectivities has more in common with the conventional associations with womanhood than it does with the masculinist rational individual. Postmodernist subjectivities might be thought of as leaky subjectivities.²⁴

The notion of the postmodern subject as constituting an interdependent subjectivity with 'fuzzy boundaries' could very well be exploited for its ecological possibilities. However, the limitation of this theory is that it posits a human-centred discourse in which the movement of meaning always moves from the human subject outwards, uni-directionally. The notion of permeability would better satisfy the requirements of ecological embodiment, describing interpenetration as dual directional, and the human and nonhuman as mutually constituted.

²³ Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan, The Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution (New York: Basic, 1998).

²⁴ Ruth Holliday and John Hassard, Contested Bodies (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) 7.

I have attempted to bring out the possibilities of marginal subjectivities that are created due to intensified conditions of embodiment, such as pregnancy, monstrosity, illness and death. I have speculated that these particular conditions provide vantage points that arise out of the awareness of being/becoming grotesque or leaky bodies. These forms of embodiment are abjected bodies that for various reasons have been hidden or excluded from discourse, particularly that of fiction. Novelists employ these egregious bodies as potent and dramatic actors in order to interrogate prevailing discourses surrounding womanhood, mobility, social power and nature: these voices are not monolithic, but are continually shifting in response to new contexts, social, economic, and political.

The fifteen texts that form the basis of this study, despite divergences in genre and narrative strategies, share one remarkable similarity: that is, the emphasis placed on the central necessity for survival. This may be due in part to my selection of narratives that emphasize the life cycle, which as Hayles describes it, assumes particular importance in periods of crisis.²⁵ Portraying situations that place stress on the twin poles of birth and death, these novelists write their way out of existential difficulty by thinking through ways and means of surviving. This engenders a comic sense of the world, rather than the noble world of tragedy, and as I have suggested, following Joseph Meeker, this form may indeed suggest ecologically-sound ways of perceiving human existence.²⁶ If the notion of tragedy centres on the tragic error as deriving from an individual, the environmental crisis derives from far more complex

²⁵ Katherine N. Hayles, 'The Life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman' in Chris Hables Gray, Steven Mentor, and Heidi J. Figueroa-Sarriera, eds., The Cyborg Handbook (New York: Routledge, 1995) 321-335.

origins, in which we are all susceptible to risk and (un)equally responsible for the extent of the problems. In this situation, the necessity for collective action is appropriate. Correspondingly, in a number of the novels studied, the emergence of a collective protagonist suggests that these problems are no longer perceived as merely individual, nor local, but require larger coalitions and groupings. Through a variety of genres and devices such as the grotesque, the picaresque, carnivalization or dialogism, these novels indicate an emergent consciousness of the enmeshment of the individual in places and ecosystems, as well as social and political worlds.

The challenge of representing human life differently is met by the use of narrative strategies that deploy extra-human time scales and settings that rechart the place of the human within them. The deployment of geological time scales within the novel re-places the human upon a broader canvas that helps to achieve less anthropocentric ways of envisioning human life as taking place against large time scales and amid a wide panoply of lifeforms. Buell describes the 'discomfiture of anthropocentrism' in the face of such techniques: 'By focusing on biological or geological realms faraway in space or time, on microscopic worlds too tiny or macroscopic patterns too vast to be assimilated, by eliminating human protagonists and plots, or by relegating them to the periphery, nature writing effectively defines human interests as marginal to nature's motions.'²⁷ Science in the forms of biomedicine or technoscience, as well as in their attendant discourses, is vigorously contested within these novels, and it is repeatedly shown that the technologies of

²⁶ Joseph Meeker, The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

modernist science as engaged within the postmodern structures of global capitalism not only pose a threat to the reproductive bodies of women, but also to the environment as a whole. Cyborgs are employed here in a variety of ways in order to dramatize and interrogate the fusion of technology with the human and animal body. The contemporary woman writer's novel in Britain looks not to the pristine countryside of the pastoral, nor to the advanced scientific worlds of a utopian future, but instead explores the contemporary situation, examining both the perils and promise found within.

The perspective on the body I have employed here is best delineated by Linda Hogan: 'The body is a knowing connection, it is the telling thing, the medium of experience, expression, being and knowing. Just as the earth is one of the bodies of the universe, we are the bodies of earth, accidental atoms given this form.'²⁸ Within Native American culture, Hogan describes ceremony as a means of putting people back together through use of 'an inner map, a geography of the human spirit and the rest of the world.'²⁹ She indicates thus a vision of earth that holds us within it, in compassionate relationship to and with our world. The woman's novel in Britain today can be viewed as attempting to perform the cultural work of such ceremonies, by realigning anthropocentric perspectives with scales of time and place that are both larger and more minute, both more simple and more complex, altogether more momentous, than we are readily capable of imagining. These novels form entryways

²⁷ Lawrence Buell, Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Bellknap Press for Harvard UP, 2001) 146.

²⁸ Linda Hogan, 'The Department of the Interior' in Minding the Body: Women Writers on Body and Soul (New York: Doubleday, 1994. 159-174) 167.

²⁹ Hogan, 'Department,' 170.

into different ways of conceptualizing the world, enabling the reader to take part in the interactive ceremony that would realign the self and place, the body and the world.

In forging these connections between ecology and the novel, science and narrative, I have indicated that there is in Britain a significant awareness not only of environmental problems, but also of the problematic forms of thinking that enable the subjugation of Others like women, animals and nature. Critical questioning of the deterministic premises that circulate through certain forms of genetic discourses such as that of the selfish gene, or anthropocentric natural history experiments, provides the impetus for new ways of envisioning more convivial and sustainable societies. Woman, too often conceptualized primarily as body, is portrayed here with a focus on the material forms of existence that have been regarded in the past as trivial or inappropriate as subjects for the novel. As has been suggested by a number of ecofeminist literary critics, this corporeal turn enables a focus on embodied materiality that at the same time sheds light not only on forms of bodily oppression and victimhood, but also indicates the profound connection of the personal with the political, the natural with the cultural, and the human with nonhuman others. For the British women writers examined here, it is clear that the 'bodies that matter' are not only human subjects, but also encompass insects, animals, and the earth itself. In stressing the corporeal, women writers run risks here of reinscribing outmoded forms of essentialism; however, the potential for entering into enriched visions of the human are correspondingly substantial. Remapping the interconnections between nature and culture, between the individual and society with the body as a central

trope for the human enmeshment within place, these writers collectively provide a new cartography for life on an endangered planet. Paradoxically, this emphasis on endangerment provides the impetus for recognition of the solutions that lie within the structures of everyday life.

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