THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE

ANKARA UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

(ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE)

TRANSCORPOREALITY IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S WRITING: MARINA WARNER'S *THE LETO BUNDLE*, SARAH HALL'S *THE CARHULLAN ARMY*, AND ANGELA SLATTER'S *ALL THE MURMURING BONES*

PhD Dissertation

Gizem ALTIN DENİZ

Ankara, 2025

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TO THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE

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I hereby declare that in the PhD dissertation entitled "Transcorporeality in Contemporary Women's Writing: Marina Warner's *The Leto Bundle*, Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army*, and Angela Slatter's *All the Murmuring Bones*" (Ankara-2025) prepared under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Zeynep Zeren ATAYURT FENGE, all information has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work. I also acknowledge that if any of these prerequisites are not met in this study, I will bear all legal consequences.

Gizem ALTIN DENİZ

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the depiction of female bodies not as passive or essentialized entities but as active, material sites of resistance, transformation and ecological awareness in three contemporary women's novels – *The Leto Bundle* (2001) by Marina Warner, *The Carhullan Army* (2007) by Sarah Hall, and *All the Murmuring Bones* (2021) by Angela Slatter (a.k.a A.G. Slatter). Through their portrayals of monstrous, traumatised, and docile bodies, these novels illustrate how embodiment is never static, but instead forged through complex entanglements with material and environmental forces. Whether through Miren's maritime monstrosity in *All the Murmuring Bones*, Leto's transgressive survival in *The Leto Bundle*, or Sister's militant reclamation of bodily autonomy in *The Carhullan Army*, each novel reimagines the female body as a space of agency emerging in and through its interactions with the world. By centring female embodiment in shifting material contexts, these narratives resist traditional binaries that separate nature from culture or human from nonhuman.

The characters' bodily transformations unfold across landscapes marked by exile, trauma, survival, or rebellion, presenting alternative models of subjectivity and relationality that defy patriarchal and anthropocentric expectations. As such, the novels themselves offer critiques of systems that marginalize or commodify the female body, asserting instead that bodies are formed by and responsive to the environments they inhabit. These texts, thus, open up new perspectives on identity, gender, and agency in posthumanist thought. To analyse this complexity, this study employs the theoretical framework of transcorporeality, a concept that examines the material entanglements between human and nonhuman bodies and offers a method of interpreting how agency is constituted through environmental and social embeddedness.

Transcorporeality, as a concept to understand the bodies of all things, examines the human body and points out the connections that are not immediately obvious to the eye. It affirms their entanglement and reveals the fluid exchanges that alter both. Transcorporeality focuses on the materiality of the human body and the environment. Therefore, the analyses through this lens enable the revelation of many connections at a material and tangible level. In fact, as Alaimo states in her interview (2023) "Deep Cuts, Chemicals, and Climate", transcorporeality "calls for a conscious effort to 'combat the delusional retreat into a domestic cocoon or a masculinist sense of the hard body as impenetrable" (Teets). Through this perspective, it is aimed to recreate the image of the body that is normally something of a private and personal matter. However, once this reconceptualization of the body takes hold, there needs to be no walls between the body and the environment, and accordingly transcorporeality supports the idea that there should not be anything personal or private about the human body. Hence, through transcorporeality, the body is revealed to be a political space for understanding the constant relationship between the human and nonhuman in an effort to close the gaps between these two parties and amend the vulnerabilities together.

The lens of transcorporeality proves particularly valuable when analysing how female embodiment is portrayed in literary texts. Literature has long been a space in which writers have explored the intersections of the body, identity, and environment. Works like Muriel Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead* and Percival Everett's *Watershed* expose how environmental issues are deeply intertwined with systemic injustices such as racism, sexism, and poverty. Similarly, Ana Castillo's *So Far From God* explores these entanglements through the lives of four sisters in a small New Mexican town, where bodily transformation – such as La Loca's resurrection and Caridad's trauma-induced healing abilities – blurs conventional boundaries between the spiritual and the physical. Narratives in these works convey how environmental and social justice are inseparable

and defy anthropocentric approaches that fail to account for the material entanglements shaping marginalized bodies. In this light, transcorporeality serves as a critical tool to uncover the deeply embedded connections between human experiences and the broader material world. In the novels analysed in this dissertation, the female body is positioned as a central space through which material, environmental, and social forces converge. With its focus on challenging the assumed boundaries between the bodies of human beings and environments, transcorporeality offers a productive method for exploring representations of the female body in contemporary fiction. With regard to understanding the body, transcorporeality allows for discussions that move beyond the traditional nature-culture divide and toward a more fluid and relational understanding of embodiment. It reveals that female embodiment and the experiences that go along with it are shaped by various factors, including societal expectations, environmental impacts, and cultural norms. These broader contexts show that a transcorporeal perspective offers insights into the lived experiences of women and makes it easier to navigate issues such as sexuality, trauma, and institutional oppression within social and environmental settings. At the same time, transcorporeality confronts anthropocentric norms imposed upon female bodies – particularly those that focus on reproductive roles, motherhood, and marital expectations – by insisting on the body's relational agency and fluid materiality. It recognizes the significance of women's agency in shaping what their bodies can do and how they manipulate their experiences within these interconnected social and ecological systems. Accordingly, this study focuses on different representations of the female body in *All the Murmuring Bones*, *The Leto Bundle*, and *The Carhullan Army*, exploring how the material world, through its agency and influence on the embodied experiences of monstrous, traumatised, and resistant bodies, fosters empowering agency, intersectionality, bodily autonomy, solidarity, and activism. In *All the Murmuring Bones*, Miren's complex relationship with her body and environment point towards a

transcorporeal connection that reveals autonomy through monstrous embodiment. *The Leto Bundle* Leto's form is presented as both a site of trauma and a symbol of survival, navigating a world that imposes its material influences upon her, thus reaching intersectional agency. Meanwhile, in *The Carhullan Army*, "Sister" is portrayed as someone who rejects societal docility, finds solidarity and empowerment within the rugged landscape of Carhullan, where her bodily autonomy is reclaimed in resistance to oppressive structures. Through these portrayals of female bodies as sites of transcorporeal exchange, the novels illustrate how embodiment is deeply influenced by material and environmental forces rather than existing as a fixed or autonomous state. Female bodies are depicted as entangled with their surroundings – whether through Miren's monstrous corporeality altered by ancestral ties and maritime landscapes, Leto's body as both a vessel of trauma and survival moulded by the shifting borders of exile, or Sister's physical transformation within the harsh environment of Carhullan that fosters resistance and solidarity. In each case, traditional and static representations of the female body are rejected, and instead, embodiment is framed as an evolving process in which agency emerges not in isolation but through relational interactions with the material world. Understanding the interconnection between female bodies and the environment shows that bodies are not bound in the traditional sense. They are not isolated entities but are in constant interaction with other bodies, materials, and environments.

In examining how contemporary literature reimagines the female body, this dissertation draws from posthuman feminist criticism to explores the ways in which sociopolitical practices attempt to control both environments and female bodies. The literary representations in *The Leto Bundle*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *All the Murmuring Bones* disclose how such control gives rise to layered forms of exploitation and resistance within entangled systems of power. These texts demonstrate that the female body has functioned not merely as a discursive object, but as a material and symbolic medium

through which historical, social, and cultural meanings are inscribed and enacted. Literature often reflects and critiques societal norms inflicted on female, offering space for the interrogation of issues such as agency, consent, sexuality, and systemic oppression. Novels, thus, act as critical sites where the female body's political, ecological, and philosophical dimensions are negotiated and redefined. Theoretical scholarship has similarly emphasized the importance of examining the body in relation to power dynamics, particularly within patriarchal systems. Influenced by Michel Foucault's concept of the discursive body, many feminist thinkers have turned their attention to how the body is constructed and regulated by institutional discourses. David Horn, in *Social Bodies* (1994), refers to Foucault's "social body," defined within modern regimes of knowledge and intervention formed by "statistics, sociology, social hygiene and social work" (3-4). However, in her article "The Body as Method?" (1999), Kathleen Canning critiques the abstraction inherent in these discursive models and identifies a materialist turn within feminist studies. She writes that discursive and social bodies "have frequently figured as abstraction," necessitating renewed attention to the material body itself (502). Such a shift is especially significant in literary analysis, where representations of embodied experience can resist abstraction by foregrounding physicality and lived interaction with the world. Contemporary novels – particularly those that affirm the female body's relation to its environment – engage directly with these developments in feminist theory. The texts explored in this dissertation build on and extend new materialist approaches that challenge binary oppositions such as nature/culture and human/nonhuman. Developed by thinkers like Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Jane Bennett, these approaches view matter not as inert substance but as actively shaping human experience. As Astrida Neimanis (2017) explains, new materialist feminist though does not merely consider matter but uses it to "articulate specific ontological, epistemological and ethical commitments" (242). The

novels discussed here embody that commitment by refusing to represent female bodies as autonomous or purely discursive. Instead, they are presented as relational, shaped by entanglements with other bodies, environments, and social forces. While the materialist turn in feminist theory continues to draw on Foucauldian views on the regulation of bodies, it simultaneously extends beyond discursive interpretations. Shildrick and Price (1999) recognize this evolution in feminist inquiry, urging scholars to investigate not only how the body is constructed but "what purpose and whose interests do particular constructions serve" (7). Emphasis on purpose and positionality becomes crucial in the novels that are at the centre of this dissertation, where representations of female embodiment engage in subversive review of the systems – political, medical, and ecological – that seek to discipline or contain the body. Through these narratives, the female body is materialized via its relationships with land, trauma, ancestry, and community, resisting the abstraction of embodiment and prioritizing corporeality as central to meaning-making and resistance. Posthumanist perspectives build upon this materialist grounding by further decentring the human as the privileged subject of agency. Karen Barad in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) states that "materiality itself is always already a desiring dynamism, a reiterative reconfiguring, energized and energizing, enlivened and enlivening" (59). Such a vision of matter rejects anthropocentric notions of bodies as isolated, personal units, and instead emphasizes their embeddedness, where female bodies are constantly altered by their environments – whether through mythological ancestry, physical exile, or survivalist adaptation. The novels' failure to separate the body from the outside world, portraying it instead as a dynamic and evolving site fashioned by both human and nonhuman forces, is consistent with posthumanist thought. Additionally, this method reframes conventional narratives of corporeal autonomy. As Herbrechter (2013) asserts in his work *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis,* "[t]he human is no longer seen as the sole hero of a history of

emancipation," a perspective that reorients traditional narratives of bodily autonomy and agency (16). Decentring the human enables a more nuanced exploration of the female body that facilitates an understanding of the female body not merely as an individual site of resistance or oppression but as part of a broader, entangled network of social, biological, and environmental forces. It also allows for an exploration of agency not as self-contained, but as co-constituted through relationality and interaction. The novels engage with this complexity by offering characters whose bodies are affected by and affect their environments – where bodily transformation is not a metaphor, but a literal entanglement with trauma, place, and power.

Posthumanism draws attention to the interconnectedness of bodies, technology, and the natural world, pushing against the anthropocentric views that place humans at the centre of history and knowledge. In the study of the female body, this perspective uncovers how bodily experiences are formed by intersecting influences – biological, technological, social, and ecological – each with its own agency and impact. It allows scholars to consider how female bodies, especially those seen as "monstrous" or "othered," can defy dominant narratives by aligning themselves with more-than-human forces, drawing attention to the body as fluid, dynamic, and embedded in a network of relations. As an example, in contexts involving reproductive technologies, environmental degradation, and biopolitics, a posthumanist lens highlights how female bodies become sites of power and resistance moulded not only by human desires and policies but also by ecological and technological systems. Rather than existing as isolated entities, female bodies are enmeshed within networks of scientific intervention, environmental impact, and political regulation that alter their lived experiences. Such forces impose restrictions while also creating new possibilities for agency, as bodies continuously adapt and respond to external pressures. Reproductive technologies, for instance, regulate bodily autonomy by embedding female bodies within medical, legal, and ethical debates, while

environmental degradation expresses how bodies are physically affected by shifting ecological conditions. Similarly, biopolitical structures inscribe authority over female bodies, yet these same bodies also become active agents of resistance within these systems. The interconnectedness shifts the attention from individual empowerment to collective agency, situating the female body within larger systems of influence and unveiling layers of control, resilience, and adaptation. Thus, posthumanism broadens the study of the female body by situating it within a matrix of relationships that expresses how it is both affected by and capable of resisting sociopolitical and environmental constraints.

The novels explored in this dissertation challenge anthropocentric assumptions about the huma body's autonomy by portraying female characters whose bodily experiences are adjusted by entanglement with material environments. The boundaries between human body and the material world are being rethought in these literary representations, which are in line with larger theoretical views in ecofeminism and posthuman feminism. Overall, however, one of the most important challenges posed by these current studies and theories is their attempt at reconceptualizing the boundaries between humanity and the material world, which is established as transcorporeality by the contemporary materialist thinker and ecofeminist writer Stacy Alaimo in her seminal work *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010). While the concept has its roots in environmental and ecofeminist studies, one of the key arguments this dissertation benefits from is related to the reconceptualization of bodies in transcorporeality. Offering a holistic theoretical approach to the body, transcorporeality confronts the assumed boundaries between bodies and environments, suggesting that humans are not separate from the natural world but instead are intimately connected to it through various forms of exchanges.

The current literary theories in humanities consider the current era we live in as the Anthropocene and therefore attempt to find ways to analyse the underlying causes and the resulting problems triggered by the activities of human beings on the rest of the world. There has been quite a backlash against this view of the era as the Anthropocene for being too anthropocentric. Since the Anthropocene is a phenomenon that underlines the impact humans have had on the planet's ecosystems, climate, and geological processes, feminist studies in collaboration with posthuman studies critique this concept of the Anthropocene as one that centres human agency while overlooking the entanglement of nonhuman forces, material processes, and multispecies interactions in shaping the world. Claiming that the emphasis on human beings can no longer be central, feminist and posthuman studies have introduced the concept of intersectionality to show a connection between social issues and environmental issues. Literary works studied here, too, increasingly reflect this shift. Especially the novels *The Carhullan Army* and *The Leto Bundle* examine how systemic control over environments parallels attempts to regulate female bodies, exposing the entangled oppressions that span both ecological and gendered realms. Through such representations, the texts dramatize the very kinds of interconnections that posthuman and ecofeminist theorists have sought to name and explore. Recent works such as Stacy Alaimo's *Bodily Natures* (2010), Asrida Neimanis' *Bodies of Water* (2017), and Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013) exemplify this shift by examining how gender, race, and class intersect with ecological concerns. Studies grounded in ecofeminist, posthuman, and feminist perspectives examine how sociopolitical systems rooted in patriarchal structures, contribute to environmental degradation and exploitation. For instance, while Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality highlights the porous boundaries between bodies and toxic environments, Neimanis's hydrofeminism in her work "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water" (2012) considers water as a medium through which bodies and ecosystems are materially connected. In a similar

fashion, Braidotti critiques anthropocentric views and calls for an ethical approach that acknowledges the agency of nonhuman entities in forming our world. Convergence of a common theme becomes obvious in the works of these theorists: that matter – whether environmental, corporeal, or technological – is never inert but actively involved in shaping lived experiences. In the novels studied in this dissertation, the female body becomes a key site for exploring these ideas, as protagonists Leto, Miren, and Sister navigate worlds altered by biopolitical regulation, ecological trauma, and more-than-human forces.

As one of the most important elements regarding the ecofeminist, posthuman, and feminist studies in the recent years, the female body has become a highly debated issue. In consideration of all the abovementioned issues, transcorporeality brings back the body into the discussion in connection with the material world. Therefore, it can be argued that transcorporeality, as a theoretical framework, sharing a common ground with ecofeminism and posthuman feminism, challenges the anthropocentric boundaries between bodies and nature. The term, coined by Stacy Alaimo, denotes that the human body is intertwined with and influenced by the material world in complex ways as it reveals how the human body is interconnected and no longer discrete or bounded. Originating from the theories in ecofeminism and environmental humanities, transcorporeality is based on the materiality of both humans and nature. In each novel, the female body is reimagined not as isolated or self-contained but as continuously interacting with social, ecological, and political systems. *All the Murmuring Bones*, for instance, weaves monstrous embodiment into maritime and ancestral settings, while *The Leto Bundle* situates its protagonist's body within borders, migrations, and historical upheavals. Portrayals of this scale speak directly to transcorporeal theory's insistence that the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world. Transcorporeality brings the body back into critical focus, not as an abstract concept but as a physically

vulnerable and materially responsive entity that reflects broader structures of power, oppression, and resistance. Examining the interconnectedness of the human body with the material world, Alaimo points out how substances, agencies, and forces can affect bodies in reciprocity. In her interview (2023) "Deep Cuts, Chemicals, and Climate", Alaimo contends that there is something new about the conditions we live in which necessitates a reconsideration of the human body in relation to its environment. In this way, transcorporeality, as a new understanding of human corporeality enmeshed with the nonhuman one, becomes a tool for Alaimo in explaining this interdependency between the human and nonhuman corporeality.

Alaimo's work *Bodily Natures* (2010) presents the need to look at the importance of nonhuman subjects within literary studies and theory as these fields are predominantly occupied by perspectives that leans towards humanistic values. The inability to provide an in-depth analysis of the decentralization of human agency limits literary studies, causing them to miss out on the potential offered by environmental and nonhuman studies. For Alaimo, we need to go beyond the dualisms so as to really grasp how the human and nonhuman are affected and also how to act responsibly after finding out these intersections. She states, "The nature/culture dualism continues to segregate academic fields and to structure our basic assumptions and mappings. Transcorporeality challenges us to think across the mind/body, culture/nature, subject/object dualisms" (*Bodily Natures* 3). *The Carhullan Army* vividly depict how these dualisms collapse under pressure. Sister's bodily transformation through militant survivalism and her integration into Carhullan both reject societal prescriptions of docility and bring forth new modes of embodied, material agency.

In an interview with Dr. Julia Tofantšuk in 2020, Alaimo discusses what really is important about the concept of transcorporeality within the current condition of the world commonly called as the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is a highly debated theory

because while it looks at both the negative and positive impact of the actions of humans over the world, "thinking in terms of 'Man' vs. the world may give us false sense of power that shields us from considering differential human vulnerability" (Alaimo). The novels studied here enact this move by presenting bodies that are both vulnerable to and enmeshed within ecological systems. This not only means that the human has no weaknesses when compared with the outside material world, but also it further underlines the notion that human is still the measure of things. Recognizing this inherent Anthropocentrism, Alaimo proposes an alternative term called post-anthropocentrism that does no longer give way to "'self-aggrandizing' accounts "in which some transhistorical 'Man' acts upon the inert, external matter of the world". All in all, it is clear that transcorporeality offers a dynamic that aims to balance the distribution of power among human and nonhuman subjects, both of which have the essential role in shaping and impacting the world. Thus, the human body, which was earlier put on a high pedestal as the propeller and controller of the events, reveals its vulnerabilities to nonhuman, making it equally the initiator and power holder. Transcorporeality allows for revelations on the issues relating to women's health in connection with their environmental health. Highlighting the ways in which inequalities such as class, race, and geography intersect with gender, it provides in-depth analysis of the women's health.

Some scholars observed this movement towards materiality in feminist studies in association with new technologies. Seeing how the technological advancements initiated a new perspective into understanding what the preconceived limitations of the human bodies were, Lesley A. Sharp, in her work *Bodies, Commodities, and Biotechnologies* (2007), reflects on *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991) where Haraway "has argued that practices in late twentieth-century capitalist medicine… that ultimately bear great potential for reshaping humanity…the thorough breaching of boundaries 'between human and animal'" (91). Sharp considers the turn to the materiality of the bodies as a movement

"stemming from dissatisfaction with radical 'social constructivism' in which matter and reality threaten to become more elusive" (5). The resulting feminist literary theory following this material turn is the new material feminist thought in posthuman feminism. Considering contemporary history as a period festering with a lot of uncertainties, doubts, and insecurities around the previously trusted boundaries and definitions, Braidotti highlights the importance of revising the concepts such as the body. In *Nomadic Subjects* (1994), she claims, "The body emerges at the centre of the theoretical and political debate at exactly the time in history when there is no more unitary certainty or uncontested consensus about what the body actually is" (19). The body is no longer understood as a stable, singular entity but rather as a contested site formed by multiple discourses, experiences and material realities. Then, for Braidotti, it is no longer possible speak of the body as a singular unit since "[t]he body has turned into many, multiple bodies," reflecting its fluid and constantly changing nature in response to shifting sociopolitical and theoretical contexts (19). In contemporary discussions on the female body in question, it is important to examine previous feminist theories and perspectives to better understand the current position of these arguments. To this end, the first chapter looks into how transcorporeality situates itself within the posthuman feminist thought with its emphasis on the interrelation between the corporeality of the human and environment. The second chapter offers an analysis of Marina Warner's novel *The Leto Bundle* (2001) as an example of a representation of traumatised female body which journeys through time and continents in the hopes of healing with its interconnection with the material world. The third chapter analyses how the female body is represented as a docile body within the dystopian world of Sarah Hall's novel *The Carhullan Army* (2007). The fourth chapter explores *All the Murmuring Bones* (2021) by Angela Slatter, paying special attention to its representation of a monstrous female body trapped within an Irish folktale and her attempt to set herself free.

To begin with, in *The Leto Bundle* (2001), Leto carries some of the mythological stories with her while Warner at the same time adds more twists and turns in her journey. The myth surrounding Leto is more than a few stories spread throughout the ancient Greek world's oral and written literature, but in this book her origin story is the most commonly known one. Leto, whose name appears in various forms such as Letona and Outis in the book, is a Titaness and the daughter of Phoebe and Coeus. Her story represents maternal struggle, resistance, and survival among the great gods of the Pantheon. Leto is pursued by Zeus, the king of the gods, and she is eventually raped by him. Hera, Zeus's wife, driven by her jealousy, attempts to capture and punish her, including the twins Leto was pregnant with. To save her life, Leto starts her journey but the birth of her twins Apollo and Artemis further complicates her struggles. In the commonly circulated version of the myth, Leto is elevated as an important figure within the Greek gods and goddesses along with her equally elevated children being associated with elements such as the sun, prophecy, moon and hunting to name a few. Thus, in the original story, Leto is successful after a series of travails during her escape as a rape victim that is eventually vindicated and gains her rightful place at an honourable position. While the original myth pays attention to Leto's path to elevation, Warner's Leto, without her knowledge, becomes representative of the marginalized groups that are in constant struggle to try and survive in strange lands while dealing with their trauma. Trauma extends beyond physical manifestations, involving a complex interplay of body, psyche, and social environment. Therefore, when a traumatised female body is under scrutiny, it requires an analysis of physical, psychological, and emotional constitution of the woman within the context of individual experiences coupled with broader social factors. While Leto is dealing with her trauma, she often is exposed to the material world, which moulds and influences her body and the way it interacts with it. Instead of merely elevating Leto,

the story expresses more than anthropocentric connections between her body and the material world.

Different from Leto's traumatised body, in Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007), the female body is represented as the docile body. Sister, the protagonist of the novel, undergoes a systemic oppression caused by a big environmental disaster that eventually prompts her to leave her husband behind to join a paramilitary women's group. As a result of the destruction of the environment, coupled with the government's total control of the human bodies through authoritative systems, the concept of docile body expands beyond the human to encompass the material world. The transcorporeal perspective illuminates how bodies and environments are entangled in their shared subjugation and their capacity for resistance. The oppressive government in the novel commands over the lives of both men and women, limiting their bodily functions within the confines of strict rules. Regulation extends to the natural environment, which is also controlled, exploited, and degraded to serve systemic needs. The docility imposed on human bodies mirrors the exploitation of the land, linking human subjugation to environmental exploitation in a way that stresses the interconnectedness of all forms of systemic control. In this respect, transcorporeality offers a way to examine how oppression operates across both human and nonhuman realms. The oppressive systems foster self-censorship, as individuals internalize the government's rules. The contradiction between Sister's outward compliance with the government's expectations and her internal resistance becomes increasingly apparent. Her conflicted monologues reveal how deeply oppression affects not only physical bodies but also psychological autonomy. In its interconnectedness through systemic oppression and exploitation, the female body and the material world are allied in their struggle against the anthropocentric practices that want to govern and control them.

In *All the Murmuring Bones* (2021) by Angela Slatter, the female body is represented as a monstrous body, contrasting with Sister's initial docile body in *The Carhullan Army*. Following the death of her beloved grandfather, the protagonist Mirin is forced to confront dark family secrets within the O'Malley lineage that compel her toward an unwanted marriage. Central to this family legacy is a sacrificial bond forged centuries ago, a pact made with the *mer* people – mythical half-human half-sea creatures rooted in various mythologies, including Irish folklore. This pact, which sustains the O'Malley family's generational wealth, demands the sacrifice of each firstborn in every other generation. Through oral and written family histories, Mirin learns of her family's close kinship with these creatures. The discovery drives her to embark on a journey not only to find her birth parents but also to free herself from the constraints imposed by this pact. She further realizes that this agreement has transformed the women of her family, binding them to the *mer* world in profound ways. Transformation is evident in their ability to communicate with the *mer* people and in their biological connection to the sea, such as having seawater coursing through their veins. Thus, Mirin's journey is one of both self-discovery and resistance against the inherited obligations that tie her to the monstrous and mystical elements of her family's past.

In these novels, the female protagonists face situations that jeopardize their bodily autonomies through practices that attempt to govern female bodies. They defy the mechanisms exploited by the authority to impose control on them, and the material world helps them reveal the interconnectedness through which the protagonists show resistance with adaptability, persistence, and transformative agency. It is also important to note that the selected novels under scrutiny for the purposes of this dissertation are all contemporary novels in English dating from the 2000s and onwards. This period holds particular significance in the study of transcorporeality, posthuman feminism, and female bodily experiences, as the 2000s marked a critical moment for literary and theoretical

engagement with posthumanist and feminist materialist thought. During this time, a growing awareness of ecological crises, technological advancements, and biopolitical control over bodies became central in public and academic discourses. The period of heightened environmental and sociopolitical awareness foregrounded issues like climate change, environmental degradation, and the ethical implications of emerging biotechnologies, all of which uniquely affect female body experiences. For women writers, the 2000s offered a rich foundation to address these intersections, often revealing how female bodies are especially implicated in, and vulnerable to, global challenges and systemic controls. Novels such as the ones studied in this dissertation *The Leto Bundle*, *The Carhullan Army* and *All the Murmuring Bones* exemplify this shift by portraying female embodiment as porous, interconnected, and deeply enmeshed with the material world. In *The Leto Bundle*, Leto's body becomes a site of historical displacement and survival, shaped by shifting borders and material traces of exile. *All the Murmuring Bones* explores Miren's monstrous corporeality, where her autonomy is continuously negotiated through ancestral and environmental forces. Meanwhile, *The Carhullan Army* reimagines bodily resistance through Sister's physical transformation, where her connection to the rugged landscape fosters both resilience and rebellion against oppressive systems. These novels thus offer a distinct lens on female embodiment, challenging anthropocentric and patriarchal narratives that seek to contain and define the female body. Consequently, the selected novels provide opportunities to interrogate the intersection of ecological and sociopolitical forces in shaping female bodily experiences and reveal the material interconnections that situate bodies within larger networks of control, adaptation, and resilience.

The types of bodily experiences depicted in the selected works are diverse and distinctly embodied, reflecting a spectrum of themes ranging from trauma and survival to resilience and resistance against ecological and sociopolitical constraints. The

experiences embody posthuman feminist themes, portraying different manifestations of the female body – monstrous, traumatised, and docile – and how each engages with, responds to, and resists these broader influences. Through portrayals of embodied female experiences, the novels transcend individual narratives to underscore the ways female bodies serve as sites where sociopolitical and ecological entanglements converge. With the lens of posthuman feminism, the female body in each of these novels is depicted as both formed by and actively responding to material forces, revealing resilience, trauma, and transformative agency within interconnected systems. This study, therefore, illustrates how the selected contemporary women's novels from the 2000s forward contribute to an understanding of the female body as a dynamic site where autonomy, solidarity, and bodily agency manifest in relation to a deeply material and often adversarial world.

CHAPTER I

THE FEMALE BODY, FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES, AND TRANSCORPOREALITY

The female body has long been a central focus in feminist critical discourse, particularly as questions of embodiment intersect with contemporary shifts in technology, power, and identity. As the world becomes increasingly moulded by digital innovations and medical interventions, the body remains a critical site of analysis – one that continues to adjust how we understand human subjectivity and lived experience. The present study defines the term *body* primarily as the human female body and nonhuman body – not as an isolated or purely biological form, but as material, social, and ecological entity that exists in continuous interaction with its environment. While the body can denote a wide range of meanings – from bodies of water to institutional bodies – this dissertation focuses on how the female body is represented in literature as a site of political, environmental, and affective entanglement with the nonhuman body. Feminist studies have long emphasized that the body is not a fixed or universal category; instead, it is altered by historical, cultural, and material conditions. A valuable framework for navigating these complexities can be found in *The Body: A Reader* (2004), edited by Fraser and Greco. This anthology organises key feminist interventions on the body around core conceptual issues, offering a foundational overview of how corporeality has been theorised in relation to gender, power, and identity. Rather than treating the body as a static object, Fraser and Greco present it as a site of constant negotiation – between discourse and materiality, structure and agency – thereby reflecting the broader concerns that animate this study.

Feminist theorist Renate Klein has been particularly critical of how postmodern feminism conceptualizes the female body, arguing that such perspectives often abstract bodies to the point of erasure. In her 1996 work, Klein expresses how theoretical discourse can "invisiblise" women (349), rendering their lived, material experiences

secondary to language and representation. She confronts the disconnection between discourse and embodiment, stating, "The bodies I have been reading about in postmodern feminism writings do not breathe, do not laugh, and have no heart" (349). For Klein, this lack of attention to the physical, emotional, and biological dimensions of the female body signals a troubling tendency to divorce feminist theory from women's material realities. The challenge of defining the female body – especially within the increasingly fragmented bases of postmodernist thought – prompted feminist theorists to critically revisit what it means to be a woman. As theoretical perspectives began to destabilize fixed categories, questions arose about whose bodies were being represented or overlooked in these evolving definitions. Barbara Brook addresses this tension in *Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (1999), observing that "to move from the commonsense acceptance that it is obvious what we mean by *woman* is to start to acknowledge that it is not always clear whose specific bodies are being talked about or envisioned in these formations, nor whose bodies are excluded" (4). Brook's point is crucial to feminist materialist analysis: before one can theorise the body, one must ask whose body is being centred and whose is rendered invisible – questions that remain central to transcorporeal and intersectional feminist critique.

One way to tackle the exclusion of the bodies came from the theories that took up on the scientific studies which leaned on what is natural and unnatural about the female bodies. It was a reaction against the ambivalence of the female bodies within regulated spaces with authoritative control. The feminist theoretical turn in the late 1960s and 1970s often cast the female body as a disruptive force – an "unnatural" presence set against the structures of orderly, patriarchal society. The perception of the female body as socially regulated and culturally coded draws heavily from the anthropological insights of Mary Douglas, whose work *Purity and Danger* (2002) examines how societies classify bodies, spaces, and boundaries to preserve normative order. Building on Douglas's theories,

Barbara Brook explains that "female bodies occupy an ambivalent place in space and are socially 'policed' for leakages and crossings between outside and inside spaces" (5). Leakage serves as a powerful metaphor for how the female body has historically been associated with boundary transgression – an association that both unsettles dominant systems and prompts their reinforcement. Since Douglas portrays how societies define their worlds through dichotomies of cleanliness and dirtiness, and purity and impurity, the female body has also been subject to various regulations and taboos imposed by these societies. Douglas' works reflect how the physical conditions of the female body such as childbirth, sexuality, and menstruation were categorized and attempted to be controlled that in turn reinforces gender roles and power dynamics of a particular society.

Feminist debates surrounding biology and the female body have long shaped how womanhood is theorised, especially in relation to power and subordination. Discussions in this matter eventually moved beyond relying solely on biological determinism, as its limitations became more apparent. Donna Haraway, a biologist and a philosopher of science and one of the central figures in feminist technoscience and posthumanism, criticizes the failure of scientific discourses to interrogate how bodies are socially constructed. In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991), she writes that biological approaches "have been less powerful in deconstructing how bodies, including sexualized and racialized bodies, appear as objects of knowledge and sites of intervention in 'biology'" (134). For Haraway, feminist theory must go beyond treating the body as a passive object of science and begin to ask how knowledge about the body is produced and politicized. A much earlier challenge to biological reductionism came from French existentialist philosopher and writer Simon de Beauvoir, whose *The Second Sex* (1994) is foundational to modern feminist theory. Challenging the essentialist thinking that denies women the agency to define themselves outside of motherhood, Beauvoir argued that femininity is not biologically determined but culturally constructed. Adrienne Rich, a

poet and theorist working from within the women's liberation movement in the 1970s, offers a counterpoint to Beauvoir's view. In *Of Woman Born* (1976), Rich explores how motherhood, though historically distorted by patriarchal systems, can also be a source of power. She writes that "under patriarchy, female possibility has been massacred on the site of motherhood" (13). Unlike Beauvoir, Rich does not reject pregnancy or motherhood as inherently oppressive but urges feminist to reclaim the maternal experience on their own terms – as a site of autonomy, connection, and even political resistance.

With the beginning of the second-wave feminism, then, there was an increased focus on how feminists should engage with the body. Since "we are constantly attempting to adapt our bodies in more or less extreme ways to fit or adjust ideas of self, and our bodies frequently resist," the realization for the feminists was the analysis of the sexed-female body (Brook 9-10). It was the aim then to remove the socially constructed concepts surrounding the body and find ways of reaching a so-called natural woman. It meant that all those constructions that reinforce the sexed quality of the female body, including all the discursive notions it carried along, were to be considered a burden. Efforts were made to create a clear distinction from the sexed identity of the body so as to "establish the capacity for women to occupy positions within society traditionally occupied by men" (Brook 11). Social constructionism, a strand of feminism, pays attention to socio-cultural definitions of women while disregarding the material body. The advocates of this theory observed that the society considered the female body to be *tabula rasa* and it was then the inevitable impact of this society to mould the female body and fill in whatever necessary things it was lacking based on its own unique standards. Thus, this approach revealed the aspect of socio-cultural impact over the body that clearly set the sex-gender division, that rested on the idea that "[w]hile there are certain natural attributes of the body which cannot be changed (or not without radical surgery), the gendered cultural

meanings circulating around and variously inscribing the body can be changed" (Brook 11). All of which were later to be attacked by the feminist theorists as well.

Therefore, the twentieth century brings into the feminist discussions this separation between sex and gender that was heavily backed by the proponents of clear-cut masculinity and femininity separatists. In this matter, Elizabeth Grosz is an important feminist theorist to mention with regards to addressing the sex and gendered bodies. One of her main arguments is that the female body has been objectified and controlled by the patriarchal systems. In her work such as *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994) Grosz criticizes the traditional approach to the female body as passive and submissive. Grosz offers a more intricate approach that highlights women's agency and the ways in which their bodies resist and disrupt the overwhelming norms surrounding women. Grosz further states that it is important to realize the diversity of female bodies by arguing against the fixed images of woman that are reductionist in essence. Instead, the female body is mutable and fluid and is formed by social and cultural factors as well as individual experiences. Her insight into the early twentieth century feminist writing is particularly illuminating in how she characterizes its treatment of sexual difference. While these writings sought to challenge reductionist views of the female body, they ultimately presented it as an empty, undefined entity – akin to a *tabula rasa*. Brook (1999) further states that "[i]nstead of seeing sex as an essentialist and gender as a constructionist category, these thinkers are concerned to undermine the dichotomy" (13).

Theoretical efforts to destabilize essentialist understandings of sex and gender find their most extensive articulation in the work of Judith Butler, whose writing interrogates the presumed stability of sex and gender within both feminist and philosophical traditions. Butler differentiates sex as a biologically influenced but at the same time a socially constructed category, defining gender as a performative act that is ingrained in social practices. In her seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler critiques

the pre-established divisions of masculinity and femininity, which were based on this focus on the sexed body, detached from all the discursive limitations. Butler's critique engages directly with and reworks earlier feminist theorists. As Brook explains, Butler draws on Monique Wittig's essay "One is Not Born a Woman" (1996), and also Mary Douglas's anthropological theories while simultaneously departing from Simone de Beauvoir's acceptance of a mind/body dualism in *The Second Sex* (1994). Thus, Butler reframes embodiment as temporally constituted, affirming its fluidity and socio-discursive malleability. As Brook (1999) notes, she is "breaking away from the static division of body/mind…to stress the mobility and changing of bodies through time" (13).

Butler extends her interrogation of fixed embodiment in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), critiquing certain aspects of social constructionism, challenging the limitations imposed by language and discourse on understanding the body. As she asserts in *Gender Trouble* (1990), "Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender," noting that bodies gain meaning through language and cultural practices, particularly those related to gender, and revealing that gendered embodiment is always already culturally mediated (12). Drawing on a discursive and performative lens, Butler reconceives the female body not as a biological constant, but as a site of power, inscription, and possible disruption. Her work, therefore, seeks to destabilize these rigid binaries and imagine a body that is less constrained by normative regulations – a body that exists not outside of culture but as a site where cultural meanings are actively contested and redefined. Butler creates a body, which is stripped from any regulations and is akin to Julia Kristeva's abject body. In her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), Kristeva defines abject as something that disturbs the system and order. Abject female bodies are marginalized but still preserve their materiality. They exist in a raw, visceral, and abhorrent state precisely because they do not conform to the standards of society and dominant discourse.

There have been current discussions among feminists regarding the management of body size, which have heavily made use of the theories of Foucault on disciplinary methods. The surveillance of the female bodies for disciplinary purposes takes place in the form of using female bodies for medical surveillance. Practices on the female body in fact reveal how different forms of power play a part in different contexts. Feminist theory has also critically examined how societal norms adjust women's perceptions of their bodies through mechanisms of surveillance and discipline. Thus, the female body is positioned inside a heteronormative economy, where idealized beauty is constructed through the lens of heterosexual male desire. The discourse promotes a system of internalized surveillance, encouraging women to monitor and regulate their own bodies through self-disciplining practices. Feminist theorist Susan Bordo offers a crucial analysis of this dynamic in her seminal work *Unbearable Weight* (1993), where she explores how medical and cultural narratives pathologize the female body. Through her examination of dieting culture and disorders such as anorexia nervosa, Bordo talks about how women's bodily practices are shaped by broader cultural imperatives – not simply personal choices, but responses to institutionalized norms that conflate femininity with control, thinness, and self-restraint. Her work thus shows how power operates not only externally, but internally, transforming the female body into both the object and agent of regulation. In her argument, Bordo recognizes that the female bodies are in a constant struggle to deal with the heterosexual world and thus when a woman suffers eating disorders such as anorexia, it is a result of this constant battle with her body against the heterosexual world. As Bordo states, this anorexic woman "takes the denial of appetite … [to] suggest the dualistic nature of her construction of reality: either she transcends body total, becoming pure 'male' will, or she capitulates utterly to the degraded female body and its disgusting hungers" (8). Bordo presents a materialist-feminist analysis, viewing anorexia as a response to contemporary heterosexual culture. Self-disciplining methods offer women

to actualize and materialize the feminine body that is idealized by the heteronormative world.

The presence of the female body in public, along with the expectations places on its appearance and behaviour, creates tension with the societal limitations imposed upon it. Brook (1999) states that "[t]he public spectacle of a woman's body enacts an antithesis to the identification of femininity with the private and domestic body" (111). Viewed this way, similar to drag performances, female body being feminine creates a spectacle and through that raises arguments regarding what the contradictions of performance are and how the gender performativity comes into these discussions. Through the theories of masquerade and impersonation, it is revealed that there is a difference between what everyday femininity means and what public performance of femininity stands for. Distinctions like these reveal how, in reality, the idea of femininity is part of construction itself. They do not defy the "naturality" of the notion of femininity, but through these distinctions, the mind-body duality as well as the single identity arguments are problematized. Disruption of fixed identities and bodily boundaries make up of some of the fundamental elements of transcorporeality, which further contests the notion of a self-contained, static body by illustrating its fluid nature in relation to the material world.

1.1. Understanding the Transcorporeal Body

The concept of transcorporeality redefines bodies, environments, and materialities by challenging anthropocentric and dualistic perspectives that traditionally separate humans from the nonhuman world. Rooted in posthuman thought, transcorporeality affirms interconnectedness, positioning all forms of existence – human, animal, ecological, and even machinic – as nodes within an expansive network of relational and material flows. Theoretical perspectives challenging human exceptionalism recognize shared vulnerabilities, agencies, and entanglements that transcend species, biological forms, and technological constructs. While this dissertation focuses specifically on the

female body, it is essential to highlight that transcorporeality is a radically inclusive and universal concept, offering insights into the co-constitution of all bodies through relationality and interdependence. By situating the female body within the framework of transcorporeality, I aim to explore how female bodies can serve as active sites of transformation in the texts of *The Leto Bundle* (2001), *The Carhullan Army* (2007), and *All the Murmuring Bones* (2021). These works construct the female body as a form endowed with agency, one that challenges traditional narratives through its interconnection with environments, animals, and culture. However, viewing the female body through transcorporeality is only one application of its broader posthuman potential. Transcorporeality extends beyond gendered embodiment to encompass nonhuman animals, landscapes, technologies, and mythological constructs, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the entangled existence of all material forms. By examining the female body as a site of inquiry within this expansive theoretical model, my work situates transcorporeality as a universal and transformative concept built upon material interconnection and collective agency informed by the works by Stacy Alaimo, Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, and Astrida Neimanis – alongside the views from Julia Kristeva, Donna Haraway, and Judith Butler. Their competing insights into posthuman feminism, material agency, and bodily interconnection–provide useful critical perspectives to further explore the complex representations of the female body in the selected novels through the lens of transcorporeality, a critical frame that fosters a critique of anthropocentric, patriarchal, and essentialist narratives about female embodiment.

Building on these developments, philosopher and posthumanist scholar Francesca Ferrando offers a significant articulation of posthuman subjectivity that deepens the theoretical grounding of transcorporeality. In her article "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences

and Relations" (2013), Ferrando argues that human existence cannot be understood in isolation from the material and ecological systems it inhabits. Rather than viewing individuals as autonomous agents, Ferrando (2013) conceptualizes subjectivity as embedded within an expansive network of relations, where "agency exceeds the political, social, and biological human realms" (32). By rejecting human exceptionalism, Ferrando demonstrates how bodies are formed through constant interactions with their environments, challenging the assumption of a rigid boundary between humans and nonhumans. Her critique of "strict dualisms and boundaries, such as the one between human and nonhuman, biological and technological," shows that embodiment is a dynamic, fluid process rather than a fixed state (31). Categories once perceived as stable become porous, revealing how material forces adjust and redefine bodily existence. Beyond ontological considerations, Ferrando, also draws attention to the ethical and ecological dimensions of transcorporeality. She argues that posthumanism "stresses the urgency for humans to become aware of pertaining to an ecosystem which, when damaged negatively affects the human condition as well" (32). Recognizing the entanglement of human and nonhuman existence calls for a reconsideration of embodiment, not only as an intersection of biological and cultural forces, but also as a site of ethical responsibility, particularly in the face of environmental degradation. Importance of this issue urges people to reconsider the relationship between humans, environment and the material world as a whole. In short, it demands stepping away from the anthropocentric views with the understanding of responsibility towards the value of this relationship. Ethical imperative resulting from this new perspective accelerated the works created in collaboration with posthumanist and environmental thinkers. Thus, the feminist scholars Cecilia Åsberg, Rosi Braidotti and Astrida Neimanis build on posthumanist and environmental approaches that help us deepen the understandings of transcorporeality as materially and ecologically grounded. In their co-authored article

"Four Problems, Four Directions for Environmental Humanities" (2016), they articulate how human and nonhuman bodies are inextricably entangled within environmental, technological, and affective systems, urging scholars to develop more responsive and relational modes of embodiment. Rather than reinforcing the traditional nature/culture divide, their work foregrounds the deep interconnection between human existence and ecological processes. As they explain, "Humans are intimately part of the environment, as through-and-through embedded in it," disrupting the anthropocentric assumptions of bodily autonomy and instead presenting the material interdependence of all living beings (Åsberg et al. 74). Expanding on this entanglement, the authors introduce the concept of "posthuman ethics," which reframes the relationships between humans, animals, waters, and lands as "irreducible, and not to be 'managed' away" (Åsberg et al. 84). The inseparability of human and nonhuman worlds calls for an ethical orientation that moves beyond mere resource management and acknowledges shared vulnerabilities and mutual responsibilities. Ethical considerations extend beyond material interdependence, encompassing cultural and imaginative realms. They describe environmental imaginaries as "a cultural terrain for collective dreaming, aspiration, collaboration, and negotiation" that can "guide us to increase our felt responsiveness to environmental bodies" (Åsberg et al. 82). By intertwining ethics, embodiment, and imagination, transcorporeality offers a lens through which to reconceptualize human-nonhuman relations, as well as to understand the role of collective vision in shaping environmental responsibility.

Reconceptualization process between human and nonhuman corporeality welcomes interdisciplinary approaches as it has the potential for feeding into more specific areas of study. Having the common goal of understanding what it means to be human and nonhuman in this new era, posthumanism and transcorporeality require various areas of expertise to contribute to its cause. Thus, the physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad, whose interdisciplinary approach bridges quantum physics,

philosophy, and feminist theory, looks at the body and materiality from this multidisciplinary stance. In "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" (2003), Karen Barad conceptualizes transcorporeality as an extension of posthumanist principles, arguing that bodies, environments, and matter are materially and discursively entangled. The relationship between materiality and discourse is central to Barad's argument, where she asserts, "The material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity. Neither is articulated/articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated" (821). Barad's approach helps expand the scope of transcorporeal theory by challenging rigid separations between nature and culture, language and substance, and by affirming that meaning and matter are always already entangled. Barad's (2003) critique of representationalism further validates the concept of entanglement, challenging the bias that pre-existing subjects simply wait for interpretation. She explains that "phenomena are the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting 'components,'" shifting the attention away from static subject-object relationships and toward a relational ontology where agency is distributed (815). Barad's analysis contributes to posthumanist efforts to dismantle anthropocentric epistemologies, redefining agency as a distributed and relational process. Barad (2003) also interrogates assumptions about matter's passivity, arguing, "Matter is not a passive blank slate… it is substance in its intra-active becoming – not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency" (822). By framing matter as dynamic and self-organising, she defies anthropocentric notions of agency and autonomy. The body, therefore, cannot be understood as a discrete, self-contained entity but must instead be recognized as embedded in and continually moulded by material flows, supporting the idea that corporeality is always in a state of becoming.

Stacy Alaimo, a key figure in feminist environmental humanities and new materialist thought, therefore turns her attention to the physical world. Alaimo's work is

particularly significant for its insistence on material agency and ecological entanglement as central to feminist theorising of the body. In her essay "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature (2008), she introduces the concept of transcorporeality to describe the inseparability of human bodies and the material world, challenging traditional boundaries that separate nature and culture, and human and nonhuman. Her theory provides a critical tool for examining how female embodiment is shaped through exchanges with toxic environments, social discourses, and nonhuman forces – a perspective that is vital to analysing the permeable, relational bodies depicted in the literary texts explored in this dissertation. Alaimo describes transcorporeality as "a place where corporeal theories and environmental theories meet and mingle in productive ways," demonstrating how human and nonhuman bodies are materially entangled rather than existing in separate domains (238). Alaimo further critiques anthropocentric divisions, rejecting the notion that human corporeality exists apart from the environment. She argues that "human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from 'nature' or 'environment,'" showing that bodies are not self-contained entities but remain in constant interaction with ecological forces (238). Such interconnections also reveal the agency of the material world, as she states that "transcorporeality reveals the interchanges and interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human" (238). Agency no longer operates within human-centred models of power but emerges as an ongoing, relational process moulded by material exchanges.

Human and nonhuman entities function as co-constitutive agents within ecological systems, challenging assumptions of hierarchical control and shifting focus toward the entangled nature of embodiment. Hierarchy, then, becomes one of the critical points as it not only involves the re-consideration of how humans see themselves as opposed to the nonhumans, but it also attempts to understand the active agency of the nonhumans. Cary Wolfe, a leading scholar in posthumanist theory and animal studies,

interrogates the foundational assumptions of humanism – particularly its exclusion of nonhuman life from ethical consideration – and examines how these exclusions are embedded in cultural, political, and theoretical frameworks. In his influential book *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003), Cary Wolfe examines how literary and philosophical texts reflect and solidify species boundaries. Wolfe's posthumanist ethics affirm a shift away from human exceptionalism by reconfiguring embodiment as a cross-species condition – one adjusted by shared vulnerability, interdependence, and the dismantling of hierarchical distinctions between species. Through addressing how nonhuman subjectivities are routinely marginalized or erased, Wolfe expands the ethical scope of posthumanism and contributes directly to the understanding of bodies – human and nonhuman alike – as leaky, entangled, and materially rooted. He critiques the assumption that "the subject is always already human," exposing the limitations of human-centred approaches in discussions of agency and subjectivity (1). Removing the human as the default subject allows for a broader, more inclusive perspective that acknowledges the entanglement of human and nonhuman existence. Wolfe further explores the interdependence of human and nonhuman worlds, stating that "the 'human' is inextricably entwined… in material, technological, and informational networks of which it is not the master" (5). Removing the human as the default subject exposes the limitations of anthropocentric approaches in discussions of agency and subjectivity, allowing for a broader, more inclusive perspective that acknowledges the entanglement of human and nonhuman existence. Rather than existing as autonomous agents, human beings operate within complex material and ecological systems that shape their subjectivities. His critique of speciesism also addresses the constructed division between human and animal, arguing, "The discourse of speciesism relies on the tacit agreement that the full transcendence of the 'human' requires the sacrifice of the 'animal'" (6). Rejecting these hierarchical classifications

shifts the ethical concentration toward an understanding that recognizes the agency and significance of nonhuman entities. Instead of reinforcing anthropocentric perspectives, transcorporeality advocates an approach that situates both human and nonhuman bodies within shared networks of existence, challenging the exclusions embedded in speciesist thought. In *A Feminist Companion to the Posthumanities* (2018), transcorporeality functions as a conceptual theory that underscores the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman entities, paying attention to the material and embodied relationships that adjust existence. The critique of the modern divide between humans and nonhumans plays a central role in this discussion, as Åsberg and Braidotti (2018) assert, "We simply can no longer stand for the modern divide of nonhuman and human, nature and culture" (2). Acknowledging these co-constitutive relationships between humans and the broader material world, dismantles rigid binaries and reorients discussions of subjectivity toward a more relational understanding of agency. Additionally, the book further examines "ecological flows between porous and susceptible bodies," to demonstrate how bodily existence is moulded through environmental and social systems (12). Positioning bodies as permeable rather than self-contained contests conventional notions of autonomy and selfhood, supporting the idea that materiality is dynamic and responsive. The entanglement of human and nonhuman worlds also carries significant ethical and political implications, demanding "ethical and political" consideration for the entanglement of human and more-than-human worlds" (Åsberg and Braidotti 1). Addressing the consequences of human activity requires recognizing shared vulnerabilities and interconnected responsibilities, positioning transcorporeality as a critical lens for analysing both ecological and sociopolitical entanglements.

Donna Haraway focuses on this interconnection, and through her essay "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inapporpriate/d Others" (1992), offers a compelling articulation of material interdependence between human and nonhuman

subjects. Building upon her broader contributions to posthumanist theory, this work affirms the inseparability of nature and culture, contending, “Nature is made, but not entirely by humans; it is a co-construction among humans and nonhumans” (297). Positioning nature as a process shape through multi-species interactions defies the binary logic that separates biological and cultural realms. Haraway’s focus on hybrid embodiment and relational ontologies support transcorporeal thinking by rejecting essentialist boundaries and showing how bodies, environments, and practices emerge through ongoing entanglements. Instead of simply erasing this distinction, Haraway’s work expresses the generative potential of these entanglements, suggesting that nature and culture are co-produced through ongoing material exchanges. Her discussion of nonhuman agency extends this argument further. She states, “The actors are not all ‘us’… not all of them human, not all of them organic,” dismantling anthropocentric assumptions by situating machines, ecosystems, and other nonhuman forces as active participants in collective life (297). The implications of this perspective disrupt traditional notions of agency as an individual possession, instead framing it as an emergent force that materializes through relationality. While this redistribution of agency resists human exceptionalism, it also raises questions about power differentials within these entanglements – if all actors participate in shaping the world, to what extent do structural forces still impose limitations on which entities exert influence? Haraway’s engagement with relationality also carries ethical significance. She states, “The theory is meant to orient, to provide the roughest sketch for travel, by means of moving within and through a relentless artifactualism,” signalling the necessity of navigating interconnected systems with an awareness of responsibility (295). Shared existence is not merely a theoretical construct but a demand for ethical responsiveness to the entangled networks that shape life. Rather than centring ethics solely on human responsibility, this approach redefines accountability as a shared condition, where both human and nonhuman entities are

entangled in the material and ethical consequences of ecological and technological change. While Haraway resists prescriptive solutions, her work prompts an urgent reconsideration of how ethical accountability functions within posthumanist thought. In "Transcorporeality: An Interview with Stacy Alaimo" (2020), transcorporeality emerges as a concept that dismantles the boundary between humans and their environments. Alaimo describes it as "the opposite of distancing or dividing the human from external nature. It implies that we're literally enmeshed in the physical material world" (139). Rather than reinforcing distinctions between the human and nonhuman, transcorporeality insists on a relational ontology where bodies are materially entangled with their surroundings. Transcorporeality contests anthropocentric notions of agency and calls for a re-examination of environmental ethics that fully accounts for the material interdependence of all living beings. If the human body is inextricably linked to the nonhuman world at a material level, then understanding embodiment requires moving beyond isolated human experiences to recognize how bodily existence is shaped through continuous interactions with nonhuman bodies. As the boundaries between human and nonhuman agency continue to be challenged in feminist and posthumanist theory, it becomes necessary to account for how these entanglements operate not only at the level of individual embodiment but across broader ecological and cultural systems. S. Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich's article "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography" (2010) focuses on multispecies networks instead of focusing on singular bodies, offering a methodological and conceptual lens through which to examine how agency, interaction, and transformation unfold across human and nonhuman lives. As anthropologists working at the intersection of science studies and cultural theory, Kirksey and Helmreich introduce the idea of "contact zones where lines separating nature from culture have been broken down" (546). These zones are not merely spaces of interaction but dynamic sites of transformation where agency is distributed among diverse human and nonhuman

actors, with the emphasis on transcorporeal understanding of embodiment that is moulded by multispecies relations. Nonhuman organisms are not positioned as passive subjects within human narratives but as forces that shape and are shaped by material and social conditions. Kirkey and Helmreich explain how the perspective regarding nonhuman subjects can be shifted towards seeing them in a different light, stating that multispecies ethnography concentrates on "the host of organisms whose lives and deaths are linked to human social worlds," complicating assumptions of human dominion over the natural world (545). The implications of this approach extend beyond descriptive observations of interspecies interaction. Drawing on Donna Haraway's concept of "becoming with," Kirksey and Helmreich (2010) stress that "becoming is always becoming with – in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake" (546). Identity and agency are redefined as emergent properties of relational existence, shifting away from the notion of fixed, individual attributes. The very notion of *who* or *what* constitutes a being is no longer predetermined but unfolds through entangled processes of adaptation and negotiation. If existence itself is co-constituted through these interactions, then ethical considerations must extend beyond human-centred perspectives, requiring an attentiveness to the material conditions that shape all forms of life.

In their critique of the anthropocentric understanding of the female body, posthuman feminism and transcorporeality complement each other as theoretical frameworks. Since transcorporeality finds its roots from the materialist feminist arguments that look beyond the anthropocentric limitations, it is clear that transcorporeality is part of a posthumanist thought as evidenced by certain areas of intersection concerning the body. Some of these areas of intersection concerning the body can be categorized accordingly. One of the shared approaches between transcorporeality and posthuman feminism is their attempt to deconstruct the dichotomies surrounding the body. They both challenge the traditional understanding of embodiment, gender, and

identity. While they reject the notion of a fixed body as unrealistic, they instead concentrate on its hybridity, multiplicity as well as fluidity. Secondly, both transcorporeality and posthuman feminism examine how power structures adjust and regulate the body.

By analysing how power operates through and upon bodies, both transcorporeality and posthuman feminism reveal the ways in which social norms, cultural discourses, and attitudes toward autonomy impose control or attempt to control over bodily existence. Such an evaluation provides a valuable resource for understanding how agency works for the body, and it welcomes the nonhuman material world namely the environment and socio-cultural structures as having impact and agency on its own to mould the female body. Another common tenet shared by transcorporeality and posthuman feminism is their emphasis on the materiality of bodies meaning that the interconnectedness between bodies and the environment has its physical and tangible quality. The material world impacts female bodies physically, resulting in embodied experiences. The concentration on traumatised, monstrous, and docile bodies connects to this, as their relationship with the material world involves physical aspects. Women in the selected works confront the imposed restrictions by testing the perceived physical limits of their bodies, resisting their confinement to roles such as mothers or reproductive vessels, among other forms of defiance. Transcorporeality and posthuman feminism, therefore, offer an alternative approach to understanding female embodiment – one that acknowledges its material presence, agency, and entanglement with the world, rather than reducing it to an abstract concept or disembodied subject. In addition, both transcorporeality and posthuman feminism contest the anthropocentric limitations of the human bodies by emphasizing how the widely accepted boundaries between human and nonhuman, nature and culture are, in fact, blurred. Boundaries are not rigid and the interconnectedness between bodies and the material world reflect human exceptionalism is no longer relevant.

The female bodies represented in the selected texts of this study show that human beings are not inherently more important or "vital" than the material world they inhabit. Instead, these bodies reveal a mutual dependence, where humans and the material world influence each other mutually. Challenging the anthropocentric view that places human beings as dominant or separate from nature, the perspective focuses on a relationship in which both humans and the material world are interconnected and hold equal significance in shaping experiences and realities. Further, both transcorporeality and posthuman feminism recognize the factors such as gender, disability, class, and many more distinctive qualities of identity can have differing but also overlapping embodied experiences. By examining female bodies across different classes, geographies, and socio-cultural contexts, it becomes clear that despite their differences, they share unexpected commonalities that shape their paths toward emancipation. While transcorporeality and posthuman feminism examine how embodied experiences differ across human identities, they also extend beyond the human, recognizing that bodies – both human and nonhuman – are enmeshed in material and ecological networks that adjust their existence.

1.2. Nonhuman within the Context of Transcorporeality

The concept of the nonhuman is central to both transcorporeality and posthumanism, challenging traditional boundaries between human and nonhuman entities while focusing on their interconnection and mutual influence. Rather than viewing humans as separate from the natural world, these frameworks explore the porous and dynamic exchanges between bodies, environments, and other forms of existence. Transcorporeality focuses on the material and relational entanglements of human and nonhuman bodies, highlighting how they shape and are fashioned by each other in continuous interactions. Similarly, posthumanism critiques human-centred hierarchies, advocating for a broader understanding of agency that includes nonhuman beings,

systems, and forces. Together, these perspectives invite a reimagining of the nonhuman as an active participant in the shared networks of life, dissolving rigid divisions and fostering a more inclusive and ethical engagement with the world.

In the context of transcorporeality, the term "nonhuman" encompasses entities, environments, and materialities that are deeply intertwined with human corporeality. It defies rigid boundaries, paying attention to the inseparable connections between human and nonhuman. In "Trans-corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature" (2008), Stacy Alaimo asserts that "[t]rans-corporeality reveals the interchanges and interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human" (238). Human bodies are not isolated but engage in constant interactions with broader ecological systems, acknowledging the agency of nonhuman beings and environments. Furthermore, Alaimo (2008) critiques the anthropocentric view of nature, observing that "the environment, which is too often imagined as inert, empty space or as a 'resource' for human use, is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings, with their own needs, claims, and actions" (238). Her reconceptualization shifts focus to the ethical and political implications of recognizing nonhuman agency as an active participant in ecological and corporeal exchanges. Alaimo (2008) further argues that nonhuman agency is not passive but dynamic, explaining that "[a]gency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has" (249). The redefinition contests anthropocentric notions of agency by asserting that nonhuman entities and systems actively contribute to and mould the processes of the world, engaging in reciprocal relationships with human bodies.

In *A Feminist Companion to the Posthumanities* (2018), Åsberg and Braidotti explore the concept of the 'nonhuman' within feminist posthumanities, presenting it as inherently entangled with humans, nature, and culture. Central to this discussion is the idea of entangled co-constitution, where humans are "fully in nature. And nature is fully

in us," indicating the interdependence between human and nonhuman forces (1). The interconnectedness is described as "a kind of perfect storm of intermingled human and nonhuman forces," making clear that the boundaries between the two are impossible to maintain (2). Further, the text critiques human exceptionalism by rejecting the historically violent and hierarchical divide between the human and nonhuman, nature and culture. In addition to its theoretical implications, the feminist posthumanities explore the ethical dimensions of relationality, advocating for the recognition of the nonhuman as an active participant in complex networks of co-constitutive relations. These relations, described as central to understanding the interconnected existence of all beings, demand a reimagining of ethical responsibilities in light of our entanglement with the nonhuman world (Åsberg and Braidotti 11). Collectively, such insights position the nonhuman not as a subordinate or separate entity but as integral to rethinking human identity, culture, and the ethical challenges of contemporary society.

With a strong emphasis on the abovementioned relationality aspect of nonhuman and the concept of material reality, In Donna Haraway's "The Promises of Monsters" (1992), the concept of the "nonhuman" contests conventional understandings of nature, emphasizing its interconnectedness with humans and its role in constructing shared realities. Her perspective rejects the idea of nature as a separate, untouched entity, instead framing it as emerging through dynamic relationships involving both human and nonhuman actors. Haraway also critiques anthropocentric views, noting, "Nature cannot pre-exist its construction" (296). Here, she positions nature as a relational construct, fluid and ever-changing, rather than a fixed, pre-existing reality. Furthermore, Haraway expands the concept of agency to include nonhuman and inorganic elements, arguing, "The actors are not all 'us.' If the world exists for us as 'nature,' this designates a kind of relationship, an achievement among many actors, not all of them huma, not all of them organic" (297). It invites a broader understanding of agency that transcends human and

organic boundaries, positioning nonhumans as active participants in shaping the world. Haraway's insights blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman, nature and culture, offering a relational view that redefines the nonhuman as an integral force in constructing shared realities. A similar focus on relationality emerges in Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality, which also rejects rigid separations between human and nonhuman bodies. In an interview with Stacy Alaimo (2020), the "nonhuman" is framed as an integral and interconnected participant within transcorporeality, affirming the deep enmeshment of humans and nonhumans. Alaimo describes transcorporeality as a view that "does the opposite of distancing or dividing the human from external nature.

1.3. Transcorporeality and Posthuman Feminist Theories

In her essay "Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism" (2016), approximately five years prior to her seminal work on this theory called *Posthuman Feminism* (2022), Rosi Braidotti lays the ground for posthuman feminism. As can be understood from the title, she presents four main theses to reveal the connections between feminism and posthumanism, three of which offer particularly valuable insight for the current argument: Anthropos can no longer be considered the centre of things, feminism is not a humanism, and nonhuman material world has the upper hand. In her approach, it is quite clear that Braidotti draws a line between human and nonhuman material world, arguing against an anthropocentric approach in social sciences. In order to deepen her rhetoric, Braidotti looks at the main arguments that create this tendency towards a human-centred approach. One of the first arguments she uses in her thesis is the idea of nature versus human dichotomy. She argues against feminist theories that look at the difficulties that women and other minorities face and pinpoint humanity as their unifying tenet. The problem with that comes as it shows "the natural order as servitude, violence, and brutality: nature as the naturalization of inequalities" (22). It means that, while the inequalities are recognized as the unifying factor and deemed urgent, such argument inevitably undermines the

material world as something secondary, an afterthought for the feminist arguments. While the general feminist theories can work towards bridging the gaps between women and other minorities against "man", it cannot escape from the exceptionalism it puts on the label of human, nonetheless.

There are, of course, according to Braidotti in *The Posthuman* (2013), similarities between the posthuman feminist arguments and contemporary feminist arguments. There is a shared consciousness in how the dominant subject is recognized especially in the Western thought where it is "assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit, and a full citizen of a recognized polity" (*The Posthuman* 65). On these grounds, the feminist thought criticizes these categories that dominate the discourses that exist in scientific thoughts across academia. However, within this approach, Braidotti recognizes areas that need further improvement and openness. In its definitions of the subject, feminist thought must "open it up to the 'others within' in such a way as to re-locate diversity and multiple belongings to a central position" (25). This is to say that, even with the recognition that women and minorities are disadvantaged against the dominant definitions of what it means to be human, the concept of human is quite limiting. Traditional definitions often do not fully encompass the diversity and complexity of human identities and experiences, particularly those of women and minorities. As Braidotti argues, conventional definitions of humanity are restrictive because they are based on dominant cultural norms that marginalize or exclude those who do not fit a narrow, normative ideal. Consequently, these definitions fail to recognize the full spectrum of diverse identities and experiences, making the concept of "human" insufficient or limiting for understanding and representing all individuals equitably. It is also important to note that the definition of the "other" is also predetermined and this type of fixity is something that posthuman feminism is quite focused on unlike the current feminist arguments. Therefore, it can be argued that, unlike

feminism, posthuman feminism seeks to expand the definitions of being a subject that reaches beyond the definitions of merely human. By framing embodiment as a continuous exchange between human and nonhuman forces, posthuman feminism moves beyond anthropocentric feminist approaches. Instead of treating the body as a fixed entity, it becomes a dynamic site of interaction, reshaping the understanding of subjectivity and agency. Posthuman feminism facilitates an egalitarian approach to female bodies that cannot be described as merely combined by anthropocentric limitations. It offers an emancipatory approach to the potential of the female bodies in recognizing the impact of environments and socio-cultural structures. Since this study examines female protagonists who are viewed as the "minorities" and "others" within their societies, the posthuman feminist aim aligns with their experiences. The protagonists embody their marginalised identities as they resist the idealized notions of body, society, and nature in various ways. On the one hand, their embodiment, and their existence within their society go against the expected models of femininity and humanity. From this perspective, there is a direct correlation between feminist criticism of the female body and posthuman criticism of the human versus nature.

Braidotti in her *Posthuman Feminism* (2022) concurs that when employing a posthuman feminist approach, "[t]he notion of humanism needs to be reviewed and assessed critically but not thrown away entirely" (23). While Braidotti offers an optimistic view of humanism, Alaimo (2010) highlights its limitations, arguing that humanism restricts open-minded and flexible interpretations of concepts like gender roles, power, authority, and beauty by enforcing rigid standards and expecting compliance. She critiques how humanist thought often overlook the interconnectedness between individuals and their environments, stating, "Many make the cut so familiar to humanism, severing the person from all that surrounds them. The body, meaning the human body, of course, may be endowed with agency and substance, but the critical interest ends at the

skin" (9-10). Alaimo's observation unveils how humanism traditionally treats the body as an isolated entity, limiting discussions to the boundaries of the skin and neglecting broader material interactions. Posthuman feminist perspectives, such as those advanced by Braidotti, challenging the restrictive definitions imposed by humanism, focusing on the body's porous and interconnected nature.

Considering 'man' as the symbol of humanist rationalism and a criterion of human perfectibility, both posthuman feminism and transcorporeality deny the dominant norm brought by the humanist ideals. Braidotti (2022) further explains that viewing "Man" as the pinnacle, results in anything "other than or different from 'Man'" being negatively perceived as "worth less than 'Man'" (18). Thus, for the purposes of this study, the dominant discourse within humanist thought stands in opposition to the proposed model of the female body. It positions women as lesser than men and treats their bodies as fixed and unchangeable, leaving no space for growth or transformation. Following this logic, the humanist mode of thinking does not provide female bodies – especially those marked by trauma, docility, or monstrosity – with any means to resist or transcend the restrictive views imposed on them. This mode of thought, which seeks to categorize and regulate bodies according to normative ideals, inherently struggles to accommodate bodies that operate outside these margins. Female bodies existing in these alternative states challenge the humanist insistence on fixed categories, which limits their potential for agency and transformation.

Braidotti, however, warns against antihumanism since there are certain values to make use of in making a posthuman feminist case. As she further states in the *Posthuman Feminism* (2022), "The humanist project of emancipation has encouraged the equality of the minorities and motivated forms of activism among women, LGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous, and colorized peoples" (40). Thus, the values regarding equal rights that were mainly the efforts of humanist activism have place in posthuman feminist and

transcorporeality theories of the female body. However, as Braidotti (2022) states, these theories also do not hesitate to point out the shortcomings of the humanist mode of thinking that was shaped by the definition of human as "white, European, heterosexual, property-owning, male, legal citizens" (25). As its argument for an understanding of a body that pushes the boundaries of these definitions, Alaimo also points out how transcorporeality goes against certain tenets of humanism. In her criticism against the utilitarian conceptions of humanism, she points out its tendency to look at maximizing utility of the material world with an end of benefiting humanity. In doing so, it ends up creating hierarchies among the other subjects of the material world based on their contribution. Therefore, Alaimo, in *Bodily Natures* (2010), states that while the "utilitarian conceptions of nature have laboured to deny the rather biophysical," it also achieved "a commonsensical realization that we are permeable, emergent beings, reliant upon the others within and outside our porous bodies" (156). By further emphasizing the need to discover how the material world is embedded and interconnected with the human bodies, Alaimo blames these humanisms as they "seek transcendence or protection from the material world" (4).

Drawing attention to this reconsideration of power dynamics between human and nonhuman bodies, Braidotti argues that rigid hierarchies only create more separation between human and nonhuman bodies rather than fostering meaningful connections. Instead of maintaining a system of dominance and separation, she envisions subjectivity as an interconnected and relational process in which human and nonhuman entities exist through mutual reliance. In this model of interconnected subjectivity, particular attention is given to marginalized groups that have historically been overlooked in these discussions. Women and the environment, often positioned as peripheral in traditional philosophical and feminist discourses, take on a central role in Braidotti's work, demonstrating how transcorporeal entanglements reshape the understanding of agency

and embodiment. To establish this connection, Braidotti's (2013) idea of posthuman feminism considers the subject as a "complex assemblage of human and nonhuman, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured, which requires major readjustments in our ways of thinking" (159). Here Braidotti means that human subjects are not merely the dominant factors in analysing the human body by itself. When human bodies are understood as constructs made up of elements from the material world – extending beyond the physical body itself – it defies conventional definitions of what constitutes the human body. Such a shift acknowledges the material world's significant role in shaping perceptions of the human body, challenging traditional notions of it as a self-contained, independent entity. In turn, this reconfiguration alters all assumptions about and expectations from the human body. Rather than seeing it as a static form with inherent traits or abilities, the body is now understood as dynamic and interconnected with its environment, reshaping ideas about its limitations, agency, and function. It will be, then, possible to come up with an empowering interpretation of the female body that contests the traditional models imposed upon the body. Of course, it is important to note that moving away from anthropocentrism does not mean eliminating the human element entirely, as Alaimo (2010) acknowledges, "Because trans-corporeality brings the human body into focus, it is possible to charge that it reinstalls anthropocentrism" (15).

However, while the human body is at the centre for this study, an equally important emphasis is also laid upon the networks that mould the activity, response, and transformation of the human body. Therefore, "although the notion of trans-corporeality may seem anthropocentric, ultimately the ostensible centre is extended throughout multiple, often global, networks (*Bodily Natures* 16). The concept introduces the agency of the socio-cultural networks as well as the environment, not as afterthoughts but equal partners in interpreting the female body. Transcorporeality, then, allows for the female body to become a subject of multiplicities and complexities that signify not only change

and resistance at an individual level, but also suggest broader, global implications accessible through the human body. It directly challenges anthropocentric limitations, especially those imposed on the female body. By integrating the material world as an equal part of the female body's transformation into an entity that is dynamic, resilient, and ecologically interconnected, transcorporeality redefines the female body as part of a network in which all elements continuously impact each other. The approach also stresses the necessity of fostering environmentally conscious bodies. Thus, according to Alaimo in *Bodily Natures* (2010), "trans-corporeal subjects must also relinquish mastery as they find themselves inextricably part of the flux and flow of the world that others would presume to matter" (17).

According to Braidotti, this move away from the centrality of humans is explained with "postanthropocentrism". As explained by Braidotti in her work "Posthuman Feminist Theory" (2016), postanthropocentrism contests the hierarchical views that places humans above other life forms by decentring humans and recognizing the interconnectedness of all species. Such shift is a necessary next step to achieve a freer space of interpretation for what is to come in the near future regarding our place and other species on Earth. Thus, posthuman feminism and transcorporeality can be considered as theories that are steppingstones and beginnings of a movement that remove the supposed boundaries between bodies. This feeds into the posthuman feminist arguments that look at the posthuman agenda that there is an interdependence across various forms of bodies. Looking at the female bodies as transcorporeal formations, as Braidotti (2022) states, "[M]arks the end of the nature-culture divide and of the many binary oppositions that structure the Western social, scientific and symbolic order" (97). Looking at all the way the patriarchal regimes operate against the autonomies of female bodies and the material world without distinctions, posthuman feminism thus adds a "commitment to social justice and the viewpoint of the excluded, the subalterns, the dehumanized, sexualized,

racialized and naturalized others" (97). Thus, transcorporeality furthers the argument of emancipation of women's and minorities resting on the notion that they all "[belong] to the same category of humanity," to emerging from the criticism of "narrow-minded self-interests, intolerance, and xenophobic rejection of otherness" (*The Posthuman* 52).

While the task for transcorporeality and posthuman feminism is clear, the application itself does not carry the same level of convenience. "Postanthropocentric turn," proposed by Braidotti in "Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism" (2016) in fact "foregrounds the politics of the 'naturalized' nonhuman others and thus requires a more radical break from the assumption of human uniqueness" (31). Exceptionalism of humans, then, is another criticism by posthuman feminism. Looking at the contemporary situation of the world, Braidotti considers that current definitions are no longer adequate and efficient in understanding the position of feminism. Realizing the inefficiency and irrelevance of a humanistic measure, posthuman feminism considers the decentring of anthropocentrism as a necessity for it "challenges the separation of *bios*, as exclusively human life, from *zoe*, the life of animals and nonhuman entities. What comes to the fore instead is a human-nonhuman continuum" (26). Posthuman feminism, then, reconceptualizes human corporeality as inherently intertwined with the material world, rejecting rigid boundaries that separate human and nonhuman existence. Instead of treating embodiment as exclusive to the human, it acknowledges continuous interactions with nonhuman forces, redefining agency and relationality. Furthermore, posthuman feminism supports the transcorporeal argument that heavily opposes the hierarchical relationship between human corporeality and the corporeality of the material world. Since both transcorporeality and posthuman feminism consider the two to be inseparable, it can be argued that both of them enforce the equality of their impact on each other. Here, the two lines of thought concentrate on a model of relationship between the corporeality of humans and of the material world that is dynamic and reciprocal. Through this emphasis

on dynamism and reciprocity comes the idea of continuous interaction and mutual influence.

In this vein, studying the female body, from a posthuman feminist perspective, can no longer be only about the human vitality itself. Thus, posthuman feminist thought pushes for a new understanding of the human body "that interacts in complex ways with social, psychic and natural environments, producing multiple ecologies of belonging" (Guattari 36). In that sense, to Braidotti (2016), the female body as a subject is "not confined within our species, but it includes all nonanthropomorphic elements: the nonhuman" which is termed as the material world in this study (686). Expanding on this posthuman feminist view, M. J. Hird and Celia Roberts, in their article "Feminism Theorises the Nonhuman" (2011), examine the historical tendency of patriarchal and heteronormative discourse to bring women closer to nature. Their observation – that "historically, as patriarchal and heteronormative discourse distanced men from nature in part by claiming women's closer association with nature," provides a critical entry point for analysing how the female body has been symbolically tied to nature in ways that both restrict and redefine its agency (Hird and Roberts 110). Offering a compelling intervention, their work draws attention to the long-standing ideological constructions that link femininity with the environment, laying groundwork for transcorporeal re-readings that resist essentialism while embracing material interconnection. Such associations have historically worked to devalue both women and the natural world, framing them as passive, consumable, and subordinate. In response, feminist theorists have contested these reductive links, resisting narratives that position women as inherently tied to nature in ways that facilitate their objectification and control. Posthuman feminism and transcorporeality, in particular, counter this legacy by articulating the material agency of the nonhuman world – not as a metaphor for femininity but as an active participant in shaping embodied experience and relational existence. In

response to the challenges of exploitation and domination of the advanced capitalist practices on the female body, the need for a "transversal alliance between humans and other species" is quite central and urgent for posthuman feminist arguments as to explaining and solving the segregation (Braidotti 686). Recognition that these preconceived boundaries and hierarchies are no longer relevant and, on the contrary, detrimental to the feminist cause of emancipation is thus an important step of analysis for this study as well. In approaching the human along with the nonhuman material world, of course, brings along certain cautionary features. According to Braidotti (2016), posthuman feminist theories, drawing inspiration from postcolonial feminist theories, should "take into account serious power differentials" (687).

In posthuman feminist and transcorporeality theories, the human body is no longer seen as a distinct or autonomous entity, but as a permeable form fashioned through continuous interaction with the nonhuman material world. The posthuman feminist perspective defies dualistic thinking that separates nature from culture, or body from environment. Environmental historian Linda Nash in her work *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease and Knowledge* (2006), explores how bodily existence is inextricably shaped by ecological contexts. As she argues, "environments have shaped human flesh in minute and profound ways," making it impossible to view the body apart from the environmental systems it inhabits (8). Nash's work is crucial for understanding how material environments – not just symbolic or discursive forces – actively constitute human embodiment. Expanding the critique of human/nature separation, Val Plumwood's work *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) contests the anthropocentric hierarchies that have long positioned human bodies as superior to nature. Her argument that we must "recognize both the otherness of nature and continuity with the human self," offers a nuanced view that preserves difference while affirming interdependence (160). Plumwood's ecological feminism intersects with the posthuman

turn by pushing beyond binary divisions and underlining mutual influence between the human and nonhuman. Her approach does not collapse boundaries but instead reconfigures embodiment as relational, decentred, and ethically responsive to nonhuman others. That is to say, there is no clear-cut distinction between the presumed anthropocentric limitations of the bodies. Approaching female bodies through this perspective allows docile, monstrous, and traumatised female bodies to be repositioned as integral parts of the material world – both impacting it and being impacted by it. Expanding on this idea, repositioning docile, monstrous, and traumatised female bodies as integral parts of the material world suggests that these bodies do not exist in isolation; rather, they are continuously fashioned by and also shape their environments. They are impacted by various socio-cultural, political, and environmental forces, which impose limitations, expectations, or stigmatizations based on their perceived deviance from normative standards. For instance, societal expectations around femininity may render docile bodies submissive, while trauma, imposed by oppressive structures, often marks bodies as damaged or monstrous, isolating them further from the mainstream. Conversely, these bodies impact the material world by resisting, challenging, and even redefining boundaries imposed on them. Monstrous and traumatised bodies, for example, disrupt social norms by embodying difference, forcing society to confront its assumptions about normalcy, strength, and resilience. Their presence contests anthropocentric and patriarchal values, compelling a rethinking of how bodies interact with and are valued within their environments. Through their resistance and transformations, these bodies invite new, non-normative understandings of agency and existence, thereby reshaping the socio-cultural landscape around them. In this way, the dynamic relationship between female bodies and the material world emphasizes how identities and environments are co-constructed, each shaping and redefining the other within complex, interdependent networks.

Certainly, there are some limitations in looking at and making sense of the human body along with the nonhuman material world, as Alaimo states in *Bodily Natures* (2010), "Even as we attempt to formulate new understandings that do not isolate the human from the flesh or from nonhuman nature, we need to mark the limits of our own ability to render the material world with language" (42). It can be argued that this limitation may appear as the human centric language that inadvertently patronizes the material world and deems it as part of a manipulated or passivized position that always waits for interaction. Transcorporeal theory challenges restrictive ways of structuring language instead of reinforcing them. As Alaimo explains, human language should "act to ensure an awareness that the process of making meaning is an ongoing one, a process that includes nonhuman nature as a participant rather than an object of inquiry" (42). It marks a clear path for this study in reaching conclusions and using resources for sites of knowledge in analysing the docile, monstrous, and traumatised bodies. The path is looking at the material world in its ways of interacting with the human and realizing that this interaction is not less frequent than when the human decides to interact with the material world.

With this point in mind, the material world as the principle factor, as put forth by the posthuman feminist and transcorporeal theories, this study avoids the predictable formulae which "rely upon a set conception not only of the female, but also of nature" (*Bodily Natures* 43). While avoiding the essentialism of human and human body, it is possible to fall victim to the essentialization of nature, against which Alaimo (2010) also warns us. One way to ensure this is by exploring approaches that emphasize how "human and nonhuman nature intersect and coalesce" (44). The perspective acknowledges that humans are not separate from the natural world but rather exist in a constant state of interrelation with it. By recognizing the ways in which human bodies, actions, and technologies are intertwined with ecological systems, these approaches dismantle the anthropocentric notion that human life operates independently of other forms of life and

the material world. Instead, they highlight a network of mutual influence, where changes in one part of the system inevitably affect others. Interconnected view prompts a shift in how we understand agency, responsibility, and impact, inviting us to see human and nonhuman actors as co-creating realities and shaping shared environments. By emphasizing this intersection, we can move toward a more holistic and ecologically responsible way of engaging with the world, one that values the intrinsic connections between human well-being and environmental health.

In considering how social and cultural constructs mould perceptions and experiences of female bodies within the material world, transcorporeality blurs the anthropocentric boundaries between female bodies and their environments. Studying this interconnectedness through the lens of female bodies uniquely highlights how gender norms, inequalities, and expectations impact women's interactions with and responses to their surroundings. Additionally, female bodies are not portrayed merely as passive recipients of external forces; instead, they are understood as active agents, capable of engaging with and resisting the constraints imposed by an anthropocentric worldview. Through this lens, female bodies exemplify how all bodies can navigate, respond to, and challenge the limitations of human-centred narratives, affirming an interrelationship with the material world that is both dynamic and resistant. In light of these considerations, the following novels are studied to explore their transcorporeal qualities, which reveal the blurring of boundaries between female bodies and the material world in their engagement with issues surrounding anthropocentric narratives of docile, traumatised, and monstrous bodies.

In Warner's *The Leto Bundle* (2001), the protagonist Leto represents a female body traumatised by experiences of sexual assault, forced migration, civil war, and displacement. Leto's body becomes a site for transcorporeality as she navigates and responds to the disadvantages and distress caused by trauma, forced migration, and

violence – situations that often threaten her physical and mental wellbeing. Through these struggles, Leto recognizes her body's deep interconnectedness with the material world, understanding that her resilience and survival are tied not only to her own inner strength but also to her engagement with the natural and social environment around her. This interconnectedness allows her to draw strength and adaptability from her surroundings, challenging the perceived limitations of her physical body by embracing a relationship with the material world that is dynamic, responsive, and resilient. In Slatter's *All the Murmuring Bones* (2022), the protagonist Mirin represents a female body deemed monstrous due to her familial connections to the mythological people of the Irish seas, known as the *mer* people. Her lineage is marked by a dark family pact that requires sacrificial offerings to these half-human, half-sea creatures, a bond that not only ties her to otherworldly forces but also renders her an outsider in her society. Mirin is connected to the supernatural in such a way that set her apart from others, blurring the line between human and mythical, and challenging the norms of femininity and humanity. Her association with the *mer* people also implies a physical and symbolic transformation, as she embodies traits – such as potential affinity for the sea or an understanding of its mysteries – that make her both feared and misunderstood by those around her. Thus, Mirin's monstrosity emerges from her resistance to conventional human boundaries, as her identity is fashioned by forces that are both within her and beyond her control, positioning her as a figure of both power and alienation in the eyes of her society. In Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007), the protagonist Sister represents both the docile body and the resistant body, reflecting the tension between submission and transformation. Initially, she exists as a docile female body, imprisoned within a highly restrictive dystopian regime governed by an overpowering surveillance system. However, as she resists these constraints, her body undergoes a profound shift, becoming a resistant body that actively contests the forces seeking to control her. Her rebellion is not solely personal

but transcorporeal, as escaping oppression coincides with a growing awareness of the environment's corporeality. The novel frames her journey as more than an act of individual resistance; it redefines subjectivity through an interconnected transformation of human and nonhuman corporeality, revealing the inseparability of Sister's fate from the material world around her.

Accordingly, these novels by Warner, Slatter, and Hall illustrate how transcorporeality serves as a vital framework for understanding the female body within the context of posthuman feminist theory. Each protagonist – Leto, Mirin, and Sister – embodies a transcorporeal relationship with the material world, challenging anthropocentric and patriarchal limitations. Through experiences of trauma, monstrosity, and docility, these female bodies are situated in close proximity with their environments in ways that subvert conventional narratives of femininity, resilience, and identity. Leto's trauma emphasizes the healing potential of interconnectedness, where her resilience emerges from an intimate bond with the material world. Mirin's monstrosity illustrates the power of defying boundaries between human and nonhuman, while Sister's journey expresses how liberation and self-realization are deeply intertwined with environmental consciousness. Together, these narratives reflect a posthuman feminist vision that foregrounds the agency and adaptability of female bodies in a world where human and nonhuman are mutually constitutive. By portraying female bodies as complex, dynamic, and interconnected with their environments, these novels offer a powerful critique of anthropocentric and reductionist views, suggesting that the female body, rather than a passive object, is an active site of resistance, transformation, and ecological awareness. Transcorporeality, as reflected in these works, ultimately calls for a reimagining of the female body as a site of agency that is both materially embedded and dynamically engaged with its surroundings. The body does not exist as a passive or static entity; instead, it continuously interacts with and responds to material forces, environments, and

nonhuman agents that shape its existence. Recognizing this constant interplay reshapes how subjectivity, agency, and embodiment are understood, moving beyond rigid divisions between human and nonhuman while opening new perspectives on gender and identity within posthumanist thought.

CHAPTER II

THE LETO BUNDLE AND THE TRANSCORPOREALITY OF THE TRAUMATISED BODY

Marina Warner's *The Leto Bundle* (2001) is a multi-layered narrative that interweaves myth, history, and contemporary struggles to explore themes of trauma, displacement, and survival. At its core, the novel follows the fragmented journey of Leto, a mythic and maternal figure whose story traverses both time and space. Warner builds upon the ancient myth of the Titaness Leto, mother of Apollo and Artemis, and reimagines her narrative within modern contexts of war, environmental collapse, and forced migration. The novel opens with Leto cast adrift, fleeing persecution and carrying her children across hostile landscapes. Her body, both vulnerable and resilient, becomes a repository of trauma, maternal care, and endurance. Along her journey, Leto encounters both human and nonhuman figures – most notably a she-wolf who provides a sanctuary and sustenance in a moment of desperate need. The interactions blur the boundaries between species, myth, and material reality, affirming relational care as a key mechanism of survival. Throughout the narrative, Warner fragments time and space, creating a non-linear structure where past, present, and myth continuously overlap. Leto's story is told through various narrative lenses: ancient myth, archival documents, oral histories, and speculative accounts. The fragmentation mirrors the disruptive nature of trauma, where memory resists linear progression and remains caught in recursive cycles of return. Warner moves between historical atrocities, ecological devastation, and intimate moments of care, showing how trauma operates on both personal and collective scales. The novel also delves into the symbolic significance of landscapes and ruins. Spaces like desolate villages, abandoned museums, and overgrown forests serve as physical embodiments of loss and historical violence. These spaces are not merely backdrops but active participants in the narrative, echoing wounds and stories of those who once

inhabited them. Leto's repeated travels to these spaces affirm how trauma is imprinted not only on bodies but also on the material world.

As the novel progresses, Leto emerges not just as a mythic mother but as a symbol of resilience and relational agency. Her survival is not portrayed as an act of individual heroism but as an ongoing process moulded by her entanglements with other bodies, histories, environments. Through Leto, as this study argues, Warner defies traditional narratives of trauma and recovery, offering instead a vision of healing that is fluid, collective, and deeply relational. In doing so, the novel ultimately poses profound questions about belonging, survival, and the enduring scars of trauma, offering an alternative vision that emphasizes interconnectedness between bodies, environments, and histories. The novel also offers a meditation on the ways myth and storytelling can act as vessels for both grief and hope.

Accordingly, this study examines the transcorporeality of the traumatised body, exploring the ways in which transcorporeality functions as a healing process that fosters collective agency. To this end, the representation of transcorporeal connections facilitated by the interactions between human and nonhuman bodies as well as human and nonhuman worlds will be explored. Drawing from Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality, which highlights the blurred boundaries between human and nonhuman worlds, this analysis places Warner's Leto within broader discussions of trauma studies, feminist theory, and ecocriticism. The novel's narrative stresses how trauma is not an isolated phenomenon but one deeply embedded in relational and material contexts. Through Warner's fragmented storytelling, spaces of ruin, and Leto's mythic embodiment, the narrative challenges anthropocentric and individualistic views of trauma, instead presenting healing as a collaborative and material process.

In this chapter, I aim to examine the intersections of trauma, transcorporeality, and collective agency in *The Leto Bundle*, focusing on how material environments function as active participants in the healing process. While the novel engages with mythological and feminist themes, its portrayal of the female body as an open, fluid site of transformation situates it within the discourse of transcorporeality. By analysing Leto's bodily transitions and her entanglements with nonhuman forces, I seek to demonstrate how transcorporeality reshapes conventional narratives of subjectivity and healing, foregrounding the material world's role in collective agency.

Through close reading and textual analysis, this chapter will explore how transcorporeality of the traumatised body is portrayed in the novel as a site for relational healing and collective agency through Leto's fragmented body, the interplay between human and nonhuman entities, and the symbolic significance of landscapes and ruins. The analysis is grounded in theoretical frameworks from trauma studies (Judith Herman, Caty Caruth), feminist theory (Elizabeth Grosz, Donna Haraway), and ecocriticism (Stay Alaimo, Karen Barad). By synthesizing these perspectives, this chapter aims to uncover how Warner's narrative explores broader questions about survival, interconnectedness, and resilience in times of crisis.

2.1. Transcorporeality and Trauma

In *Bodily Natures* (2010) Stacy Alaimo, affirms the 'lively relationalities' of bodies and environments, which challenge "commonsensical conceptual landscapes" and reshape understandings of agency and existence" (111). In *The Leto Bundle*, Warner portrays these networks through Leto's fragmented corporeality and her interactions with objects, terrain, and sensory memory. Her bodily state is never stable but constantly altered by physical environments – such as war-torn cities, ruined buildings, and open natural landscapes – that are not merely settings but agents shaping Leto's experience.

The physical weight of her trauma, displacement, and maternal anxieties is embedded in those places, merging internal pain with external disruption. The entwinement of Leto's internal pain and the disrupted landscapes she inhabits is poignantly reflected when Leto tries to make sense of her surroundings following her escape from Zeus:

> Where was she? Under the bent scant tree which, of all the sprits on earth, had agreed to give her shelter, on the stones that had answered her implorations, in a parched wilderness that had accepted her when she begged for an end to her flight; condemned every one to bareness, they had defied the goddess's vengeance. (*The Leto Bundle* 17)

Here, the landscape itself responds to Leto's desperation, revealing it to be an active presence that absorbs and reflects her suffering. Elizabeth Grosz's concept of bodily transformation in *Volatile Bodies* (1994) similarly supports this reading. She describes bodies as neurologically and materially altered by intense external stimuli, which leave lasting impressions: "when the quantity of energy is cathected strongly enough to traverse the contact barriers, these neurones are permanently modified" and become "a mnemic record of perceptions" (337). Warner's depiction of Leto's embodied memory echoes this interpretation as Leto carries visible and invisible imprints from the world around her – an aching ankle, a dirt-streaked dress, a fractured psyche – all of which record her passage through loss and violence. The somatic and psychological toll is conveyed in a moment when Leto, caught in the chaos of an explosion, is described as feeling "bodiless, as if something was lifting me high, high, high out of the world, and then dropping me back down, with a crash" (*The Leto Bundle* 256). The disorienting violence continues: "Then the explosion happened again, and again, and in the smoke and the flames she lost sight of her daughter and fell on to the hard, hot road" (*The Leto Bundle* 256). The trauma embeds itself not only in Leto's emotional state but in the physical memory of her body's fall, echoing the novel's recurrent emphasis on how external

violence leaves lasting imprints on flesh and memory alike. Stacy Alaimo's later work *Exposed* (2016) offers another perspective in understanding this novel's representation of embodiment. Alaimo describes a "turbulent flowing together" of human and nonhuman materialities, which resonates with Leto's physical entanglements with her environment – her body absorbing dust, ash, and the touch of others, and in turn shaping the world around her through acts of care, movement, and refusal (*Exposed* 124-125). The nonhuman subject shifts from an unseen force to an active agent of survival, demonstrating how human and nonhuman forces dynamically intersect.

Relationality in *The Leto Bundle* positions trauma not only as a source of pain but also as a generative site of transformation. Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992) is an interdisciplinary study that connects clinical psychology with sociopolitical analysis. Originally grounded in Herman's work with survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence, the book broadens its scope to include political trauma – such as war, genocide, and terrorism – arguing that trauma operates through similar psychological mechanism regardless of scale or context. Her claim that "[e]mpowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery" helps understand the condition of Leto, who must navigate such harsh conditions while seeking agency in a setting of chaos and displacement (141). Despite being physically broken and emotionally exhausted after being kicked out of Karim's palace, Leto begins to imagine ways forward:

> And yet, deeper even than her yearning for no pain, for numbness, for death even, the nestlings at her flank lit a taper inside her: her mind was forming pictures of the future, of schemes she must attempt, of means she must use. These plans were physic; they administered a fluttering, winged medicine to her ordeals as her needs and her children's began to assert their claims on her. (*The Leto Bundle* 162)

In this moment, the emergence of looking forward – sparked by maternal attachment – becomes a source of emotional restoration. Leto begins to envision survival as a future-oriented and relational practice, one anchored in care, necessity, and reconnection. Herman's thoughts are embodied here not through abstract resilience, but through the act of imagining continuity and care while still in the process of suffering. Similarly, in Gothic literary tradition that exists an exchange between physical and psychological survival. David Punter and Glennis Byron's *The Gothic* (2004), a wide-ranging critical account of the genre's thematic evolution, explores how trauma is inscribed in external space. They describe such spaces as externalizations of inner psychic disturbance: "Gothic spaces are themselves frequently externalizations of trauma, which becomes visible and indeed physical in a manner which has to be confronted by the characters" (*The Gothic* 58). Leto's survival also depends on navigating fragmented spaces, where objects bear witness to histories of violence and resilience – an idea conveyed through the depiction of ruined homes and devastated landscapes through the acts of pirates scavenging and plundering homes:

> They smashed it if it was humble; they seized it if it was comfortable…the water had been cut off by the shelling many months before and the long low houses with shaded gardens that had once been luxuriously furnished had been plundered for firewood to keep the besieged alive during the winters. (*The Leto Bundle* 265)

The houses carry the burden of memory, grief, and historical rupture – materials through which Leto must forge new meaning. The convergence of place and pain demonstrates how trauma lives not only in the body but in the material world. Leto's fragmented identity is not presented as pre-formed or essentialized, but as something altered through contact with the world around her – through wounds, maternal longing, tactile impressions, and geographical dislocation. Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway*

(2007) conceptualizes such identity as the product of intra-action, where bodies and matter are not pre-existing subjects but co-emerge through relationships. Barad argues that "[i]ntra-actions between material bodies create new possibilities for being and knowing," a concept embodied in Leto's cyclical journey, where objects and environments serve as co-agents in her survival (142). What Barad helps show here is not just the permeability of Leto's body, but its capacity to exist through each entanglement – with space, with memory and with sensation. Echoing this perspective, Donna Haraway, in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) examines how survival in damaged world depends on forming relationships that defy conventional logic. Haraway argues, "Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations," as survival depends on "entangled and worldly" relationships (4). Leto's endurance is similarly rooted in these unlikely alliances. Her survival is fashioned not only through her personal resolve but also through her dynamic connections with animals, objects, and unfamiliar terrains – relationships that resist both anthropocentric and patriarchal expectations of individuality and control. Connections like these are not merely incidental but essential as they provide her with sustenance, direction, and moments of recognition in an otherwise fragmented existence. Whether through alliances with nonhuman creatures, adaptation to shifting environmental conditions, or engagements with mythic forces, Leto's bodily experiences challenge the notion of individual autonomy, demonstrating how agency and resilience in the face of trauma emerge through interdependent, transcorporeal relationships rather than through isolated self-determination. The surrounding environment encapsulates what Astrida Neimanis describes in *Bodies of Water* (2017) as the interconnectedness of "bodies of water," highlighting how we are "ethically, politically… implicated in other bodies of water into and out of whom we flow" (142-143). Leto's transcorporeal existence embodies fluid entanglement, as her body remains in constant exchange with the

landscapes, bodies and artifacts around her. Interactions of this calibre shape her survival, reinforcing both her dependence on external forces and her own role in reshaping the material world she inhabits. By destabilizing boundaries and reimagining care beyond traditional structures, Warner redefines trauma as both cyclical and relational, challenging fixed notions of identity and recovery.

Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), a work that focuses on affect theory and feminist phenomenology, explores how emotions are not simply private states but social and political forces that mould bodies and spaces through repetition, circulation, and contact. Her observation that "it is the circulation of hate between figures that works to materialise the very 'surface' of collective bodies," becomes especially relevant in understanding how Leto's body carries the imprints of collective violence, fear, and exclusion (Ahmed 46). Leto's body is not sealed off from the world, instead, it forms a surface where sociopolitical tensions register and are made visible – an affective site shaped through both trauma and the possibility of relational repair. The affective imprint of violence on the body is rendered vividly through Phoebe's injuries that were inflicted during a civil war: "Phoebe's skin was burned off her body as if by acid coating an etching plate, biting the print of its passage everywhere it met naked skin" (*The Leto Bundle* 257). Warner's narrative embraces this concept, where also myth operates not just as a narrative tool but as a material foundation for processing trauma. In *The Leto Bundle*, the shared hatred and exclusion Leto faces from human and nonhuman entities alike contribute to shaping her identity and reinforcing the boundaries of the collective bodies she both belongs to and is alienated from. By reclaiming maternal archetypes, Warner integrates what Rosi Braidotti in *The Posthuman* (2013) calls "nomadic subjectivity," where relational identities transcend individual boundaries to create collective resilience (93). Leto's evolving self emerges through her encounters with fragmented landscapes that reshape her memory and sense of being. She takes shelter in

> a stone building that had once served as a byre, perhaps, but had lost its roof and was no longer in use; the thin straw under them was grey and brittle. A twisted tree was growing from one corner, its crooked branches silhouetted like script in black ink against the sky. (*The Leto Bundle* 163)

Desolate spaces function as more than mere scenery – they become material witnesses to pain and caretakers of survival, echoing the relational entanglements that sustain Leto's transformation. The collective identity is embodied by Leto can be traced in as Alexander Weheliye's work *Habeas Viscus* (2014), which bridges Black studies, affect theory, and posthumanism. Weheliye explores how marginalized bodies, altered by historical and political violence, operate as "racialized assemblage" – configurations of flesh, history, and affect that resist containment within fixed categories (51). His argument that subjectivity is formed through and as relationality offers a useful lens for understanding Leto's transformation – not as a linear recovery, but as an emergent, collective resilience. Her fragmented identity is also spatially and temporally dislocated, unfolding across historical ruptures and mythic echoes. That disjointed temporality becomes particularly evident where Leto's body is digitally reconstructed and displayed in a museum. Stripped off her subjectivity, Leto is presented as forensic specimen and aesthetic object: "She was dressed in 'a simple linen shift' and her face was "high cheek-boned, full-lipped, her complexion dark and her real hair, under the elaborate wig, was found to be scanty…The cause of death was acute vitamin deficiency…" (*The Leto Bundle* 24). Presented through the clinical language of historical recovery, Leto's body is recontextualized as both artifact and spectacle – caught between death and display, between past suffering and present interpretation. Female bodies marked by trauma are often abstracted into symbols or evidence, flattened across time even as their stories remain unresolved. Rather than offering closure, the scene reflects a transcorporeal entanglement where material traces – malnutrition, costuming, digital reconstruction – speak to a nonlinear, multi-sited

experience of survival and remembrance. The material world through which Leto travels plays an equally vital role that can be interpreted through the political theorist Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010) where objects and environments are explained not as inert settings, but as active participants. Bennett's concept of "thing power," describes the unpredictable agency of objects – what she calls as the "efficacy of objects in excess of the human meanings, designs, or purposes they express or serve" (42). Such distributed agency surfaces Leto's fragile routines of survival, where scraps of fabric, leaking milk, and the act of feeding become charged with more than biological necessity. In a moment of exhaustion and instinctive car, Leto "sat up, bundling her scraps of clothing under them to support their small bodies…Her breasts were hard from the milk, and the infants' tiny hard gums closed on her flow, clamped tightly as seashells to rock as the tide rises" (*The Leto Bundle* 18). The objects and bodily functions involved in this scene – threadbare clothing, breastmilk, seashell metaphors – carry meaning and force that exceed narrative symbolism. They operate as agents in the precarious maintenance of life, paralleling Bennett's view that the nonhuman world actively shapes human experience through affective and material force. A related argument is found in the work of anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, whose work *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015) examines post-industrial landscapes and multispecies entanglements, particularly through her ethnographic study of matsutake mushroom foraging in the forests of Oregon and beyond. Tsing critiques the "modern human conceit" that reduces descriptions of the nonhuman world to mere "decorative footnotes," arguing instead for attention to "patchy landscapes, multiple temporalities, and shifting assemblages of humans and nonhumans: the very stuff of collaborative survival" (19-20). Her emphasis on precarious coexistence and ecological interdependence stresses the ways material environments sustain life beyond human control or intention. Fragmented, multi-temporal survival finds resonance through the figure of Dr. Fernly, who reconstructs meaning from remnants, thinking:

> She might find, in a tray of rubble, the single, crooked piece of elbow that solved a shattered marble figure's pose, or the fragment with a speech from one of a great tragedian's lost plays. The vital bit that changed the picture might look, at first, like nothing at all. (*The Leto Bundle* 11)

The curatorial act of assembling lost parts parallels Tsing's notion of survival through entangled relations, suggesting that resilience lies not in wholeness but in relational repair – finding coherence in the fractured, and continuity across temporal and material disruptions. Val Plumwood, an environmental philosopher in her ecofeminist writing *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), critiques the concept of humans as "nature rendered self-conscious," arguing that it erases "independence, difference, and self-directedness" from the nonhuman world, making it "impossible to represent conflicts of interest" between rational humanity and non-rational nature (16). Warner conveys this critique in Leto's transcorporeal connections with her environment, where her human and nonhuman worlds are depicted as interdependent yet distinct, challenging hierarchical binaries. When Leto and her children approach the new city Tirzah they are immediately hit with the stark contrast of the places they were before: "The new ground underfoot, unfamiliar to the little band of fugitives, wasn't rutted by cartwheels or stamped with the hooves of oxen or donkeys or other animals. It wasn't paved here, either, its broken edges showing strata of grit and sand and stones" (*The Leto Bundle* 254). The terrain registers the pressure of movement, displacement, and memory, echoing the instability of Leto's own position. As she travels spaces fractured by time and use, the ground becomes a material archive – its textures and disruptions reflecting the fragility and persistence of the body in motion. Basel van der Kolk is a leading psychiatrist and trauma theorist whose interdisciplinary work *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014) synthesizes findings from neuroscience, clinical psychology, and somatic therapy. His research foregrounds the embodied dimensions of trauma, demonstrating that traumatic experiences are often

encoded somatically and cannot be fully processed through cognitive means alone. He emphasizes that "[t]rauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies" and that "[p[hysical self-awareness is the first step in releasing the tyranny of the past (125). In the novel, trauma is also not solely depicted as a psychological rupture but as a corporeal condition fashioned by environmental contact, sensory experience, and somatic memory. Van der Kolk's emphasis on the body as both a site of suffering and a medium for recovery deepens a transcorporeal reading of Leto, whose embodied interactions with terrain, objects, and memory constitute a process of negotiating and refiguring past violence. She reflects:

> But my memories are like splinters under my skin, they weaken me like spears stuck in a pig's neck. For they attach me to the past and I've been flung out of time and don't know what past belongs to me… The present has a way of turning translucent for me, of opening up to me. (*The Leto Bundle* 178)

Leto's disoriented temporality and somatic pain indicate how memory is not merely cognitive but inscribed in the flesh as well. This chapter examines Warner's intertwining of myth and trauma, emphasizing how storytelling creates relational spaces where suffering is articulated and shared. By drawing on trauma theory, feminist literary criticism, and ecocritical perspectives, this analysis explores Leto's fragmented yet resilient body as a site where trauma becomes cyclical, relational, and transcorporeal. Through these perspectives, healing from trauma can be reimagined as an entangled process of transformation, renewal, and collective agency thanks to transcorporeality.

2.2. The Traumatised Body and the Physicality of Trauma

Trauma, as defined by Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), is not merely the occurrence of a catastrophic event but the way that event is experienced belatedly, "returning to haunt the survivor later on" (4).

Cathy Caruth's work emphasizes the belatedness and unassimilable nature of traumatic experience, where the past erupts into the present through flashbacks, bodily symptoms, or fractured narratives. Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) extends this understanding by arguing that recovery must address both "the social, relational dimensions" often best explored in group settings and "a highly specific, individualized focus on desensitizing the traumatic memory," as both are essential for full recovery (167). Cyclical temporality disrupts linear notions of time and selfhood, leaving an indelible imprint on both the psyche and the body, a disruption that Warner channels through Leto's disjointed experiences of memory, embodiment, and environment. Leto's fragmented existence indicates the need for reconnection on both individual and collective levels, therefore supporting this dual approach. Similarly, Bessel van der Kolk, in *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014), explains that "the imprints of traumatic experiences are organized not as coherent logical narratives but in fragmented sensory and emotional traces: images, sounds, and physical sensations" (211). Theories on trauma converge on the understanding that the traumatised body is permeable, continuously interacting with its environment and others in ways that blur boundaries between self and other, individual, and collective.

In *The Leto Bundle*, Warner brings these insights to life through the figure of Leto, whose body becomes a living archive of trauma. Her physical scars, her forced labour, and her maternal care for Phoebe serve as tangible manifestations of her suffering, while her interactions with fragmented spaces and displaced communities reveal the relational and transcorporeal nature of her survival. Leto's narrative not only exemplifies the disruptions caused by trauma but also reveals the potential for healing through transcorporeal exchanges and collective agency, bridging personal and shared experiences of pain and resilience. In line with this, Leto's suffering transcends individual experience, transforming into a shared phenomenon interwoven with historical, spatial,

and mythological dimensions. Her trauma, which is inscribed both on her body and in the spaces she inhabits, displays the interconnectedness of personal suffering and collective agency through transcorporeal exchanges. Leto's rape and enslavement in Tirzah reveal the profound commodification and fragmentation of her body. Sold by her father into a trade agreement that later collapses, she becomes a housemaid and, eventually, is forced into prostitution to provide for her children. Her servitude at the Hotel Metropole, where she cleans the rooms of wealthy guests, positions her as a body within a machine of labour, stripped of autonomy and subject to constant surveillance. Such experiences are not isolated but tethered to larger structures of patriarchal and economic oppression. The repetitive nature of her labour mirrors the cyclical temporality of trauma, which manifests not only in her own fragmented identity but also in the relational bonds she attempts to preserve with her children amidst dehumanizing conditions. Leto's body becomes the site of these entanglements, where personal suffering and systemic violence converge.

Phoebe's scars function as visible markers of violence that transcend their physicality. During their flight from the siege of Tirzah, Phoebe was severely burned by incendiary bombs filled with glue-like substance that seared through her skin, leaving permanent damage. These scars not only represent the physical violence of war but also embody the relational impact of trauma, connecting Leto's maternal care to acts of survival. Leto scavenges creams and ointments from the wealthy patrons of the Hotel Metropole, smuggling them home to massage into Phoebe's wounds. The act of care is neither simple nor passive – it transforms the oppressive materiality of her environment into tools of healing. Her hands, worn from labour, serve as both a medium of nurture and a reminder of the violence they endure. The act of tending to Phoebe's scars becomes a moment of transcorporeal exchange, where Leto's body, Phoebe's pain, and the material fragments of their oppressive world intersect to form a network of relational care.

The physical and emotional toll of Leto's suffering underscores the materialization of trauma within and beyond her body. While Phoebe bears the physical scars of violence, Leto's body carries its own marks, such as the cuts and bruises from her labour and emotional exhaustion of repeated subjugation. Bessel van der Kolk (2014) explains that trauma survivors often store the "memory of helplessness" as muscle tension or feelings of disintegration in specific body areas, with their lives revolving around "bracing against and neutralizing unwanted sensory experiences" (*The Body Keeps the Score* 311). It is a dynamic that is evident in Leto's weary posture and her obsessive focus on soothing her daughter's wounds. Warner's depiction of Leto scavenging ointments highlights her resourcefulness in navigating an oppressive environment, where even stolen fragments of material goods become acts of defiance and care. Leto's interactions with her surroundings convey this idea, positioning the body as a site altered by and shaping its specific cultural, racial, and socioeconomic contexts. Leto's body, marked by trauma, does not conform to universal or idealized notions of the human form but instead shows the unique and oppressive circumstances she inhabits. By repurposing fragments from these systems – like scavenging materials for survival – Leto not only resists the forces that seek to confine her but also transforms her body into a medium of agency and healing. The spaces Leto inhabits also display the entanglements between bodies and environments in Warner's narrative. When Leto and her children take refuge in a dilapidated church, the shattered stained glass and crumbling walls mirror her fractured sense of self. These ruins are not passive; they actively participate in Leto's journey, embodying the layered histories of violence and survival that intersect with her body. To theorise such spaces, Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopias in "Of Other Spaces" (1986) offers a compelling spatial paradigm by describing heterotopias as

> real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted

> utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (24)

The church, much like Leto's body, functions as a heterotopia – a space that embodies the accumulated trauma of its history while simultaneously offering a counteraction, enabling survival and reconnection. Like the mirror Foucault describes, the church reveals and contests its own fractured reality, becoming a site where Leto's absence and presence, pain and resilience, coexist.

The borderlands and ruins Leto traverses further illustrate the transcorporeal dimensions of trauma and healing. These spaces are populated by displaced refugees and abandoned artifacts, creating networks of shared survival. Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) explains that "hate creates the surfaces of bodies through the way in which bodies are aligned with and against other bodies," where the "skin comes to be felt as a border through the violence of the impression of one surface upon another" (54). This dynamic is evident in Leto's journey, where her interactions with others – human and nonhuman – reform both bodily and social spaces. For instance, when Leto lies in the meadow, "[t]he grass [is] prickly on her cheek and cold," yet its touch "refreshed her and the earth gave her moorings" (*The Leto Bundle* 372). The sensory impressions of the environment ground her, evoking an interconnectedness as she feels "her anchor line tugging fathoms down where the crown of the trees, mirrored in the roots, dipped and soughed like weed on the ocean bottom" (*The Leto Bundle* 373). Leto's body becomes a site of impression and resistance, fostering collective agency through the emotional alignments that mould her relationships with the spaces she inhabits. The interactions between Leto's body and these fragmented spaces illustrate how

transcorporeality functions as a narrative strategy for navigating trauma, where environments and bodies coalesce in moments of resilience.

2.3. Trauma and Its Mythological Connections

The Leto Bundle intricately reimagines myth to foreground the transcorporeality of the traumatised body, where healing and collective agency emerge through relational entanglements. Central to this reimagining is Warner's transformation of Leto, a figure traditionally rooted in silence and victimhood, into an active participant in her own story. In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), Luce Irigaray critiques the construction of the "other" in patriarchal systems, noting that the "function of the 'other' is stripped of the veils that still shroud it" when one interrogates the subject's need to replicate himself within thought or a "soul" (135). In *The Leto Bundle*, this logic is subverted by granting Leto a material presence that resist containment. Her embodied actions – from nursing her newborns with raw urgency to negotiating survival within a barren, hostile terrain – recuperate the maternal not as static myth but as active struggle. In one scene, Leto's survival instinct surfaces through her consumption of albumen and crushed shell: "She swallowed but her throat was dry…hoping the calcium might replenish her sapped forces a little" (*The Leto Bundle* 16). Leto transcends the imposed roles of myth and narrative, her suffering and strength becoming intertwined with both human and nonhuman worlds. Reconfiguring the "other" resists its positioning as merely a projection of the male subject, instead creating a narrative of agency and survival that defies the hierarchical binaries Irigaray critiques. A relational and fragmented portrayal of Leto expresses the enduring nature of trauma. Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) provides a lens for understanding Warner's narrative structure as Caruth posits that trauma "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known" (4). Warner captures this cyclical temporality through Leto's fractured mythological identity, presenting her story as a series of interwoven past and present encounters. Narrative fractures underscore the

process of healing as both ongoing and relational, where myth operates not only as a repository of suffering but also as a material framework for survival and adaptation.

Warner's reconfiguration of myth also emphasizes the transformative power of reclaiming narrative voice as a feminist act. French theorist Helene Cixous, in her seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976), argues for the necessity of écriture feminine – writing the female body – as a radical form of self-expression and resistance. Her call for women to "write [themselves]: to write about women and bring women to writing," becomes resonant in the depiction of Leto (875). Rather than being spoken for or silenced within mythic structures, Leto is reimagined as a woman whose story is not simply inherited but continuously rewritten through bodily encounters, movement across geographies, and affective ties to others. Where Cixous affirms the urgency of self-expression, American philosopher Kelly Oliver in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001) offers a complementary ethical dimension by interrogating the limits of subject-object recognition in traditional models of identity. Oliver proposes an ethics grounded in "witnessing," which she defines as "an openness to otherness," requiring "the insomnia of vigilance that recognizes the urgency of opening toward what is beyond recognition" (220). Oliver's conceptualization of witnessing as an ethical openness to otherness offers a lens through which to understand Leto's agency as emerging from responsiveness rather than autonomy. Leto's relational mode of being, fashioned through acts of endurance, care, and navigation across precarious terrains, reflects this ethics of openness, where identity is constituted through interdependence rather than possession. There is openness to Leto's interactions with her environment and the people she encounters throughout her journey. Sincere moments of connection are not fixed or transactional but fluid and transformative, embodying Oliver's idea that love and witnessing resist being flatted into mere recognition. Leto's survival becomes an act of collective witnessing, where her openness to the "other" – both human and nonhuman – intertwines her resilience with

that of the larger community and the ecological systems she inhabits. The depiction of migratory birds as symbols of grace and power captures this dynamic. As the townspeople observe:

> She appeared, with her long-legged step and her unusual height more like a migratory bird than a woman: her presence among us gave us a glimpse of grace and power no less memorable than the visit of the flocking storks that made a land bridge in our city and the territory around every Easter. Sometimes, she clasped the children to her; this was not motherly behaviour, however, not in sense of fleshly connection and even possession intended by the general. (*The Leto Bundle* 132)

Here, the comparison between Mother Cecily and the storks symbolizes a shared sense of migration, grace, and endurance. Just as the storks form a land bridge every Easter, suggesting continuity and resilience, Cecily's presence demonstrates how acts of connection – whether with the children or the environment – become moments of grace and renewal. Jane Bennet's *Vibrant Matter* (2010) offers a conceptual lens that resonates with Warner's exploration of transcorporeal connections, affirming that "materiality is a term that applies more evenly to human and non-humans," encompassing everything from "neurochemicals, hurricane winds [and] E. coli" to the "viruses, parasites, and heavy metals" within both human and nonhuman bodies (130). Warner illustrates this through Leto's interactions with natural elements and mythological figures, where her body becomes a permeable site of healing and survival. For instance, Leto's maternal role extends beyond traditional boundaries, as she forms relational bonds with both human and nonhuman subjects. Relationships between the human and nonhuman subjects, therefore, reinforce the ecological and corporeal dimensions of her mythological identity, where survival is deeply embedded within relational interdependence. *The Leto Bundle*'s exploration of bodily permeability and unstable subjectivity resonates with critical

discussions on corporeality and boundary dissolution, particularly in Margrit Shildrick's *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* (1997), where she examines how bodily instability disrupts fixed notions of selfhood – an idea that speaks to the novel's interrogation of embodied transformation and relational interdependence. Shildrick argues that "just as the excessive and leaky female body threatens self-certainty, so too the leaky logos undermines ontological and epistemological closure" (104). Warner conveys this transgressiveness through Leto's fragmented corporeality, where the ruptures of her trauma blur distinctions between self and other, human and nonhuman. Yet, these very ruptures also create the conditions for healing, as Leto's body becomes a site of relational entanglement and transformation. Leto's body, scarred and marked by her suffering, becomes a site where resistance emerges in response to power. Her physical wounds are not merely signs of victimhood but focal points where trauma and resilience converge. These marks transform her body into a narrative text, bearing the imprints of her defiance and survival as she navigates the oppressive systems around her. Warner conveys this principle through Leto's interactions with mythological and ecological forces, where survival depends on forming connections that extend beyond the self.

A recurring motif in Warner's analysis of myth and folklore is metamorphosis, particularly in tales like "Beauty and the Beast". Warner views transformation – whether physical, emotional, or moral – as symbolic of broader societal fears and desires. In Warner's (1995) reading, "Beauty and the Beast" represents the heroine's quest to uncover the true nature of the unknown male lover: "Beauty, the heroine, is the questor who discovers his true nature" (*From the Beast to the Blonde* 275). However, this transformation also carries undercurrents of societal control, where patriarchal anxieties about female desire and agency are negotiated and regulated through narrative resolution. Despite such constraints, Warner identifies spaces for subversion and creative intervention within these transformative tales. Moments of resistance enable women

storytellers to use allegory as a tool for exploring female agency, challenging male-dominated narrative authority. Makinen's *Feminist Popular Fiction* (2001) explores how popular genres can offer subversive spaces for female agency, particularly through allegorical and symbolic narratives that contest dominant ideologies. Her study examines how women writers often use fiction genre – especially fantasy and gothic forms – to blur the boundaries between societal expectations and personal autonomy. In *The Leto Bundle*, moments of resistance similarly enable women storytellers to use allegory as a tool for exploring female agency, challenging male-dominated narrative authority. Makinen (2001) observes that such transformations often blur the lines between societal expectation and personal agency, ultimately creating spaces for narrative resistance (*Feminist Popular Fiction* 64). In Warner's interpretation of such myths, the act of storytelling becomes a transformative practice in itself that negotiates between patriarchal control and female autonomy.

In *The Leto Bundle*, Warner situates trauma within mythological and historical narratives, emphasizing how the traumatised body serves as both the site and agent of collective suffering and healing. Warner reimagines myths as cultural tools that inscribe trauma onto bodies, providing a shared vocabulary capable of articulating pain and loss beyond the limits of linear language. The fragmented, recursive nature of myth mirrors the fractured temporality of the traumatised body, which resists straightforward narrative resolution. Through fragmented narratives and prolonged silences, Warner evokes the somatic effects of trauma on memory and communication, portraying bodies that resist erasure through symbolic transformations and relational collections. Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) describes trauma as a disruption of linear temporality, one that manifests through repetition and haunting: "Trauma… assets to its endless impact on a life" (7). Warner's approach in *The Leto Bundle* speaks to this idea where trauma is not

confined to individual suffering but becomes a shared burden, etched onto bodies as well as landscapes, ruins, and mythic symbols.

Warner's narrative of Leto foregrounds the transcorporeality of the traumatised body, suggesting that healing cannot occur in isolation but requires relational structures and collective witnessing. The characters in the novel such as Leto and Gramercy inhabit fluid spaces where traumatised bodies are situated within cycles of historical violence and ecological devastation, underpinning the interdependence of individual and collective trauma. By returning to images of mythic figures caught in cycles of suffering and rebirth, Warner positions the traumatised body as central to these generational and spatial reverberations of trauma. Feminist reinterpretations of myths as stated by Makinen (2001) often explore "new ways of telling the ancient myths buried by patriarchal culture," celebrating themes of community, communication, and ecology to envision alternative forms of agency (*Feminist Popular Fiction* 142). The revisions use cycles of transformation and suffering to reimagine gender and power dynamics, challenging patriarchal structures and situating the body as a site of collective and relational agency. The cyclical structure of the novel mirrors trauma's refusal to adhere to linear time. Warner repeatedly returns to spaces of loss, using myth and fragmented storytelling to articulate the cyclical nature of traumatic memory. For example, the imagery of Leto's mind entangled in her lost loves conveys this cyclical pattern of emotional turmoil and longing: "Her lost loves still danced in her mind's cave, but receded from her as they turned and gestured, the sound of the wind and water outside tearing the sounds out of their mouths so that, as she strained to hear, she couldn't catch the words and she found herself running after them, but her legs rooted to the ground" (*The Leto Bundle* 177). The image of her lost loves "dancing" suggests a sense of movement and recurrence, yet their retreat implies an unattainable nature. Leto is unable to fully grasp or understand these memories, as if they are continuously slipping away from her just out of reach. Her

experience connects nature to trauma, where the mind remains anchored in pain and grief, preventing recovery. The external forces that distort and drawn out her memories echo how overwhelming emotions and unresolved trauma can cloud one's ability to heal, creating a cycle that is difficult to break. Caruth's (1996) trauma theory further supports this: "Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event…but rather in the way it… returns to haunt the survivor later on" (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). Warner embeds this cyclicality in Leto's ongoing struggle for survival, a theme that surfaces during a pivotal moment in the story. As Leto treks across a desolate and unforgiving landscape, she searches for sustenance and protection in an environment defined by scarcity and danger. Her hand slips between the crevices of a rocky outcrop, revealing an unexpected tool of survival: "Phoebe could slip her hand in between [the rocks] and draw it out" (*The Leto Bundle* 168). The knife, sharp and weathered, becomes more than a physical object; it serves as both a survival tool and a metaphor for reclaiming agency in a hostile world.

Marina Warner, in *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1995), positions myth as a cultural repository through which societies articulate collective fears, desires, and resilience. Myth in the novel functions as both a narrative structure and a relational tool, encapsulating trauma's cyclical temporality. *The Leto Bundle* exemplifies this by embedding myth within experiences of displacement and violence, illustrating how personal and historical traumas become entangled through storytelling. As the novel unfolds, myth does not merely function as a distant, symbolic construct but actively moulds the lived realities of its characters, drawing attention to the persistence of suffering across time. The convergence of myth and embodied trauma becomes particularly evident when Phoebe and Leto arrive in the war-torn city of Tirzah, only to find themselves trapped under siege. Leto, carrying her son Phoebus while trying to keep her daughter close, was caught in a horrific attack of bombing. The explosive devices

contained a fiery, glue-like substance that burned through clothing and seared into Phoebe's skin, leaving her back and limbs horribly scarred. Her skin became translucent, taut, and crisscrossed with keloid scars that hard and caused her immense physical discomfort. In the aftermath of the bombing, Leto focuses on caring for Phoebe's damaged body. Phoebe's physical scars serve as a haunting reminder of violence, with her mother meticulously smoothing ointments over the "angriest part of the scars," attempting to erase the visible traces of trauma (*The Leto Bundle* 260). Their life in Tirzah is defined by scarcity and survival as they reside in a shantytown near the riverbank where they live in extreme poverty, with Leto taking on cleaning jobs at the Hotel Metropole during the day and working at "businesses of one kind or another" at night (*The Leto Bundle* 260). Leto scavenges and pilfers creams, oils, and ointments from the wealthy guests of the Hotel Metropole in an attempt to soothe her daughter's painful, stretched skin. Every morning, she massages Phoebe's scars with foundation cream to soften their appearance and ease her discomfort. Leto's daily labour and sacrifices are motivated by her determination to ensure a future for her children, particularly her son, Phoebus, whom she eventually sends away in hopes of securing him a better life. Leto's attempts to care for her child's wounds show both her resilience and the burden of survival, as she strives to lessen the visible reminders of the violence they survived. The mother's repetitive and deliberate actions demonstrate her own guilt, helplessness, as well as the desire to restore normalcy in the aftermath of this violent attack. Thus, the scars become not just about physical healing but also about an attempt to reclaim agency and control in a world marked by violence and instability.

Similarly, Cunmar's treatment of Leto reveals the power dynamics embedded in myth, where control and vulnerability coexist; his "quickfire pity that in him lay close to disdain" exposes the paradox of protector-oppressor figures (*The Leto Bundle* 142). Cunmar and Leto are situated within the fortress of Cadenas, a citadel in the contested

borderlands of the Ophiri and Lazuli empires. Cunmar, a brutal yet strategic leader, has risen to power through military cunning and political manoeuvring, and Leto, the daughter of the merchant Ser Matteo, was left in Cunmar's care as collateral for a trade agreement. Leto's arrival at Cadenas, then, was marked by a sense of otherness, as she stood out among the people of the citadel. Her father had traded her as part of a bargain while promising Cunmar a treasure that would secure his dominance. However, Matteo's promises were never fully realized, and Leto remained under Cunmar's control.

On the other side of the world and timeline, Kim reflects on Leto's timelessness, observing that she exits "always in time present, cutting across ours," illustrating how myth transcends linear temporality and preserves trauma as a continuous cycle (*The Leto Bundle* 144). The materiality of myth is further emphasized through the silk's healing properties, symbolizing myth's capacity to hold and mediate trauma – "place a poultice made of it on a wound, and that wound will close" (*The Leto Bundle* 138). Finally, Leto becomes a vessel for collective identity, embodying figures like "Persephone," "Europa," and "Hagar," connecting her personal trauma to a broader mythological and cultural continuum (*The Leto Bundle* 103). Through these interconnected fragments, Warner demonstrates how myth encapsulates collective fears, desires, and resilience, preserving cultural memory while providing a structure to understand and articulate trauma across generations. The cyclical nature mirrors the repetitive pattern of traumatic memory, where unresolved trauma resurfaces in symbolic forms. In the novel, Warner echoes this through Leto's archetypal presence, as she becomes a vessel for collective trauma across time and myth. Kim McQuy describes:

> She's everyone who's ever been driven from home, who's been stolen away or beaten out…she's Persephone and dozens and dozens of young women who've been raped – not least Europe, you know that story. That victim gave

> her name to where we live now. She's Hagar and Mary and…well, she's Leto. (*The Leto Bundle* 103)

Kim McQuy makes this statement at a formal committee meeting to discuss identity, diaspora, and national belonging. Kim speaks about Albion's history of migration and hybridity, affirming how the nation has been altered by repeated waves of refugees, political exiles, and marginalized groups. He uses Leto as a unifying symbol to illustrate survival, maternal sacrifice, and resilience amidst displacement and violence. His speech bridges historical myth and contemporary societal struggles, portraying Leto as a timeless figure whose story remains relevant in addressing issues of identity, belonging, and cultural integration. Kim's involvement with the Leto Bundle began with his discovery of the manuscripts and artifacts connected to Leto. His initial fascination grew into an obsession leading him to advocate for Leto's story to be recognized not merely as ancient myth but as a relevant and urgent narrative for modern times. Leto, as reimagined by Warner, transcends her mythological origins to become a figure deeply intertwined with historical and contemporary crises through her transcorporeal existence. As Makinen states in *Feminist Popular Fiction* (2001):

> The maternal, as our first site of licence and prohibition, takes on territorial identity. Simultaneously familiar and unknowable, it is our primary metaphor for the defamiliarised explorations into home territory that we project outwards as speculative fictions (58).

Maternal, then, can be taken as both a grounding and disruptive force, which is also something that consequently shapes boundaries as it is "territorial." Accordingly, maternal also becomes a paradox that consists of familiar and unfamiliar aspects, which is replicated in the genre itself. Therefore, maternal imagery does not only appear in the genre of fiction merely for the purposes of plot but also as a key that allows the

exploration of altered realities. Warner also uses the maternal in her works differently as she resists patriarchal inscriptions through myth, reclaiming maternal archetypes as symbols of endurance and collective survival. In *The Leto Bundle,* Warner portrays maternal care not merely as a biological imperative but as an act of political resistance, drawing upon themes that resonate with Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* (1995). Ruddick's influential work affirms that, "mothers do not work in private," drawing attention to the social and relational dimensions of maternal labour (35). This maternal care, deeply entwined with survival, emerges as both emotional response and political strategy, enacted through Leto's transcorporeal connection to her children and her environment. The novel, thus, resists patriarchal inscriptions through myth, reclaiming maternal archetypes as symbols of endurance and collective survival. It challenges traditional representations of motherhood, positioning maternal figures as agents of transformation rather than passive subjects. Reframing maternal roles in such a manner invites readers to reconsider the maternal body as a dynamic force that disrupts patriarchal structures, contributing to feminist critiques of maternal roles in society.

Leto finds herself in a harsh wilderness after fleeing persecution, a place where barren rocks and twisted trees become her reluctant sanctuary. She has given birth to twins – a boy and a girl – in a state of extreme vulnerability and exhaustion, with no immediate resources for their survival. Here, Leto's body is not just a passive vessel but an interactive site, constantly exchanging with the environment and her children. The wilderness itself becomes an active participant in her plight, its rocks and barren forms blurring the boundaries between organic and inorganic, alive and lifeless. The stones, once cursed by a goddess and transformed form fertile beings into lifeless forms, interact with Leto in a moment of symbolic transcorporeality. They grant her temporary shelter, saying: "We were once girls who talked of men and hoped for love, but she noticed our beauty and she struck us into this shape. She can do us no more harm, and so, Leto, accept

us, as your resting place, a temporary mooring" (*The Leto Bundle* 18). These stones – once bodies, now landscapes – symbolize the fluid exchange between Leto and her surroundings, offering her not only refuge but also an ephemeral alliance.

As she tends to her children, Warner emphasizes the deep transcorporeal bond between Leto and her twins, where survival is dependent on a literal exchange of bodily fluids and warmth. Despite the exhaustion, her daughter's slight movements bring her a flicker of joy and hope: "The sight, the feel, the smell of the twins made something inside her leap brokenly, the slow legato of her normal breathing had been jolted into a wild rhythm, and she was whirling to it" (*The Leto Bundle* 17). Warner also contrasts maternal sacrifice with survival pragmatism through Leto's reflections on the story of the pelican – a bird said to wound itself to feed its young. Leto rejects this image of maternal excess as foolish: "The pelican might peck her own breast till the blood flowed into the open beaks of her young…Leto had laughed, but inwardly she thought the pelican sacrificed herself to excess and folly – a weakened or dead mother was no good to anyone" (*The Leto Bundle* 16). Instead, Leto resolves to adapt, echoing the survival strategies of smaller creatures like the sea-mouse and the toothpicker fish, who thrive symbiotically with larger hosts. The passage describing her care for her newborns is equally visceral and raw, further highlighting transcorporeality through bodily exchange. Leto attempts to clean and comfort her babies using her tongue, her saliva mingling with flakes of albumen and remnants of their hatching sacs: "Shell and bone, albumen, lymph and milk: could the three of them survive by exchanges of their substance, their fluids, their flesh?" (*The Leto Bundle* 16). It is a moment that expresses an almost ecological intimacy, where survival depends on the seamless transfer of bodily substances – milk, lymph, saliva – between mother and child. Her body is not an isolated entity but a site of continuous interaction with her children, sustaining them even as her own resources are depleted. Leto's physical state mirrors the barrenness of her surroundings – her throat parched, her body depleted,

yet she remains driven by maternal resilience to ensure her twins' survival. Her body becomes a bridge between the material and the symbolic. Her body transcends the traditional boundaries of self and environment, human and non-human, maternal and ecological. Her survival is not an isolated struggle but a deeply relational and embodied act, where the boundaries between flesh, stone, water, and air blur in an ongoing cycle of exchange and resilience.

As the landscape is harsh and unyielding, it offers little shelter or sustenance. Leto's body is weakened from childbirth, and her milk supply begins to dwindle. Despite her exhaustion, Leto remains determined to keep her children alive, drawing strength from her maternal resolve. Amid her search, Leto stumbles upon a cave, its entrance partially hidden. Driven by a mix of exhaustion and fragile hope, she ventures inside. The cave is dark and carries a strong odour – a scent unmistakably tied to animal inhabitation. Leto realizes that she has walked into a wolf's den, and the realization sends a wave of fear through her. Wolves are predators, and entering their territory puts her and her children in immediate danger. However, instead of hostility, a she-wolf named Lycia emerges from the shadows. The name Lycia carries a mythological resonance, evoking the word *lycanthrope*, a term derived from the Greek *lykos* (wolf), which refers to the transformation of humans into wolves. Myth blurs the boundary between human and animal, mirroring the fluid identities explored throughout the novel. Lycia's posture is calm, her movements measured, and her gaze holds something maternal – an understanding of the fragility of life cradled in Leto's arms. Lycia does not attack or chase them away. Instead, she approaches with an air of quiet authority and compassion. Warner, through this exchange, frames Leto's maternal care as an act of endurance, negotiation, and ecological reciprocity. Her body becomes both an archive of suffering and a site of resilience, where survival is secured through transcorporeal exchanges with her children, the wolf, and the environment itself. Leto's body becomes a transcorporeal

site of nourishment and survival, her physicality echoing Sara Ruddick's (1995) notion of maternal reasoning as both practical and deeply relational. Yet, Warner also captures the psychological toll of Leto's maternal role, as her separation from her children after birth evokes an existential estrangement. The deep bodily connection forged during pregnancy lingers beyond birth, making the sudden separation feel like a rupture within herself. Warner portrays this sense of dislocation as such: "After the clandestine closeness of the last months inside her, how own hot, tight secret, their new separateness from her gave her a sense of deep exile, of estrangement from her own self" (*The Leto Bundle* 18). The lingering effects of this detachment illustrate how maternal embodiment is not limited to physical proximity; Leto's identity remains intertwined with the children she can no longer hold. Leto's experience embodies Cathy Caruth's (1996) theory of trauma as a belated temporality, where suffering is not confined to a singular moment but continually resurfaces as a fragmented narrative tied to her body and "psyche" (*Unclaimed Experience* 58).

Warner extends the maternal archetype beyond the human realm in Leto's encounter with the she-wolf, who offers both physical sustenance and maternal wisdom. The she-wolf's nurturing gesture is symbolic of collective survival: "The supply's not the freshest, so if your milk is dry and thin, you and your babes can drink mine – my own cubs are so lively they excite more than enough from their mother. It'd be a relief to me" (*The Leto Bundle* 36). The moment illustrates transcorporeal resilience, where survival transcends species boundaries and maternal care becomes a shared, almost ecological act. Moreover, the she-wolf's advice carries an emotional and political charge: "Never make yourself needier than you are, and the love of men does that, believe me. So keep your heart closed, the better to defend yourself. Remember how we survive: we look to our own kind" (*The Leto Bundle* 37). Ruddick's (1995) concept of maternal thinking as not merely nurturing but "strategic" functioning as amoral act designed for survival resonates

with this perspective (199). Warner's depiction of Leto ultimately bridges the maternal, the mythological, and the corporeal, positioning her body as both an archive of suffering and a vessel of resilience. Through these moments, Warner contests patriarchal myths of maternal passivity, reimagining maternal archetypes as transcorporeal agents of endurance, healing, and collective survival. In this way, Leto's suffering, like the Leto Bundle, becomes a collective testimony – a site where personal and historical traumas converge.

During a lecture delivered by Hortense Fernly, Warner introduces Leto's mythological significance: "Leto was a very important goddess in that part of the world: she was the mother of the twins, of the god of the sun Apollo and of the goddess of the moon Artemis, after she was pursued and raped by the father of the gods, Zeus" (*The Leto Bundle* 40). Dr. Hortense Fernly was asked to deliver a talk about the historical and mythological significance of Leto in the museum's lecture hall. She was directed to prepare this speech, following public protests and mounting frustration surrounding the removal or mishandling of an artifact referred to as the Leto Bundle. The museum director asked her to deliver this lecture to ease tensions and provide context. Hortense, despite her initial reluctance – describing her audience as "ladies who lunch plus a sprinkling of homeless in off the streets for some comfort" – takes on the responsibility of addressing the artifact's historical accession, iconography, and cultural significance (*The Leto Bundle* 30). Her lecture stresses Leto's mythological importance as the mother of Apollo and Artemis and recounts her pursuit and violation by Zeus and the relentless persecution by Hera that forces her into a wandering exile until she could give birth. However, Hortense's analysis transcends myth, bridging the mythic and contemporary to reveal parallels between Leto's suffering and the enduring displacement, violence, and systemic injustices faced by women in wartime. Such connection elevates Leto beyond her role as

a mythic maternal figure, framing her as a symbol of collective endurance and survival. Hortense explains the artifact, saying:

> The carved relief on the cist – that's the front slab of the tomb – is terribly damaged, but the creatures on either end – always taken previously for sphinxes – are more likely to be wolves, who were sacred to the goddess because one helped her when she was fleeing. (*The Leto Bundle* 40)

Warner, here, reinterprets the wolf motif as central to her narrative, symbolizing unexpected alliances and interspecies solidarity. The wolf emerges not only as a protector but also as an embodiment of transcorporeality, where boundaries between human and nonhuman are blurred, creating networks of survival through shared vulnerability. Through environmental symbolism, Warner stresses Leto's mythic journey as one moulded by relational exchanges with her surroundings: "Leto and the twins left the byre…she recognized the animal by the gamey odour stirring from the recesses of the den; she knew she was in a cave used by wolves" (*The Leto Bundle* 34-35). As this moment situates Leto in a dangerous, inhospitable wilderness, the portrayal of the wolf and the wilderness supports the broader thesis on transcorporeality where survival emerges through interconnected relationships between the human and nonhuman. The wolf's cave, a space of both danger and salvation, becomes a heterotopic site where trauma, survival, and relationality converge. By reframing Leto's vulnerability as a source of strength, Warner emphasizes the healing potential of transcorporeality, where maternal and nonhuman alliances challenge the boundaries of individual endurance, transforming suffering into collective agency.

Warner's portrayal of vulnerability as a source of strength through maternal and nonhuman alliances invites for the reconsideration of a broader perspective on the body. In her work *Volatile Bodies* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz suggests that the body itself is a

canvas upon which social, cultural, and political forces leave their mark (310). Leto's encounter with the she-wolf exemplifies this interplay as her physical and emotional survival becomes intertwined with her surroundings. As Leto sees in the dim light of the cave, a she-wolf emerges "from the shadows beyond the pool, she saw a she-wolf ambling towards them, the animal's powerful shoulders moving to her stride and her long narrow head cocked" (*The Leto Bundle* 35). The she-wolf, initially a figure of potential threat, approaches Leto and her children with an unexpected air of curiosity and calm. Recognizing their desperation, the she-wolf offers them refuge, leading them to a cave hidden among the rocks. Inside, the space is marked by its earthy odour and darkness, but for Leto, it represents a rare moment of safety. The interaction between them not only establishes a bond between Leto and the wolf but also positions the nonhuman world as an active participant in Leto's survival. Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality highlights the inseparability of human bodies from their environments, emphasizing that survival often depends on interdependence. Alaimo (2010) observes:

> A recognition of the risks of transcorporeal interchanges can, in short, motivate an array of psychological, political, and material boundary practices aimed at protecting individuals from the world. On the other hand, understanding the world and the self to be coextensive, as the material memoirs do, can also inspire a transcorporeal, posthuman environmentalism that builds connections rather than boundaries and that undertakes ethical actions from within global systems, interchanges, and flows. (*Bodily Natures* 111)

Leto's reliance on the she-wolf for sustenance and shelter indicates a deep interconnection. Rather than viewing her environment as separate or adversarial, Leto's survival depends on recognizing the nonhuman world as a shared space of mutual dependence. The relationship mirrors Alaimo's vision of transcorporeal

environmentalism, where survival and resilience emerge through connection and ethical actions within larger ecological systems. Warner describes, “The wolf shared food with her: she suckled her, and gave her bones to pick” (*The Leto Bundle* 36). In the dim light of the cave, Leto accepts the wolf’s offerings – scraps of meat and marrow from the bones – and feeds herself and her twins. The act of sharing sustenance transforms the relationship between the two into one of mutual reliance. The she-wolf watches over Leto’s children while Leto gathers her strength, creating a momentary ecosystem of care and survival. Donna Haraway’s exploration of kinship provides another lens to understand this dynamic. Haraway, in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) argues that “kin making is making persons, not necessarily as individual or as humans,” urging us to reimagine kinship as a practice of care that transcends ancestry or genealogy (102-103). The connection between Leto and the she-wolf exemplifies this expansive notion of kin, evolving beyond a simple exchange of resources into a profound bound that redefines survival and relationality. After the initial exchange of food, the wolf speaks to Leto, revealing an unexpected depth of understanding. They discuss the challenges of survival and the fragility of their existence, with the wolf commenting on Leto’s resilience. This moment of dialogue not only bridges the gap between species but also introduces the wolf as a figure of wisdom and guidance, embodying Haraway’s vision of kinship as an active, relational process. Cathy Caruth’s insights into trauma’s recursive nature deepen this understanding of Leto’s journey. Caruth (1996) argues that “the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one’s own life” (*Unclaimed Experience* 62). As Leto shelters in the cave, the scent of damp earth and the flickering shadows trigger fragmented memories of her past, forcing her to confront the ungraspable threat that continues to shape her existence. These memories haunt Leto, intertwining with her present circumstances and reminding her of the fragility of her sanctuary. The cave becomes both a space of

protection and a site of confrontation with the unresolved echoes of her trauma. Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), asserts that "[r]ecovery requires remembrance and mourning," a process seen in Leto's retreat to the she-wolf's den (174). The temporary refuge not only shields her from immediate danger but also creates a space for reflection, where she processes her losses and reconnects with her maternal instincts – a step toward healing. The fragile hope that emerges from her interspecies bond with the she-wolf and the safety of the cave exemplifies Herman's claim that healing begins in moments of connection and protection. Leto's time in the cave reveals the necessity of relationality, both with the natural world and with her own fragmented sense of self.

The novel's emphasis on bodily interdependence and the restorative potential of nonhuman relationships extends beyond trauma recovery, engaging with discussions in posthumanist environmental ethics. Stacy Alaimo, in *Bodily Natures* (2010), contests anthropocentric divisions and argues that

> the flows, interchanges, and interrelations between human corporeality and the more-than-human world resist the ideological forces of disconnection. I contend that a profound reconsideration of matter needs to be at the root of a posthumanist environmental ethics. Matter is not a passive resource for human manipulation and consumption, nor a deterministic force of biological reductionism, nor a library of codes, objects, and things to be collected and codified. (142)

Warner's depiction of Leto illustrates this interrelation vividly. Leto's survival and healing are inseparable from her engagement with the ecological systems around her, demonstrating how her body is enmeshed in a web of more-than-human connections. This interconnectedness is vividly illustrated when Leto shares a rare orange with her children:

> However shrivelled, Skipwith's orange was scented: there was precious juice trapped inside and its sharp sweetness pierced through the drying rind and wrinkles. She hid the fruit against her ribs and stole under the sail that Teal had rigged outside the crate to give them shade… With one hand she fed the segments to the twins, with the other she crammed a larger piece and then another chunk into her mouth. Now that she had broken into the orange, she no longer split off the pieces carefully, following the fruit's inner structure, but tore into it so that her children, their initial suspicion melted away, could take the pieces in their fists and push them blissfully into their own mouths. (*The Leto Bundle* 209-210)

The transcorporeal flow of sustenance, where the orange – a product of the ecological systems beyond Leto's immediate reach – becomes a medium for nurturing life is highlighted in this scene. The sensory descriptions of the orange's scent, taste, and texture emphasize the material and emotional dimensions of survival. Leto's actions intertwine her body with the natural world, not only as a recipient of sustenance but as an active participant in transforming the fruit into a shared moment of resilience and care. There is an inextricable link between human survival and ecological interconnectedness. Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet* (2008) challenges traditional human-centred views by exploring the complex dynamics between humans and nonhumans. Haraway examines ethical, emotional, and political dimensions of interspecies relationships, arguing that our survival and evolution are deeply intertwined with other species. By reimagining encounters as transformative interactions, the boundaries between species are seen as fluid and subject to continuous mutual influence and exchange. Placed within the broader discussion of ecological interconnectedness, Haraway's insights reveal how human well-being emerges from dynamics relationships in a diverse and interdependent ecosystem.

In this work, Haraway expands on these connections, affirming interspecies relationships as sites of transformation. Haraway poses the question:

> The question between animals and humans here is, Who are you? And so, Who are we? Who is not a relative pronoun in the co-constitutive relationships called training; it is an interrogative one. All the parties query and are queried if anything interesting, anything new, is to happen. In addition, who refers to partners-in-the-making through the active relations of coshaping, not to possessive human or animal individuals whose boundaries and natures are set in advance of the entanglements of becoming together. (*When Species Meet* 208)

Haraway confronts the notion of fixed identities, arguing instead that relationships between human and nonhuman beings are fluid, reciprocal, and constantly reshaping both parties. Rather than reinforcing rigid distinctions, she presents identity as something that emerges through ongoing entanglements, where mutual influence replaces hierarchical separations. Her emphasis on "partners-in-the-making" suggests that selfhood does not exist as a fixed entity but takes shape through ongoing exchanges with the nonhuman world. *The Leto Bundle* exemplifies this approach in its portrayal of Leto's relationships with the nonhuman world, particularly in her bond with the she-wolf. Just as Haraway envisions interspecies interactions as sites of co-shaping, Warner presents Leto's survival as intrinsically linked to nonhuman forces. Her endurance is not an individualistic struggle but a shared act of strength across species and landscapes. The she-wolf does not merely serve as a symbolic figure but actively participates in Leto's journey. By situating Leto's experience within Haraway's perspective, the novel shows how bodily and emotional survival depend on relational exchanges that dissolve rigid human-animal distinctions. In *The Leto Bundle*, these entanglements are depicted in Leto's relationships with the nonhuman world, such as her interactions with the she-wolf. Warner illustrates

this through Leto's interactions with human and nonhuman forces, where endurance becomes a shared act of resilience across species and landscapes. Warner further supports this notion of endurance in Leto's reflections on fate: "Sometimes you've just got to sit out the evil in your fate. It's got to be cleared from the air, like the weight of a storm before it breaks and lifts and brightens the summer again" (*The Leto Bundle* 36). During a moment of stillness, Leto contemplates her suffering while awaiting change. The storm imagery, evoking chaos and eventual renewal, mirrors her internal struggle and reinforces her connection to the natural world. At this moment in the novel, healing is situated as a process that is cyclical and relational, altered by patience and adaptation to the rhythms of her environment.

In *The Leto Bundle*, Leto's body functions as both a narrative and a material structure, representing trauma, survival, and recovery. Warner's reinterpretation of mythological archetypes emphasizes fragmented temporality and ecological entanglements that define Leto's corporeal experience, reimagining her role within contemporary contexts. Central to this portrayal is Leto's identity as a mother, which is further complicated by her relational bond with the she-wolf. The she-wolf, embodying both protection and guidance, contests traditional notions of motherhood by situating it as a shared construct that transcends species boundaries. The bond they have reinforces Warner's ecological and corporeal approach, where the boundaries between human and nonhuman blur, illustrating what Margrit Shildrick (1997) describes as "the transgressive interchangeability of body parts; the blurring of distinctions between life and death; the bypassing of generations in reproduction; [and] the creation of genetically transformed individuals" (*Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* 215). Warner's narrative uses some of these transgressions to challenge conventional boundaries and explore new forms of relationality, which is very specifically portrayed through the time jumps of Leto. The physical scars and relational imprints borne by Leto are not merely markers of suffering

but also inscriptions of adaptation and survival. Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), describes such constructs as "a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another" (105-106). In the novel, Leto's body functions within this network as both a site where trauma is embedded and a medium through which she negotiates survival. Her corporeal experiences – formed by violence, displacement, and interspecies connections – do not passively record suffering but actively redefine her sense of agency and resilience. By embedding Leto's journey within ecological, corporeal, and historical dimensions, Warner reframes trauma as a transcorporeal experiences. Through this, Warner positions Leto's body as a locus of recovery, bridging mythological archetypes with contemporary concerns of ecological and bodily interdependence.

2.4. Embodied Memory: Transcorporeal Connections

The museum in *The Leto Bundle* serves as a liminal space where transcorporeality functions as healing for the traumatised body, mediated through collective agency. Introduced as an institutional site in Albion, the museum houses artifacts tied to mythological figures, most notably Helen, whose story intersects with Leto's. Warner reimagines the museum not as a neutral repository of history but as an active environment where human and nonhuman agents – artifacts, visitors, and spatial surroundings – interact to reassemble fragmented identities. Such interplay displays the broader thesis that trauma and healing emerge not in isolation but through relational and material connections between bodies, histories, and spaces, which are the characteristics of transcorporeality.

Leto's body and the museum are deeply interconnected through the artifacts and the histories they carry. Leto's connection to the museum artifacts is poignantly illustrated

through her earrings, an intimate possession laden with personal and collective histories. For instance, Leto thinks on the loss of her earrings during a moment of desperation in a temple which was later referred as the "Temple to the Goddess Leto" (*The Leto Bundle* 27). The earrings, small golden hoops, were tied to an incident when Leto, believing the frogs in the temple had swallowed them, killed the creatures in a futile attempt to retrieve them. These earrings, displayed later as part of the Helen artifacts in the museum, signify both her personal trauma and the transcorporeal connections between her body, memory, and the material world. The manuscripts in the bundle further deepen this narrative, enabling Leto's fragmented story to transcend her physical existence and provide museum visitors with a tangible connection to her past, even in the absence of direct historical context. Through these manuscripts, the artifacts become more than relics; they transform into conduits for relational healing, connecting Leto's lived experiences to the broader collective memory of displacement and survival. This relational exchange underscores how the museum, through transcorporeal connections, bridges the gaps between individual suffering and collective agency, preserving Leto's story as an enduring testament to resilience and transformation.

Leto encounters the cist relief depicting wolves sacred to the goddess. Hortense explains during her lecture to the museum visitors: "The creatures on either end… are more likely to be wolves, who were sacred to the goddess because one helped her when she was fleeing" (*The Leto Bundle* 40). The imagery found later in the manuscripts for the 'Helen' exhibit recalls a critical moment in Leto's life when, during her escape from Tirzah, a she-wolf provided shelter and protection to her and her children. The connection between this relief, the manuscript depicting this relief and Leto's personal history expresses how the museum serves as a space where transcorporeal exchanges destabilize the boundaries between myth, memory, and lived experience. Through this interplay,

Warner highlights the relational dimension of Leto's healing, where her body and the artifacts participate in shared narratives of trauma.

The protests outside the museum demanding the return of the Helen artifacts further amplify the connection between Leto's body and the contested artifacts. During a public outcry over the museum's handling of cultural artifacts, the demonstrators critiquing their alienation from their original contexts and chant: "We want her back here… Yes! Then we'll lay her to rest, somewhere decent" (*The Leto Bundle* 29). The urgency of this protest is in fact is a way of questioning of established boundaries which is explored in *What is Posthumanism?* (2010), where Cary Wolfe challenges philosophical humanism by arguing that language functions as a nearly magical property that separates Homo sapiens from all other living creatures. The Helen exhibit brings this argument to life as he views language as "a well-nigh-magical property that ontologically separates Homo sapiens from every other living creature," revealing how cultural constructs like language can impose artificial boundaries and prompt a re-evaluation of human exceptionalism (120). Similarly, the artifacts within the exhibit defy complete classification within the museum's institutional setting, challenging anthropocentric narratives. In parallel, Leto's fragmented identity defies reductive categorizations, emphasizing her connection to broader ecological and evolutionary systems that transcend human exceptionalism. Just as the artifacts resist full containment within the museum's institutional setting, Leto's fragmented identity defies the reductive narratives imposed upon her. Both the artifacts and Leto's body retain agency, forming relational connections that transcend institutional boundaries.

The museum's temporal layering further encapsulates Leto's cyclical experience of trauma and healing, with its artifacts and narratives acting as a bridge between past and present. One striking example is the inclusion of materials recovered from the Letoniast mythography, preserved through the meticulous efforts of the Circumflex Scribe and later

mediated by Hereward Meeks in the 20th century. These manuscripts, alongside archaeological artifacts such as sacrificial altars and divination tools, convey a complex story of persecution and survival. As Hortense Fernly explains during a lecture in the museum, "[t]hrough these surviving fragments… we can perhaps catch the voice of a woman who presided over a cult of female deity, feature here not as a Titaness, or a towering mother goddess, but as a young, persecuted fugitive" (*The Leto Bundle* 42). Leto's mythological representation is juxtaposed with her lived reality, symbolized by the museum's reconstructed narrative. The artifacts, including tortoise shells used for divination and evidence of burnt offerings of local frogs, are imbued with layers of relational and transcorporeal meaning. The historical and ecological specificity of these items not only situates Leto's story within a tangible landscape but also reveals the relational networks of human and nonhuman agents that sustain her legacy. The museum transforms these objects into a dynamic site of transcorporeal exchange, allowing audiences to engage with Leto's trauma and collective agency across temporal and cultural boundaries. As these artifacts shift from personal relics to curated exhibits, their meaning is no longer fixed but continually reinterpreted through the act of viewing. The process of perceiving and assigning meaning to material objects is not passive but emerges through relational entanglements, shifting historical contexts, and subjective experience. Timothy Morton, a prominent thinker in contemporary ecological theory, reconsiders traditional distinctions between nature and culture in *Ecology Without Nature* (2007). In his work, Morton contests the entrenched idea of nature as an immutable, pristine realm, arguing instead that we consider nature as a construct that is continuously redefined by our lived experiences and historical circumstances. He questions the very basis of how we understand and relate to the environment, suggesting that our perceptions are intrinsically linked to a web of cultural and temporal forces. He argues for the relationality of perception:

> Perceptual events only appear in different to one another. Phenomenology has delineated how perception involves a dynamic relationship with its objects. Current neurophysiology is developing a quantum theory of perception… But instead of confirming a holistic world in which object and subject fit each other like a hand in a glove, the reduction of perception to a sequence of dots enables us to demystify it. (*Ecology Without Nature* 166)

Drawing upon Morton's assertion that perception is inherently fragmented and relational, it can be stated that rather than serving as a static repository of the past, the museum becomes a space where temporal and spatial dimensions blur. Through its artifacts, the museum embodies shifting atmospheres and narratives, forcing visitors – as well as the readers of Leto's story – to confront the interwoven nature of history and memory, which transcend linear or fixed interpretations. For Leto, this coexistence becomes a way to confront and integrate her trauma, allowing her body to participate in broader narratives of endurance and resilience.

Kim McQuy's lecture inside the museum reinforces these connections by tying the Helen artifacts to Leto's mythological and personal story. Addressing an audience of academics and officials during the exhibition opening, McQuy states, "She's everyone who's ever been driven from home, who's been stolen away or beaten out…" (*The Leto Bundle* 103). His speech reframes the artifacts as symbols of collective suffering and survival, linking Leto's experiences of displacement to broader cultural and historical cycles. Sara Ahmed highlights in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) how movement and attachment bind bodies to material worlds through emotional and spatial connections:

> The relationship between movement and attachment is instructive. What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place. Movement does not cut the body off from the 'where' of

> its inhabitance, but connects bodies to other bodies: attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others. The circulation of objects of emotion involves the transformation of others into objects of feeling. (11)

Similarly, the Helen artifacts evoke affective ties that connect Leto's bodily scars to collective narratives of migration and resilience. Scars and artifacts as such embody the circulation of emotion, transforming both Leto and the objects into powerful symbols of shared history and survival, grounding her experience within a collective structure of displacement and memory. The commodification of trauma within the museum is critiqued through its portrayal of artifacts as alienated from their original contexts and turned into consumable spectacles. The museum, rather than preserving memory in an unmediated form, transforms personal and collective trauma into curated objects that fit within institutional narratives. In *The Ahuman Manifesto* (2020), Patricia MacCormack – a critical theorist known for her work in posthuman studies – questions conventional ideas about identity and relationality. MacCormack deconstructs how external structures impose meaning on selfhood, suggesting that the processes of curation and remembrance contribute to power structures that form both individual and collective experiences, arguing that

> Spatially, we can experience, or even tactically configure, our existence as an immanent encounter with ourselves in connection with everything else as a series of relations which resist and refuse the subjectification we have been ascribed while being aware and attentive to the categories of ascription that we still occupy, because in this set of relations, the openness of others is questionable. We may be becoming but society still retains us in being. (45-46)

MacCormack's discussion of subjectification speaks to the way museum spaces reconfigure meaning, forcing objects and histories into fixed narratives that often obscure their original relational significance. While her argument addresses how identity and existence resist categorization, it also highlights how institutions maintain control over meaning-making, even when transformation is possible. *The Leto Bundle* depicts this tension in the way Leto's personal artifacts – her earrings, the manuscripts, and the mythologized accounts of her story – are repositioned within the museum's constructed setting. The museum's curation of Leto's fragmented past attempts to impose coherence onto a narrative that resists stability, much like MacCormack's idea that we may be "becoming," yet remain inseparable to the categories assigned to us. In the novel, the act of exhibiting Leto's history reduces her lived experience to an artifact of collective memory, raising the question of whether true transcorporeal agency can survive institutional mediation. The director of the museum confesses to taking part of altering Leto's history as he talks to Kim McQuy: "'There was no body,' resumed the director. 'That's why we used another mummy to illustrate the way the mask and case were used to enclose the deceased'" (*The Leto Bundle* 44). The exchange between the director and McQuy demonstrates how institutional forces reconstruct identity and history, replacing lived realities with curated, mediated narratives. The museum, thus, becomes more than a site of containment. The artifacts in presented in the novel, though enclosed within glass cases, evoke relational connections that transcend their commodified state. They act as bridges between past and present, facilitating 'immanent encounters' that challenge fixed categories and institutionalized narratives. Despite their containment within glass cases, the artifacts retain a residual agency that fosters transcorporeal connections between past and present. The museum appears as a realm of isolation and recovery, in which the objects evoke Leto's personal wounds and the enduring impact of her trauma. In "Of Other Spaces" (1986), Michel Foucault introduces the concept of heterotopology as a

means of analysing and describing heterotopias, which he defines "[a]s a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live… That is a constant of every human group. But the heterotopias obviously take quite varied forms, and perhaps no one absolutely universal form of heterotopia would be found" (24). The depiction of the museum in *The Leto Bundle* fits this concept as it serves as a site of temporal and relational complexity. The museum functions as a heterotopia by simultaneously embodying mythic and real dimensions: it preserves the past through its artifacts while forming the present and future through its narratives and interpretations. In this space, the layered histories of migration and survival intersect, mirroring Foucault's assertion that heterotopias exist as both universal and culturally specific constructs. Through these interactions, the museum in *The Leto Bundle* emerges as a transcorporeal site where trauma is not only preserved but also transformed within a collective setting. Leto's body and the museum become intertwined as spaces where fragmented identities are reassembled, and histories are renegotiated. Warner's narrative underscores how transcorporeal connections between human and nonhuman agents create opportunities for resilience and renewal, illustrating the healing potential of collective agency.

2.5. Nonhuman Bodies and Trauma

In *The Leto Bundle*, nonhuman subjects, particularly animals, serve as vital agents of healing and collective agency, forging transcorporeal connections with traumatised human bodies. These relational exchanges dissolve species boundaries, creating networks of mutual care and resilience amidst displacement and trauma. Leto's various forms of encounters with animals such as the wolf cub, the bronze fly, and other creatures throughout the novel exemplify the blurred boundaries between humans and nonhuman entities, illustrating how shared vulnerability fosters survival and recovery.

Leto's reflections on animals reveal a profound connection between memory, instinct, and survival. As Kim pieces together her story from Skipwith's bundle, he hears Leto musing:

> Do animals remember? They know how to tell friend from foe, bane from berries – the yew from the redcurrant. They recoil from fire, unlike my babies, who'd have put their hands to the dance of the flames. But do animals keep particular memories, in the way humans experience memory? It isn't memories I need any more. The longing to return, to reel back the rope that's being paved out will weaken me. I can't be weak. Nostalgia for all that I've lost will shackle me. I – We – need the future. We need a future. (*The Leto Bundle* 178)

Leto's meditation on animal memory exposes the tension between biological instinct and the burden of human recollection. While animals distinguish between danger and safety through ingrained knowledge, they are not weighed down by nostalgia or the desire to reclaim the past. In contrast, human memory is entangled with longing and loss, creating an emotional connection to what has been left behind. For Leto, memory is no longer a source of strength but a liability – an emotional weight that threatens her ability to survive and move forward. By drawing parallel between animal instincts and human recollection, the novel frames memory as a transcorporeal force, one that is not only embodied but also moulded by environmental and material conditions. Leto's struggle is not just psychological but also corporeal; her survival depends on resisting nostalgia's physical pull and embracing a life that is full of hope. A deeper entanglement between memory, the body, and the environment emerges in Stacy Alaimo's work *Exposed* (2016), where she observes that "ideological and discursive categories position bodies differently and have material effects," making the negotiation of corporeal processes "a necessary epistemological and political process" for survival (184). Leto's rejection of nostalgia and

embrace of a forward-looking relationality demonstrate the healing potential of transcorporeal exchanges, where survival is negotiated through the interplay of human and animal instincts. Her interactions with both human and nonhuman worlds highlight how corporeal processes, formed by exposure to broader social and material conditions, become acts of resistance and resilience. Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) highlights that in the aftermath of trauma, "rebuilding of some minimal form of trust is the primary task," with "assurances of safety and protection" being crucial for recovery (44). Leto's connection to the nonhuman world, particularly her interactions with animals, serves as a source of this trust and safety. These relationships provide her with the emotional support needed to begin navigating the complexities of her trauma, offering a bridge to healing and reconnection with the larger world. Astrida Neimanis, in *Bodies of Water* (2017), similarly argues that human existence is inextricably tied to material world, asserting, "We as human bodies do not sit atop and apart from the entanglements of the material world; we are instead consistently pulled out of our place of privilege by our symbiotic relationality to other bodies" (44).

Animals also become central figures in Leto's attempts to create sanctuary and forge collective agency. For instance, the wolf cub, adopted for Phoebe's companionship, embodies the fluid boundary between domestication and wildness. Gramercy Poule, a musician known for her distinctive vocal style and public persona, is introduced in the novel as someone who retreats to the countryside to prepare for an upcoming tour. Having purchased a land in Fellmoor, an area protected as a National Park, she distances herself from her urban celebrity lifestyle and immerses herself in the rugged landscape. Phoebe meets this wolf cub while working for the makeshift animal shelter created by Gramercy in her land. Therefore, when Gramercy expresses concern about keeping a wolf, it reflects her own negotiation between wilderness and domestication. In response to Gramercy's indecisiveness, Phoebe retorts, "She's been raised in captivity – she's no wilder than a

guide dog" (*The Leto Bundle* 352). The exchange reframes the wolf as a mediator of relational care – one whose presence contests assumptions about wildness and domestication. Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of ethical responsibility, developed in *Totality and Infinity* (1969), ground morality in the face-to-face encounter, where the presence of the Other demands an unqualified moral response. While Levinas's ethics centres on human relations, the logic of ethical obligation he proposes opens up space for reconsidering who – or what – can be recognized as an ethical subject. Deborah Bird Rose, a scholar of ecological ethics, addresses the anthropocentric limits of Levinas's thinking in *Wild Dog Dreaming* (2013), observing that "[t]he one big limit in Levinas's thought is that he confined his ethics to humans" (15). *The Leto Bundle* reimagines the contours of ethical responsibility by positioning the wolf as a figure that disrupts human-centred boundaries and gestures toward interspecies forms of care. Phoebe's remark challenges the assumption that the wolf exists outside the structures of care and social bonds, instead portraying it as a being fashioned by human influence, much like Leto herself. Situating the wolf within a web of interspecies relationality, the novel confronts Levinas's human-centred ethics, proposing that responsibility and care extend beyond human Others to the nonhuman world.

Warner transcends this limitation in *The Leto Bundle* by building on Levinas's notion of ethical relationships to include the nonhuman. The wolf's functions not merely as an animal but as a participant in a web of shared vulnerability and survival. Through their interactions, the wolf's "call" becomes an invitation to relational care, bridging the boundaries between species. Additionally, the wolf cub becomes a source of comfort and resilience for Phoebe, drawing attention to the agency of animals in nurturing human recovery. Donna Haraway, in *When Species Meet* (2008) emphasizes the grounded nature of relationality in interspecies encounters, explaining that "[a]ccountability, caring for, being affected, and entering into responsibility are not ethical abstractions; these

mundane, prosaic things are the result of having truck with each other" (36). The wolf cub's companionship with Phoebe exemplifies this concept, as their bond allows both to navigate their shared experiences of displacement and survival.

The narrative also weaves mythological elements into its depiction of nonhuman agency, particularly through the tale of the bronze fly and the leech, recounted by Leto to her children. Although sounds like a simple children's story at first, the story, situated within the broader mythos of the novel, reflects the integration of human ingenuity and animal metaphor in overcoming shared adversities. Leto's storytelling is deeply embedded in her maternal role, offering a means of both teaching her children and connecting them to the larger narratives of resilience that define their existence. The bronze fly, described as "ferocious, so hungry, as if it would eat anything and everything that came its way," becomes a powerful symbol of transformation and adaptability in the face of systemic forces of decay and exploitation. Its creation by the fly-catcher echoes Leto's own attempts to navigate the traumas of displacement and forge a pathway to survival for herself and her children (*The Leto Bundle* 222). The fly's narrative is not merely a tale for the children but also a reflection of Leto's strategies for survival. Much like the bronze fly is engineered to overcome the plague of flies in Enoch, Leto herself becomes a figure of resilience, adapting to her circumstances with ingenuity and determination. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015) highlights such assemblages, affirming how "[c]osmopolitan knowledge develops out of historical mergings – with research subjects, living and nonliving, and with itself in other forms (239). The bronze fly functions as a metaphorical assemblage, uniting the mechanical with the organic to challenge the exploitative structures that threaten both human and nonhuman lives. Similarly, Leto's resourcefulness in retelling this myth to her children illustrates how narratives themselves can become tools for collective agency, enabling her family to cope with the instability of displacement.

The tale also stresses the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman entities, aligning with Margrit Shildrick's assertion in *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* (1997) that "a postmodernist approach uncovers both the multiple differences and distinctions that mediate interactions, and paradoxically the way in which all boundaries are permeable and ultimately indistinct" (9). The fly's transformative journey mirrors Leto's own, as both become catalysts for healing and resilience within their respective narratives. The fly's ability to confront and neutralize threats in its environment parallels Leto's determination to protect her children, despite the precariousness of their existence. Through this story, Warner highlights the importance of relationality and interdependence, not only between humans but also across species and ecological systems. Leto's use of the bronze fly narrative as a teaching tool also speaks to the role of myth and storytelling in constructing collective identity and resilience. As she recounts the tale, her children engage with the story, finding both entertainment and a means of making sense of their own struggles. Deborah Bird Rose in *Wild Dog Dreaming* (2013) examines the profound interconnectedness of cross-species relationships, stating, "Cross-species kin groups are founded in flesh and blood, and what happens to any member of the group impacts other members of the group. There is vulnerability in these relationships because of the connectivities, and at the same time there is strength" (99). The entanglement of lives across species boundaries challenges hierarchical distinctions between human and nonhuman beings, instead positioning relationality as the foundation of existence. Within this context, the fly functions as more than a mythical creature; it serves as a liminal figure that collapses the boundaries between species, demonstrating how human and nonhuman lives are deeply entwined. The novel resists a human-centred perspective, instead presenting the fly as an agent of interconnection, mirroring the precarity and resilience of Leto's own existence. The relationships between species are not incidental but structurally significant, forming the ways in which survival,

vulnerability, and care unfold across different forms of life. *The Leto Bundle* positions the fly within this network of shared existence and reinforces an ethics of interdependence, where no being – human or nonhuman – exists in isolation. By situating this narrative within the broader context of her family's displacement, Leto embodies the idea that survival is a collective endeavour, reliant on the interplay of diverse agents and forces. Furthermore, the fly's narrative is steeped in a critique of systemic exploitation and broken promises, reflecting the broader socio-political themes of the novel. The fly-catcher's initial agreement with the rulers of Enoch, followed by their betrayal, echoes the precariousness of Leto's own interactions with societal structures that marginalize and exploit the vulnerable. The mechanical fly's subsequent acts of defiance serve as a metaphor for resistance and highlights the potential for nonhuman entities to contest and subvert oppressive systems. An interplay between human and nonhuman agency embodies what Stacy Alaimo (2016) describes as an "ethics of inhabiting", as she explains:

> Just as an ethics of inhabiting entails turning the human outdoors, it also entails, conversely, inviting what is out of doors in. This reversal is not meant to level out everything into an anthropocentric or anthropomorphic sameness that denies nonhuman nature its own particular beings and agency but, instead, to make space for an 'ethics of the Real,' in Catriona Sandiland's term, in which nature is not a 'human constructed presence, but an active, enigmatic other'. (32)

The fly's defiance, much like Leto's own resilience, becomes an act of transcorporeal resistance, bridging the divide between human and nonhuman agents in the struggle for survival and justice. The fly's defiance serves as a microcosm of the larger relational dynamics at play, where transcorporeal exchanges create a shared space for survival and solidarity. Thus, Alaimo's "ethics of inhabiting" calls for a reimagining of agency as an

entangled process that respects the autonomy of nonhuman beings while acknowledging their integral role in human survival and justice.

The mythological layers of the bronze fly's narrative also serve to enrich the children's understanding of their own agency within the world. As Leto weaves this tale, she instils in her children's understanding of their own agency within the world. As Leto weaves this tale, she instils in her children a sense of empowerment, affirming that even seemingly small or nonhuman agents can effect significant change. The children's engagement with the story is evident as Phoebe eagerly asks, "And then?" while Phoebus reacts with curiosity and concern. She assures them that despite the challenges faced by the fly-catcher and his creations, justice and change remain achievable: "This happened some long time ago, but the story hasn't been forgotten and its effects are still felt" (*The Leto Bundle* 225). This message parallels the family's own journey as marginalized figures striving for survival in a world that seeks to erase them. Blurring the boundaries between myth and reality, Leto embodies this interconnectedness, finding moments of agency and comfort even when experiencing displacement and trauma. Her story emphasizes the potential for collective transformation through these shared flows.

CHAPTER III

TRANSCORPOREALITY AND THE RESISTANT BODY IN *THE CARHULLAN ARMY*

Sarah Hall's dystopian speculative fiction novel *The Carhullan Army* (2007) interrogates the relationship between female bodies, their environments, and systems of power. The novel illustrates how these bodies, traditionally framed as sites of passivity and control, can become loci of agency and resistance through their material and relational entanglements with both human and nonhuman forces. Given the novel's engagement with the themes of biopolitical oppression, ecological interconnection, nonhuman agency, and feminist resistance, this chapter examines how *The Carhullan Army* portrays the transformation of docile female bodies into resistant bodies. Through an analysis of the female characters' interactions with their repressive environment, this chapter seeks to expand on the healing attribute of transcorporeality, as discussed in the previous chapter. As a result of this analysis, collective action and nonhuman agency are found out to be the main components in understanding this function of transcorporeality. In the novel, nonhuman agency in question manifests through the material landscape which not only moulds but also co-constitutes the women's resistance by offering both physical refuge and a means of reconfiguring bodily autonomy. On the other hand, the collective action emerges as a relational force, wherein the women's shared struggles and interconnected embodiments create new modes of agency that challenge hierarchical power structures. The novel, by positioning the natural environment as an active participant, redefines resistance as a transcorporeal experience that illustrates the way the human and nonhuman forces facilitate both individual empowerment and collective transformation.

Set in a near-future Britain devastated by environmental collapse and governed by an authoritarian regime, the novel offers a harrowing vision of a society coping with the

aftermath of resource scarcity, economic decline, and oppressive biopolitical control. In this dystopian context, the government enforces strict regulations over all aspects of civilian life, including the imposition of intrauterine devices (IUDs) on women to curb population growth, severe limitations on personal freedoms, and the monopolization of food supplies through industrial systems. In the novel, the population is confined to tightly monitored urban zones, where individuals endure gruelling labour and a pervasive sense of despair. Within this suffocating environment, the state exerts control over both the public and private realms of existence, reducing female bodies to passive objects subjected to institutional regulation. The novel centres on the unnamed protagonist, referred to as "Sister," who becomes increasingly disillusioned with the dehumanizing conditions of her urban existence. Sister's life is defined by routine, submission, and the oppressive weight of her surroundings, which render her voiceless and powerless. However, driven by a desire for autonomy and a growing rejection of the docility imposed on her body and mind, she undertakes a perilous journey to Carhullan, a remote female-led commune nestled in the rugged landscapes of northern England.

Carhullan operates as a radical alternative to the state's authoritarian regime. Led by the charismatic and uncompromising Jackie Nixon, the commune rejects the biopolitical controls imposed by the government, including its reproductive policies and reliance on industrialized systems. Instead, the women of Carhullan embrace sustainable practices, self-sufficiency, and a profound connection with the natural world. Here, nonhuman agency emerges as a key element of their resistance. Nonhuman agency refers to the capacity of nonhuman elements – such as land, weather, plants, animals, and other ecological forces – to influence and alter human actions and societal structures. The concept recognizes the active role of nonhuman forces in forming the material realities of the human body and its environment. At Carhullan, the women's reliance on the land for substance and survival exemplifies this relationship between the human body and

environment. The natural world, far from being a passive backdrop, becomes a partner in their defiance of the state's control. Through collective action and their embodied relationship with the environment, the women reclaim their autonomy and resist the structures that have sought to dominate them. Sister's transformation within Carhullan exemplifies the novel's critique of patriarchal and ecological exploitation. The commune's rejection of state control and its reliance on farming, communal labour, and resistance strategies challenge the state's systematic subjugation of female bodies. At Carhullan, Sister not only finds refuge but also undergoes a profound shift in her identity, shedding the constraints of her former life and embracing the collective resistance embodied by the women of the commune.

3.1. The Docile Female Body in Foucault's Discourse

Following the works of Lucy Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) and Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1980), late twentieth-century feminist theory contested the deep-rooted anthropocentrism and symbolic exclusion within dominant cultural narratives. Irigaray critiques how Western metaphysics constructs subjectivity through masculine norms, systematically silencing female difference. Kristeva, meanwhile, interrogates the symbolic order's rejection of the maternal and the abject, showing how women's expressions are often positioned outside legible discourse. Together, their insights expose the ways patriarchal structures frame women's voices within male-defined boundaries that limit genuine articulation. An inherent characteristic of this system reduces women to docile subjects, constructed and regulated within linguistic and cultural structures designed to reinforce male dominance. Phallocentric systems reduce the female body to a site of inscription, where norms and expectations are imposed. As a result of this imposed docility, the female body becomes both the object and product of power – an existence that transcorporeality seeks to dismantle by affirming the dynamic entanglement of bodies, environments, and discourses. To comprehend the

prevalent commentary surrounding the passivity of submissive female bodies, Foucault's fundamental writings, including *The History of Sexuality* (1978) and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995), will be referenced. While his work offers valuable insights into how power operates through disciplinary mechanisms, it remains insufficient for a feminist analysis of embodied experience. Further, as the novel also challenges the deterministic conception of submissive bodies by emphasizing complexity, intersectionality, and active agency, the analysis will draw from the theoretical works by Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, and Amy Allen to discuss the connection between the theories of feminism and power and more specifically the theory of transcorporeality. Their perspectives bridge the gap between feminist theories of power and transcorporeality, which situates the body within an ongoing material exchange with its environment, rejecting the anthropocentric hierarchies that position humans as separate from or superior to nature. Transcorporeality, which stresses the ongoing interplay between the body and the environment and confronts the anthropocentric ideas that indicate human supremacy over nature, is essential for comprehending the construction of the female body in *The Carhullan Army*.

In *The Carhullan Army*, these ideas materialize through the depiction of women reclaiming agency not by rejecting their materiality but by embracing it as a source of power and resistance. Sister's escape from the regulated spaces of Rith is not only a political defiance but also a reclamation of her embodied self within a new environmental and affective ecology. As she reflects, "There were no regulations out here. There was no human mess, no chaos, poorly managed, and barely liveable. There was just me, in my own skin, with my blood speeding up. I was taking a chance on something that felt not like a gamble now but like my only option" (*The Carhullan Army* 20-21). At this point, the body – previously surveilled, controlled, and medicalized – becomes reintegrated with the natural world, awakening a renewed sense of agency through movement, sensation,

and spatial liberation. Michel Foucault's theories on discourse and power introduce a similar transformative perspective. Foucault challenges the notion of a singular, immutable centre of power, proposing instead that power is dispersed and relational, making discourse an arena where all parties – women included – can participate and contest for agency.

Critically linking Foucault's insights to transcorporeality, the female body emerges as a site of both oppression and resistance. Transcorporeality situates the female body not as a passive object within patriarchal structures but as an active participant entangled withiest socio-material surroundings. Relational understanding of such parallels Foucault's emphasis on power as circulating through interactions rather than being unilaterally imposed. Thus, the docile female body, long relegated to the margins of discourse, gains a platform for resistance within Foucault's analysis of power and a material basis for agency within transcorporeal theory.

Feminist philosopher Jana Sawicki explores such relationship between power, embodiment, and subjectivity in feminist thought. Her work is particularly useful for projects that contest essentialist understandings of the female body and instead focus on how bodies are moulded through historical and discursive forces. In *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body* (1991), Sawicki argues that Foucault's conception of power could help navigate the ways in which women differ and how these differences impact their experiences. These experiences are differentiated through institutional and cultural mechanisms. She emphasises the importance of moving beyond the assumptions of humanist thought by engaging with Foucault's "accounts of how certain institutional and cultural practices have produced individuals" (22). Sawicki does not view identity as grounded in a stable essence, instead, she identifies ways in which subjectivity is formed through specific configurations of power. According to Sawicki, Foucault's view challenges the humanist thought that power originates from individual

agency. He makes the argument that institutions and societal structures exert their power over the masses and as a result they condition individuals into compliance. The novel follows a similar process in its depiction of state oppression, where institutional mechanisms such as surveillance, reproductive restrictions as well as militarized governance construct docile female bodies and reinforce systemic subjugation. One instance of such control appears in the scene where the protagonist undergoes state-mandated contraception: "The nurse clenched her fist around the coil to signify a womb, and she smiled at us. We could all expect heavier periods after insertion, she said, and perhaps a fraction more pain. But really it was nothing to worry about" (*The Carhullan Army* 32). Medical discourse is used here to normalise invasive bodily control and biopolitical regulation of female reproduction. Yet even as such mechanisms aim to suppress autonomy, the narrative exposes the instability and contradictions within the system. The same structure that enforces compliance also create conditions under which resistance can emerge. Sister's rebellion takes shape not outside but within the disciplinary apparatus; her calculated silence and secret preparations that lead to her departure from Rith demonstrate how the tools of control – routine, surveillance, bodily regulation – can be repurposed as tactics of resistance. However, the novel also exposes the instability created by such a system, since the same structure that produces compliant subjects also create the perfect conditions for collective resistance. For Foucault, this type of power is defined as "disciplinary power," which is "exercised on the body and soul of individuals. The idea of "docile bodies," as proposed by Michel Foucault (1995), captures the way disciplinary authority moulds and manipulates people in contemporary institutions such as prisons, schools, and hospitals. Through normalization and surveillance, this power alters bodies, making them docile and efficient. As Foucault explains, "it increases the power of individuals at the same time as it renders them more docile" (138). Viewed in this context, the protagonist Sister experiences discipline on two

levels: as an individual, she is disciplined by the government, and as a woman, she is disciplined by her husband. Sister writes about her exchange with the hospital during her life in Rith, "I received notification of my appointment at the hospital…and went in to be fitted," the mandated insertion of a contraceptive device clearly shows the biopolitical coercion by the government (*The Carhullan Army* 31). At the same time, following her return home from this procedure, Sister's husband insists on intimacy despite her discomfort as she recalls, "He put his thumb to me and began to rub, but I told him not to" (*The Carhullan Army* 34). Her back-to-back experiences that rooting from different sources with similar coercive results that disregard her bodily integrity and autonomy makes a clear connection that there is an unspoken network of oppression over women's body. The network of power relations is a crucial concept for understanding how the docile body emerges from various systems of oppression. Sawicki explains that, unlike the Marxist approach, which attributes power to a centralized source, Foucault "expands the domain of the political to include a heterogeneous ensemble of power relations operating at the microlevel of society" (*Disciplining Foucault* 23).

The connection between feminist theory and Foucault can be established on the basis of difference, as mentioned earlier. Rather than viewing power as a singular centralized force, Foucault conceptualizes it as a network of relations operating at multiple levels of society. Feminist theory expands on that by examining the differences such as gender, class, and material embodiment, all of which alter an individual's experience of power and resistance. The concept of docility, as it relates to both bodies and power structures, is intertwined with resistance, making difference a critical factor for feminist theory. Recognizing difference goes against the universalist tendencies of humanist thought, which often generalize and oversimplify issues of identity and resistance. In line with posthuman feminist theory, this approach critiques the humanist reliance on dichotomies – such as male versus female – arguing that such binaries obscure

the fluidity, complexity, and relationality of bodies. As Braidotti notes in *The Posthuman* (2013), "post-anthropocentric practices blur the qualitative lines of demarcation not only among categories (male/female, human/animal, centre/margin) but also with each one, subsuming the human into global networks of control…targeting 'Life'" (64). Her critique of power structures challenges the way disciplinary mechanisms regulate bodies and identities within larger socio-political systems. While she builds on Foucault's concept of power as dispersed and relational, her approach differs from Foucault's because she aims to advocate for a more materialist and feminist reworking. Despite these limitations, Foucault's method remains valuable to feminist thought as it offers a historical and critical approach to resisting essentialist narratives. Sawicki (1991) elaborates on this point, explaining, "What Foucault offers to feminism is not a humanist theory, but rather a critical method which is thoroughly historical and a set of recommendations about how to look at our theories" (29). Coupled with the posthuman feminist agenda, this method emphasizes the materiality and specificity of bodies, resisting the "dogmatic adherence to categories" that universality classifications perpetuate (Sawicki 29). By situating bodies within dynamic power networks, transcorporeality reflects the politics of difference, showing how power and resistance operate within the material and relational realities of the female body.

The female body, traditionally portrayed as submissive and malleable, is subjected to significant socio-material influences in the novel. As Sister journeys from the oppressive structures of Rith towards the uncertain promise of Carhullan, her embodied experience continues to bear the weight of both past trauma and present threat. During her escape, she accepts a ride from a man whose crude comments and invasive gaze evoke the kind of male entitlement and latent violence that has defined much of her life under Rith's patriarchal control. Though no actual assault occurs, the psychological residue of

systemic oppression surfaces in the form of a vivid, imagined attack. The boundary between real and potential violence becomes thin as Sister narrates:

> Suddenly I saw an image of the man bent over me, his broad white thighs rocking, his hands holding down my arms, smothering my mouth, blind with what he craved and unstoppable. I was not frail, but I would not have been strong enough to stop such a thing. I knew that. (*The Carhullan Army* 24-25)

Sister's fear in the car expresses how systemic oppression materializes within the body as both memory and anticipatory fear. Judith Butler's critique in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) approaches the body in a similar manner as she presents the body something that is formed by linguistic and social forces. Butler challenges the notion of the body as purely passive, affirming its relational and dynamic nature stating that the body is moulded through "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (*Bodies That Matter* 2). Grosz expands on this view, emphasizing the dynamic and active nature of embodiment. She argues that "modes of self-production and self-observation… entwine us in various networks of power," but they do not render individuals "merely passive and compliant" (*Volatile Bodies* 144). Foucault's conceptualization presents power not as an external constraint imposed on a submissive actor but as a force that generates and constitutes subjects through its embeddedness in relational dynamics. A dynamic understanding contests the conventional division of power into agency and structure, offering a more nuanced model where individuals both participate in and are fashioned by systems of power. The novel engages with this perspective through Sister's reflection: "We've become used to waiting, hoping to be saved, hoping those in charge will reform and reform us. It's the sickness of our breed," illustrating the internalization of power and its capacity to alter individuals' perceptions and actions (*The Carhullan Army* 209). Power is not merely imposed but becomes a material and psychological force shaping the fabric of human experience.

Building on this concept, Amy Allen in *The Power of Feminist Theory* (1999) describes how disciplinary tactics disproportionately impact women, who internalize patriarchal standards and become "self-policing subjects" (50). Within the Carhullan community, discipline is not imposed through authoritarian force but absorbed through the women's own internalized sense of necessity. Many of them arrive at the farm already convinced they need correction:

> There were fewer victims at Carhullan than I had imagined. Often it was the women themselves who had committed a crime or were misfits: they had been violent, outspoken, socially inept…and aware that they needed some kind of system to bring them in to line. They all agreed that Carhullan was the best thing to have happened to them. (*The Carhullan Army* 140)

These norms that discipline that are not patriarchal but as Allen said are self-imposed. Sandra Bartky's critique in *Femininity and Domination* (1990) examines the disciplinary practices that shape women's bodies and behaviours under patriarchal norms. Bartky illustrates how practices such as adornment, posture, and dieting are designed to mould women into more submissive and compliant subjects compared to men, reflecting broader systems of control over the female body. In the Carhullan army, the rigorous physical routines serve a different structure:

> We were woken each day in the black inhospitable dawn by members of the unit shouting at us to get up. We dressed, sleep drugged and assaulted by torchlight… By then the weather was savage. The rain seemed too cold not to freeze but it remained soluble, fat and icy, soaking us to the skin almost every day as we walked. (*The Carhullan Army* 185)

These daily practices echo Bratky's theory of disciplinary shaping, yet here it is not male dominance but nonhuman forces that sculpt body. Rather than diminishing agency, these

ecological pressures foster resilience and solidarity, transforming discipline into a means of collective resistance with the inclusion of nonhuman forces. Extending the discussion beyond anthropocentric perspectives, Jane Bennett's argument in *Vibrant Matter* (2010) where she refers to how "human being and thinghood overlap" supports the idea that bodies are influenced by external forces rather than existing independently (4). Therefore, understanding the role of external forces is essential in examining how bodies exist in continuous interaction with their environments, influenced by the material conditions that define their existence. Bennett rejects the idea that agency is solely a human attribute and proposes that it exists within a network of relationships where human and nonhuman elements influence one another. She argues that objects, landscapes, and biological processes are not inert. Institutional power functions through both explicit control and implicit normalization, which eventually force individuals to be compliant. A similar process is presented in the novel through the government's biopolitical regulations and patriarchal structures that dictate women's bodily autonomy, revealing how oppression can find room to grow through interconnected systems rather than a single authoritative force. Mechanisms such as these do not operate in isolation but get their support through cultural narratives that naturalize subjugation, which frame control over bodies as something both necessary and inevitable.

Throughout history, women and other oppressed groups have been marginalized by various ideologies, often through the appropriation of concepts related to nature. These ideologies have historically framed women as inherently tied to the natural world, portraying them as passive, nurturing, and subordinate by associating them with biological determinism and natural cycles. Such structures have been used to justify their exclusion from public and intellectual spheres, relegating them to roles deemed "natural" for their gender. Similarly, marginalized groups have been othered and dehumanized by being likened to untamed or 'uncivilized' aspects of nature, reinforcing hierarchical

structures of power and control. By positioning nature as inferior and subordinate to human reason and culture, these ideas have perpetuated systems of oppression that intertwine gender, race, and class with environmental exploitation.

Stacy Alaimo in *Bodily Natures* (2010) explores this phenomenon, noting that "[n]ature has long been waged as a philosophical concept" and viewed as a "cultural repository of norms and moralism" used against marginalized communities, including women (4). This demonstrates how the very concept of nature has been used as a weapon to drive female bodies into submission and docility. Women's relationship to nature has historically kept them outside of the realms of agency and reason since women have been described by Western philosophy as being "mired in 'nature' and thus outside the domain of human transcendence" (Alaimo 4-5). Feminist philosophy has made a significant effort to detach women from this connection by affirming women's subjectivity and autonomy and rejecting the idea of docile female bodies. The concept of transcorporeality strengthens this argument, which challenges the notion that the human subject – and especially the female subject – occupies a central position. It confronts the idea that docile female bodies are passive objects by making us think about how people, especially women, are constantly a part of an "active, often unpredictable, material world" (Alaimo 17).

In the novel, Sister's physical engagement with the land at Carhullan shows that unpredictability which was filled with negative assumptions regarding nature: "By the end of the day, after hours spent shovelling the block loamy earth, laying it out, and stacking the already hardened bricks, I felt more satisfied than I could recall feeling before" (*The Carhullan Army* 141). The body of Sister does not dominate or retreat from the environment – it moves with it, learns from it, and derives meaning through that material interaction. The cold and the resistant soil co-produce her sense of self, resulting in the interdependence of human and nonhuman forces. Reminiscent of Alaimo's concept

of transcorporeality, which incites a reconsideration of the human as entwined with nonhuman elements, including animals, ecosystems, and technology and rejects the assumption that the human body is fixed and limited, posthuman feminism affirms interconnectivity, permeability, and fluidity. Posthuman feminism breaks away from the idea of submissive, passive individuals by addressing the materiality of bodies and their surroundings and positioning female bodies as active participants in larger ecological networks. This approach brings together simple dichotomies between human and nonhuman subjects by entangling bodies in a dynamic materiality. The lines separating nature, and the body are blurred by this interconnection.

In *The Carhullan Army*, the interplay between human and nonhuman agency disrupts systems of control and creates pathways for transformation. By presenting female bodies as intrinsically entangled with nonhuman forces and collective action, the novel reframes them not as passive recipients of institutional power but as active participants in reshaping the oppressive structures that seek to define and limit them. The dynamic relationship between nonhuman agency and collective resistance reveals the potential for agency within the very systems designed to enforce docility. According to the theory of transcorporeality, as advanced by Stacy Alaimo, bodies are inextricably linked to the socio-material surroundings in which they exist. Offering a challenge to the deterministic and reductionist viewpoint of the body, transcorporeality provides a more nuanced perspective on the concept of docile bodies by pointing towards the fluidity of female bodies actually through their interconnection with environments, technologies, and socio-cultural structures that encourage resistance rather than passivity.

In the novel, female bodies are portrayed as active participants in their material world rather than inert objects, despite being subjected to disciplinary procedures and technologies. The state's imposition of intrauterine devices (IUDs), a biopolitical measure to control reproduction, symbolizes the reduction of women's bodies to objects of

governance. However, the women at Carhullan actively reject this invasive technology, reclaiming autonomy over their reproductive systems. Their engagement with the land further underscores their material agency, as they sustain themselves through farming, gathering resources, and living in harmony with the natural world. The self-sufficiency contrasts sharply with the industrialized and heavily regulated systems of the urban zones. The physical endurance and labour required to maintain the commune, such as agricultural work and survival tasks, reflect the Carhullan women's embodied resistance and their integral connection to their environment. Their collective preparation for rebellion against the state, through physical training and strategic planning, indicates their transformation into active forces of resistance. Together, these examples illustrate how female bodies in the novel resist objectification, asserting their agency by actively reforming the oppressive socio-material structures that confine them. Alaimo highlights that "nature" is "as close as one's own skin," not just a far-off backdrop (*Bodily Natures* 2). The concept results in the re-evaluation of how female bodies – which are typically seen as submissive – are inextricably connected to and constantly interacting with their surroundings. Thus, it challenges the traditional notion of female bodies as passive, arguing that women are actively engaged with their environment at all times.

The premises of docility and docile female bodies are called into question by posthuman feminist theory, which acknowledges the ambiguous borders that exist between the body and nature. Transcorporeality provides a means to see female bodies as active agents in a greater web of existence, rather than as passive objects influenced by external forces, by reintroducing them as intrinsically linked to the material world. In *The Carhullan Army*, female bodies are framed as deeply interconnected with the environment and nonhuman agency, as seen in the women's reliance on self-sustained farming, their physical endurance within the harsh natural landscape, and their rejection of industrialized systems of control. The interconnection is not only practical but also

psychological and restorative. As one of the Sisters, Shruti says: "There's nothing like this place for rehabilitation…It's working with the land that does it. Getting back to basics. The key to it…was communing with the actual ground and not being divorced from reality any more" (*The Carhullan Army* 140-141). Through their labour and daily routines, the women of the Carhullan engage in a form of material resistance that redefines their bodies as active, resilient participants in an ecological system, which is a stark contrast to being passive recipients of state control. The novel emphasizes how these bodies are transformed through their material entanglement with the natural world, subverting the imposed institutional docility. For example, the protagonist's journey to Carhullan itself symbolizes this transcorporeal shift as she sheds the physical and ideological constraints of her previous life, engaging directly with the untamed wilderness and claiming her place within a collective community that confronts oppressive systems through embodied practices rooted in the land and its resources.

Building on these foundations, Janice Sawicki (1991) offers a critical feminist perspective that interrogates the implications of Foucault's ideas for women's agency. As a prominent scholar of feminist philosophy, Sawicki engages deeply with Foucault's philosophy to examine how discourse and power intersect with gender. In her seminal work *Disciplining Foucault* (1991), she explores whether Foucault's theories provide meaningful opportunities for women to resist patriarchal structures or whether they inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities. According to Sawicki, Foucault brings a new dimension to the understanding of discourse in consideration with the relationship between language and power. For him, discourse offers an arena in which every party can take part and contest for power. Then, for women, there are no assumed barriers for inclusion or for acquisition of power. However, while Foucault's concept of power theoretically democratizes the arena of discourse, Sawicki critiques its limitations, arguing that structural inequalities and historical exclusions continue to hinder women's

full participation in these power dynamics. Despite these critiques, Foucault's redefinition of power as relational and historically contingent provides a useful method for understanding the dynamics of oppression and resistance in *The Carhullan Army*. His views on discipline highlight how institutions impact subjects drastically through surveillance, normalization and control. However, transcorporeality extends beyond Foucault's model by insisting on the materiality of bodies and their entanglement with systems of power. While Foucault remains instrumental for examining how docile bodies are produced, transcorporeality expands this discussion through the revelation that bodies do not merely submit to power but actively engage with their surroundings in ways that generate agency and resistance. And viewed in this light, embracing difference – whether in terms of identity, material conditions, or lived experiences – can disarm the normative power structures that perpetuate female docility. In addition, the novel demonstrates how the materiality of the female body, its difference from patriarchal norms, and its entanglement with collective action and the natural world disrupt the docility imposed by authoritarian systems. By linking Foucault's insights on difference to the novel's portrayal of transcorporeal female bodies, we see how women's identities and materiality become catalysts for subverting power and reimagining agency. One clear expression of this appears in Jackie Nixon's rallying speech, delivered as she prepares the Carhullan women for their final act of resistance – a full assault against the fascist government. As the leader of the Carhullan army, Jackie reframes their embodied experiences not as burdens, but as the foundation of their strength and political purpose:

> You've succeeded where others have failed. We've succeeded here. We've created true liberty…Freedom comes with responsibility; it comes with privilege and a conscience. It comes with difficult choices. We cannot stand by and allow the Authority to do what it is doing any more. We cannot wait for them to come and take apart what we've made. (*The Carhullan Army* 177)

Her words assert a form of agency that emerges not despite their material struggles, but through them – grounded in lived, bodily difference and the collective power it enables. Foucault's views expand the boundaries confining how we understand the source and solution of the problem regarding docile bodies. Firstly, this perspective demolishes the conception that the source of power is somewhere high and unreachable for the individual, thus making it abstract and unsolvable. Secondly, it allows the individual to seek localized help and support in her resistance against oppression. More importantly for this study, this approach directs analytical attention to everyday social occurrences and how various forms of power as Sawicki (1991) states are "exercised at the everyday level of social relations," enabling a more relevant and tangible understanding of the docile body as a material existence within the socio-material world (*Disciplining Foucault* 23). The tangible understanding, then, also breaks the stereotype that individual-level oppressions, limitations, and controls are of no great consequence or relevance in the broader societal picture. Since individuals collectively form society, these microlevel interventions on individual bodies reflect the sum of their overarching impact.

To explore Foucault's and posthuman feminism's relevance to the docile female body, the interplay between sexuality, power, and resistance becomes central. Radical and libertarian feminist theories have long critiqued institutional control over sexuality, emphasizing its role in shaping women's freedom and authority over their own bodies. Institutions determine acceptable and unacceptable sexual practices, thereby regulating individuals through their bodies. However, these feminist views often fail to incorporate the fluidity and multiplicity of sexualities, instead perpetuating humanist tendencies toward binary thinking. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) critiques these binaries by emphasizing that gender is a kind of "imitation" which there is no original, challenging essentialist views of identity (78). By revealing identity as performative and constructed, Butler opens up space for understanding subjectivity as fluid, relational, and moulded

through power. Extending on relationality of subjectivity, Audre Lorde in *Sister Outsider* (1984) argues for the political urgency of embracing difference. Her insistence that "[t]here is no such thing as single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives," draws attention to how race, gender, sexuality, and class must be addressed together, making her work vital to any intersectional approach to resistance (91). Lorde's assertion that struggles are never isolated but rather interwoven reflects the broader material entanglements that alter power dynamics and resistance. In *The Carhullan Army*, Sister's transformation is not a singular rejection of state control but a continuous negotiation of identity within the collective space of Carhullan. The commune itself becomes a site where these complexities unfold, as seen when she begins contributing to its daily routines: "I volunteered to work, and I was placed with a contingent of women shifting and storing peat bricks… It was amazing to me that so much could be culled from our surroundings" (*The Carhullan Army* 136). Her sense of self begins to shift not through grand gestures, but through shared labour and immersion in the material results of communal life. Within the commune, acts of survival, labour, and collective decision-making become integral to dismantling the forces that once constrained her. Rather than a static opposition to authority, resistance take shape through the daily negotiations of power, shared responsibility, and the redefinition of agency beyond individual rebellion.

The Carhullan Army resists this limitation by portraying women with diverse backgrounds and sexual orientations, each wielding impactful agency within the narrative. For example, as Braidotti's argument explained through the concept "embodied subjectivity" in her work *Nomadic Subjects* (1994), the women of Carhullan are depicted as exploring their sexualities, not with superficial or performative intentions, but as free individuals reclaiming their bodies and desires within a liberating community. Sister, the narrator, forms a meaningful and intimate relationship with Shruti, a woman whose tenderness and openness provide a stark contrast to the rigid, controlled environment

Sister fled. The depth of their connection emerges quietly in a moment of vulnerability and care: “I had calmed her down after the fight, holding her head against my chest, stroking her hair and trying to ease the images out of her head… She leaned over and brushed my cheek with her lips” (*The Carhullan Army* 162). Intimacy between them is not dramatized but gently woven into their daily lives, offering a form of connection that resists the emotional numbness imposed by authoritarian rule. Their connection transcends the boundaries of individual bodies, becoming a form of transcorporeal healing where their shared vulnerability and strength flow between them. It can be understood through this type of bond that their bodies are not isolated but interconnected within the broader environment of Carhullan, which itself fosters resilience and empowerment.

Similarly, Jackie Nixon, the leader of Carhullan, embodies a transformative and assertive sexuality formed by her past as a soldier and her vision for Carhullan as a radical feminist commune. Jackie’s leadership fosters a sense of collective embodiment, where the women’s physical and emotional connections to one another and to the land become integral to their resistance. Her philosophy is reflected in the way Carhullan is structured as a space of autonomy and physical resilience. As Sister notes upon her arrival:

> She was visibly proud of the place. But I wondered how much she felt she might have failed in her original plan, how much she might have had to compromise. Perhaps she had tried to leave behind her past, as the others had, and found that she could not, that even in this most remote of places she could not escape human conflicts. (*The Carhullan Army* 107)

The tension between Jackie’s idealism and the compromises required for survival highlights the contests of constructing a utopian feminist space. Despite the external pressures and internal conflicts, Carhullan remains a site of embodied resistance, where

the women cultivate strength through shared labour, physical endurance, and emotional solidarity. More than a leader, Jackie becomes a conduit for the women's transformation. The communal environment allows for a renegotiation of identity, as Sister comes to recognize that

> I knew then that I was nothing; that I was void to the core. To get here I had committed a kind of suicide. My old life was over. I was now an unmade person. In the few days that I had been at Carhullan nobody had called me anything other than Sister, though they had seen my identification card and knew my name, and I had shouted out my story over and over from behind the metal walls of the dog box, trying to engage their sympathies, trying to tell them who I was. The person I had once been, the person who had walked out of the safety zones and up the mountain was gone. She was dead. I was alive. But the only heartbeat I had was the pulse these women were beating through me. (*The Carhullan Army* 101)

The erasure of past identity and the forging of a new, collective existence reflect Carhullan's radical embodiment, where transcorporeality reshapes the boundaries between self and collective. Sister's survival is no longer an individual endeavour but a shared act of resistance, in which bodily experience extends beyond personal autonomy and merges with the communal struggle. The physicality of labour, intimacy, and solidarity at Carhullan emphasizes how the women's bodies exist in constant interaction with one another and their environment, further establishing the interconnectedness of flesh, landscape, and political defiance. Jackie's leadership facilitates this transformation, binding the women together not only through ideology but through the corporeal processes of endurance, adaptation, and resistance. As bodies are pushed to their limits and reconstituted within this collective survival, the boundaries between individual and communal identity dissolve.

By framing sexuality as inherently interconnected and influenced by shared experience and environments, the narrative stresses a transcorporeal understanding of healing and liberation, where bodies, emotions, and spaces coalesce into a unified force against oppressive systems. The bonds formed among the women of Carhullan become a symbol of resistance, where love and physical intimacy serve as acts of healing and empowerment rather than compliance with external norms. As Sawicki (1991) states, "[D]ifference can be a resource insofar as it enables us to multiply the sources of resistance to particular forms of domination and to discover distortions in our understandings of each other and the world" (28). Sister's realization in the novel reflects a similar shift in perception, in which the difference becomes a resource that generates new forms of resistance and disrupts dominant structures. Standing before "the gutted church," she experiences "the arrival of a new calmness, an assurance of my own company" (*The Carhullan Army* 47). As she muses, "I was no longer complicit in a wrecked and regulated existence. I was not its sterile subject," a statement which illustrates her rejection of state imposed biopower (*The Carhullan Army* 47). Her defiance reflects Colebrook's argument in *Death of the PostHuman* (2014) that posthumanism challenges human supremacy, proposing a world where "technology, animals, and systems are intertwined" (160). Sister's resistance to this biopolitical technology and biopolitical control exemplifies how transcorporeality redefines the boundaries of agency, while emphasizing interconnectedness over isolation.

3.2. Reproductive Control and Biopolitical Power in Sister's Narrative

The modern society depicted in the text reflects Foucault's interpretation of power as a force that operates through the production of specific forms of knowledge. It suggests that, while physical and tangible interventions are central to the creation of docile bodies, there are also methods aimed at extracting knowledge from these bodies. The novel reflects this dynamic through its narrative structure, which incorporates police notes

obtained via investigative surveillance of Sister. Feminist theories of the body examine how biopower operates to control women's bodies through intersecting discourses and practices. Biopower, unlike more overt authoritarian systems that manifest through violence or obstruction, is a more invasive and effective form of social control that is hard to detect and dismantle. Sawicki divides biopower into two components. The first, disciplinary power, views the body as a machine to be controlled and maximized for productivity. Achieving this requires bodies to be malleable and docile, ensuring their compliance with systemic needs. The second component of biopower, as Foucault outlines, is regulatory power, which extends beyond individual bodies to manage populations. While disciplinary power seeks to maximize the efficiency and compliance of individual bodies, regulatory power focuses on the population as a whole, using mechanisms such as public health policies, demographic regulations, and economic systems to ensure collective stability and productivity. As Foucault (1978) describes, biopolitical mechanisms "serve as the basis of biological processes affecting birth, death, the level of health and longevity," regulating bodies through institutional and societal controls (*The History of Sexuality* 68). By defining bodies in terms of their reproductive capacity, the governing institution assumes a medically interventionist role, exercising control over the most intimate aspects of human life.

In *The Carhullan Army*, this intervention manifests through the compulsory placement and monitoring of intrauterine devices (IUDs) in women's bodies by state-appointed medical teams. The intrusive nature of this practice exemplifies how biopower operates through disciplinary technologies, transforming female bodies into tools for population management. Sister's own experience illustrates the profound violation inherent in these procedures. Recalling the moment of her forced insertion, she states:

> A nurse came in and quickly explained what would happen to us. She held up a model of the device. It was made of copper and was about the size of a

> matchstick. Two threads ran from it. She pointed to these and said they were longer than those of the original coils, so that the vaginal checks we would undergo to see whether they were still in place could be made more easily, and not necessarily at the clinic. I didn't understand what she meant. It was only later I found out the Authority was making random examinations; that women were sometimes asked to display themselves to the monitors in the backs of cruisers. (*The Carhullan Army* 32)

The act of mandatory insertion, described in stark clinical terms, shows the systemic dehumanization of women's bodies under authoritarian rule. The extended threads symbolize not only the physical presence of state intervention but also the lingering sense of surveillance and control. Routine examinations in arbitrary locations, such as the back of Authority cruisers, further strip women of bodily autonomy, reducing them to objects of governance. Through these mechanisms, *The Carhullan Army* critiques the dehumanizing effects of state control, particularly on women's autonomy and agency. Through the eyes of Sister, the protagonist, we see the women rejecting external definitions of their sexuality and instead commanding autonomy over their physical and emotional needs. More than an infringement on reproductive rights, these measures reflect a broader strategy of bodily discipline that reinforces hierarchical power structures. As Sister's testimony expresses, such interventions are neither natural nor benevolent; they operate as tools of oppression that inscribe authority onto the most intimate aspects of life.

For feminist theories, the sexuality of the female body is not confined solely to identity but extends to the ways in which authoritarian systems regulate bodies for their own benefit. Sister's IUD placement is described as an invasive and demeaning experience, as she says: "All I could think about was the doctor who had rubbed cool lubricant inside me, inserting the speculum and attaching the device as efficiently as a

farmer clipping the ear of one of his herd" (*The Carhullan Army* 32). Her body is reduced to a site of regulation, stripped of individual agency and treated as livestock – an asset to be marked, controlled, and monitored. By likening the procedure to the tagging of cattle, Sister's comment points out how biopolitical control operates through depersonalization, transforming reproductive autonomy into a mechanism of state governance. The clinical efficiency of the doctor mirrors the impersonal violence of the system, where bodily interventions are enacted without regard for consent or subjectivity. Similarly, Iris Young's perspective in *Throwing Like a Girl* (1990) reflects this sentiment, noting that such interventions constrain women's bodies, reducing their agency, and "target[ing] the enclosures of women's bodies" (35). In Sister's case, the routine public examinations further reduce her to an object of surveillance, echoing Bartky's (1990) critique that "the tight, disciplinary control of the body has gotten a hold on the mind as well" (*Femininity and Domination* 65). The juxtaposition of Sister's physical suffering and her husband's detached satisfaction with her modified body underscores the gendered imbalance of biopolitical control. While Sister endures the pain and violation of the IUD, her husband perceives her newly modified body as an enhancement, oblivious to her physical and emotional trauma. The patriarchal underpinnings of biopower become clear in how it targets women disproportionately while exempting men from similar interventions. Bartky (1990) talks about this dynamic, warning that "[t]o overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed" (*Femininity and Domination* 65).

Iris Young's (1990) phenomenological engagement with Merleau-Ponty's notion of "lived body" can be used to contextualize the formation of active agency in bodies. In *Throwing Like a Girl,* Young holds light to how bodies are fashioned by their sociocultural environments while maintaining agency. The Carhullan women embody

this concept as they rebel against patriarchal systems and reimagine their identities in a communal setting. As Sister notes, "I liked them, and I liked being with them. There was a camaraderie on the moors and in the dormitories that I had never experienced before. It went beyond tolerance or absence of men. It was the sense of basic usefulness" (*The Carhullan Army* 140). Her recognition of collective purpose mirrors Young's assertion that the "lived body… refuses the distinction between nature and culture," as the women's interactions with the land and each other redefines both their individual identities and strengthen their resistance (*Throwing Like a Girl* 17). The commune's harsh environment and collective work foster a transcorporeal connection between human and nonhuman forces, allowing the women to redefine their physicality and agency. The intersection of transcorporeality and reproduction in the novel highlights the tension between autonomy and control. Young's observation that pregnancy renders fluid the boundary between self and other resonates with Sister's experience under the state's reproductive laws. Sister, the protagonist, reflects, "Since the regulator had been fitted I'd felt a sense of minor but constant embarrassment about myself, debilitation almost, as if the thing were an ugly birthmark" (*The Carhullan Army* 97). This device symbolizes the invasive control of women's bodies, stripping them of autonomy and reducing them to tools of state power. In Carhullan, reproductive control persists under Sister's leadership but serves a different purpose: ensuring the survival and strength of the commune. While still a form of regulation, it reflects the Carhullan women's collective resistance and their effort to prioritize autonomy over submission. Such duality underscores Young's observation that the female body is both a site of alienation and empowerment, constantly negotiating its agency within broader systems of power.

3.3. From Docility to Resistance

The protagonists in *The Carhullan Army* subvert gender norms by developing a personal code of conduct and self-awareness, which allows them to redefine their roles

and identities outside the constraints of patriarchal and authoritarian structures. The personal code of conduct is moulded by their rejection of imposed societal rules, such as the state's reproductive regulations and the expectation to conform to passive, subservient roles. Instead, they create their own principles rooted in autonomy, mutual respect, and collective responsibility. Self-awareness plays a critical role in this process, as it involves a deep understanding of their desires, needs, and the impact of their actions on both themselves, and their community. By reflecting on their oppression and envisioning alternative ways of living, they cultivate an empowered sense of self that resists external control.

At Carhullan, this self-governance is balanced by an acknowledgment that individual autonomy cannot exist in isolation from the material realities of their environment. The women recognize that their survival and harmony depend on respecting the needs of the tangible world, including the land they cultivate, the resources they share, and the communal norms they establish. For instance, their decision to engage in sustainable farming and reject industrialized systems of consumption reflects a commitment to living in harmony with the environment. The community's values take material form in the community's infrastructure and daily practices:

> Within a year of it being inhabited the women had installed a waterwheel, harnessing a nearby spring. A year-round garden had been planted, and a fast-growing willow copse. There were sties, bees, an orchard, and a fishery at the beck shuttle of the tarn… It was, and had always been, removed from the faulted municipal world. (*The Carhullan Army* 59)

Likewise, their collective approach to governance – built on solidarity and shared responsibility – demonstrates how their personal codes of conduct are integrated into a broader structure of communal ethics. By honouring the self-imposed norms that enable

both individual freedom and collective well-being, the women of Carhullan embody a model of resistance that challenges traditional gender norms while remaining deeply attuned to the socio-material interconnections that sustain them.

Since Sister's initial struggle and trauma is caused by the system of government she was living under, there could be a tendency to generalize this as the radical feminists' identification of "patriarchy as the origin of all forms of oppression" (Sawicki 19). However, this generalization does not work for the novel either, since Sister has a twist within the novel. The name Sister, at first glance, reflects the unity but also the loss of individuality within cult-like groups, however in the organisation of the Carhullan army itself, there is a clear indication that each Sister is quite different from one another. Therefore, the army does not reflect the sentiments of the radical feminist theories. In *The Carhullan Army*, this recognition of difference becomes a critical tool for resistance, as the individuality of each Sister strengthens the army's collective agency rather than undermining it. The novel thereby reconceptualizes feminist solidarity as a balance between unity and diversity, demonstrating that recognizing and embracing differences can strengthen collective action rather undermining cohesion.

Looking at individual cases of resistance, it becomes clear that these acts can reflect the larger dynamics of collective action. Through the lens of transcorporeality, the resistance of the docile female body is not merely an abstract opposition to power but a materially entangled phenomenon that arises from the body's interactions with its socio-material environment. For instance, within the oppressive domestic sphere, Sister's initial resistance is localized, focused on the immediate power her husband exerts over her. Here, her body's agency is limited by the constraints of the home, yet even in this space, her acts of defiance – whether subtle or overt – confront the disciplinary forces acting upon her. Her carefully rehearsed escape demonstrates this quiet resistance, as she recalls:

> In the early morning I left our bed without waking Andrew and dressed quietly in the communal bathroom… I had trained myself to wake early and had practiced this departure…He would never have let me go off with a packed bag, out of the official zones, even though we were at odds now, hateful or silent towards each other. (*The Carhullan Army* 10)

Even while embedded in the domestic sphere and monitored by both her husband and the state, Sister's body becomes the site of covert preparation and resistance. Sawicki's (1991) interpretation of Foucault's views on struggle reflects this dynamic. She notes that "[s]ince struggle is continual and the idea of a power-free society is an abstraction, those who struggle must never grow complacent" (27-28). In Sister's case, this translates into a constant vigilance against the forces seeking to render her body docile. Her resistance is not a singular act but an ongoing negotiation of her agency within a system that perpetually encroaches upon it.

In *The Carhullan Army*, the narrative allows us to see how Sister's body, far from being a passive recipient of oppressive power, transforms into an agent of resistance as it interacts with varying power structures and environments. Resistance, according to this view, emerges from the very material and social entanglements that constitute power relations. For instance, in the government-controlled housing system, Sister is subjected to invasive forms of biopolitical control, including the mandatory insertion of IUDs to regulate reproductions. Despite these oppressive forces, Sister's departure to Carhullan marks a critical turning point both physically and psychologically. In the novel, Sister's individual docile body does not simply resist power in isolation but engages with her material surroundings – both human and nonhuman – to redefine her agency. The docility comes in many forms, as Sister's daily routine reveals through the pervasive surveillance of cameras and guards monitoring the area, alongside the unsettling implication that neighbours and even family members may serve as informants for the authorities. The

unrelenting scrutiny creates an environment where individuals are compelled to internalize the rules and restrictions imposed upon them, leaving no option to defy or escape the premises. Such conditions exemplify how docility is not merely enforced externally but cultivated internally through a system designed to produce compliance. Docility, in this context, is a deliberate effect of disciplinary power, which seeks to render bodies malleable and obedient to systemic demands. As Foucault observes, this process transforms bodies into tools of productivity and order, stripping them of autonomy while reinforcing their role within larger social and political structures. In *The Carhullan Army*, the rigid structures of the government-controlled housing system reveal how individual privacy and freedom are systematically eroded. Sister's experience demonstrates the material and psychological dimensions of docility, as her body becomes a site of tension between imposed control and emerging resistance. Because at Carhullan, Sister's body becomes entangled with her environment and the collective resistance of the women who inhabit the commune. In one scene, she participates in the rigorous physical training led by Jackie Nixon, the group's leader, showing that her body can be reconditioned for empowerment: "It was here in the blue fells that I first knew I was strong, and that I had it in me to be stronger" (*The Carhullan Army* 47). Reclamation of her body, which is achieved and advanced through its material entanglements with Carhullan's rugged landscape and communal ethos, illustrates the transcorporeal dynamics of resistance. Her body, once passive under state control, now becomes a conduit for resilience, formed by and contributing to the collective strength of Carhullan.

The technological interventions described in the novel also serve as instruments of disciplinary power. As Foucault explains, "[d]iscipline dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns into an aptitude, a capacity, which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection" (182). The state's use of IUDs to control

reproduction and its periodic checkups to monitor women's bodies exemplify its attempt to assert dominance and claim ownership. Such measures reduce women to docile subjects, undermining their bodily autonomy. Yet, within these oppressive structures, the novel presents moments where transcorporeal resistance emerges. As Sister reflects, "By the end of the three weeks I was carrying half my own weight, and I had begun to realize what a matchless device the human body was" (*The Carhullan Army* 144). Her realization signifies her growing recognition of her body's agency and resilience, challenging the constraints imposed by biopower. Sister's physical endurance and adaptation to the wilderness underscore the material entanglements of her body with its surroundings, drawing attention to the transcorporeal dynamics that enable resistance.

Sister's decision to leave her husband and reject state regulations marks a critical departure from docility. Such acts of resistance affirm Butler's (1990) assertion that the body, though altered by external forces, possesses the capacity to oppose them. Sister's acknowledgment of this internalized dynamic signals her growing awareness of the systems that govern her body and identity, underscoring the relational nature of power and agency. The impact of such conditioning is evident in Sister's reflections on her community's rigid adherence to Authority rule. As Sister observes:

> For years I had not been out of Rith. No civilian had, unless they were being transported to a detention centre. The zones did not allow for transference. The original register bound people to their areas at the time of the collapse. Only government agents and the Authority has any need to travel, or the means to do it, and then it was usually by train. (*The Carhullan Army* 11)

The restriction of movement reflects a broader mechanism of control, in which individuals internalize their confinement as an unquestioned reality. By tying citizens to designated zones, the state transforms geographical limitations into a form of

psychological regulation. The fear of punishment ensures compliance, eroding the very notion of autonomy. Further, Sister's departure disrupts the patterns of submission that define life under the Authority. Her rejection of assigned identity is apparent in her words:

> My name is Sister. This is the name that was given to me three years ago. It is what others called me. It is what I call myself. Before that, my name was unimportant. I can't remember it being used. I will not answer to it now, or hear myself say it out loud. I will not sign to acknowledge it. It is gone. You will call me Sister. I was the last woman to go looking for Carhullan. (*The Carhullan Army* 8)

Renaming herself represents more than a personal reinvention; it signifies a refusal to be bound by the identity assigned to her within the Authority's system. By severing ties with her former name, she actively rejects the structures that sought to define her. The entrenchment of state control within daily life shows how oppression operates not only through direct enforcement but also through self-surveillance. Sister's escape from Rith is not just a flight from external restrictions but a confrontation with the internalized forces that have shaped her existence. Her journey toward Carhullan is, therefore, both a physical and ideological act of resistance – one that destabilizes the notion that subjugation is inevitable.

The atmosphere of confinement and control is intensified by the physical environment, from the cramped, monotonous housing structures to the pervasive presence of guards. Sister's reflections on these surroundings indicate her growing resistance to internalized compliance, as she begins to question the normalization of such conditions: "I was tied to this building. He knew it, and I knew it. There were no other options for us" (*The Carhullan Army* 12). Sister's resistance to this internalized dynamic grows more evident through her interactions with others and therefore, she attempts to escape her jail,

and, on her way to escape she constantly reminds herself: “I made myself not turn around. I told myself the best way for me to keep going was to give my eyes one simple option – forward” (*The Carhullan Army* 12). Sister’s resistance becomes a transcorporeal act as she reclaims her autonomy through her connection with her immediate environment. Her observations of the natural world beyond the confines of the Authority’s control, even in fleeting moments, suggest an alternative mode of existence where bodies and spaces are interconnected and not solely defined by biopolitical constraints. As she begins to reshape her identity and agency, her body shifts from a site of control to one of defiance and liberation. Reflecting on her evolving identity, Sister states, “I liked what I saw in the clouded mirror and I was shocked by it. She was a stranger to me, this woman opposite, and yet I saw the truth of her” (*The Carhullan Army* 218). Sister’s recognition of her transformed body signifies a break from docility, where her identity is no longer confined by external structures but redefined through her agency and relationality. Her agency emerges as she begins to see her body not as an object moulded solely by external control but as an active participant in forming her own identity. Sister shares this intimate moment with the mirror, reflecting her reclaiming autonomy, where her body becomes a source of strength and resilience rather than compliance. The shock she feels is not rooted in fear but in the realization that she has redefined herself on her terms, detached from the Authority’s expectations. Her body, scarred and strengthened by her journey, becomes a testimony to her resistance and growth. Relationality plays a key role in this transformation, as Sister’s identity is forged not in isolation but through her connections with the women of Carhullan. Their shared labour, collective resistance, and mutual care serve as the foundation for Sister’s evolving self-perception. In this space, relationality transcends mere interaction, becoming a dynamic force where the strength of community enhances individual agency.

The tension between these external forces remains central to Sister's transformation, indicating how her body and identity evolve through continuous interaction with her surroundings. After joining the Carhullan rebellion, Sister reflects, saying, "On my birthday, as I undressed beside the copper tub, I looked in the mirror and saw the change in my body, the metamorphosis that had occurred" (*The Carhullan Army* 217). Her transformation is both physical and psychological, signifying a shift from a life of submission to one of agency and resistance. A metamorphosis like this involves overcoming the regimented existence imposed by the state and growing stronger, more independent, and more aware of her physicality. The demanding life in Carhullan redefines discipline as self-imposed and communal, intended for survival and rebellion, rather than the external control of a totalitarian regime. Judith Butler's critique of traditional gender constructs in *Gender Trouble* (1990) further illuminates the transformations seen in the novel. Butler contests the division between the female body and liberty, pointing to Beauvoir's assertion that the body "ought to be the situation and instrumentality of women's freedom, not a defining and limiting essence" (16). In *The Carhullan Army*, the women reclaim their bodies not as passive sites of control but as instruments of resistance and transformation, redefining agency through physical endurance, communal solidarity, and their connection to the natural world. Sister's arrival at Carhullan marks a definitive break from her former existence, signifying not only physical escape but also a deeper transformation in how she inhabits her own body. Sister reflects, "The person who had ventured up the mountain and out of the safety zones was gone. She was dead. I was alive" (*The Carhullan Army* 101). Her words capture the dissolution of her past self, one conditioned by state oppression, and the emergence of a new identity. The Carhullan women's rejection of gendered expectations and their transformation into active agents of resistance affirm the novel's exploration of

transcorporeality, where bodies are intertwined with material and social forces rather than being passive entities.

3.4. Individual and Collective Agency: Sister vs The Carhullan Army

The socialization of women and how their interactions with particular groups and settings mould and/or reinforce specific expectations for their appearance and behaviour, all based on the conventional gender roles and norms that prioritize the subjugation of the female body, are examined by both transcorporeality and posthuman feminist theories. In *The Carhullan Army*, the authoritarian regime enforces oppressive biopolitical controls that impose conventional gender roles and norms, reducing women to passive objects of governance. The imposition of intrauterine devices (IUDs) symbolizes the state's effort to control women's reproductive capacities, reinforcing their role as biological vessels rather than autonomous individuals. Women in the urban zones are confined to domestic and industrial labour, reinforcing patriarchal expectations that tie their value to caregiving and productivity under strict supervision. The strict gender norms imposed by the state stand in stark contrast to the commune at Carhullan, where women reject these imposed roles and construct alternative ways of being. By living communally, engaging in physical labour, and fostering self-sufficiency, the women at Carhullan subvert traditional notions of femininity, asserting their agency and autonomy. Transcorporeality and posthuman feminism, therefore, contest these norms by reframing female bodies as dynamic participants in their material and social environments, rather than as passive recipients of institutional control. The novel brings forward the unique struggles, perspectives, and contributions of each woman by portraying individuality within the collective. The narrative offers a more nuanced vision of solidarity, which accommodates diversity rather than erasing it, and stands in contrast to essentialist models often critiqued by contemporary feminist theorists.

Foucault's (1978) assertion that "where there is power, there is a resistance" reflects the transcorporeal perspective, which situates resistance within, rather than outside, systems of power. At Carhullan, the dynamic shifts as power structures are reconfigured, and Sister's resistance evolves into a collective struggle. In a community where power structures are reconfigured, Sister's resistance takes on a collective dimension. After Jackie's death, Sister steps into a leadership role, taking command of the resistance and guiding it into open confrontation with the state. Her transformation from solitary dissenter to revolutionary leader is solidified when she declares:

> We took the town and held it for fifty-three days… We executed those monitors that were captured, and three doctors from the hospital, and we destroyed all official records for the Northern territories… My name is Sister. I am second in council to the Carhullan Army. I do not recognise the jurisdiction of this government. (*The Carhullan Army* 221)

The transcorporeal nature of her body, now enmeshed in a network of other bodies, resources, and shared goals, becomes a catalyst for organised defiance against the state. The transformation of resistance from individual to collective mirrors the relational transformations of power. Her resistance is not framed as universal or detached but as deeply contextual, fashioned by her material conditions and the socio-political networks she inhabits. Sister's individuality, as well as her interactions with others in the Carhullan army, depicts the transformative potential of difference material specificity.

The close analysis of resistance, particularly in the context of power transforming into force, expresses a multitude of strategies that contribute to resisting oppression. While subjectivity is often dismissed in scientific disciplines for its inability to provide reliable, replicable results, Foucault stresses the significant role it plays in shaping knowledge and resistance. Such "popular" or "regional" knowledge, while often

overlooked, holds value because it provides contextual insights into individual and collective acts of resistance. From a feminist perspective, these disqualified forms of knowledge offer a critical resource for understanding resistance movements. Transcorporeality and posthuman feminism converge on the idea that differences – whether material, social, or experiential – are not liabilities but sources of strength and agency. Foucault's discourse similarly rejects universalism, recognizing the significance of material and relational specificities of resistance, which resonates with the posthuman feminist focus on embodied subjectivity.

In *The Carhullan Army*, the British government exemplifies this embodied subjectivity through the creation of living conditions designed to optimise labour while suppressing individuality and agency. Residents are forced into communal housing near factories, monitored by cameras, guards, and even their own neighbours, who act as informants. Rith's structure mirrors Foucault's concept of panopticon, where the constant possibility of observation compels individuals to self-regulate their behaviour. Communal living in Rith remains vividly horrifying for Sister as she recalls "[t]he bacterial smell of the refinery and fuel plants began to disperse at night… and all of us packed tightly together like fish in a smoking shed" (*The Carhullan Army* 8). Within this microcosm, bodies are subjected to constant surveillance and denied the freedom to leave or resist. Sister's daily life reflects the dehumanizing effects of this system, where her body is expected to conform to strict rules under the guise of societal order. The emotional and physical toll of such control was not unique to Sister as she states, "Life changed in every way and it was difficult to adjust. There was despondency and resentment, food shortages, humiliations" (34). Examining Sister's lived experiences through the lenses of Foucault's and Butler demonstrates how *The Carhullan Army* depicts power as something inscribed onto bodies, yet also negotiated and resisted through the very structures that seek to control it. *The Carhullan Army* presents a compelling critique of how power operates

through and within bodies, interrogating the materiality of power and its relationship to the docile female body. It situates power as a force not only exerted externally but also internalized through repetitive acts that alter physicality and identity. Sister's eventual escape and participation in the radical community of Carhullan display how resistance evolves from these initial recognitions of agency.

3.5. Nonhuman Agency and Environmental Resistance at Carhullan

Karen Barad's concept of material agency in her seminal work *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) underscores the active role of nonhuman forces in forming reality, asserting that "[r]eality is not a fixed essence" but "an ongoing dynamic of intra-activity," where phenomena are "specific material configurations of the world" (206). Barad further demonstrates that humans, like other parts of nature, "are of the world, not in the world, and surely not outside of it looking in" (206). Alaimo expands on this idea, stating that the "existence of anything – any creature, ecosystem, climatological pattern, ocean current – cannot be taken for granted as simply existing out there (*Bodily Natures* 21). Karen Barad's concept of intra-activity emphasizes that the human and nonhuman worlds are not separate entities but deeply intertwined, shaping and being moulded by one another. The material world is not a passive backdrop to human action but as an active participant in the socio-material configurations that define existence. Similarly, theorists like Donna Haraway and Jane Bennett explore the vitality and agency of the nonhuman, underscoring the equal participation of both human and nonhuman forces in shaping reality. Haraway's notion of "companion species" and Bennett's concept of "vibrant matter" both put forward the idea that nonhuman entities possess their own forms of agency, challenging traditional anthropocentric views. Barad's assertion that humans and nonhuman materiality are co-constitutive and entangled in the ongoing becoming of the world is quite relevant with these views in question. Together, they blur the conventional

divisions between human and nonhuman subjects, offering a more integrated view of material agency that is critical to understanding how docility is constructed and resisted.

In *The Carhullan Army*, docility and passivity can be reimagined through a compelling exploration of transcorporeality and material agency. The novel reveals how female bodies, in conjunction with the nonhuman material world, can resist and subvert disciplinary systems through collective action and self-discipline. The protagonists' engagement with the land, their reclamation of autonomy, and their creation of communal practices rooted in both human and nonhuman agency demonstrate the transformative potential of material entanglements. By integrating feminist theories and a recognition of the vitality of the material world, Hall redefines the boundaries of agency and underscores the dynamic interplay between human and nonhuman forces.

As discussed, transcorporeality reveals that the body is not isolated but deeply enmeshed within networks of human and nonhuman forces, making resistance a response formed by the body's relational entanglements. Rather than being a fixed act, resistance emerges through the body's shifting interactions with its surroundings. Sister's defiance is not a singular moment but an evolving process, shaped by the material conditions of her existence and her growing awareness of the power structures that seek to contain her. Sawicki (1991) expands on this dynamic, stating, "When restraining forces are overcome, power relations collapse into force relations. The limits of power have been reached" (25). Sister's trajectory demonstrates how her physical escape from Authority control gradually transforms into an assertion of force, dismantling the structures that once governed her. In the novel, this collapse occurs as the women of Carhullan, through their material and social connections, escalate their resistance from survival to rebellion. Sister's final testimony before her arrest captures the culmination of this transformation: "This is my statement. Let is serve as a confession if one is still required. I was a willing participant in the siege on Rith, and the occupation of Authority headquarters" (*The Carhullan Army*

221). Their shared struggles and mutual reliance forge a network of material and social bonds, enabling them to channel individual grievances into collective action. The relational dynamic in posthuman feminism emphasizes this type of interconnectedness, challenging the anthropocentric logic that isolates bodies.

Barad's (2007) concept of materiality suggests that "[a]ll bodies, not merely 'human' bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity" (152). Barad's notion of "intra-activity," wherein bodies are co-constituted through their interactions, closely connects to transcorporeality's focus on the permeable and interconnected nature of bodies within broader networks of human and nonhuman forces. In the novel, the women's bodies are not only moulded by the oppressive state but are also profoundly influenced by the natural environment of their rural commune. The landscape and its raw, untamed forces serve as catalysts for their physical and emotional transformation. Barad's assertion that "materiality is an active factor in processes of materialization," where nature and culture mutually shape one another," emphasizes how the women's resistance is intertwined with their engagement with the land (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 183). The connection is vividly portrayed when Sister reflects on her experience living in Carhullan: "There was a purity to the existence, a basic sense of solvency, that the country had long since discredited… After so many months of tin openers and foil packaging, reconstituted food and dependence on the foreign shipments, this was as honest and raw as I could get" (*The Carhullan Army* 111). Here, Sister's rejection of industrialized systems and her immersion in a more organic lifestyle demonstrate how her body begins to transcend its previously docile state. The "rawness" of her surroundings, including the labour-intensive tasks of farming, foraging, and cooking from unprocessed ingredients, allows her to reconnect with the materiality of her environment. Entanglements between her body and the unmediated forces of nature – soil, plants, weather, and physical exertion – demonstrate the transformative potential of

engaging directly with the environment, reforming her identity, and reclaiming her agency. Resistance is not an isolated act; it stems from a collective intra-activity between the women and the land, illustrating transcorporeality's potential to disrupt oppressive socio-material structures. The potential lies in the mutual transformation that occurs when human bodies and the nonhuman environment interact in meaningful ways, creating conditions that challenge systems of control. In *The Carhullan Army*, the women's physical engagement with the land – tilling soil, building infrastructure, and foraging for sustenance – not only fosters their survival but also reinforces their autonomy and solidarity. The nonhuman agency of the environment becomes a critical factor in the women's resistance, as the land itself provides the resources, challenges, and space that enable their independence. For example, the harsh terrain surrounding Carhullan acts as both a barrier against external surveillance and a medium through which the women forge their resilience. Sister looks towards the commune during her ascent on the hill and places her hopes on to it:

> It was only when I heard dogs barking in the distance, and I looked up…Against the dull brown massif it looked like the last place on earth, defended and extraordinary, an outpost where all hopes and energies, all physical means, had been consolidated and fortified. (*The Carhullan Army* 69)

The intra-activity blurs the boundaries between human and nonhuman agency, as the environment is not merely a backdrop but a participant in shaping the conditions of resistance. In Sister's case it fashions her hopes and dreams that promise her a better future. As Barad states, "materiality is not a fixed essence; it is a doing – a congealing of agency" (183). The land itself becomes an active participant in their rebellion, enabling them to develop strength and resilience needed to resist the state's control.

Haraway's notion of care as a counterpoint to thoughtlessness connects to the Carhullan women's rejection of imposed docility. Haraway in *Staying with The Trouble* (2016) warns against a disconnection from the world, writing, "There was no way the world would become… a 'matter of care" (36). In contrast, the Carhullan women forge a society rooted in collective care and shared resistance. Jackie Nixon, the leader of the commune, symbolizes this ethos, described as a figure who "stayed up on the tops with [the sheep] for months, like a shepherd" (*The Carhullan Army* 104). Her leadership indicates the transformative potential of rejecting hierarchical power dynamics in favour of a relational approach to agency. The rural landscape, untamed and raw, becomes an integral force in reshaping the women's bodies, breaking the constraints of societal docility. The land, weather, and ecological systems play a crucial role in the physical and emotional transformation of the women, revealing transcorporeality as an ongoing exchange between human and nonhuman forces. The natural environment, while offering freedom from governmental oppression, also tests the women's endurance, reinforcing their interconnectedness with the material world. In the novel, for instance, when Benna loses her life attempting to cross a treacherous river, Jackie Nixon reacts, "This is what it looks like to be nothing. Don't fucking forget it" (*The Carhullan Army* 195). The Carhullan women, especially in moments of extreme vulnerability, mirror his observation as they struggle against unseen, oppressive forces.

3.6. The Material Body of Sisters

The docile bodies in *The Carhullan Army* are transcorporeal in a number of ways in relation to their entanglement with nonhuman agency, ecological systems, and collective resistance. As stated before, the concept that bodies are material and immersed in larger socio-material environments forms the basis of the transcorporeality theory. The female body in *The Carhullan Army* is not a passive object, even though it is exposed to a variety of disciplinary methods and technology. They actively interact with and are

formed by the material environment, both as individuals and as collective groups. The Carhullan army presents an alternative conception of disciplined bodies that is predicated on the connectivity between bodies, objects, and environments, while institutions intend to isolate and alienate female bodies through the disciplining of the docile body. In contrast, the model challenges the elevation of authoritarian figures that undermine the autonomy and individuality of female bodies, bringing out unique qualities within individuals while at the same time respecting the material world's needs.

According to Foucault, human relationships are in constant flux, and this instability creates a ripple effect that influences allegiances and coalitions. Such ripple effect underscores his theory of "resistance subjectivity." He emphasizes that these subjectivities include forms of knowledge or experience that "have been disqualified as inadequate to their task, or insufficiently elaborated" (Sawicki 26). Sawicki identifies their importance for feminism, stating that "feminism can mobilize individuals from diverse sites in the social field and thereby use differences as a resource" (26). With docile female bodies in mind, this concept relates specifically to Sister in *The Carhullan Army*. Her discomfort stems from the understanding that even superficial interventions – such as communal living arrangement – demand significant sacrifices of physicality and agency. While such arrangements under the authority functioned as tools of control and surveillance, at Carhullan they are reconfigured as part of a collective ethos. Still, the adjustment is not without tension, as Sister states:

> It was odd at first, so many women sleeping in the same room, but I was used to hearing close-by neighbours, and in a way I was glad there now no walls to separate me from my fellow humans… I could hear two women together, moving under the sheets, whispering, and I listened until they were finished. It made me feel both lonely and reassured. (*The Carhullan Army* 135)

Her physical discomfort and sense of exposure are not just reactions to her immediate surroundings but reflections of the broader socio-material systems that seek to discipline and confine her body. Regardless of the initial discomfort, her final reassurance shows the even in a space of relative autonomy, the body remains sensitively attuned to its environment, negotiating intimacy, vulnerability, and selfhood.

By acknowledging the materiality of bodies and their interconnectedness with nonhuman forces, posthuman feminism provides a lens for analysing how resistance operates within and across diverse contexts. Transcorporeality further enriches this analysis by situating her resistance within the entanglement of her body, the natural environment, and the oppressive systems she seeks to escape. The novel demonstrates how resistance is not only a produce of individual will but also of the body's relational dynamics with its environment and the social structures surrounding it. The interplay demonstrates the value of regional, situated knowledges and the dynamic connections between material agency and feminist resistance. From a posthuman feminist perspective, power, technology, and the female body are deeply entangled. Rather than accepting the anthropocentric and patriarchal logic that casts women's bodies as passive and controllable, posthuman feminism foregrounds the transcorporeal nature of the docile female body, wherein the body is not isolated but enmeshed in socio-material networks that include medical technologies, government systems, and cultural expectations. Networks mould the body's capacity for resistance and agency. Sister's resistance begins as an embodied rejection of the invasive procedures forced upon her, as she acknowledges: "What choice did I have? … It's the law. I was surrounded by the system, and … they have these places where those who refuse are sent" (*The Carhullan Army* 125). Her realization demonstrates how resistance emerges from the oppressive constraints of her socio-material environment. Sister's experience also engages with Hartsock's feminist materialism in "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for

a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism" (1998), which brings attention to the interconnectedness of bodies within social and environmental contexts. Hartsock argues that "[w]omen as mothers even more than as workers are institutionally involved in processes of change and growth and more than workers must understand the importance of avoiding excessive control in order to help others grow" (294). A similar perspective appears in Jackie Nixon's leadership at Carhullan, where she fosters a community that prioritizes growth and shared responsibility over rigid hierarchies. For instance, Jackie's approach to leadership is both authoritative and nurturing, as she encourages the women to contribute to the commune through collective labour while also allowing them the space to develop their individual strengths. Sister observes this behaviour when she sees how Jackie refrains from micromanaging every task, instead trusting the women to take initiative in areas such as food preparation, defence planning, and resource allocation. A balance between guidance and autonomy mirrors Hartsock's emphasis on avoiding excessive control to facilitate growth. Sister herself experiences this in training sessions, where Jackie pushes her to develop physically and mentally, yet ultimately leaves the responsibility for progress in her own hands. By creating an environment that values mutual support and individual agency, Jackie embodies the feminist materialist idea of interconnectedness, where personal and collective growth are inseparable.

The Carhullan community serves as an expression of transcorporeal resistance, as Sister's initial struggle with communal living gradually gives way to a sense of empowerment found through collective action. The first sparks of having hope on her escape to the Carhullan testifies the interdependence and hope she attested to the community. She describes how "[i]t was hope that nourished me day after day, in a way the imported canned food never would," expressing the material and emotional interdependence of the women in Carhullan (*The Carhullan Army* 18). The women's shared labour and rejection of hierarchical systems redefine their identities and resist the

patriarchal structures that once confined them. Foucault's ideas on power's immanence also inform Butler's theory of gender performativity as she argues that "there might be a 'truth' of sex… produced precisely regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms" (*Gender Trouble* 23). Butler's argument exposes how social systems influence the physical characteristics of sexed bodies and gender identities, demonstrating the interplay between material and discursive forces. Jackie's statement draws attention to how women's bodies are simultaneously sites of control and resistance, manipulated by societal structures yet capable of asserting agency. Barad further explores Butler's concept of the "constitutive outside," which examines how external forces influence agency and materialize the body. Barad (2007) critiques the ambiguity in Butler's theory, noting that it leaves open questions about how "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" fully accounts for the material reality of bodies (65). The tension between discursive and material forces is vividly illustrated in Sister's transformation. Her participation in the collective physical training at Carhullan symbolizes a material redefinition of her body, with the sessions strengthening her physically while reconnecting her with her agency, ultimately prompting her to view her body as an instrument of both personal and collective resistance.

The women of Carhullan do not exist as detached entities observing the world; rather, they are enmeshed in a process of intra-activity that fuels their collective defiance. Their symbiotic relationship with the environment challenges traditional notions of docility, showing how the entanglement of human and nonhuman forces can catalyse transformation and resistance. Haraway's critique of bureaucratic complicity, exemplified through her engagement with Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), expresses how the erosion of critical thought sustains systems of power. Haraway writes, "Function mattered, duty mattered, but the world did not matter," critiquing

Eichmann's detachment from the moral consequences of his actions. In *The Carhullan Army*, thoughtlessness finds resonance in the oppressive systems of the dystopian government, where the reduction of individuals to docile bodies perpetuates systemic violence. Hall's portrayal of Sister's transformation within the Carhullan commune complicates Haraway's warnings about docility. Unlike bureaucratic compliance criticized by Haraway, the women of Carhullan actively resist their reduction to tools of an oppressive regime. Sister's integration into this collective reveals the transcorporeal dynamics of resistance. For example, as Sister adjusts to her new life in the Carhullan, she observes: "I felt myself again, a self I had not been for so long. I remembered how I had experienced the same feeling in this place when I was young, when I had been here walking, before the restrictions" (37). Her reflection connects her current sense of renewal to her earlier experiences of freedom in the same environment. Remembering how she once moved freely in the countryside contrasts sharply with the controlled and oppressive conditions she endured under the Authority. The physical act of being in an unrestricted natural space rekindles both emotional and physical autonomy, reminding her of a time when her identity was not defined by external control.

The novel further exposes the nonhuman agency embedded in the transcorporeal body by illustrating how human bodies are formed and influenced by their interactions with nonhuman elements such as the land, animals, and the material conditions of survival. In Carhullan, the women's physical and emotional transformations are deeply tied to the environment they inhabit and the resources they engage with. Colebrook's (2014) analysis of birds as assemblages of expressive materials indicates that agency extends beyond human intention and exists within the materiality of life itself. She writes, "The bird is only able to move and self-organize because there are expressive matters that enable processes of assembling" (184). Nonhuman elements functions as active participants in shaping agency, a concept central to *The Carhullan Army*. In one of the

rigorous training sessions at Carhullan, Sister writes about her close encounter with the nonhuman:

> Now I stumbled across its gills and over its marshland, bending to meet the wind when it roared against me, and dragging myself up the scars by handfuls of heather and thorn bushes, by any firm hold…If the mountains tested my limits, they also gave me satisfaction, they were the measure by which I gauged my resilience. (*The Carhullan Army* 187)

Mountains are no longer a distant element of nature for Sister. She willingly reaches out and sweats on it, uses it as a measure for her strength. Unlike the anthropocentric view, Sister considers the mountain as the higher body, setting a standard that humans should strive to live up to and determine whether they survived or not. Jane Bennett's (2010) theory of vibrant matter adds another layer to this exploration of nonhuman agency. She writes, "assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements," where human and nonhuman entities collaboratively shape agency (23-24). The women's bodies in *The Carhullan Army* exemplify this assemblage. Their physical strength and collective resistance are not products of isolated human will but emerge from their entanglement with the land, the harsh climate, and even the tools they wield.

Interactions with the environment reveal how nonhuman elements actively influence the women's capacity for resistance, dissolving the boundaries between human autonomy and nonhuman agency. The novel's portrayal of Jackie Nixon further illustrates this dynamic. Her scarred and weathered becomes a symbol of posthuman resilience, moulded not by societal expectations but by her entanglement with the unforgiving environment. As Colebrook (2014) notes, "material expressions… seize on forces that they manage to assemble" (94). Jackie's body and leadership encapsulate this assemblage, demonstrating how nonhuman forces, from the rugged terrain to the tools of

survival, contribute to her agency and that of her community. The transcorporeal perspective presents the female body as a dynamic participant in a network of human and nonhuman interactions, resisting docility through its entanglement with the material world.

3.7. Nourishment as Transcorporeal Resistance

In *The Carhullan Army,* food serves not only as sustenance but as a symbol of the deep interconnection between human and nonhuman forces, reflecting the concept of transcorporeality. Eating, as Karen Barad (2007) suggests, becomes "a series of mutual transformations" where the boundaries between inside and outside blur, drawing attention to the entanglements of bodies with their environments (49). In the novel, the women's reliance on self-sufficient foods – grains, root vegetables, and foraged flora they cultivate and gather – signals their deep material connection with the land that sustains them. Nourishing their bodies through these resources strengthens their collective resolve to resist the oppressive society beyond their rural enclave. Moving from industrialized, state-controlled food to homegrown meals transforms eating into an assertion of autonomy. The women's connection to the land and their self-reliance stresses their resistance to state control, initiating a profound transformation in their relationship with their bodies. Engaging directly with the natural terrain of Carhullan – harvesting wild plants, navigating the rugged landscape for survival, and utilizing the land's natural defences – they shift from being passive recipients of biopolitical control to active participants in a symbiotic relationship with their environment. The relationship between food and resistance extends to the communal preparation of meals. The women often cook hearty stews made from the vegetables they grow, using the act of cooking to deepen their bond with the land and each other. By consuming what they cultivate, the women attune their bodies with the rhythms of the land, reclaiming agency in ways that contest both the industrial food systems and patriarchal control over female bodies.

The idea of food as a material bridge between human and nonhuman worlds is further supported by Jane Bennett's (2010) concept of "entelechial vitality," which demonstrates the interconnectedness of all living matter" (83). The women's resistance draws on this vitality, as their reliance on the land reflects an understanding of the shared life force between human and nonhuman entities. The women of Carhullan, by engaging with the land in this matter, resist the commodification of food imposed by the state, reclaiming their autonomy through this transcorporeal interaction. The material interaction between the women and their environment challenges hierarchical systems that have historically subjugated female bodies. By subsisting on food they cultivate, the women reclaim the very act of nourishment as a means of empowerment. Sister and the women of Carhullan demonstrate that food is more than sustenance; it is a site of resistance, transformation, and agency. By cultivating their connection to the land and embracing their shared materiality, they reject the state's control and redefine the boundaries of their autonomy. The transcorporeal dynamic not only nourishes their bodies but also reinforces the role of nonhuman forces – such as the land, weather, and resources – in forming their transformation. The transcorporeality of the Carhullan women's bodies operates as a mechanism for converting institutionalized docility into active agency, as their physical engagement with the nonhuman environment allows them to resist and reshape oppressive socio-material structures. The land itself becomes an agent of change, providing the women with both sustenance and the conditions for their collective resilience, demonstrating how the interplay between human and nonhuman forces can disrupt systems of control and create spaces for empowerment.

Accordingly, the representation of transcorporeality in *The Carhullan Army* underscores posthuman feminist arguments by ensuring equal agency and relationality between female bodies and the material world. Through a variety of acts of resistance, group activities, and activism, the characters collectively oppose and undermine

disciplinary systems. For instance, the women of Carhullan reject the state's biopolitical control, most notably the mandated use of IUDs, by physically removing these devices from their bodies. Removing these state-imposed controls becomes a direct act of resistance, symbolizing their refusal to let the government define and regulate their reproductive roles. Asserting autonomy over their physical and material selves, they reclaim their bodies from oppressive forces. Similarly, their reliance on sustainable farming sand self-sufficiency demonstrates an intentional departure from industrialized systems, connecting their bodies directly to the land as a source of strength and survival.

Through acts of self-discipline and group solidarity, the dynamic connection between the material world and the female body maintains their agency and strength to fight institutionalized docility. The women's physical labour, such as cultivating the land, maintaining the commune, and training for rebellion, shows their material engagement with their environment, turning their bodies into instruments of resistance rather than sites of control. Sister's transformation is not only symbolic but deeply material, as her body adapts to the challenges of survival and the demands of life in the commune. Collective action also plays a critical role in supporting this transcorporeal agency. The women of Carhullan engage in communal activities such as strategic planning, physical training, and the sharing of resources, fostering a sense of solidarity that strengthens their resistance against the oppressive regime. Acts of resistance and unity are not merely ideological but rather they are embodied practices that blur the boundaries between individual agency and collective power, affirming the interconnectedness of their bodies with each other and with the material world. Together, they show how transcorporeality functions as a mechanism for female bodies to resist and reshape the socio-material systems that confine them.

The potential for unintended consequences is another reason for Foucault's rejection of universal commentaries on resistance and its outcomes. Refusing the

universality of power relations and forms of oppression helps prevent oversights when identifying threats and responding appropriately. For Sister, this means recognizing that the communal housing system, though superficially tolerable to some, was a direct affront to her bodily autonomy and privacy. While her neighbour's wife conceded to the lack of privacy in the communal showers, she found solace in the illusion of control within their private unit and possessions. Sister, however, rejected this system entirely, perceiving it as an immediate and ongoing invasion of her physical and personal boundaries as a woman. Sister's resistance, therefore, arises not from abstract ideals but from the material realities of her body's exposure and the societal expectations imposed on her. The contrast shows Sister's heightened awareness of how the system requires women to concede bodily autonomy under the guise of practicality. Each concession, no matter how minor it appears, reinforces the broader systems of control over docile female bodies, prompting her to resist through both actions and words. Sister's actions demonstrate how transcorporeality and the material entanglements of her body with her environment mould her resistance.

The Carhullan army's alternative system of organisation further shows the transcorporeal dynamics of power and resistance. While Sister initially struggles with the communal structure and the loss of individual freedom, she gradually recognizes the potential of collective action in reshaping oppressive socio-material structures. Through shared labour, collective decision-making, and a rejection of hierarchical power dynamics, the women of Carhullan create a model of resistance that intertwines their bodies, their environment, and their collective agency. The environment becomes an active participant in their resistance, forming their strength and resilience while being cultivated and redefined by their efforts. Hartsock (1998) talks about a similar formation of reciprocal relationship where he states that "a feminist standpoint may be present on the basis of the common threads of female experience, but it is neither self-evidence nor

obvious" (303). In *The Carhullan Army*, the women's shared experiences of oppression under the Authority provide the foundation for their collective resistance. However, their feminist standpoint is not a given – it must be actively constructed through their interactions, labour, and struggles. For instance, Jackie Nixon's leadership, while empowering, also brings tension, as her authoritarian style occasionally conflicts with the women's desire for collective decision-making. The feminist standpoint in Carhullan is neither monolithic nor automatically unified; it requires negotiation, adaptation, and continuous engagement. Moreover, the women's diverse backgrounds and personal histories demonstrate how their collective identity emerges not from identical experiences but from the process of weaving together their individual stories in a shared vision of resistance. Their feminist standpoint is thus not static but evolves as the women navigate the complexities of survival and solidarity in Carhullan.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1995), Michel Foucault examines how power is exercised through the regulation and control of physical activities, arguing that "discipline increases the forces of the body… while turning it into a relation of strict subjection" (138). Institutions use discipline to both enhance bodily capabilities and enforce obedience, reflecting the dual role of power in shaping the body's materiality and agency. As Karen Barad expands in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), "it is through the repetition of specified bodily acts that bodies are reworked, and that power takes hold of the body" (63). Power is not merely an external force, but something profoundly ingrained into the fabric of physical existence through repeated acts. Jackie Nixon reflects a similar understanding when she declares, "It's still all about body and sexuality for us. We are controlled through those things; psychologically, financially, eternally" (*The Carhullan Army* 55). The relational forces at play enable Sister's transformation from a subject of docility into an agent of resistance, as her transcorporeality – fashioned through her

entanglement with both human and nonhuman forces – functions as a mechanism for transforming institutionalized docility into active agency.

Hall's portrayal of Sister's physical and psychological evolution amplifies the potential for bodies to resist and reshape oppressive systems, offering a vision of feminist resistance grounded in the material and transcorporeal realities of the docile female body. The chapter has explored how Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* encapsulates the transformation of docile female bodies through transcorporeality and posthuman feminism. Central to this transformation is the idea that bodies are not isolated, static entities but are continuously moulded and altered by their interactions with material, social, and environmental forces. A dynamic approach contests the traditional constructs of docility and gender, fortifying the potential for bodies to resist and redefine oppressive socio-material structures. Her physical and psychological metamorphosis reflects the novel's commitment to portraying the body as a site of resistance. The women of Carhullan redefine the boundaries of their bodies, not through passive acceptance but through active engagement with their environment and each other. Their resistance to the state's invasive control over their reproductive and physical lives prove how transcorporeality can disrupt power structures and create spaces for liberation. Moreover, the novel situates this transformation within a broader critique of patriarchal and authoritarian systems. It critiques the ways in which women's bodies are commodified and controlled while simultaneously celebrating the potential for bodies to reclaim autonomy. The potential in question is rooted in the women's connection to the land, their shared labour, and their communal values, drawing attention to the interplay between human and nonhuman forces in the creation of agency. Engaging with posthuman feminist perspectives, *The Carhullan Army* invites a reimagining of the female body as transcorporeal, intertwined with the material world and capable of transcending traditional gender binaries. The women's resistance demonstrates that agency is not a

singular, internal quality but an emergent property of bodies enmeshed in networks of material and social relations. Moving from docility to agency exemplifies the transformative potential of transcorporeality, offering a vision of feminist resistance that is both radical and deeply rooted in the material realities of women's lives.

Ultimately, the novel asserts that reclaiming agency is not just an act of resistance but also an act of creation. It forces readers to envision a world where bodies – human and nonhuman – are recognized for their interconnectedness and potential to reshape oppressive systems. Through its narrative of bodily and ideological transformation, *The Carhullan Army* provides a powerful critique of institutionalized docility and an inspiring vision of transcorporeal empowerment. Ultimately, *The Carhullan Army* offers a powerful critique of the socio-material structures that oppress women while envisioning the transformative potential of collective action and transcorporeality.

CHAPTER IV

ALL THE MURMURING BONES AND TRANSCORPOREALITY OF THE MONSTROUS BODY

Angela G. Slatter, an Australian author renowned for her Gothic and speculative fiction, has garnered widespread recognition for her richly atmospheric narrative and her innovative reimaging of myths and folklore. With works like *Sourdough and Other Stories* (2010), *Of Sorrow and Such* (2015), and *All the Murmuring Bones* (2021), Slatter has established herself as a leading voice in the genre, celebrated for her ability to weave macabre, feminist critique, and mythological inspiration into compelling narratives (Warner 312; Crump). Slatter's *All the Murmuring Bones* exemplifies her signature style of blending the fantastical with the eerie, a feature often attributed to her background in folklore and Gothic storytelling. Her *All the Murmuring Bones* weaves a narrative steeped in gothic themes, familial legacy, and monstrous femininity. The novel follows Miren O'Malley, the last scion of a once-powerful family whose fortunes were tied to a dark pact with supernatural beings including selkies, merfolk, the undead, and Miren's own monstrous body. Given Miren's monstrous body, this chapter seeks to examine specifically the connections between monstrosity, abjection, and grotesque in the context of transcorporeality. Specifically, it explores the ways in which the transcorporeality of the monstrous female body – far from serving as a mere symbol of horror – destabilizes patriarchal norms and facilitates agency across human and nonhuman worlds. Feminist and posthumanist theories, particularly those of Alaimo, Butler, and Grosz, provide critical insights into the novel's themes, emphasizing the importance of fluidity, hybridity, and transgression in resisting oppressive systems. In *All the Murmuring Bones,* Miren's body, anchored by ancestral ties to the mythical sea creatures, embodies transcorporeality that serves as both a means of survival and a form of subversion,

enabling her to navigate between human and nonhuman realms, and redefine established power, gender, and inheritance structures.

The monstrous and grotesque female body has long held a central place in feminist literary imagination. From Medusa to the witches of early modern literature to postmodern reimaginings of monstrosity, feminist scholars have reclaimed these figures as subversive and generative rather than purely terrifying. As Mary Russo notes in *The Female Grotesque* (1995), the grotesque body disrupts the closed, classical ideal of femininity, exposing its fluid, excessive, and boundary-crossing nature (8-9). In this tradition, the monstrous female figure is not simply a deviation from normativity but a challenge to the boundaries that define normativity itself – bodily, moral, and social. Miren emerges in this lineage not as a fixed symbol of otherness, but as a dynamic figure whose monstrosity is fundamentally relational and ecological. Drawing inspiration from Irish myths and legends, the novel explores the legacy of the O'Malley family, bound by a supernatural pact with the mer people. That bond surfaces not just in family history but in the stories passed down through generations – dark tales written in a black-covered ancestral book that Miren's grandmother, Aoife, reads aloud. In one of the stories talks about a mother quietly sending her children to the sea to fulfil the family's ancient debt: "There was nothing to be done about it: the tithe had to be paid whether they wished it or no… The creature's arms were scaled… their reach was long as it grasped Connor and drew him in… echoed with Connor's last noises" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 30). Slatter's nuanced portrayal of Miren, a fiercely independent protagonist, and her connection to the monstrous feminine has earned praise for its "intensely feminist" themes and Gothic undertones (*Reader Voracious*). As Mogsy in *The Bibliosanctum* (2021) notes, the interwoven family fairy tales enrich the novel's world-building, offering "backstory to the world" while deepening the reader's understanding of its central conflicts (Mogsy). Slatter's storytelling is characterized by what Brigitte Herron (2021) describes as a

"hauntingly beautiful tale about a woman out to get everything she's owed," particularly emphasizing her ability to balance folklore with realism (Herron). The cinematic quality of her writing has been compared to the structure of fairy tales, where omissions, repetitions, and time skips serve to immerse the reader in the text's Gothic sensibility. Such narrative approach, combined with her atmospheric prose, contributes to what Tammy Sparks (2021) describes as "a dark and dreary Gothic setting that reflects both physical and emotional decay" (*Books, Bones & Buffy*). The monstrous female body, as this chapter analyses, adds an extra dimension to the gothic feel of the narrative, while offering a fluid site that critiques power dynamics. Gothic theory's focus on the body as a site of transgression is reconfigured in the monstrous female form, whose transcorporeality – rooted in ancestral ties to supernatural liminal beings called the mer people and expressed through its fluid capacity to traverse human and nonhuman boundaries – is unveiled in the novel through narrative portrayals of bodily transformation and resistance that undermine patriarchal power dynamics and conventional representations of femininity.

The monstrous female body, as this chapter analyses, adds an extra dimension to the Gothic feel of the narrative, while offering a fluid site that critiques power dynamics. Gothic theory's focus on the body as a site of transgression is reconfigured through the monstrous female form, whose transcorporeality – rooted in ancestral ties to supernatural, liminal beings like the mer people and expressed through her fluid ability to traverse human and nonhuman boundaries – manifests in the novel through narrative portrayals of bodily transformation, haunting, and resistance. Ecological aspects are deeply intertwined with these narrative portrayals as the monstrous feminine blurs the lines between body and environment. Narrative strategies of bodily transformation and liminality undermine patriarchal power dynamics and confront conventional representations of femininity, but also call attention to the exploitation and

marginalization of the natural world. The grotesque body, then, functions not as a site of degradation but as one of possibility: a mutable, open body engaged with the material world in ways that emphasize permeability, connection, and non-normative agency. The monstrous female body has long been a site of fear and fascination, occupying a liminal space that challenges societal norms. As Rosi Braidotti notes in *Nomadic Subjects* (1994), "[t]he body, or the embodiment, of the subject is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological" (4). The monstrous female body embodies this transgressive quality, rejecting fixed definitions and existing within a space of continuous transformation and resistance. Braidotti presents the notion of "nomadic shifts" as "a creative sort of becoming," focusing on the fluid and transformative aspects of femininity and its resistance to fixed structures of identity (6). Like Braidotti's emphasis on instability and becoming, Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, as discussed in *Powers of Horror* (1980), examines the disruption of identity and societal order, describing that "what disturbs identity, system, [and] order" exposes the fragility beneath cultural boundaries (4). Miren embodies aspects of the abject, but her role extends beyond Kristeva's concept of abjection. While she unsettles societal norms and defies patriarchal constraints, she does not exist solely as an object of horror or revulsion. Instead, her transcorporeality position her as a figure of both disruption and agency:

> "But you didn't eat me even though I slept."
>
> "You would not…agree with my digestion, salt daughter."
>
> "Why do you call me that?" My hand goes to the silver bell beneath the collar at my throat. He cannot see it, but the creature nods towards my fingers as if he knows what they seek. "Not entirely human, are you? I can sense it in your veins"

> "Of course I'm human!" It was foolish to speak so loudly; now he knows I'm suddenly uncertain.
>
> "What do you know of my blood?" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 143)

The creature's identification of Miren as a "salt daughter" in the exchange marks her as neither fully human nor entirely other, but as a hybrid entity. Hybridity, rather than signifying deficiency, emerges as a form of strength – stressing the transcorporeal nature of Miren's being, a leaky identity formed by water inheritance, ancestral memory, and environmental entanglement. The kelpie's recognition of something in her blood marks Miren as a figure who does not fit neatly into human or nonhuman categories. Reminiscent of Kristeva's (1980) theory that the abject forces one to confront an unsettling instability within the self, Miren's confrontation with her true nature destabilizes her own certainty about her own identity. Although at times Miren is attempted to be cast or annihilated, she manages to redefine her own position that is outside of the O'Malley lineage. Rather than fully submitting to the expectations and burdens of her bloodline, she begins to imagine a life beyond its constraints: "And there is, I must admit, the thought singing at the back of my mind that there is only Aoife now, and when she is gone I might leave Hob's Hallow and all the obligations of this place and the O'Malley name behind me" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 21). Her abjection, then, thanks to her transcorporeal connection with the sea, is not merely a marker of exclusion but a catalyst for transformation. Within a transcorporeal perspective, abjection becomes not an endpoint, but a generative state through which identity is reconstituted in relation to both material environments and nonhuman agents.

Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* (1994) stresses the dynamic nature of bodies, as Grosz argues, "bodies are not inert; they function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, [and] unpredictable" (282). Miren's

refusal to conform to the constraints imposed by her family, her defiance of arranged marriage, and her eventual rejection of the O'Malley legacy exemplify the unpredictability Grosz associates with bodies, as they challenge societal expectations and patriarchal control. Her bodily existence remains entangled with the sea, reinforcing her transcorporeal nature and positioning her as both part of and apart from the O'Malley lineage. As Miren reflects:

> Even away from the sea, Isolde was an O'Malley, there was salt in her veins just as there is in mine. The sea mourns when we die, we female O'Malleys, for whatever reason. Perhaps because we produce the children, the tithe we feed to the waters. Perhaps that's why we are a loss. And all the waters in the world are joined. (*All the Murmuring Bones* 221-222)

The sea's act of "mourning" for them suggests that their bodies are not only subjected to patriarchal control but also hold significance beyond human structures, embedded within a supernatural ecological system. However, Miren's rejection of her family's expectations disrupts this cycle of sacrifice, refusing to remain confined within the role assigned to her.

Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993) examines how patriarchal structures like those construct the female body as a site of fear and disruption, particularly due to its perceived uncontrollability, its ties to nature and its resistance to domestication. The concept of the monstrous feminine as a threat to social order stems from its refusal to adhere to bodily containment and cultural expectations. Creed argues that "all human societies have a conception of the monstrous feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, and abject" (26-27). In transcorporeal terms, this horror emerges from the body's porousness – its open borders, its refusal to remain enclosed or isolated from the world. Miren's sea-bound, salt-infused lineage is precisely what marks

her body as abject and uncontrollable. Creed's exploration of the monstrous feminine signals how cultural norms construct fear around behaviours and identities that diverge from the expected. O'Malleys' depiction shows a similar pattern:

> There was something not quite right with the O'Malleys: they didn't fear like others of their ilk. They, perhaps, put their faith elsewhere. Some said the O'Malleys had too much saltwater in their veins to be good and god-fearing, or good anything else for that matter. (*All the Murmuring Bones* 13)

Their estrangement from conventional religiosity and gender norms mirrors the Gothic and feminist tradition of monstrous women who resist assimilation into dominant moral orders. The metaphor of "saltwater in their veins" works both symbolically and materially, stressing their transcorporeal entanglement with the sea and suggesting a deep bodily divergence from societal norms. Creed explains that "[t]he phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity," which further shows how Miren's identity challenges cultural stereotypes (33). Cultural fear surrounding the monstrous is precisely what transcorporeality helps reinterpret: instead of viewing monstrosity as mere deviation, it recognizes in its leaky, boundary-blurring nature a model of interdependence and dynamic agency. As a figure both feared and empowered by her entanglement with nonhuman worlds, Miren exemplifies how monstrosity, when read through a transcorporeal lens, offers an alternative to narratives of containment. She embodies the grotesque in the Bakhtinian sense – open, hybrid, and always becoming – yet also radically placed in material relations with both human and nonhuman subjects. Her monstrosity thus becomes a site of ecological and feminist resistance.

Donna Haraway's assertion in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991) that "[n]ature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the source for appropriation or

incorporation by the other" delineates the fluid boundaries of embodied identities (151). While the cyborg image may seem superfluous for Miren, the focus on a dissolving dichotomy between the natural and the constructed is central to understanding her corporeality. In feminist theory, the monstrous body – often associated with excess, permeability, and hybridity – has long served as a symbol through which women's lived experiences are represented outside traditional binaries. The monstrous body, as theorised in feminist literary imagination, resists containment and exposes the artificiality of imposed boundaries between self/other, inside/outside, human/nonhuman. Miren's corporeality reflects the condition of flux emphasized by Haraway's cyborg metaphor – an identity not rooted solely in biology or culture but emerges through multiple entangled influences. In her introspection, Miren notes about this sense of becoming:

> Though I've always hated to swim in it, I miss the stinging smell of the saltwater every day; it runs in my veins and will ever do so. Where I am, it is. Here, however, I am becoming a different thing: an Elliott with all the potential that offers, leaving behind the O'Malleys and their burdens – or at least until my mother returns. (*All the Murmuring Bones* 222)

Miren's words display an acute awareness of her evolving state, where inherited legacies and emergent identities cross paths. Through her dilemma, it becomes clear that just like Haraway's theory of the cyborg, Miren's identity is not fixed but subject to ongoing reconfiguration. Her subjectivity emerges from both ancestral legacy and present agency, blending familial trauma with self-making. While Miren does not represent a literal cyborg, the transcorporeal nature of her body – as something hybrid, mutable, and connected to broader material forces – places her within the lineage of feminist posthuman embodiments that destabilize gendered, anthropocentric, and binary models of being.

In *All the Murmuring Bones*, Miren's physicality is marked by vivid signs of transformation and ancestral legacy, creating a body that both fascinates and unsettles:

> I take off the corset an examine the impressions the whalebone has made on my torso, I dip my fingers into the furrows in the flesh, then move them until they find the scar just above my right hip (there are other scars but I don't touch them, don't seek them out). Raised, still pinkish despite the years. A brand, really, though the finer details have been lost in the healing: a Janus-faced mermaid with two tails. (*All the Murmuring Bones* 37-38)

Miren's brand is not merely a mark of past pain; it is a tangible inscription of her transcorporeality, one that merges human frailty with an almost mythic marine essence. Like the grotesque body theorised by Bakhtin – open, marked, and always becoming – her body bears visible signs of transparency and liminality. Her scar, her saltwater veins, and her resistance to containment through corsets and domesticity all mark her body as a threshold. Equally, her persistent lament about the stinging saltwater that courses through her veins reaffirms a connection to the supernatural pact of her lineage, but also to an ecological embeddedness that defies easy categorization. Her lineage ties her to the O'Malley family's dark pact with the mer people, situating her body as a site of both power and oppression. When Miren comes face to face with the mer-queen, the depth of that ancestral bond pulses through her body: "And in that broad circle of liquid, the mer-queen, coiled in a space not quite big enough for her; and the brand on my hip burns as if the hot iron has only just been applied to my skin" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 257). The burning brand signifies how Miren's body is not merely marked by this legacy but actively responds to it. It is a visceral reminder of the enduring hold of the O'Malley pact and the inescapable entanglement of her identity with the supernatural forces that have formed her lineage. Through these layered inscriptions – biological, cultural, mythological – Miren's body becomes more than a container of identity. It becomes an

active, transcorporeal surface where competing forces leave their mark. Her struggles dramatize the friction between individual agency and systemic control, echoing feminist critiques of how female bodies are regulated, inscribed, and disciplined. In that respect, Slatter's portrayal of Miren configures the monstrous female body not simply as grotesque spectacle, but as a radical figure of challenge. As Haraway, Grosz, Kristeva, and Creed each explore in different ways, the monstrous is not only a site of transgression but also of new meaning-making. In *All the Murmuring Bones*, monstrosity is therefore not a punishment but a potential – a fluid condition that allows Miren to move across ontological boundaries, reimagine kinship, and resist inherited violence. Through the lenses of feminist and posthumanist theories, this chapter contextualizes the transcorporeality of the monstrous female body as a subversive force, one that speaks not to exclusion alone but to transformation, ecological awareness, and the reclamation of agency.

The novel begins with the O'Malley family's decline, their wealth and influence eroded by years of failed sacrifices to the mer people – a pact that once ensured their prosperity. Miren, the protagonist, is introduced as both a victim and a rebel within this cursed lineage. She navigates the complexities of her heritage, marked by the family's pact, which demands the sacrifice of a child in each generation. The arrangement places Miren in a position of resistance, embodying the monstrous female body's duality of power and subjugation. One of the central themes in the novel is the legacy of the O'Malley family and its connection to the supernatural. The duality mirrors Miren's internal struggle as she tries to make sense of her identity and agency. Miren's journey is punctuated by encounters with key characters who shape her understanding of autonomy and transcorporeality. Yri, a mysterious figure connected to the natural and supernatural realms, represents an alternative path for Miren. His presence challenges her perceptions of identity and highlights the fluidity of the monstrous feminine. Isolde, Miren's mother,

emerges as a pivotal figure despite her absence. Her defiance of O'Malley traditions and her connection to the sea symbolize the transcorporeal essence of the monstrous feminine. Miren's grandmother Aoife's dominance within the family and her unyielding determination to uphold the pact demonstrate the societal policing of female bodies and their transgressive potential.

The sea, as discussed below, serves as a recurring motif throughout the novel, symbolizing both freedom and constraint. Its association with the O'Malley lineage reinforces the theme of transcorporeality, where the boundaries between human and nonhuman dissolve. Miren's connection to the sea mirrors her struggle to reconcile her autonomy with her inherited responsibilities. Through its intricate narrative and complex characters, the novel examines the intersections of monstrous femininity, family legacy, and transcorporeality. Miren's journey disrupts traditional approaches to identity, agency, and corporeality, presenting the female body as both a battleground for control and a space of transformation. Rather than existing within rigid boundaries, her body becomes a shifting site where inherited burdens, supernatural ties, and personal defiance converge, redefining power and resistance.

4.1. The Monstrous Female Body as a Subversive Force

The monstrous feminine emerges as a transformative force in *All the Murmuring Bones* functioning as a site of subversion that confronts patriarchal control and disrupts societal norms. Feminist theory has long interrogated the boundaries of the female body by conceptualizing it as a constantly changing terrain rather than a static container of identity. In this context, transcorporeality captures the view that the body extends beyond the strictly human by incorporating natural, cultural, and mythological dimensions. Such a reconceptualization destabilizes established categories and renders what was once a symbol of vulnerability into a potent resource for resistance. Central to this discussion is

Barbara Creed's analysis in *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993), which asserts that "[t]he image of woman as castrator takes at least three forms: woman as the deadly femme castratrice, the castrating mother, and vagina dentata" (48). Creed's observation encapsulates the deep-seated patriarchal anxiety regarding female power - a fear that manifests in myths designed to confine and control. These very myths, however, are subverted in the novel by a female body that refuses to remain static. Miren's body, imbued with an ancestral connection to supernatural beings such as selkies, merfolk, and other liminal creatures, defies conventional limits. Ever since her escape from Hob's Hallow, the merfolk pursued her relentlessly, drawn not only to her bloodline but to something in her very being that resists containment. Their presence is undeniable as they appear before her, unbound by distance:

> Three heads, large; pale skin with a greenish tinge; gills that I can see in the necks even from this distance; and tails that flip and splash and slap. The mer, grinning at me and hissing. No song this time. No need… 'They followed me from Breakwater,' I confess. 'They want no one but me.' (*All the Murmuring Bones* 212)

It is through this connection that her corporeality becomes transcorporeal, a dynamic site where the curse of her lineage transforms into an instrument of defiance and empowerment. Embodied in the physicality of the monstrous female body, Miren disrupts conventional feminine aesthetics through both inherited marks and a deliberate renegotiation of gender norms. Amid the measured solemnity of the funeral procession at Hob's Hallow, Miren's gesture becomes an act of both personal and subversive assertion. As the family moves toward the crypt, where even the smallest defiance carries weight, Miren deliberately adjusts her cap to obscure her features: "I pull Malachi's cap down over my forehead so my face is shadowed, square my shoulders and push into the group, pressing against the flow. I'm taller than most of them; I make a point to walk like a man,

lay claim to all beneath my feet as if it's my right" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 122). Here, her stance is not merely a posture but a conscious, even aggressive, reclaiming of space that defies traditional expectations of delicacy and passivity. Her physical assertion is layered with the weight of her lineage – a body touched by supernatural legacies and bound to the dark pact of the O'Malleys. In the body of Miren, the corporeal becomes transcorporeal: her visible, self-fashioned defiance transforms inherited vulnerability into a potent symbol of power and resistance. Miren's transformation exemplifies transcorporeality as her body evolves into a dynamic site where inherited curse and the promise of renewal coexist. The marks she carries are more than remnants of a cursed lineage, representing both the weight of the past and the potential for change. Her transcorporeality is unique because it presents the body as a constantly transforming terrain – an active site where transformation and resistance occur rather than a static marker of oppression. Similarly, Creed (1993) states that the grotesque nature of the monstrous feminine "unsettles, disturbs, and questions dominant ideological structures" (*The Monstrous-Feminine* 15). The novel reveals an unsettling duality in the O'Malley family's legacy, which operates simultaneously as a mechanism of oppression and a source of strength. Their dominion over Miren is symbolized by the pact with the mer people – a mythical connection that shows the dynamics of patriarchal control. Miren's rejection of these demands demonstrates her resistance against the constraints imposed upon her, as she says, "I would hate to think that I needed to report these matters to either the Church or the authorities" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 101).

Traditional mythic narratives concerning the female body further elucidate the stakes of this subversion. The myth of vagina dentata, for example, has long circulated as a warning that frames female sexuality as both inherently dangerous and uncontrollable. Yet, within the novel, Miren's evolving body, marked by scars, the taste of saltwater in her veins embodies the possibility of liberation. Her transcorporeal state destabilizes the

very fears encapsulated in the myth of vagina dentata – transforming what might be read as a symbol of inherent danger into a dynamic resource for redefining identity and reclaiming power. Transcorporeality redefines the body as an ever-shifting terrain – a space where the physical self is continually remade by both cultural impositions and its own intrinsic fluidity, rather than a static container of identity. Traditional feminist perspectives often regard bodily autonomy as a stable asset that must be defended or secured, while transcorporeality views the body as dynamic and continuously evolving entity. Furthermore, transcorporeality recognizes that the body itself, with all its scars and transformations, is a site of ongoing negotiation and resistance.

Psychologist and feminist scholar Jane Ussher, in *Managing the Monstrous Feminine* (2006), examines how female bodies – particularly the reproductive and sexual – are frequently depicted as sources of danger, pollution, or horror in cultural narratives. She notes that such representations "transform dread of the vagina into myth" and serve to sustain patriarchal anxieties about female power (1). In *All the Murmuring Bones*, Miren's ties to her family's supernatural legacy embody these cultural fears, yet her physical experience offers a unique counter-narrative. For instance, when Miren recalls, "For a moment I'm unsure, then I remember their laughing faces as I huddled in the rowboat," her vulnerability is laid bare – but it is precisely in this moment of uncertainty that her body's capacity for transformation and defiance is revealed (*All the Murmuring Bones* 63). Her monstrous body bridges the gap between the cultural dread of the dangerous, transgressive female and the possibility of liberation, turning what was once a mark of abjection into an active site of self-redefinition and empowerment. Mary Douglas's exploration of purity and danger provides another layer to this analysis in relation to how societal fears of contamination are projected onto the female body. In *Purity and Danger* (2002), Douglas writes that "[d]irt is essential disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder" (2). She shows how ideas

of impurity arise from cultural efforts to impose structure and meaning. As Douglas later writes, "The idea of dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death" (5). The monstrous feminine distorts societal norms of purity and containment, existing at the margins of societal order. In the context of the novel, Miren's monstrous femininity operates at the margins of order. Her body, which refuses to conform to rigid dichotomies, embodies the possibility of transformation – a terrain where the interplay of order and chaos offers opportunities for renegotiation of identity.

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection further contextualizes these fears, tying them to existential anxieties about identity and order. In *Powers of Horror* (1980) Kristeva notes that "[t]he abject confronts us… with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal" (12). Cultural narratives surrounding the monstrous feminine often dwell on the unstable boundaries between human and nonhuman, turning these liminal spaces into sites of fear and fascination. Margrit Shildrick's *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* (1997) similarly examines the disruption of binary dichotomies, stating, "The fragmentation must usually be associated with postmodernism and feared for its destructive potential is to be celebrated… for the refusal to exclude the complication of fluid boundaries" (216). Shildrick further contends that "[i]n evading the risk of moving from the deconstruction of the binary to a re-enacted gender indifference, what is being (re)claimed is not a homogenous category of women, but rather a multiplicity of fluid positions linked only by the in-common experience of a specific body form" (9).

In Slatter's novel, Miren's connection to the mer people symbolizes this permeability of boundaries, challenging the rigid distinctions between human and nonhuman, autonomy and control. After the arrival to the village where her parents once escaped to build a new life together, she notices a statue of a mermaid in the centre of a fountain pool. The contrast between this harmless, decorative figure and the mer she has

encountered firsthand expose the violent, untamed reality that lies beneath romanticized depictions of mythic creatures:

> I stare at the thing. It's an idealised version to be sure, pretty and sweet, nothing like the creatures who pulled me into Breakwater Harbour, with their teeth and talons, sharp fins on lashing tails, gashes of gills and scaly skin. This lovely thing was sculpted by someone who's never actually seen the truth of a mer. (*All the Murmuring Bones* 184)

The scary truth of Miren's life juxtaposes the vagina dentata myth that was originally thought to be used for belittling women. As can be seen in the vagina dentata myth, hybridity of Miren also encapsulates this destabilization, portraying female sexuality as both threatening and uncontrollable. Jane Ussher's (2006) analysis emphasizes that such myths are not merely cautionary tales but mechanisms of control, positioning the female body as "an enemy to be contained and controlled" (*Managing the Monstrous Feminine* preface). Cultural anxiety is illustrated in the novel through the haunting descriptions of Hob's Head: "See this house perched not so far from the granite cliffs of Hob's Head? Not so far from the promontory where once a church was built?" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 11). The setting itself becomes a metaphor for the precarious balance between power and fear, and it captures the tension inherent in the monstrous feminine.

The merging of nature with the bodily experiences defines the transcorporeal aspects of Miren's journey, where her autonomy is intertwined with her family's supernatural legacy. Haraway's statement that "Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other" resonates with Miren's rejection of the patriarchal and anthropocentric systems that seek to confine her. In embracing transcorporeality, the monstrous feminine – as in the example of Miren – transcends fixed identities, transforming the body's inherent mutability into a potent

resource. The ever-shifting nature of the body allows it to elude categorizations. Reconceptualization, which takes place thanks to the embracing of transcorporeality of the female body, opens up new avenues for self-determination and empowerment.

The narrative's spatiality further reinforces these themes. The setting of Hob's Head is invoked in a query that stresses the precariousness of established order. The landscape, imbued with echoes of ritual and memory, mirrors the internal turbulence and transformative potential at the heart of Miren's journey. The very ground upon which the narrative unfolds becomes a metaphor for the shifting boundaries between control and liberation. In *Bodily Natures* (2010), Stacy Alaimo emphasizes the permeable boundaries between human and nonhuman realms, while Elizabeth Grosz, in *Volatile Bodies*, portrays the body as an arena for continuous remaking. Within the narrative, the sea emerges as a powerful emblem of this fluidity; its ever-changing nature dissolves rigid boundaries and unveils vast possibilities for transformation. Miren's acceptance of her transcorporeal identity – marked by a synthesis of supernatural legacy and personal resilience – stands as a declaration of agency. During a heated argument with her uncle, who suddenly tried to assert control over her niece through violence and intimidation, Miren resists and states that she cannot be compared to someone like Nelly – who was a caretaker but also the lover of his uncle: "'That might work on Nelly, but I'm a different kind of creature all together,' I say softly. I lift my chin, keep my eyes on his and slowly the hand is lowered" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 241). Her journey, marked by active metamorphosis, recasts the legacies of trauma as avenues for resistance and self-determination.

The narrative interrogates patriarchal control through the O'Malley family's pact with the mer people. Commodifying the bodies of its women to secure the family's survival, this pact starkly represents the mechanisms designed to contain female autonomy. Miren's outright rejection of this legacy is captured in her remark, "I would

hate to think that I needed to report these matters to either the Church or the authorities" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 101). Her defiance signals not only personal liberation but also the broader capacity of the monstrous female body to disrupt oppressive systems. In subverting these controls, her body becomes a living site where inherited oppression is continuously renegotiated. As Rosi Braidotti argues in *Nomadic Subjects*, "[t]he body, or the embodiment, of the subject is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological" (4). The female body emerges as a threat to patriarchal order, evoking both fear and fascination through its capacity to disrupt stability. *Nomadic Subjects* by Rosi Braidotti further expands on this disruption, as Braidotti describes the monstrous female body as resisting traditional categorizations, becoming "a point of multiplicity and transformation" (86).

In *All the Murmuring Bones*, Miren's journey captures the tension between selfhood and inherited obligation as she navigates her identity within the confines of her family's legacy. Miren's body, tied to the supernatural through the O'Malley pact with the mer people, symbolizes the monstrous feminine as both a site of oppression and a source of power. Her rejection of the family's demands shows the subversive potential of the monstrous female body to resist patriarchal control and redefine its autonomy. The monstrous feminine in feminist theory ultimately reclaims its power by embracing transcorporeality.

4.2. Miren and the Legacy of the O'Malleys

The O'Malley family legacy in *All the Murmuring Bones* is steeped in Gothic traditions, supernatural pacts, and generational burdens, with Miren positioned as both heir and disruptor of these intertwined histories. The O'Malley family's pact with the mer people lies at the heart of their wealth and influence, demanding the sacrifice of a child

from each generation in exchange for prosperity. The pact binds the family to the sea both symbolically and physically, intertwining the family's identity with supernatural forces. Aidan, determined to force Miren into marriage, chases her all the way to her parents' village and openly declares his intent to sacrifice their future child to uphold the bargain: "And you will give me children, Miren, and I will feed one at least to the sea and our bargain will be reforged. Or rather, the sea-queen" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 249). His words expose the horrifying persistence of the pact, where familial legacy demands not just obedience but bodily offering. Marina Warner, in *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1995), describes mythical figures like sirens as "[h]ybrid between worlds in more ways than one, they ceaselessly seek connection, turning their faces and their calls outwards, to bring others to them" (399). The O'Malleys embody a similar liminality, existing between human and nonhuman realms, a position reinforced by their pact. The mer people, as supernatural beings, represent a disruption of purity codes, with their demands symbolizing the contamination of human life through unnatural unions. The sacrificial aspect of the pact reveals the patriarchal commodification of bodies, reducing children to objects of exchange.

The physical manifestation of the O'Malley estate indicates this liminality. Miren describes it as a "fortified mansion," explaining that it is "an agglomeration of buildings of various vintages: the oldest is a square tower from when the family first made enough money to better their circumstances" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 11). The evolving architectural structure mirrors the family's layers of secrecy and hybridity. The estate's ivy-covered tower, "sometimes grey, sometimes gold, sometimes white, depending on the time of year, time of day and how much sun is about," symbolizes the family's resilience and deep ties to tradition (*All the Murmuring Bones* 11). However, its Gothic presence is tainted by the family's darker history, with rumours abounding that they "smuggled, committed piracy, hid their ill-gotten gains there until they could be safely

shifted elsewhere and exchanged for gold to line the family's already overflowing coffers" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 12).

The mer people, as supernatural beings, disrupt societal purity codes, symbolizing a contamination of human life through unnatural unions. Douglas's (1966) claim that "pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined," captures the unease caused by their existence (114). The mer people in the novel function as an embodiment of transgressive hybridity, unsettling rigid social and biological boundaries. Their presence disputes human and purity codes by blurring distinctions between land and sea, human and nonhuman, natural and unnatural. Douglas's argument about pollution as a form of structural danger is particularly relevant here as the mer people represent a disruption to the O'Malley family's carefully maintained lineage and the broader social order. Interspecies unions display anxieties surrounding contamination – both literal, through the mixing of bloodlines, and metaphorical, through the destabilization of human supremacy. Miren's struggle to define herself within the constraints of her family's legacy exposes the tension between individuality and collective obligation. As a member of the O'Malley lineage, her identity is deeply intertwined with the supernatural. However, Miren resists being reduced to a tool of the family's pact. While her identity is deeply tied to the supernatural, Miren resists the family's control, reclaiming her autonomy. As Miren observes, "[t]he family was simply too influential to be easily destroyed but, as it turned out, they brought themselves down with neither aid nor agitation from either Church or peers" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 15).

Miren's name, phonetically reminiscent of the word "siren," carries rich mythological and etymological significance, underscoring her connection to the sea and the themes of hybridity and autonomy central to *All the Murmuring Bones*. In Greek mythology, sirens are often depicted as hybrid creatures – part human, part bird or fish –

who inhabit the liminal space between land and sea. Their alluring songs symbolize both temptation and danger, embodying the power to disrupt boundaries. Similarly, the name "Miren" also has etymological roots in Basque, where it is derived from the name "Marian," a reference to the Virgin Mary. The dual resonance captures Miren's complex identity as both a figure of rebellion and purity, a dichotomy that reflects her role in challenging her family's oppressive legacy. The interaction between name and identity situates Miren as a transcorporeal figure who embodies the interconnections between human and nonhuman realms, much like the sirens of mythology. Miren's name reinforces her hybridity. Warner notes (1995), "It is a paradox frequently encountered… that they are flouting, in the act of speaking and teaching, the strictures against female authority they impart" (*From the Beast to the Blonde* 394). Miren's journey embodies this paradox, as she navigates the tension between her inherited obligations to the O'Malley pact and her desire for autonomy. Her name, evoking the siren's duality of allure and danger, underscores her capacity to disrupt the systems that seek to confine her. The connection to sirens also deepens Miren's association with the sea as a transcorporeal space. Sirens are often tied to themes of control and power, luring sailors to their doom while remaining untouchable within their aquatic domain. Similarly, Miren's connection to the sea signifies her struggle to reclaim agency within the boundaries imposed by her family's pact. As Warner (1995) describes, "[h]ybrid between world in more ways than one, they ceaselessly seek connection, turning their faces and their calls outwards, to bring others to them" (399). By embracing this identity, Miren transforms the constraints of her lineage into a source of strength. Through the symbolic weight of her name and the mythological parallels it evokes, Miren's journey becomes a narrative of resistance. Her rejection of the O'Malley pact not only liberates her from the cycles of sacrifice but also positions her as a figure who reclaims autonomy through the transgressive power of the monstrous feminine. Thus, Miren embodies the siren's

capacity to challenge and subvert the systems that seek to define her. Miren's relationship with the mer people emerges as one of potential reclamation rather than mere subjugation. Miren, like the sirens of mythology, disrupts boundaries, navigating the tension between her inherited obligations and her desire for autonomy.

Throughout *All the Murmuring Bones*, the sea serves as a potent symbol of transcorporeality, representing both freedom and constraint. Its association with the O'Malley lineage highlights the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman realms, while its vast, shifting nature indicates the fluidity of identity. Astrida Neimanis (2017) asserts, "[o]ur wet matters are in constant process of intake, transformation, and exchange – drinking, peeing, sweating, sponging, weeping" (2). Constant flow of water is the indication to the O'Malleys' deep ties to the sea, as well as the transformative potential of their transcorporeal connections. The sea holds dual meaning in the novel, embodying both the oppressive legacy of the O'Malley pact and the possibility of transcendence. Slatter's descriptions of the sea reinforce its symbolic weight, as Miren writes that "[t]here are only tales of things that might once have been, and I write them in the book of stories Isolde had begun" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 264). Storytelling serves as a means for Miren to reclaim her identity and rewrite the narrative of her family's past. The O'Malley family's pact with the mer people reinforces this liminality, situating the sea as a space of transgression and transformation. Haraway's (1991) concept of hybridity in "The Promises of Monsters" is particularly resonant here, as she writes that "[b]y the late twentieth century, out time, a mythic time, we are all chimaeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (4). Such hybridity parallels the merging of human and nonhuman worlds in the O'Malley pact, situating the sea as a contact zone where boundaries blur. Miren's eventual embrace of the ocean shows her acceptance of her transcorporeal identity, as she moves beyond the binaries imposed by her family's legacy.

Miren's rejection of the O'Malley pact aligns with feminist critiques of patriarchal structures. Miren disrupts these structures, refusing to sacrifice herself or others for the family's legacy. Within the O'Malley household, Miren's grandmother Aoife embodies this dynamic, scrutinizing Miren's every move to ensure compliance with the family traditions. However, Miren shifts this power dynamic, embodying Mulvey's observation in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) that "[w]oman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other… bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (7). By resisting Aoife's control, Miren transforms herself from a passive object to an active subject, challenging the systems that seek to confine her. Miren's ultimate rejection of the O'Malley pact establishes her transcorporeal identity as a source of strength. Through this transformation, Miren reclaims autonomy by embracing the transgressive potential of the monstrous feminine. Miren's resistance to the O'Malley traditions not only liberates her but also destabilizes the patriarchal systems embedded in her family's legacy. The legacy of the O'Malleys in *All the Murmuring Bones* serves as a microcosm of broader societal tensions surrounding gender, power, and transcorporeality. Miren's journey manifests the subversive potential of the monstrous feminine to confront patriarchal control and redefine autonomy. By rejecting her family's pact, Miren embraces her transcorporeal identity as a source of empowerment, transforming the O'Malley curse into a narrative of resistance and liberation.

4.3. Relationality and Transcorporeality

Transcorporeality in *All the Murmuring Bones* underscores the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman worlds, particularly through Miren's relationships and the symbolic role of the sea. Stacy Alaimo in *Bodily Natures* (2010) emphasizes that "[p]otent ethical and political possibilities emerge from the literal contact zone between human corporeality and more-than-human nature" (2). Miren's bond with Yri exemplifies transcorporeal fluidity, challenging rigid boundaries between self and

other. Yri's ambiguous identity – rooted in both natural and supernatural realms – positions him as a bridge between these worlds. His deep connection to the sea moulds Miren's understanding of her own transcorporeal existence, allowing her to navigate the shifting relationship between her lineage and the forces that define her identity. The partnership between Miren and Yri disrupts traditional power dynamics, offering a relationship based on mutual transformation rather than domination. Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991) depicts the subversive potential of hybrid identities, asserting that "[t]he cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" (151). Yri's hybridity, coupled with Miren's evolving sense of self, mirrors this cyborg like rejection of fixed identities and hierarchical structures. By embracing this hybridity, they resist the binaries that underpin patriarchal systems. As Miren notes, her encounters with Yri often challenge her expectations, such as when she observes that "[t]here are some viable seams, he says in a way that's both grand and dismissive, and rings false to my ear; I wonder how much or how little he knows about mining" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 181). The tension here shows the fluid and transformative nature of their bond, which defies traditional categorizations.

Isolde, Miren's mother, represents another facet of transcorporeality through her defiance of patriarchal expectations and her profound connection to the sea. It can be seen in Astrida Neimanis's *Bodies of Water* that "[f]or us humans, the flow and flush of waters stain our own bodies, but also connect them to other bodies, to other worlds beyond our human selves" (2). Isolde's relationship with the ocean exemplifies this interconnected embodiment, allowing her to forge an identity beyond the constraints of the O'Malley family's oppressive traditions. Her defiance positions her as a subversive figure who confronts the systems that seek to control female bodies. Isolde's connection to the sea

serves as both a reclamation of agency and an assertion of her transcorporeal identity, conveying the relational nature of bodies and environments.

Relationality emerges as a key theme in this exploration of transcorporeality, as it displays the interconnectedness of all bodies. Alaimo writes in *Bodily Natures* (2010) that "by attending to the material interconnections between the human and more-than-human world, it may be possible to conjure an ethics lurking in an idiomatic definition of matter" (2). Miren's journey embodies this idea, as her relationships with Yri, Isolde, and the sea serve as sources of resistance against patriarchal systems. By embracing these connections, Miren redefines her identity, moving from a position of subjugation to one of agency. Her care for others is evident in her words to Nelly: "I'm not saying otherwise, dear Nelly, I simply want to ensure you are happy and rested" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 225). The emphasis on care embodies the ethics of interconnected embodiment that Neimanis explores. Miren's story concludes with a reclamation of autonomy through her transcorporeal identity. As Niemanis notes, water's relational nature resists "discrete individualism" and calls for an ethics of care and responsibility that extends beyond human concerns (2). Similarly, Miren's connection to the sea and her relationships with others underscore her ability to disrupt patriarchal narratives and reclaim her agency. Miren transforms the constraints of her lineage into a source of strength and therefore is able to wield the transgressive power of the monstrous feminine, which allows her to challenge and subvert the systems that seek to define her.

Here, Miren's monstrous body operates on a similar ground to the concept of the grotesque body as one that defies rigid boundaries, embracing hybridity, excess, and permeability. Her webbed fingers, elongated limbs, and amphibious traits mark her as a liminal figure, neither fully human nor entirely nonhuman. The hybrid form of the grotesque body intersects with transcorporeality, regarding its potential for subversion and nonconformity. By engaging with the grotesque, as theorised by Bakhtin and Russo,

it is possible to examine Miren's grotesque body as a site of transformation, transgression, and resistance against oppressive systems. Mikhail Bakhtin's exploration of the grotesque in *Rabelais and His World* (1984) positions the grotesque body as a site of transformation and renewal. Bakhtin writes:

> The grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an a yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming. The relation to time is one determining trait of the grotesque image. The other indispensable trait is ambivalence. For in this image we find both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis. (24)

Bakhtin's emphasis on transformation and ambivalence speaks to the instability of bodily boundaries, a characteristic that mirrors Miren's own shifting corporeality. Her body exists in a state of flux, resisting fixed categorizations and embracing both human and nonhuman elements. The grotesque, in this sense, becomes a powerful tool for unsettling normative constraints, allowing Miren's body to exist outside of imposed binaries. In *All the Murmuring Bones*, the grotesque manifests in the O'Malley family's pact with the mer people, which blurs the line between human and nonhuman. The pact's consequences expose the permeability of bodily and ancestral identities. The intergenerational bargain extends beyond a simple transaction, binding the O'Malleys to a web of obligations that does not take into account the distinctions between land and sea, human and supernatural. The O'Malley estate, with its crumbling Gothic architecture, embodies this unsettling hybridity, capturing the tension between inheritance and transformation. Once a symbol of power and prosperity, the estate now reflects generations of decline:

> The great fleet was whittled down to a couple of merchant vessels…Almost all their affluence bled away, faster and after until with a few generations

> there was just the grand mess of a home on Hob's Hallow… The estate used to be carefully tended by an army of gardeners and groundsmen, but now there's only ancient Malachi… All the walled gardens are over-run… their doors are sewn shut with brambles. (*All the Murmuring Bones* 15)

It is a space of both grandeur and decay, showing the tension between power and fragility inherent in the family's pact. Mary Russo builds on Bakhtin's work in *The Female Grotesque* (1995), exploring how the grotesque body disrupts patriarchal norms. Russo states, "[t]he grotesque body is exuberantly and democratically open and inclusive of all possibilities. Boundaries between individuals and society, between genders, between species, and between classes were blurred or brought into crisis in the inversions and hyperbole of carnivalesque representation" (78).

Mary Russo's theorisation of the grotesque body as fluid, excessive, and transgressive offers a critical lens for examining *All the Murmuring Bones*, particularly in relation to Miren's ambiguous position within the O'Malley legacy. The grotesque body's openness, as Russo describes, unsettles fixed categories, dissolving distinctions between self and other, human and nonhuman, and inherited identity and self-determination. Miren's body resists containment within the rigid structures of her family's expectations. Her body becomes a site of both oppression and resistance, as she navigates the boundaries imposed by her family's pact. Miren's rejection of the O'Malley legacy mirrors the grotesque body's ability to invert societal norms, transforming spaces of control into spaces of liberation. The grotesque, in this context, stresses the monstrous feminine's capacity to destabilize societal hierarchies and reclaim agency. Patricia MacCormack's *Posthuman Ethics* (2008) provides further insight into the role of the grotesque within a posthuman framework. She writes:

> Monsters formed from human matter are never entirely independent from the human form, their uncanny redistribution of human elements considered aberrant configurations. It is the part we recognize as made strange, or in proximity with a part with which it should not sit side by side, that makes monsters monstrous. (82)

MacCormack's analysis emphasizes the hybridity of the grotesque and its ability to interrogate the myths of human integrity and anthropocentrism. In *All the Murmuring Bones*, this hybridity is evident in the O'Malley family's interactions with the mer people. The monstrous bodies of the mer people symbolize the breakdown of boundaries between human and nonhuman, challenging anthropocentric narratives that position humans as separate and superior. Miren's journey aligns with MacCormack's emphasis on the grotesque as a site of ethical transformation. By embracing the monstrous aspects of her identity, Miren subverts the anthropocentric norms upheld by her family's traditions and reclaims her agency. When she faces Edward Elliott – the man who posed as her uncle while orchestrating the destruction of her family – she lets him believe she has submitted, only to strike back: "I stand, and I smile, I give him my full face and he makes a mistake: he takes my expression for acceptance, for yes. As he approaches, I pick up the lantern and I throw it at him as hard as I can" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 244). The grotesque body in *All the Murmuring Bones* reveals the disruptive potential of transcorporeality, challenging fixed boundaries and redefining resistance. Through transformation and fluidity, the body becomes a site where inherited constraints are contested, allowing for new possibilities of agency and self-definition. Disrupting the boundaries and hierarchies, the grotesque challenges patriarchal norms and redefines identity. Miren's monstrous body functions as a force of resistance and creates a tension by disrupting the hierarchies that sustain patriarchal structures. The conflict emerges through Miren's uncertain status

within the O'Malley lineage, particularly in how her family perceives her bloodline as "mixed and mingled," producing something neither fully human nor monstrous:

> And they're not proper O'Malleys, not true ones, pedigree all mixed and mingled – like myself – the products of marriages made with men and women not of our line. Their blood thinned. Honestly, thought, such breeding had to be done, for all my grandmother laments it. How many times can a line fold back on itself without bringing forth a monster? (*All the Murmuring Bones* 17-18)

O'Malley bloodline has this inherent quality that is prone to losing its purity. Thus, the fear settles in within the family as the potential of this lineage brings stands against all the categorizations. Miren's similar connection to the merfolk and her status as both an extension of and a disruption to the O'Malley legacy feeds into this fear even more. Through the fluidity and interconnectedness of the grotesque, Miren transforms her family's legacy into a narrative of resistance and liberation. Her journey points out the transformative power of the monstrous feminine, as she reclaims her autonomy and asserts her place within a broader network of human and nonhuman relations.

4.4. Patriarchy and Policing of Female Bodies

The patriarchal policing of female bodies, a central theme in *All the Murmuring Bones*, emerges through societal norms and familial expectations designed to control and contain women's autonomy. Such expectations dictate not only how women should appear and behave but also constrain the possibilities for recognizing the self-worth and gaining empowerment. Forces as such work to maintain traditional power structures that limit the transformative potential of the feminine body. Michel Foucault's analysis of biopower and the regulation of bodies provides a crucial background for understanding how power functions through bodily control. In *Discipline and Punish* (1995), Foucault

argues that power is enacted not only through laws and institutions but also through the disciplined and normalized behaviours imposed on individuals. He writes that "[t]he body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (25). Within the O'Malley family, they treat women in a similar fashion as female bodies become sites of discipline – ritualistically bound to family legacies and controlled through restrictive expectations. O'Malley women's roles are defined by their adherence to the family's supernatural pact. In the novel, the patriarchal policing of female bodies is both challenged and reinforced through the characters of Miren and Aoife. Miren's rebellion shows the transformative potential of agency and defiance, as she reclaims her body as a site of resistance against the patriarchal forces that seeks to control her. Butler (1993) further critiques the political regulation of the body, noting that "[t]he body is not a 'being,' but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated" (177). During a quiet reading in the library, Aoife shares an ancient family fairy tale about the O'Malley children's secret journey to a sea cave – a place where the line between human and the sea creatures becomes distinct. The story is about the fate of a women whose transformation goes beyond the human conditions, questioning how long she maintained her humanity, how long her children remained with her, and whether she eventually reverted to a seal or dissolved into sea foam and dreams after her death: "I wonder what happened in her ever-after: how long she lived as a human, how long her children stayed with her, what happened after she died. Did she turn back to a seal then? Or become nothing more than sea foam, nothing more than dreams?" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 132). Imagery ranging from sea foams to seals all blurs the boundaries between human and nonhuman, suggesting that the body possesses the inherent capacity to evolve into entirely new forms. In addition, the implication of this little story is that the physical form is constantly reformed – not just by natural forces, but

also by political and social power – which are external forces such as cultural norms, laws, and institutional practices – play a role in altering and controlling how we understand and experience our bodies. In other words, the transformation of the body is not solely a natural or individual process; it is also influenced by the rules and expectations imposed by society and politics. In the case of Aoife's storytelling, she is indirectly warning Miren about what they – as the O'Malley women – are capable of but also what type of consequences they could face when one decides to step outside the boundaries determined by a long line of O'Malley lineage. Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1980) talks about the mechanisms of patriarchal control through her theory of abjection. Kristeva writes that "[a]bjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated form another body in order to be" (10). Kristeva's concept of abjection – that primordial violence through which a body is violently separated to establish boundaries – illuminates how patriarchal systems devalue and control female bodies. In the novel, the O'Malley pact's demand for child sacrifice exemplifies this dynamic, positioning the female body as both a vessel of impurity and site of control. The pact not only reinforces an ancient, ritualistic violence but also converts the body into a commodity that must bear the burden of familial and societal debts. Upon her return to Hob's Hollow from her grandmother Aoife's funeral, Miren finds the contents of a long-hidden letter that sheds light on the dark legacy governing the O'Malleys. Penned by Miren's own mother – who ultimately abandoned her in a desperate bid to escape the relentless demands of a pact steeped in sacrifice and corruption and to continue her marriage with someone who is not part of the O'Malley bloodline – the letter cautions her father against seeking them out and confesses that something invaluable was lost. Something invaluable turns out to be Miren as the letter goes on to declare that, in an attempt to honour a binding agreement with their mother, the couple left their child as collateral: "Father, Do not look for us. I know we

have stolen from you, but we have left our child as surety. We have honoured the agreement with Mother in spirit if not entirely in deed" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 86). The letter concludes with a chilling directive: "Let Miren be the price between us" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 86). Such a demand encapsulates the abject mechanism at work – by designating a child as both sacrificial and a marker of familial defilement, the novel vividly shows how the patriarchal control is coercive and dehumanizing, ideas which are critiqued by Kristeva.

Margrit Shildrick's *Embodying the Monster* (2002) revolves around the notion that monsters, as liminal figures, challenge the normative boundaries of human identity and embodiment. Shildrick explores how monstrous bodies disrupt binaries such as self/other, normal/abnormal, and human/nonhuman, representing societal anxieties about difference and vulnerability. The work argues for an ethics that embraces ambiguity and interconnectedness, opposing the exclusionary structures of identity and suggesting that the monstrous is intrinsic to the human experience. Shildrick's analysis of the monstrous sketches a dual nature – one that refuses to remain entirely external or fixed. She argues that "the monstrous is never simply negative because it is never fully outside, but always a figure of ambiguous identity," a concept represented through the O'Malley lineage (5). The family's paradoxical traits emerge in the observation that "their daughters and sons did not drown (or only those meant to) for they swam like seals" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 11). The depiction of the O'Malley children is contrasted with the following portrayal:

> O'Malley children had no fear of rain or grey skies, and no fear of the sea either for they learned to swim almost before they could walk. But they were careful on land, found it somehow treacherous the way it sometimes gave way to without warning, when it promised such solidity. (*All the Murmuring Bones* 34)

Ambiguity here does not signal a mere lack of definition: instead, it represents a deliberate unity of contradictions that destabilizes conventional identity. In a similar vein, Shildrick (2002) observes that "[t]he supposedly intrinsic leakiness of female – and monstrous – bodies is, then, a threat to well-being a breach in the boundaries of selfhood that blurs the distinctions between self and other, and between one corpus and another" (105-106). The boundaries of identity, as Shildrick notes, are breached not only in the physical sense but also in the mental investments that permeate selfhood: "The skin is both the limit of the embodied self and the site of potentially transgressive psychic investments… Any compromise of the organic unity and self-completion of the skin may signal monstrosity" (51). Physical form – for Miren – is never a closed system. Her connection to the sea and the mer people demonstrates the fluid, permeable nature of the body which becomes a site of control and agency. Miren's body, redefined through its inherent instability, becomes the site where imposed limits dissolve, allowing her to transform inherited restrictions into moments of opportunities. Confronting Aidan after admitting having killed the assassin he sent to silence her, Miren not only resists his attempts to control her future but also asserts a legacy on her own terms, which both him and Aoife failed to anticipate: "Nonetheless cousin, I'm Aoife O'Malley's granddaughter, a fact both of you seem to have forgotten – and there was very little Aoife did that she did not wish to" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 247). In her struggle, the rigid distinctions between human and nonhuman, self and other, are reconfigures – not as fixed barriers, but as dynamic thresholds that she continually negotiates and reclaims as her own.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory* (1996) offers a critical lens for analysing the patriarchal policing of female bodies through the concept of monstrosity. Here, Miren and Aoife's resistance to societal norms can be reframed as acts of subverting the "monsterization" imposed by patriarchal systems. Cohen's exploration of monstrosity as a cultural construct expresses how societal anxieties around gender and power are

projected onto individuals who disrupt established norms. His work explores how the monstrous resists containment: “The monster always escapes because it refuses easy categorization” (6). Cohen (1996) further asserts that “[t]he monster’s body is pure culture. A construct and a projection… it is always a displacement,” meaning that the monstrous serves as a mirror for cultural fears and contradictions (4). In this light, Miren and Aoife disrupt the stable, prescribed identities dictated by the O’Malley legacy. Their defiant actions destabilize the traditional order by refusing to conform to a system that seeks to contain their power.

Aoife, Miren’s grandmother, embodies the duality of resistance and complicity within patriarchal systems. While Aoife enforces the family’s oppressive traditions, her roles as matriarch reveals the limits of patriarchal control. Aoife’s position within the O’Malley family shows this paradox, as she both upholds and subverts the patriarchal order. Aoife’s autonomy within the family marks the potential for resistance even within oppressive systems. Aoife’s actions, while often supporting patriarchal goals, disrupt the family’s stability by asserting her authority in ways that challenge traditional gender roles. She is positioned as both a product and a disruptor of the patriarchal systems she inhabits. Miren’s rebellion against the O’Malley pact represents a direct challenge to the patriarchal policing of female bodies. Her journey stresses the importance of agency in resisting systems of control. By choosing her path, Miren redefines her identity outside the constraints of patriarchal norms. Her decision marks her reclamation of her body as a site of agency rather than subjugation. Embracing her connection to the monstrous allows her to assert autonomy and disrupt the patriarchal systems that have sought to control her.

In *All the Murmuring Bones*, the patriarchal policing of female bodies is both challenged and reinforced through the characters of Miren and Aoife. While Aoife embodies the complexities of complicity and resistance within patriarchal systems, Miren’s rebellion highlights the transformative potential of agency and defiance. Thus,

Miren's journey is punctuated by moments of defiance that underscore her resistance to control. As she talks to herself saying, "[e]ven falling to your death is better than having Aidan to husband," Miren declares her refusal to be confined by the societal expectations (*All the Murmuring Bones* 105). Similarly, she critiques external forces that attempt to dominate her: "But your little escapade made the Robber Queen think I couldn't deliver, that I wasn't in control of all I said I was" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 249). Her autonomy pushes back against the systems that try to limit her. Consequently, O'Malley family's efforts to regulate Miren are reciprocated by her rebellion which represent a direct threat to their constructed order. After the funeral at Hob's Hallow, as tensions flare over ancient pacts and the crushing burden of family debts, Miren says, "Good to know Bethany Lawrence doesn't have control of everything" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 253). In the novel, Bethany Lawrence is a powerful figure in Breakwater who wields significant influence over both civic affairs and the local economy. Often referred to as the "Queen of Thieves," she symbolizes the external, patriarchal forces that echo the O'Malleys' internal tyranny. Miren's comment expresses her growing resistance against these layers of control, marking a turning point where she begins to reject the constraints imposed on her by both her family's dark legacy and the broader systems of power represented by figures such as Bethany Lawrence.

4.5. Hybrid Ancestry and Nonhuman Connections

The novel weaves hybrid ancestry and nonhuman connections to open space for exploring transcorporeality and the breakdown of rigid binaries. By delving into the O'Malley family's selkie lineage and the presence of hybrid creatures like kelpies, it is aimed to examine how hybridity stands against human/nonhuman and natural/supernatural divides while supporting the subversive potential of the monstrous feminine.

Selkies, also called "seal people," are mythical beings capable of transforming between seal and human forms. Originating from Scottish, Irish, and Nordic folklore, selkie legends explore themes of identity, freedom, and the bond between humans and nature. Often depicted as enchanting and tragic figures, selkies symbolize the fluid and transformative nature of identity. Their dual existence, bridging sea and land, mirrors humanity's complex relationship with the natural world. As described in *Folktales of Water Spirits, Kelpies, and Selkies* (2010), "[s]eals were popularly divided into two classes; namely, first, the common seal, here called tang fish, which had no power to assume the human form. To the other class belonged all seals larger in size… called 'selkie folk,' because they had the power of assuming the human form" (25). Culturally, selkie myths differ in tone and focus. Scottish stories dwell on romance and tragedy, echoing the region's rugged maritime environment. Irish tales blend selkie folklore with other mythical elements, steeped in Ireland's deep mystical heritage. In Nordic traditions, selkies symbolize adaptability and survival in harsh conditions, presenting a more pragmatic view. Many tales situate selkies in remote, idyllic environments: "The only home of the selkie folk was some far outlying skerry, or sea-surrounded rock. They lay basking in the sunshine, or gambolling about in the sunny atmosphere, with their seal skins lying beside them on the rock" (*Folktales* 25). Selkie legends explore gender dynamics uniquely, with balanced portrayals of male and female selkies. Male selkies are often depicted as irresistibly handsome, charming human women, while female selkies capture the hearts of human men through their beauty and gentleness:

> It was believed that males among the selkie folk sometimes held secret and illicit intercourse with females of the human race… on assuming human shape they became in form fair, attractive, and in manner winning; and by their seductive powers the female heart seems to have been easily conquered. (*Folktales* 25)

These stories frequently involve love, loss, and the struggle for freedom, such as in "The Tale of the Selkie Wife", where a selkie woman regains her seal skin to escape captivity and return to the sea. Ecologically, selkie myths convey humanity's connection to marine ecosystems. Their tales echo the importance of preserving the ocean and its biodiversity, offering a metaphorical lens for current environmental concerns like pollution and habitat destruction. For instance, the myth connects human misfortune with selkies: "If a young and fair girl was lost at sea, she was not drowned, but taken captive by selkie folk or finfolk… If a married woman found her husband unfaithful to her, she would revenge herself by secret intercourse with a marine lover" (*Folktales* 29). Psychologically, selkies represent identity transformation, the human desire for freedom, and the tension between belonging and individuality. By navigating dual existences, selkie myths resonate universally, indicating struggles of self-expression, the complexity of relationships, and humanity's enduring connection to the natural world. As the folklore explains, "[i]t was only at certain periods and conditions of the tide in which the seals had power to assume the human alter. But these periods were a subject of dispute among my oral authorities" (*Folktales* 25). Selkie tales engage with human emotions, cultural traditions, and ecological consciousness.

The O'Malley family's pact with the mer people is deeply intertwined with their hybrid ancestry, particularly their descent from selkies. The selkie lineage serves as a literal embodiment of transcorporeal hybridity, connecting the O'Malleys to both land and sea. The selkie identity blurs these boundaries, situating the O'Malleys within a liminal space that defies rigid categorizations: "I'd made him prosperous for the shoals gather where selkie wives bide" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 115). The prosperity linked to the presence of selkie wives points towards the profound, albeit unspoken, dependence humans have on the nonhuman world. The natural rhythms that bring abundance to the shoals emphasize the selkie's integral role in sustaining human success. Yet this

symbiotic relationship is far from equal, as selkies are often confined to human expectations while their contributions remain unrecognized. Miren's struggle with her family's legacy brings out the strain between embracing hybridity and conforming to societal norms. Miren witnesses an important moment after being led to a hidden shore during her escape from the family. There, she sees a selkie woman attempting to restore a man to his original form: "He was very cold, limp, and for a while the selkie skin would not take hold" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 116). The man, once human, lies lifeless and unresponsive as the selkie skin refuses to take hold. His body, cold and limp, resists the transformation, affirming the fragile boundary between human and nonhuman existence. The selkie woman, having suffered years of domestic abuse at the hands of her human husband, decides to reclaim her agency through an act of supernatural vengeance. Once a captive bride taken from the sea, she had made her husband prosperous, as the presence of selkie wives ensures abundant fishing. However, his descent into alcoholism and violence fractures their once-content life. In response to his cruelty, she conjures a violent storm – one of unprecedented ferocity – that wrecks his boat and leaves him broken and near death on the shore. Faced with the consequences of her wrath, she makes a desperate attempt to transform him into a selkie so that he might survive in the water rather than die on land. The process of reintegration into his nonhuman form is met with difficulty, as his body initially resists the transition. The moment is significant for understanding the nature of transcorporeality as it is evidenced from the rejection of the selkie form that transcorporeality cannot be forced. Additionally, the struggle to reintegrate the selkie skin with the lifeless body speaks to the fragile balance between human and nonhuman existence.

Existing in both worlds, as witnessed in the selkie women's attempt to save her husband, is something experienced by Miren as well. Miren's selkie ancestry positions her as a symbol of this resistance, defying the patriarchal systems that seek to define her

as either human or monstrous. The comment made by the selkie woman about their story with her husband stuck with Miren: “And they were dark, some of them, so I knew they had selkie blood for all they thought themselves better than me” (*All the Murmuring Bones* 115). She had been captured by a fisherman who refused to release her, eventually making her his wife. Over time, she assimilated into human society, bearing children and observing the contradictions of those around her. Despite her forced integration, the selkie recognizes the lingering traces of selkie ancestry among her husband’s relatives. Relatives of the husband, though carrying the same bloodline, regard themselves as superior to her, revealing the tensions between human and nonhuman heritage. They are dark in appearance, which complicates their efforts in distancing themselves from their nonhuman heritage. While these individuals consider themselves superior, the traces of selkie lineage in their features betray a shared heritage they refuse to acknowledge.

The presence of hybrid creatures such as kelpies contributes to the novel’s thematic focus on liminality and transformation: “A kelpie, a water horse, a nuggle, a tangie; so many names for the same thing” (*All the Murmuring Bones* 142). The varied names for the kelpie suggest the universality of its presence across cultures, where it is understood through different lenses but remains fundamentally the same. The multiplicity of names captures the creature’s shifting identity, embodying a boundary-crossing existence that defies strict categorization. The kelpie becomes a shared symbol of humanity’s complex relationship with the nonhuman world. Kelpies, suspended between human and nonhuman forms, channel deep-rooted cultural anxieties about hybridity and monstrosity: “The kelpie bows too, which is nice, but the dead men called me ‘Miss’ very nicely too and they meant me ill” (*All the Murmuring Bones* 142). The kelpie’s bowing, though seemingly polite, calls attention to the ambiguity of intentions in both human and nonhuman interactions. Comparison to the “niceness” of the dead men expresses the protagonist’s wariness, formed by her past experiences. Trust and suspicion collide and

unveils the uneasy dynamics often present in relationships with hybrid beings. In *All the Murmuring Bones*, the kelpies represent how embracing hybridity can lead characters to confront danger while opening space for transformation. The kelpies, with their fluid identities and connections to the material world are not afraid to show their capacity, therefore, they can be seen as both threats and allies to the O'Malleys. "The kelpie has eyes that look like whirlpools – Maura said they were always pits of fire but it's probably hard to keep flames alight underwater" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 142). Maura's dramatic vision of the kelpie contrasts with a more grounded understanding of its nature, and the tension between the mythical and the practical becomes central to the narrative. The whirlpool-like eyes evoke an otherworldly danger, while the humorous remark about flames underwater adds a touch of realism. Together, these elements enhance the kelpie's mystique and make clear that hybrid beings emerge through the influence of both myth and reality. Miren's encounters with these creatures parallel her own negotiation of hybridity, as she experiences her identity as both an O'Malley and a selkie descendant: "The halter is ragged but clearly cannot be removed by the kelpie's own hands" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 142). The image of the kelpie's ragged halter captures its state of captivity and the enduring effects of human intervention. Bound by something it cannot remove, the kelpie's predicament represents the broader theme of hybrid beings constrained by external forces. The scene raises questions of autonomy and power, as the kelpie's inability to free itself exposes the imbalance inherent in human-nonhuman relationships.

The intersection of hybridity and monstrous feminine is central to Miren's journey. Miren's selkie ancestry binds her to both human and nonhuman worlds, allowing her to embrace her transcorporeal identity as a source of strength and agency. Miren's rejection of her family's pact and her embrace of her selkie heritage represent a reclamation of autonomy through hybridity. Miren's hybrid identity allows her to

navigate the liminal spaces between human and nonhuman, reclaiming her agency in ways that defy patriarchal expectations.

4.6. Magic, Myth, and Resistance

Magic and myth in *All the Murmuring Bones* serve as potent metaphors for female agency and resistance against patriarchal systems. It is aimed in this section to explore how these elements intersect with feminist theory, focusing on Isolde's power as a "proper witch," the patriarchal fears embodied by Aidan and the crypt, and the broader implications of magical narratives in reclaiming autonomy.

Throughout *All the Murmuring Bones*, magic functions as both a source of power and a site of conflict, reflecting societal anxieties surrounding female autonomy. During a period when the O'Malleys faced a decline in both fortune and authority at Hob's Hallow, ritual and pretence became their tools for survival. The description of the waning influence goes as follows: "Yet they kept their position and their power for they maintained the impression of worship for the sake of appearances" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 13). With this introduction, the O'Malley family's reliance on performative rituals to maintain their influence despite the erosion of their true power is clearly laid out. Their adherence to the appearance of worship underscores the theme of deception and the fragility of authority. The O'Malleys are portrayed as clinging to tradition and illusion to preserve their social standing. The family's internal collapse becomes visible beneath their carefully maintained exterior, pointing to the diminishing power of their hybrid heritage and mystical legacy. In the novel, magic manifests through the O'Malley family's pact with the mer people and through Miren's growing connection to the supernatural. The magical elements heighten the conflict between control and liberation, and Miren's choice to embrace them marks her assertion of power:

> In the house, Malachi's sister, Maura – younger by a little and less given to farting – does what she can to keep the gilings and decay at bay, but she's one woman, arthritic and tired and cross; it's a losing battle, though she keeps her hand in with herb magic and rituals to ensure the kitchen garden continues producing vegetables and the orchard fruiting. (*All the Murmuring Bones* 15-16)

Maura struggles against decay as the family attempts to preserve their legacy. Her reliance on herb magic and rituals indicates the blending of mundane labour and mystical practices, a hallmark of the O'Malleys' hybrid identity. However, her exhaustion and the inevitability of decline show the limitations of their power and the overwhelming weight of tradition, which connects directly to the novel's themes of decay and resilience. Magic blurs the boundaries between the natural and supernatural and exposes the instability of fixed identities and the potential for transformation. Within the O'Malley household at Hob's Hallow, there comes a lengthy depiction of the slow decay of family's wealth, status, and power. Maura, an elderly servant who has been with the family for decades, maintains the house through both physical labour and remnants of old magic as stated: "Their years of being productive have been extended by Maura's tiny rituals, but there's only so much small magics can do" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 16). Despite Maura's efforts, the estate is crumbling, the livestock are barely sustaining themselves, and the family's influence is waning. The reference to "small magics" implies that while rituals and traditions may prolong the inevitable, they are insufficient to reverse the family's decline. It mirrors the broader tension in the novel between clinging to the past and facing the reality of their crumbling influence. The O'Malley, once known for their supernatural ties and maritime dominance, now find themselves struggling to maintain even the illusion of control. Magic, once an integral part of their strength, has become little more than a desperate measure to keep the estate running, rather than a tool of real power.

Isolde, Miren's mother, embodies the concept of the "proper witch," a figure who subverts patriarchal expectations through her connection to magic and the natural world. Isolde's defiance of the O'Malley traditions situates her as a subversive figure, disrupting the systems that seek to control her. Her refusal of the family's pact and acceptance of the sea's power marks a turning point, as she asserts autonomy and reclaims control through magic. Once, the women of the family wielded such unquestioned power, their influence tied to magic and their connection to the sea. However, shifting societal structures and the family's financial decline have weakened their control, allowing figures like Aidan to assume patriarchal dominance. Such a shift is acknowledged in the novel: "The days of the O'Malley women's power being unquestioned are long gone, and more's the pity," which mourns the loss of authority the O'Malley women once held and signals the transition to a more restrictive and male-dominated order (*All the Murmuring Bones* 19). Lost power becomes the source of lamentation, drawing attention to the theme of resilience amid societal shifts, where hybrid ancestry and mystical connections once grounded their authority. It also focuses on Miren's struggle, which takes places within a family defined by its fading legacy. His obsession with maintaining the O'Malley family's legacy show the patriarchal need to control and contain female bodies. The crypt, as a physical and symbolic space, amplifies these fears and serves as a site of containment for the family's secrets and sacrifices:

> We're watching the coffin (a death-bed made at great expense to ensure he stays beneath, golden locks and hinges, padded silk interior stuffed with lavender which calms the dead, the joins sealed with eldritch adhesive over which spells have been sung) be carried down, down, a'down into the crypt beneath the chapel floor. (*All the Murmuring Bones* 17)

The O'Malleys are portrayed as bound to wealth, tradition, and magic, which is a connection made clear in the detailed burial ritual. The meticulous details, from the

golden locks to the eldritch adhesive, display the family's obsession with controlling death and maintaining appearances. The crypt beneath the chapel stands for the weight of ancestral legacy, as well as the lengths the family goes to protect their secrets. Life and death, and magic and decay collide in the scene and expose the core struggle that defines the O'Malleys'. In the novel, the crypt's role as a site of sacrifice indicates how the violence is inherent in patriarchal systems, while Miren's rejection of its demands represents her resistance to these structures. Magic and myth in *All the Murmuring Bones* not only challenge patriarchal systems but also offer a means of reclaiming agency. "Or perhaps, just perhaps, some of our reputation remains, some echo that makes even the powerful wary" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 24). The statement, made by Mirin during her grandfather's funeral following her epiphany regarding their rapidly declining influence as a family, implies that despite the O'Malley family's reputation decline, their legacy retains a lingering influence. An "echo" of their former power runs through the narrative, which is directly linked to the novel's themes of memory and legacy. It also speaks to the fear and respect that hybrid ancestry and mystical associations can still inspire. Despite their decline, the O'Malleys remain symbols of an uncanny power that disrupt societal hierarchies and affirm the enduring potency of their mythic connections. Miren's embrace of magic and her defiance of her family's legacy mark her as a figure who reclaims autonomy through her connection to the mythical. Her connection to the mythical world grants her the strength to redefine her own path, moving beyond the expectations imposed upon her. Miren's transformation emerges clearly when she recalls: "Let me plummet for so long that I thought I'd drown and I realised the only way to survive was to save myself with the long strokes and powerful kicks Aoife herself used" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 26). Facing the threat of being overwhelmed, Miren draws on the memory of Aoife, whose strength and survival instincts serve as a guide.

The imagery of swimming and survival echoes the novel's recurring motifs of water and transformation. Miren refuses the binaries imposed by patriarchal systems and transforms the O'Malley family's curse into a narrative of empowerment, showing how the myth and magic can become sources of transformation. "There are many volumes with the golden 'M' on their spine that denotes 'Murcianus' – *Murcianus' Little-known Lore*, *Murcianus' Mythical Creatures*, *Murcianus' Strange Places*, *Murcianus' Songs of the Night*, *Murcianus' Book of Fables*" (28-29). Through this catalogue of Murcianus' works emphasizes the novel foregrounds the role of knowledge and storytelling in preserving history and asserting agency. The golden 'M' signifies the preservation of lore and the connection between human and nonhuman worlds. Murcianus's writings not only contain tales of mythical creatures and strange places, but also indicate the hybrid ancestry of the O'Malleys and their reliance on stories to maintain their identity. The collection also can be taken as examples of fragmented knowledge, since these texts hold pieces of a larger, elusive truth. For example, one entry notes that "[t]here is even a *Murcianus' Magica*, but it is an incomplete version, the true one having been lost centuries ago in the sack of the Citadel at Cwen's Reach or so it's said" (*All the Murmuring Bones* 29). An entry in a compendium of archival texts documents how vital knowledge became dispersed and fragmented amid historical upheavals. Local tradition – and the manuscript itself – indicates that the complete *Murcianus' Magica* vanished during a violent assault on the Citadel at Cwen's Reach, an event symbolizing a widespread loss of wisdom and an ongoing quest for forgotten truths. The incomplete *Murcianus' Magica* can be taken for the fragmentation of the O'Malley family's power and knowledge. Full version is lost, which marks a deeper erasure of ties to their hybrid ancestry and magical heritage. The sack of the Citadel, a reference to historical violence, links the family's decline to broader forces of destruction and loss. The incomplete text

portrays the difficulties Miren faces in piecing together her own identity from the fragments of her family's past.

To conclude, *All the Murmuring Bones* offers a powerful exploration of the monstrous feminine and its capacity to destabilize patriarchal control. Through its emphasis on transcorporeality, hybridity, and relationality, the novel – exemplified by characters such as Miren, kelpies, selkies and the mer people – questions rigid binaries and anthropocentric systems and redefines the boundaries of identity and agency. Miren embraces her connection to the monstrous, grotesque and the nonhuman, which allows her to reclaim her autonomy and transform the O'Malley family's legacy into a narrative of empowerment. Through its nuanced portrayal of the monstrous feminine, *All the Murmuring Bones* displays the transformative potential of transcorporeality and offers a vision of empowerment that transcends the limitations of patriarchal control.

All the Murmuring Bones integrates diverse theoretical perspectives and positions the monstrous female body as a multifaceted force that challenges the binaries of human versus nonhuman, self versus other, and purity versus impurity. Miren's body – entwined with myth, memory, and resistance – embodies transcorporeality. It becomes a site where inherited vulnerabilities are transformed into resources for empowerment and where cultural anxieties are transmuted into symbols of liberation. Thus, the narrative offers a radical redefinition of identity – one that recognizes the body as a dynamic terrain capable of endless remaking. Ultimately, the convergence of theorists such as Creed, Ussher, Douglas, Kristeva, Shildrick, and Haraway exhibits that the monstrous female body is not merely a repository of cultural fears but a living, transformative force. Their analyses reveal that bodily fragmentation and fluidity are not signs of disintegration but indications of a profound capacity for renewal. As characters actively defy the constraints imposed upon them, they open new spaces for self-determination and liberation.

CONCLUSION

Taking its motive from an understanding of the inseparability of human bodies from their environmental conditions and thus the interconnectedness of individuals and their surroundings, this study examines the function of transcorporeality through an analysis of the representation of the female body in three contemporary women's novels – *The Leto Bundle* (2001) by Marina Warner, *The Carhullan Army* (2007) by Sarah Hall, and *All the Murmuring Bones* (2021) by A. G. Slatter. The female body as dynamic and materially entangled site of resistance, transformation, and ecological awareness forms the central focus of this dissertation, which challenges essentialist and isolated conceptions of embodiment. Grounded in the understanding that human bodies are inseparable from their environment, it examines the concept of transcorporeality as both a theoretical and narrative framework across these three contemporary women's novels. Through these works, the study traces how female bodies – traumatised, monstrous and resistant – become vessels of relationality and collective agency in response to patriarchal, anthropocentric, and ecological pressures. By foregrounding female embodiment as porous and interdependent, these novels challenge conventional binaries of human/nonhuman, mind/body, and nature/culture, proposing new models of resilience and agency that are materially anchored.

Central to the study is the assertion that the female body, far from being passive or objectified, emerges in literature as a politically and ecologically active site. Drawing on Stacy Alaimo's theory of transcorporeality, the analysis demonstrates how literary texts reimagine embodiment as an ongoing negotiation between the human and the more-than-human world. The work at hand extends the use of transcorporeality by thoroughly examining how it functions through form, symbolism, and character in contemporary women's literature. Positioning the female body within current discussions of posthumanism, the Anthropocene, and intersectional ecofeminism – not merely as a

theoretical object but also a narrative force that reshapes meaning –advances feminist literary criticism. The broader theoretical landscape in which the study is positioned includes critical interrogations of the Anthropocene, which has been critiqued for centring a universalized human subject while erasing the uneven vulnerabilities experienced by marginalized groups, particularly women. In response, posthumanist theorists have advanced more nuanced, inclusive frameworks that resist dualisms and account for the interdependent relationship between bodies and environments. Within this discourse, the monstrous female body has returned as a powerful figure – no longer framed through essentialist connections to "nature" as in earlier ecofeminist discourse but reimagined as a site of disruption and negotiation. The dissertation builds on that shift, showing how the monstrous and the marginalized body in literature can expose and undo entrenched ideologies that confine women to static, naturalized roles.

With this context in mind, the first chapter lays the theoretical foundations by situating transcorporeality within feminist and posthumanist debates. It traces how patriarchal systems have historically constructed the female body as inferior through dualistic separations that exclude it from cultural, intellectual, and ecological agency. Drawing on theorists such as Stacy Alaimo and Rosi Braidotti, the chapter establishes that transcorporeality offers a model of embodiment that resists these exclusions by affirming movement, materiality, and interconnection. According to transcorporeality, the female body is a relational actor within larger networks of ecological influence and power rather than a passive object. Theoretical foundation functions not merely as a lens but as a generative force in literary analysis, opening up new ways of interpreting how bodies respond to and reshape the conditions that surround them.

Building upon this theoretical foundation the second chapter analyses Marina Warner's *The Leto Bundle*, centring on Leto as a representation of the traumatised female body. Warner's novel explores the physical, emotional, and cultural ruptures Leto endures

through displacement, sexual violence, and forced migration. These experiences are not only psychological but deeply ecological, embedding her trauma within scorched battlefields, crumbling cityscapes, and mythological landscapes. The chapter demonstrates how Leto's body becomes a transcorporeal entity – entangled with her surroundings and historical mythologies – through which trauma is not only registered but reworked into resilience and connection. Her fragmented self mirrors the ruined environments she travels through, revealing the inseparability of bodily and environmental suffering. By embodying both ancient myth and modern crisis, Leto's body functions as a living archive of environmental and historical violence, where the past is constantly negotiated through material experience. Her interactions with physical and symbolic landscapes prove that healing does not occur in isolation but through the permeability of borders between body, land, and memory. The analysis shows that Warner does not merely reimagine the mythological figure of Leto for contemporary contexts but rather uses her as a narrative and material system for exploring how interconnectedness – between humans, nonhumans, and cultural memory – enables recovery and the reassertion of agency. Through exile, motherhood, and corporeal vulnerability, Leto's body challenges notions of singular identity and reclaims space as a site of relational healing.

The third chapter turns to Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army*, where the resistant female body takes shape through the protagonist Sister. Set in a dystopian world where patriarchal control and ecological devastation render women's bodies docile and expendable, the novel maps Sister's transformation from compliance to radical resistance. Her initial submission to societal control underscores how biopolitical power operates through bodily regulation. However, upon entering the Carhullan collective – a women-led, off-grid community – Sister experiences a profound shift. The Carhullan community is presented in this chapter as a transcorporeal space, where bodies and land function not

as passive entities but as active participants in resistance. The women's intimate reliance on the landscape, their labour in cultivating the land, and the community's physical withdrawal from mainstream society draws attention to the reciprocal relationship between space and political autonomy. Nature is not merely a backdrop but a collaborator in sustaining resistance, shaping how bodies move, organise, and relate. The women's connection to this harsh landscape and to one another exemplifies a relational, ecological agency that transcends individual empowerment. By linking bodily liberation to environmental interdependence, the novel illustrates how transcorporeality disrupts anthropocentric and patriarchal power structures.

The final chapter deals with A. G. Slatter's *All the Murmuring Bones* with a specific focus on Miren's embodiment as a monstrous female figure. The novel intricately weaves themes of family legacies, mythological connections, and sacrificial traditions, using the monstrous female body to disrupt conventional narratives of femininity and agency. Miren's lineage is entangled with her family's pact with the mer people, a legacy that binds her identity to mythological and material forces. The analysis demonstrates how Miren resists the oppressive structures imposed on her by her family, reclaiming autonomy through a transcorporeal relationship with her environment and the mythological entities surrounding her. By embracing her monstrous identity, Miren subverts the expectations of womanhood, uniting with nonhuman forces to confront anthropocentric and patriarchal constraints. Miren reclaims her autonomy by embracing her connection to monstrosity to subvert oppressive systems. Hence, the novel portrays monstrosity not as a marker of otherness or marginalization but as a source of power and adaptability, capable of destabilizing oppressive systems. Miren's monstrosity in that sense evokes the grotesque body, and as discussed, the grotesque body serves as a powerful framework for understanding transcorporeality and its potential for resistance. Through its disruption of boundaries and hierarchies, the grotesque challenges patriarchal

norms and redefines identity. As argued in this chapter, *All the Murmuring Bones* offers a radical reimagining of agency and identity, portraying monstrosity as a dynamic and transformative force within ecological and cultural contexts.

Taken together, the three analytical chapters demonstrate the dissertation's unique contribution to contemporary literary and theoretical discourse by bringing into focus how trauma, environment, and feminist though intersect through the lens of transcorporeality. In the analysis of Marina Warner's *The Leto Bundle*, the study bridges trauma theory and ecocriticism, revealing how environmental and sociopolitical conditions mould resilience and recovery. The study expands current understandings of trauma by placing it within ecological and material contexts, rather than confining it solely to the psychological realm. Through *The Carhullan Army*, the dissertation engages with feminist theories of solidarity and resistance, revealing how collective agency is not simply a political stance but a material, embodied practice formed through connection to place and community. In particular, the work contributes to feminist thought by demonstrating that the reclamation of bodily autonomy is deeply tied to ecological entanglement and the transformative potential of transcorporeality. Finally, *All the Murmuring Bones* offers a crucial intervention in the discourse surrounding monstrosity and the female body. Rather than displaying monstrosity as a site of exclusion or abjection, the study reframes it as a space of agency and ecological relation. The monstrous female body, as theorised through Miren's character, becomes a symbol of not deviance but of resistance to the oppressive legacies of lineage, gender, and environmental exploitation. Feminist literary criticism is advanced by a perspective that reclaims the grotesque and monstrous as productive and transformative, especially when placed within the theory of transcorporeality.

Collectively, the dissertation showcases how transcorporeality can operate across diverse narrative terrains – trauma, resistance, and monstrosity – offering a flexible and

powerful guideline for interpreting female embodiment in literature. By putting feminist and posthumanist theories into conversation with literary texts, this work not only illuminates how the female body is imagined in contemporary fiction, but also provides a method for understanding how material and symbolic forces converge in forming gendered experience. The emphasis on relationality, environmental entanglement, and embodied agency in the research extends transcorporeal theory and demonstrates its relevance to contemporary sociopolitical and ecological concerns. The integration of feminist and ecological discourses in the study opens new critical possibilities for recognizing the female body as a site of resistance, not through abstraction or metaphor, but through its embeddedness in real, material conditions. Ultimately, this dissertation argues for the necessity of reimagining embodiment – particularly female embodiment – not as a static of symbolic form, but as a dynamic and relational site where agency emerges through interconnection, transformation, and response to the world.

While ecofeminism has been instrumental in displaying the shared exploitation of women and the environment under patriarchal systems, this study shifts the focus to the material and relational dimensions of these interactions. By employing transcorporeality as a critical frame, the analysis points out the tangible, embodied connections between female bodies and their environments, moving beyond metaphorical representations to explore how these relationships manifest in physical, social, and ecological contexts. Through the analysis of *The Leto Bundle*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *All the Murmuring Bones*, the study engages with the fluid and dynamic portrayals of female bodies as interconnected with nonhuman entities. By addressing ecological interdependence, social agency, and the generative potential of relationality to withstand structural violence and limitation, it thereby aims to advance posthuman feminist discourse.

Moreover, this research reclaims the monstrous, docile, and traumatised female body as critical sites of resistance and transformation. Each of these forms of embodiment

– long marked by marginalization or stigma – are here reframed through transcorporeality as powerful positions from which to contest patriarchal and anthropocentric ideologies. The dissertation thus extends the scope of transcorporeal theory by depicting its application not only within feminist and ecological discourses but also in broader conceptualizations of resilience, agency, and identity. In particular, the reassertion of the monstrous female body – a figure that has resurfaced repeatedly since feminist criticism of the 1970s – signals an ongoing cultural and theoretical need to interrogate the boundaries of what is considered human, natural, and acceptable. While earlier feminist thought often cautioned against essentializing associations between women and nature, this project revives that connection through a critical, non-essentialist lens that emphasizes interdependence, permeability, and resistance.

The recurrence of the monstrous body in contemporary literature is no accident. In moments of environmental crisis, gender backlash, and socio-political uncertainty, the monstrous female figure resurfaces because she holds the capacity to rupture and reconfigure dominant narratives. Her unruliness, her fluidity, and her connection to nonhuman forces make her a compelling symbol of defiance and transformation. The dissertation engages with that symbolic power while simultaneously placing it within material, transcorporeal experiences. In line with this, the monstrous body is not a return to essentialism, but a reimagining of the female form as both vulnerable and potent – capable of bearing the weight of trauma, resisting normative definitions, and opening new possibilities for relational and ecological existence. The analysis presented in the study also encourages new ways of understanding contemporary cultural and global challenges. By emphasizing relationality and interconnectedness, the texts explored here offer a model for collective responses to issues such as climate change, gender inequality, and systemic oppression. Rather than framing empowerment as an isolated or individual achievement, these novels envision resistance and resilience as collaborative, embodied,

and rooted in material interdependence. Reclaiming the traumatised, monstrous and docile bodies as sites of agency challenges cultural narratives that marginalize women and other non-normative identities. An expanded perspective promotes a more inclusive understanding of identity and embodiment – one that accounts for how social, environmental, and cultural forces co-shape lived experiences. Transcorporeality as both a theoretical tool and a guiding principle for interdisciplinary thinking, social justice advocacy, and ecological consciousness emerges clearly through this framework.

Through the analysis of *The Leto Bundle*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *All the Murmuring Bones*, this study has reaffirmed the inseparability of human and nonhuman entities, challenging anthropocentric and patriarchal narratives that marginalize the female body. It is understood through these texts how female bodies, often depicted as traumatised, docile, or monstrous, resist systemic oppression and redefine their relationships with the material world. Transcorporeality, then, provides a lens not only for interpreting literature but also for addressing global challenges such as environmental degradation, gender inequality, and systemic injustice. By underlining the interconnectedness of bodies and environments, transcorporeality draws attention to the transformative potential of collective agency, relationality, and resilience in both theoretical and practical contexts.

The integration of theoretical perspectives from Stacy Alaimo, Rosi Braidotti, and Donna Haraway establishes a robust foundation for analysing the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman entities. The close reading of *The Leto Bundle*, *The Carhullan Army*, and *All the Murmuring Bones* benefited from this theoretical framework to explore the various representations of the female body and its entanglements with social, cultural, and ecological systems. Balancing theory with textual analysis, the study traced how embodiment in these works becomes a critical space of negotiation, entanglement, and agency.

One significant limitation of this study, however, lies in its focus on a relatively small selection of texts. While the chosen novels – *The Leto Bundle, The Carhullan Army*, and *All the Murmuring Bones* – offer diverse perspectives on female embodiment and transcorporeality, their specificity may constrain a broader understanding of how transcorporeality functions across varying narratives and settings. The theoretical framework itself also has some limitations. While transcorporeality is a powerful lens for examining interconnectedness, it risks overlooking the distinctiveness of individual experiences in favour of emphasizing relationality. This tension between the collective and the individual could be further explored in future studies, particularly with regard to the subtleties of agency and autonomy in contexts of trauma and resilience. Additionally, the intersections of transcorporeality with emerging discourses in feminist materialism and posthumanism present opportunities for new theoretical explorations.

The dissertation concludes by stressing the applicability of transcorporeality as a literary lens and as a framework for reconsidering relational existence in the face of pressing environmental and societal issues. Literature – particularly women's writing – has the capacity to bridge the abstract and the experiential, the symbolic, and the material. As demonstrated through the rich portrayals of female embodiment in the selected novels, transcorporeality reveals the world-making power of relationality: the capacity of bodies, human and nonhuman, to transform, resist, and reimagine the systems that alter them. The study invites us to take seriously the possibility that embodiment is not confined to the self, but always in relation – an ongoing negotiation with history, myth, place, and others. In this light, the female body – once treated as static, symbolic, or subordinated – reclaims its position as a vital, world-engaged site of transformation and agency.

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ÖZET

Bu tezin amacı çağdaş İngiliz kadın edebiyatından örnekler kapsamında geçişken bedenselliği, sosyopolitik ve ekolojik bağlamlarda kadın bedeni, travması ve iradesini anlamak için dönüştürücü bir çerçeve olarak incelemektir. Bu doğrultuda, Marina Warner'ın *The Leto Bundle* (2001), Sarah Hall'un *The Carhullan Army* (2007) ve Angela Slatter'ın *All the Murmuring Bones* (2021) adlı romanlarında betimlenen kadın bedeninin ataerkil ve insan merkezli anlatılara nasıl meydan okuduğu tartışılmaktadır. Bu eserler ışığında, tezde kadın bedeninin sistemli baskı karşısında dayanıklılığı ve dönüşümü yeniden tasavvur etmedeki rolü irdelenmektedir. Çalışmada özellikle travma geçirmiş, dirençli ve 'ucube' kadın bedeni tasvirlerinin ilişkisellik ve kolektif katılımcılık paydasında nasıl birleştiği vurgulanarak, bu ilişkiselliğin insan ve insan dışı varlıklar arasındaki çok katmanlı karşılıklılığı ele alınmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, bedenler ve çevreler arasındaki geçirgen sınırları araştırmak için geçişken bedensellik kuramsal bir bakış açısı olarak öne çıkmakta olup, geçişken bedensellik insan sonrası feminist teori ve materyal beden teorileri içinde konumlandırılmaktadır. Tezin ilk bölümünde, geçişken bedenselliğin insan bedenini çevresinden ayıran insan merkezci ve ataerkil çerçevelere nasıl meydan okuduğunu ele alınarak teorik temel atılmaktadır. Bu kavramın, bedenlerin insan ve insan dışı ağlar arasındaki dinamik, ilişkisel doğasını vurgulayarak bedenlenmeyi nasıl yeniden kavramsallaştırdığını araştırmaktadır. İkinci bölümde, Marina Warner'ın *The Leto Bundle* (2001) adlı romanı incelenmekte ve Leto'nun travma geçirmiş bedeninin nasıl hem tarihsel ve mitolojik şiddetin bir ürünü, hem de bir hayatta kalma ve başkalaşım geçirme sahası olarak işlev gördüğü tartışılmaktadır. Leto'nun zaman ve coğrafyadaki yolculuğu, travmanın materyal ve insan dışı güçlerle etkileşimler yoluyla nasıl somutlaştığını ortaya koymakla birlikte sosyopolitik baskıya karşı bir direniş biçimi olarak bedensel mücadelenin öneminin altını çizmektedir. Üçüncü bölümde, Sarah Hall'un romanının baş karakteri Sister'ın hem insan bedeni hem de doğal

çevre üzerinde kontrol sağlayan otoriter bir rejimle karşı karşıya geldiği *The Carhullan Army* (2007) adlı romanı incelenmektedir. Bu bölümde, romanda çevresel bozulma ile kadın bedenine uygulanan baskılar arasındaki paralelliğin nasıl tasvir edildiğinin altı çizilmekte ve özgürleşme için verilen simbiyotik mücadelenin önemi tartışılmaktadır. Dördüncü bölümde, Angela Slatter'ın *All the Murmuring Bones* (2022) adlı romanına odaklanılarak, Mirin'in canavarlaştırılmış bedeninin, insan dışı okyanus güçleriyle olan mitolojik akrabalığı sayesinde nasıl şekillendiği incelenmektedir. Mirin'in sahip olduğu hibrit beden ve mitolojik deniz canlılarıyla olan atalarından kalma bağlantısı, insan/insan dışı sınırların istikrarsızlaşmasını yansıtmakta ve Mirin'in miras kalan ailesel ve toplumsal kısıtlamalara karşı direniş yoluyla kendi katılımcılığını geri kazanmasına olanak tanımaktadır. Bu bölümde, 'ucube' beden, tiksindiren bir form olarak algılanışının ötesinde fiziksel dünyada dönüştürücü bir unsur olarak tartışılmaktadır. Tez kapsamında incelenen bu eserlerde geçişken bedensellik yerleşik ikiliklere meydan okumak ve aktif katılımı, vücut bulmayı ve ilişkiselliği yeniden tanımlamak için önemli bir anlatı aracı olarak hizmet etmektedir. Sonuç olarak tezde, küresel zorluklarla mücadelede ilişkisel düşüncenin ve kolektif katılımın öneminin yanı sıra kadın bedenini dinamik bir katılım ve birbirine bağlılık alanı olarak yeniden tasavvur etmede edebiyatın ve özellikle çağdaş kadın yazınının rolü vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *The Leto Bundle*, travma geçirmiş beden, *The Carhullan Army*, direnen beden, *All the Murmuring Bones*, 'ucube' Beden, geçişken Bedensellik, insan ötesi feminizm

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to examine transcorporeality as a transformative framework for understanding female embodiment, trauma, and agency in sociopolitical and ecological discussions in the context of selected novels from contemporary women's writing. By analysing *The Leto Bundle* (2001) by Marina Warner, *The Carhullan Army* (2007) by Sarah Hall, and *All the Murmuring Bones* (2021) by Angela Slatter, the study explores how the representation of the female body in these texts challenge dominant patriarchal and anthropocentric narratives. In the light of the literary works, this study probes into the role of the female body in providing a means to reimagine resilience and transformation in the face of systemic oppression. Specifically, the dissertation highlights how portrayals of traumatised, resistant, and monstrous female bodies, unified under the common denominators of relationality and collective agency, reveal an intricate interconnectedness between human and nonhuman entities. This study situates itself within posthuman feminist theory and material body theories, employing transcorporeality as a critical lens to investigate the porous boundaries between bodies and environments. The theoretical framework emphasizes how human and nonhuman bodies are in constant material exchange, highlighting the importance of interconnectedness in forming agency and identity. The first chapter lays the theoretical foundation by addressing how transcorporeality challenges anthropocentric and patriarchal frameworks that separate the human body from its environment. It explores how this concept reconceptualizes embodiment, emphasizing the dynamic, relational nature of bodies across human and nonhuman networks. The second chapter analyses Marina Warner's *The Leto Bundle* (2001), demonstrating how Leto's traumatised body functions as both a product of historical and mythological violence and a site of survival and transformation. Her journey through time and geography reveals how trauma becomes embodied through interactions with material and nonhuman forces,

underscoring the significance of transcorporeal survival as a form of resistance to sociopolitical oppression. The third chapter examines Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007), where the protagonist Sister confronts an authoritarian regime that enforces control over both human bodies and the natural environment. This chapter highlights how the novel portrays a parallel between environmental degradation and the subjugation of female bodies, illustrating a symbiotic struggle for liberation. The fourth chapter focuses on Angela Slatter's *All the Murmuring Bones* (2022), where Mirin's monstrous embodiment is shaped by her mythological kinship with nonhuman, oceanic forces. Her body's hybridity and connection to ancestral sea creatures reflect the destabilization of human/nonhuman boundaries, allowing Mirin to reclaim her agency through resistance to inherited familial and societal constraints. This chapter argues that the monstrous body, far from being a site of abjection, becomes a source of transformative power within the material world. In the light of the works examined in this dissertation, the study reveals how transcorporeality serves as a vital narrative device for challenging established binaries and redefining agency, embodiment, and relationality. Ultimately, the dissertation underscores the role of literature, and contemporary women's writing in particular, in reimagining the female body as a dynamic site of agency and interconnectedness, advocating for relational thinking and collective action in addressing global challenges.

Keywords: *The Leto Bundle*, traumatised body, *The Carhullan Army*, resisting body, *All the Murmuring Bones*, monstrous body, transcorporeality, posthuman feminism