Within The Folds: How Biomedical Science is Redefining Traditional Concepts of Parenthood and Parenting.

Researching *Within the Folds*

Critical Commentary

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

of Doctor of Philosophy

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Time folds you in its arms and gives you one last kiss, and then it flattens you out and folds you up and tucks you away until it’s time for you to become someone else’s past time, and then time folds again

(Atwood, 2006).

**Within The Folds – Synopsis.**

*Within the Folds* is a 70,000 word novel where prehistory and the near future meet together in a narrative examining the forces of evolution and duration. The work particularly focuses on the conceptual changes taking place in parenting models as biomedical science gives opportunities to reproductive paradigms which were previously impossible. Taking the premise that developments in human engineering are unstoppable, I explore the transgenic boundaries between 'natural evolution' and proactive human design, conceptually and thematically, as new models of gender roles within family life become inevitable.

The novel is set in a cosmopolitan world of comparative temporalities and new moralities somewhere in the near future. The settings span across England, America, India and the Middle East, drawing together global cultural myths and provoking diverse evolutionary futures. Through my characters and plots I examine the role art can fulfil in the realms of the post-human, literature, scientific discovery, and public opinion.

David Marriot, a Civil Engineer in the construction industry, has a strained relationship with his wife, Jo, who refuses to give birth to a second child (her first, Katy, being from a previous relationship). Desperate for his own child, David engages a surrogate mother, Mayarani, in Mumbai to give birth to his baby daughter. Dr Nandini Patel runs the surrogacy clinic which he visits. Her aim is to give young Indian women finances and passports which will provide them with more opportunities and life choices. Despite receiving death threats from ‘The League of the Natural Order’, Jac Costa, a dowager artist and David’s childhood sweetheart, uses her art forms to create new concepts of reproductive engineering in womb-like pods, which also promote her own healing from a previous teenage abortion, conceived with David. Meanwhile, Trace and Daz are arranging an illegal party in the disused metro tunnels of New York which David’s engineering company are about to fill with liquid concrete. Worrying about
his missing wife and step daughter and unaware they are trapped in these tunnels, David inadvertently becomes responsible for their deaths when he trusts his work colleague to carry out the void filling procedure. When David finally takes charge of his baby daughter he finds all the women close to him are not available to help. He subsequently has sole charge of Zoe, whom he brings up alone.

Slipped between the pages of this narrative is a fictional book of the Virgin Mary, written in the first person, from the perspective of a thirteen year old. Her story mirrors Mayarani’s maternal surrogate status and throws a light on traditional narratives concerning the maternal and parenthood. It highlights particularly the impossibility of virgin birth and suggests that the young ‘Mary’, who has been experiencing her awakening sexuality, lied about the father of her child to avoid social stigma. The novel functions as a composite palimpsest, including poetry, footnotes, emails and prayers.

The main metaphors of rock and water highlight evolutionary beginnings, instability and the female maternal predicament of being trapped between a rock and a hard place. Feminist revolution can be seen to be eroding traditional paradigms through haphazard rhizonomic forces.

**Generation – Introducing Theoretical Approaches and Contextualising Fiction.**

Of course intellectual researchers have paid particular attention to biomedical ethics and the revolutions taking place as a result of reproductive technologies, yet there is no exclusive creative study about the potential 'seismic shift' taking place in concepts of parenthood and how this may influence changes in gender stereotyping. Scientific technologies have greatly enhanced the possibility for individuals, previously inhibited by medical or social circumstances, to have the opportunity to parent children who share their DNA. As Michelle Stanworth says since the birth of the first ‘test-tube’ baby in 1978 terms such as ‘in-vitro fertilisation, surrogate motherhood, genetic engineering, frozen embryos or egg donation have acquired the status of
household words’ (1987, p.1). However, many observers of these progresses in science have articulated concern that these ‘unnatural’ advances have the potential to increase the risk of child trafficking, manipulation of women and give rise to a new kind of quasi eugenics reminiscent of some of the darker episodes of 20th Century European culture. Controversially it is scientifically more and more possible to determine the genetic makeup of a foetus before it is conceived and to detect abnormalities thus making selection processes entirely plausible. Many concerned parties, including feminists, have expressed apprehension about the how these developments may have an agenda which further represses the civil liberties of women and children.

These issues have been covered in numerous dystopian narratives and many religions, societies, nations and philosophies prohibit the use of any form of intervention to the ‘natural’ processes of reproduction, whilst others impose strict controls on potential surrogacy arrangements. I did not set out for this novel to address these innovations in reproductive technologies from a scientific perspective but instead chose to consider the social implications from a feminist point of view. I perceived that such scientific advances challenge the traditional conceptual framework of ‘natural’ procreation and therefore open a doorway to consider reproduction in a new light. I suggest that these innovations, far from further subjugating women, have the potential to revolutionise women’s social role which is so intricately bound up with ideologies of ‘natural’ order. Instead the scientific advances provide a framework where conception is possible outside of the genetic maternal female body and therefore it is an opportunity for men and women to share more equally in the process of parenthood and subsequently in parenting roles. The novel does not in any way deny the complex maternal reality nor set out to degrade motherhood but, instead, through the application of scientific innovation, opens the possibility for men to share more fully in the ‘maternal’ experience. Individual men and women are seeking surrogates to provide children when they do not have permanent partners and same-sex couples parent children who share their DNA. These advances will highlight and mirror the already transforming gender roles in society. This novel suggests that these technologies may not be selective or prohibitive but alternatively have the potential to create a more multiplicitous freedom for family structures and alliances. A society where more choice and diversity is possible and where women are no longer bound by their ‘biological function’ and perceived social role. There is the possibility to challenge all
perceived norms, particularly those of gender roles. *Within the Folds* attempts to create a world within which women are more in control of the conceptual sphere of reproduction removing it from its patriarchal roots and are therefore freer to make choices regarding the relationship between their social role, reproduction and parenting. It deconstructs the ideology of traditional motherhood and creates a world in which parenthood and parenting has more latitude and possibility. Far from the problem being that women and children’s needs will be understood less and therefore side-lined there is a chance that if women take a stronger position in reproductive technologies and achieve more agency, men have the opportunity to become more conscious and accountable for childcare and their relationships with their children, subsequently becoming placed more equally in the family. The mother-child bond is not weakened, instead as it becomes less sacrosanct, it can give space for the father-child bond to be strengthened. This could provide a far more diverse social and psychological backdrop for future generations where gender roles become more fluid and everybody benefits. The novel suggests that the dangerous application of biomedical technologies has nothing to do with changing gender roles; the danger has to do with the potential perpetuation of economic and patriarchal control over these reproductive technologies.

My aim is to examine these issues in the form of a novel, with the opinion that such advances have the potential to profoundly break through conventional limitations and redefine traditional views of motherhood and parenting. This commentary is an analytical reflection of my novel’s development as well as a critical essay on the themes related to the core subject material. It will place the creative component in a theoretical framework and situate it within a genre of contemporary fictions.

In *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976) Marina Warner examined the socio-political power of semiotics and storytelling in relation to the concept of the Virgin mother. She also explored the subsequent historical restraints felt by women regarding their social role. Yet, nearly forty years later, across the globe, women are still primarily responsible for the care of children. Despite waves of feminisms rippling across continents, many women, like me, continue to be daily confronted with such sexist expectations. Our culture is saturated with traditional myths of womanhood thus limiting career prospects and financial independence. I wonder what happened to the world of equality the feminists of past decades sought to create. Having lived through and been radically involved in the feminist movement in
the 1980’s,¹ I am surprised by the irony of finding myself having lived in a traditional marriage struggling to balance issues to do with work alongside the restrictions of primary childcare responsibilities. In order to better understand these predicaments, I have written the novel *Within the Folds* to examine how the myth of the Virgin still perpetuates in many cultures and religions. I explore how traditional models of what constitutes femaleness are deeply limiting, affecting the lives of a diverse cross-section of women across the world whether living in financial prosperity or poverty. I examine these issues in the light of recent advances in biomedical science which have the potential to profoundly redefine such conventional views.

A woman’s ‘choice’ to be a mother is uninfringeable and not seen in political terms as an inequality. This preserves, in the female psyche, an unspoken devotion or obedience to the phallocentric system and reveals collusion in such a status quo. Via my characters’ relationships I reveal how traditional scientific and religious thinking has attached a ‘natural order’ to these male and female reproductive roles. I deconstruct the resulting rationale of traditional structures of marriage which have designated unpaid/low paid childcare responsibilities to women and are still a global conformity. In my novel, Nick and Ethan (two gay men) show they have the potential to provide a more nurturing and secure family environment than the conventional heterosexual couple, David and Jo. Mayarani’s traditional family roots in Mumbai reveal sexual oppression and abuse from which she must escape; Mary’s pregnancy and birth is based on untruths and is not under the auspices of a customary marriage; and the prehistorical care of a baby is exclusively female. The women in my novel are subject to and attempting to take control of the narratives of parenthood and parenting to create new possibilities. I have chosen to highlight reproductive developments as I believe it is essential that care is observed in the new research and innovations taking place in biomedical engineering to avoid replicating further gendered constraints and inequalities. As Allen Buchanan suggests (2011) it is not the biomedical advancements in themselves which are the cause for concern, it is how they impact other systems. The legal system and science are redefining traditional concepts and it is vital that women understand the issues and are rigorously engaged in debates and policy making.

My novel chronicles the drive for survival, where women desire a way out from the constraints of traditional prototypes by demanding to be individuals. I explore the restrictive historical

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¹ *Greenham Common* Peace Camp, Newbury, Berkshire. The female-only composition of the peace camp allowed women to claim their own governance in a political arena often reserved for men. The location was predominantly a ‘male’ military airbase where the women of Greenham integrated themselves, not through violence, but through their presence and activism.
layers of the myth of the Virgin through multiple character perspectives. My creative practice has been directly informed and inspired by a number of fictions and critical approaches through which I have examined this myth. I will outline their relevance and explain how they have facilitated me to articulate an exploration of the changing role of parenthood through the medium of creative writing. I have investigated *Stabat Mater* by Julia Kristeva (Moi, 2002); *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) by Shulamith Firestone; Sarah Dillon’s *Palimpsest* (2007); as well Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004) and I have used my characters, plot and setting to illustrate the rhizonomic² nature of feminist rebellion. However, other theoretical considerations seep through the text, including ecocriticism, colonialism and cybernetics, as well as Lisa Appignanesi’s *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Madness* (2009) and Michel Foucault’s work on sexuality and *The Birth of the Clinic* (2003). I have been particularly influenced by the themes addressed in the fiction of Margaret Atwood, particularly *The Handmaid’s Tale*, published in 1985, Kazuo Ishiguro (*Never Let Me Go*, 2005), Marge Piercy (*Woman on the Edge of Time*, 1977), and Jim Crace (*Quarantine*, 1998). The examination and experimentation with language in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), and Monique Wittig’s *The Opoponax* (1964) and *Les Guérillères*, (1969), has emboldened my technique and political point of view. While examining the palimpsest nature of historical research, I have also drawn upon Peter Ackroyd’s *Hawksmoor*, published in 1985, and I have reflected upon David Mitchell’s structural techniques, where he splices out moments of time, and creates repetition throughout history, arching and folding it back on itself in *Cloud Atlas* (2004). Thematically Michel Houellebecq’s controversial novels have also engaged me as he draws on French intellectuals and philosophers to explicate his cutting edge critiques and projections of dystopian futures and I have also been fortified by the themes he and Ali Smith (*How to be Both*, 2014) address regarding the power of artistic endeavour. There have been many other creative works which have influenced my work including *Next* (2007) by Michael Crichton who writes about genetic advancements in America, *The Testament of Mary* (2013) by Colm Toibin who gives Mary the Virgin a first person narrative and I have also studied Somalian Poetry (*An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, 1993) which has supported the imagery I have used and my research on Nomadic/migrant life, politically and socially. I have been stimulated by science

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² *Rhizome* is a philosophical concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*Capitalism and Schizophrenia, 1972–1980*). It is an idea devised from the growth patterns of rhizome plants which develop multiplicities. “Rhizome” and “rhizomatic” are words used to describe the theory that countenances multiple, non-hierarchical movement or evolution. Deleuze and Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus, 1987*) use it to refute an arborescent concept, which works with linear connections and binary classifications. A rhizome works with planar and trans-species connections creating multiplicities.
and speculative fictions by writers such as William Gibson and Ursula Le Guinn, and not forgetting Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) which has inspired much writing about the medical influence taken in reproductive technologies. There is not enough space within the confines of this thesis to discuss the plethora of influences upon which my work stands. As a result, it is my aim to limit discussion to the most salient and influential texts and ideas that have informed and contextualise the writing of my novel.

This critical commentary will also show, as a result of my research, how and why I reveal geological themes and metaphors, particularly of rock and water. I will examine my choice of character, plot and creative writing techniques as well as explain my research methodology through the action of creative writing. The novel is polyphonic, my plots, storylines and characters overlay one another and intersect and I hope my readers will engage with the creative text as tectonic, ‘a dynamic...*intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point’* (Dunn and Morris, 1995, p.117).

Julia Kristeva asks,

*Resorption of femininity within the Maternal is specific to many civilisations, but Christianity ... brings it to its peak. Could it be that such a reduction represents no more than a masculine appropriation of the Maternal, which ... is only a fantasy masking primary narcissism? Or... the workings of enigmatic sublimation?*


Through my text, I deconstruct this question and create new narratives in the light of biomedical science and reproductive techniques. The heterosexual nuclear family as a romantic fantasy still persists in contemporary culture and, although it is clearly no longer universally practicable, it is still the reference point from which family life is measured. Using a traditional biblical format for one of the textual surfaces of my work, I have chosen to record a fictional *Book of Mary* to redress the underlying traditional myth of the Virgin with a new narrative and explore alternative possibilities to this ‘cult’. Further influenced by Colm Toibin’s fictional account, *The Testament of Mary* (2013), my reinterpretation and revisioning of the biblical text, putting it in the first person and including narratives previously omitted, I refuse a traditional concept of the Virgin, God and the subsequent underlying myths (Barthes, 1967). This is
because the history of the events or human encounters is never something that can be exhausted or agreed upon, but will always remain conjecture, especially without authentic first-hand accounts. I aim to not be heretical in my exposure of the possible lived life of the Virgin but rather to create Kristeva’s idea of ‘herethics’ in *Stabat Mater* (1985), a new representation, in this case, of motherhood, a discourse which is able to speak for women outside of patriarchal family arrangements.

I challenge the myth’s psychosocial functions and examine how it has been used and changed to suit a variety of agendas throughout history. I have used a traditional biblical format and set it in aligned paragraphs with horizontal text. This appears on the page like strips, piled upon one another like the strata of rock in a chronological form. I wanted to show in historical layering, like a palimpsest, that words may alter but still have traces of their origins and how they have shaped our view of landscape, particularly the notion of rock as permanent, stable and unmoving. I aim at an interpretation of the geography of language as erodible, changeable and fluid. My text seeks to give women voice and new narratives by valuing the importance of the body within landscape, to show what the French call ‘terroir’, the link between land and identity. Influenced by the globalised geopolitical terrain Houellebecq describes in *The Map and the Territory* (2011), I hope to find

**. . . the rediscovery of a meaning, the perceiving that the earth is a form of writing, a geography of which we had forgotten that we ourselves are the authors**  
(Perec, 1974, p.79).

Warner’s book, which documents a chronological history of language, belief and social control, appeared to me as a metaphor of layered history, a palimpsest, like geological rock strata, heavily imposed on and broadly internalised by women right up to the twenty-first century. I wanted to imitate the device which Ackroyd uses in *Hawksmoor* (1993), where these sediments and traces of past lives and written words seep into the present as a kind of haunting, and to create a similar atmosphere in my novel by the appearance of Mary as she slips out from the biblical past into the underground tunnels of New York (p.171). Through a web of continuous repetitions or echoes of conversations and events, I hope to reveal that evolution and the understanding of evolution takes place through rhizonomic systems. Traces of the past are
always in the present and often linked by language, so rather than seeing evolution as a linear development of embodied matter I wanted to show ‘emergent processes, each of which builds on the complexities that emerged from the preceding level’ (Hayles, 2005, p.25). I considered this in the light of *The History of Sexuality* (1990) where Foucault emphasises that the ‘power mechanisms of sexuality are socially constructed, unstable and historically situated’ (p.1) and began to exhume this ‘unstable’ status quo, understand its meaning and find solutions to remedy it. In parallel, and using the character of Jo’s mother, I also wanted to unearth the psychological impact of such historical concepts on women and have drawn upon the work of Lisa Appignanesi, *Mad Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors* (2009) to reveal this. I broadly interpreted her work as a record of the mass psychological internalisation by women of the religious patriarchal system and the profound social consequences of reducing women’s voices of malcontent into madness or the infantile.

Kristeva’s works, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) and *Stabat Mater* (Moi, 2002) alongside Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (2002), suggest the possibility of a new conversation around motherhood, moving away from its traditional religious roots in purity, virginity, worship and sacrifice. Wittig describes this as ‘only a sophisticated and mythic construction … which reinterprets physical features (in themselves neutral …) through the network of [social] relationships in which they are perceived’ (Wittig, cited in Stone, 2007, p.94). I aim to explore this in the light of Ann Stone’s idea that it is possible to affirm the biological reality of sex whilst also pursuing the abolition of gender.

Religion and gender, throughout history, seem to have been poetically connected to concepts and experiences of nature, i.e. maleness/godliness being akin to strength, rock-hard solidity and immovability whereas femininity is viewed as being weaker, more fluid, unpredictable and dangerous. To review these notions, I have used metaphors which consider our corresponding changing relationship with our planet and the environment, where rock is mutable and fluidity advantageous.

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1 *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982). Kristeva states that it is not the absence of “cleanliness or health” that produces abjection, but it is that which disrupts identity, organisation and symbolic systems. The abject dwells outside symbolic representation, and confronting or facing it is a fundamentally distressing experience as it brings us to confront our own mortality. From Kristeva’s psychoanalytic point of view, we make abject the part of ourselves that we need to exclude. Eg. the mother. We must abject the maternal, the object which has created us, in order to construct an identity.
She wished the rock would give a little. Like a soft mattress, so she could bend it aside

(p.120).

I also inquire how the compelling attraction to the state of being untouched, pure or without stain is deep in our psyche and ask profound questions of the ecology movement which constantly seeks to reinstate this belief system. Through references to Bt Cotton and Monsanto Company *(the lorries and farming on the outskirts of Mumbai, p.19)* I explore the complex and deep seated anthropological concepts as discussed by Douglas in *Purity and Danger*, (2002) and why these moral ideals are so strong in discourses concerning ecological activism, religious ideologies and law making concerning genetic engineering. Looking at George Myerson’s pamphlet *Donna Haraway and GM Foods* (2000), I examine what is pure and ask, is it better to purify nature or is this process one which inherently and paradoxically contaminates, as it could be seen as an attempt to alter nature and change natural processes. As Brent Rannalli discusses in his conference paper,

*From a scientific point of view, the removal of synthetic and naturally occurring chemical impurities from air and water produces significant health and ecological benefits – but only up to a point, and then it becomes inefficiently costly, and sometimes even detrimental to health*  

(Ranalli, 2013, p.14).

Why we are so attached to the natural order of things is an interesting debate especially as we know it to be cruel. Nature is not a ‘beautifully designed, harmonious, finished product’, evolution is more of a ‘morally blind … tinkerer’ *(Buchanan, 2011, p.29)*. According to Buchanan, playing God responsibly is probably a better option than relying on nature’s mistakes. I am, therefore, interested in the relationship between concepts of purity and the innovations in technology which may be interpreted as polluting all that is natural. As Lisa Lynch says we are ‘haunted’ by uncanny and frightening images of futuristic scientific and biomedical discoveries but the desire to enhance human capability is ongoing. Agricultural and health industries rely upon sophisticated genetic innovations to enrich possibilities and productivity. Human Reproduction is no longer limited to functioning within a corporeal body and therefore

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4 *Monsanto Company* – An American agricultural multinational specialising using agrochemical and biotechnology.
there is an attempt to transcend the abjection of the beginnings of life. This logic suggests that it may also provide the prospect of possible medical interventions which may also transcend death. Such biomedical developments have the potential to constitute both progressive and monstrous results, both purifying ‘nature’s mistakes’ and contaminating natural processes.

Michel Houellebecq documents in his dystopian novel, *The Elementary Particles* (2003), sex stripped of its connection to reproduction. Like Huxley, he describes it as no longer a reproductive function but reduced ‘not as a pleasure principle, but as a form of narcissistic differentiation’ (cited in Cooksey, 2006, p.209). Houellebecq reveals the dangerous possibility of ‘grafting the post-human onto a liberal humanist view of the self’ (Hayles, 1999, p.287). My character David is based on Houellebecq’s male characters, who are generally unsociable, sexually awkward men. With such men at the centre of reproductive choices in a phallocentric world it seems necessary that women, such as my fictional Dr Patel, Mayarani and Trace, are beginning to take hold of the narratives of reproduction before the advances in biomedical science are yet again usurped by such men and inequality and exploitation are again the norm of reproductive practice. Houellebecq notes in *The Map and The Territory* (2011) that it is a man’s place in the productive process not the reproductive process which defines him thus leaving reproduction open to the daunting prospect of capitalist forces. Houellebecq is criticised for his often brash and abhorrent depiction of reality, but there is something dangerously resonant, that pokes at a raw nerve, about his characters and how convincingly their lives reflect capitalist/consumerist society.

Advances in human reproductive technologies are creating a multiplicity of diverse choices, such as, manipulating the genetic heredity of embryos, illustrated by the recent suggested alteration to the human fertilisation and embryology act 1990. This enables mitochondrial donation and gives same sex couples the opportunity of parenthood with offspring made up from their shared DNA. These changes may ultimately transform the established status and social roles for women in relation to childbirth and childcare and women must be present in the creation of narratives surrounding such advances. Biomedical Science provides an alternative to traditional Darwinian relationship models that can then be replaced by alternative non-dualistic or non-linear ancestries.
If we engage with the theory of endosymbiosis, autopoiesis and turbulent organization, modes of sex and reproduction (information transmission) are not predetermined by the economy of survival, sexual competition, selection of the fittest and passive adaptation. Modes of sex and reproduction are not subjected to a predetermined aim – such as genealogical filiation aimed to increasing progression and emancipation of humanity– but involve molecular differentiation across singular states of cellular organization (Parisi, 2004, cited in Braidotti, par 34, 2002).

My character Jac Costa, is a radical, dowager of younger artists engaged in political and feminist endeavour. Her name is a direct reference to Jocasta, the quiet and almost absent mother in the Oedipus story. Through her I explore how artistic impressions and creative images of these biomedical advances and genetic modifications influence public opinion and, therefore science, and I examine where my novel might fit into these innovations. We are already aware of how images of aborted children affect public opinion (The Silent Scream)\(^5\) and how such imagery is used in political discourse. Jac Costa is using the same processes but relaying a different message, a feminist political discourse which frees women from traditional maternal ideologies.

The relationship between art, scientific discovery, the multiplicity of public opinion and financial markets is examined as her fictional installations reveal these forces at work especially in relation to parenthood, surrogacy and advanced reproductive techniques. Again Houellebecq (2011) examines this relationship between art and the world it seeks to depict, in a warning which explores egotism, capitalism and selfishness. Far from seeing him as a misogynist, I am intrigued at how brazenly he predicts the horrors of the male instinct and through his novels he forces counter activity. It would be interesting to observe more fully how Houellebecq’s characters would approach the women in my novel. Certainly his characters in The Possibility of an Island (2006) represent the possibilities of male behaviour if detached from their traditional role in reproduction. I have, therefore, chosen to place at the centre of my novel the story of a man whose wife wants no more children and who subsequently uses, The Oasis Center, a surrogacy agency in Mumbai, India, to parent another child. This (not so) fictional agency is involved in research and testing and is politically connected to the work of Jac Costa. Through the plot and these characters I explore the relationship between art, cultural revolution and

\(^5\) The Silent Scream – Anti abortion propaganda film made in 1984. Where the foetus can be seen expressing pain during the procedure.
social action and investigate the complexity of how, despite appearing revolutionary, art can also reassure that the issues which concern us are being addressed in political quarters and, as a result, engender public apathy.

My novel is therefore a metaphor for shifting and changing consciousness and the emerging new concepts of parenthood as a result of biomedical pioneering in reproductive technologies. This opens up options to a right to parenting models which are free from the conditioned male and female roles, and creates possibilities of new multiplicitous models of family life. It explores what is now scientifically possible and its impact on the choices people may make in childbirth and childrearing practices. This novel contributes to the struggle and shaping of the future from a feminist perspective. As Eric Lander said,

*As important as the scientific process is going to be, there’s an equally important need to struggle over the images and the metaphors that we’re going to be able to use to understand the science, and in the end I think that the people who contribute the images and the metaphors that we as a society choose will shape the impact of the genetics every bit as much as the scientists* (2000, cited in Lynch, 2007, p.180).

As my character Maya, the surrogate mother in Mumbai, says,

‘*I’m an idea, not a commodity*’

(p.149).

Myth is present in art and writing and both of these influence us through symbolic gesture. The myth/story of the Virgin is one from which we still base our ideals of motherhood. We turn to it when inquiring who we should aspire to, and we measure our successes and failures by the traditional designs of society and what constitutes normal moral behaviour. ‘Stay at home’ fathers who take long stretches of paternity leave are still in the minority because they are not present in the myth as natural care givers. As a result, posts in business and politics, academia and so on, are still predominantly male. Surveys repeatedly reveal that men command more
high positions in work (e.g. women hold less than one third of top jobs). The contributory factor of motherhood and family is touched upon in discussion, and comments made about how women are helped by the provision of childcare as if men do not also require such support. The choice is left to women. As a woman’s ‘choice’ to be a mother remains sacrosanct and not seen in ethical terms as inequality, an unspoken adherence to continue to place her subject to the phallocentric systems reveals female complicity in this status quo, the freedom to make ‘choices’ outside of deeply rooted psychological systems may be viewed as an important factor. The roots of what governs this ‘choice’ remain inadequately questioned. This leaves notions of the ‘natural untamed force’ of instinct and the maternal, unexamined, sacred and untouchable. We cannot be sure then whether this is choice or a state of affairs governed by an underlying myth which governs many systems. Kristeva suggests that this interpretation of maternal instinct is because it resides in what she terms ‘the speech of non-being’ (cited in Eagleton, 2011, p.268), because it is viewed as abject, as it represents a non-binary space where Mother and child are not separate, where two things merge into one, preverbal and over which narrative has no control.

The conundrum of why women are still in the minority in positions of power, therefore, is never tackled at its source, straight at the maternal origins. Women will never reach an agreement on these issues but it is important that the origins of discourses about the maternal are analysed from within the folds of a number of viewpoints, including the personal, psychological, legal, historical, social and biological. By deconstructing the Virgin myth in the light of biomedical advances in reproduction, I wrestle with these origins in my novel. Despite a persistent surface howling from many voices for equality for women and a general state of lip-service given to the topic, an unwillingness to dig deeper continues. This leaves the issue deeply embedded in cultural expectation and dominated by the constraints and regulation of a maternal myth which remains and persists as an enduring and powerful unconscious drive. Women are said to ‘choose’ to give up professional status in preference to family as if it were a truly a choice and not an innate cultural expectation. It is rare to find men having to, choosing to or willing to make this long-term decision.

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6 Women hold fewer than a third of top jobs – BBC research by Gerry Holt, BBC News, 29th May 2012.
The Wounded Researcher - Creative Writing and Research.

As I write and research this subject I am aware and will examine how the unveiling of history and its interpretation for future narratives can be a subjective process and one which may be steeped in personal and political responses. There is a ‘complex relation between me, the researcher, and the topic, [where] ... lingers the weight of history that waits to be spoken’ (Romanyszyn, 2007, p.4).

My final thesis is, in the majority, a 70,000 word novel. There are elements of autobiography within this text, disguised in character, plot and metaphor. As Barthes says, autobiography often also incorporates dehiscence⁷ (cited in Burke 2008). This personal psychological wound could be viewed as dwelling in a gap between the words of the research and my own experience. This imaginal gap is the place from which the research has sprung, where my ‘real life has fallen into the cracks between myself’ and my novel (Shields, 2010, p.73). At times my own voice can be heard as it slips onto the page, occasionally deliberately left undisguised (p.199-200). Romanyszyn suggests that there is a difference between what it is that I as researcher bring to and hope to gain from the work, and that which the research degree demands or wants of me (2007). Nonetheless linking the two processes has been a dynamic and rich journey. I have had to return to and re-examine areas of my own life through the investigative process and at the same time make academic sense of my personal concerns to find solutions. I have explored issues which touch me personally and which I have felt important enough to consider worthy of a minimum of three years of my intensive attention, yet I have recorded them in a fictional sense. As Burke suggests in The Death and Return of the Author (2008) ‘[Auto]biography disrupts, enhances and displaces aspects of [my] work’.

I have led a bemused existence as a mother and feminist over the past twenty years. I was born in the early 1960’s, and am part of a generation of women who want to manage life differently from that of our mothers. However, I am faced with the task of creating things which were not role modelled at a grassroots level. I desperately wanted to show a different paradigm to my own children yet despite my feminist intentions and efforts I was struggling to find clarity and could not understand why or what held me back in the realisation of this ideal.

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⁷ Dehiscence is a term used to describe the release of matter by the splitting open of a bodily organ or tissues in animal or plant materials. It might be used in surgery to refer to the rupture of a surgically closed wound.
grew up in a phase of feminism where ‘choosing’ parenthood was still seen to be one that involved giving up career aspirations. Parallel to this, a plethora of popular books under the heading ‘psychology’ were published about what constituted good parenting, including examinations of the trauma of childhood and the wounds of abandonment, especially by the mother. This is not to say that there are not important truths at the centre of these works but they have also led to a concentrated assimilation of female guilt, self-loathing and a deep fear of failing our young children. These parenting ideals place the child at the centre of the maternal, where his or her subjectivity is paramount, to the detriment of the mother. I have punished and chastised myself for my not ‘good enough’ parenting and at the same time my not ‘good enough’ feminist-being. This thesis has helped me to fold away this self-reproach and create something more empowering. This is not to say it is time to tuck away the important bonds between parent and child or a person’s choice to stay at home with children, but rather to shake out and examine what is newly unfolding as the traditional models are fast changing.

I have been encouraged and deeply reassured that the future of research in creative writing focuses, not only on academic sources but combines these self-reflexive aspects in academic research methodology. This puts learning in the context of social meaning making academia relevant and transformational. This fitted with my examination of the French feminists as it directly amalgamates lived experience with academic hypothesis. I struggled in the initial stages of the work to attempt to squeeze and fit my work into my own projected and perceived notion of what PhD level research consisted of, namely a masculine linguistic style with minimal personal content. It was refreshing to attended a recent John Berger conference (Cardiff Metropolitan University, 2014) where I was heartened and inspired because many of the fascinating papers were given by academics and professionals who were creative practitioners exploring the very personal nature of their work and its relation to academic research.

The aim of a research degree is to generate new questions or knowledge, involving the enquiry and creation of fresh and original thought. It provides an opportunity to deepen wisdom and understand ourselves and the world we live in. It is this ontological quest which drives research and enquiry into a greater and further multifaceted understanding of the mysterious universe.

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in which we live. For my research it has been vital to understand the relationship between this and the Deleuzian process of ‘becoming’.9

Creativity/creative writing does not require a beginning or an end, it is an ever changing, ever shifting concern, emerging, generating, regenerating, splitting, shifting and copying, in the business of examining the nature of being. We are never writing from ground zero. Like any other research, my project does not begin in originality but will be following on, in the wake of previous fictions and theories, copying and reinterpreting. Yet through this doubling, and the grouping of new assemblages of thought, it regenerates and becomes new, as Jeri Kroll states in her chapter The Creative Writing Laboratory and its Pedagogy (2013) ‘the dynamic relationship between practice, methodology, theory and artefact that exists can be conceived of as a rhizomatic system’ (p.102). The research is an experiment with present lived conditions, testing them against philosophical thinking with the aim of making new discoveries and hypotheses, but as yet, although it is clear creative writing is a discipline which can involve a high degree of intellectual input, it is still difficult to pin down a specific research methodology. Clearly I have used a qualitative methodology where I have evaluated the experiences of individuals and groups (relating to biographical histories); examined communication, both historical and newly developing; and also closely analysed documents (text, film and images), but this by no means encompasses the whole of it (Flick, 2007).

The written word causes us to live differently into the future. It moves us forward evolutionarily. As Elizabeth Grosz discusses in The Nick of Time (2004) evolution does not only take place in the logical, linear and physical realm as The Origin of the Species (1859) has been interpreted by Darwinian theorists. It also occurs in the semiotic, in the world of the unspoken, the pre-lingual, and through the connection of this with the symbolic (written word). The conditions for re-evaluation and change often lie behind language or the text of a novel,

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9 Becoming is a process of change, flight, or movement within an assemblage. Rather than conceive of the pieces of an assemblage as an organic whole, within which the specific elements are held in place by the organization of a unity, the process of "becoming-" serves to account for relationships between the "discrete" elements of the assemblage. In "becoming," one piece of the assemblage is drawn into the territory of another piece, changing its value as an element and bringing about a new unity. .The process is one of deterritorialization in which the properties of the constituent element disappear and are replaced by the new properties of the assemblage (D&G p.257-258, available at http://www.rhizomes.net/issue5/poke/glossary.html).
somewhere in a semiotic life that lived before it was written, in a sort of ‘choric’ soup. These preconditions for a new symbolic system are essentially different from nothingness or ground zero. The unspoken has repeatedly been relayed through literature, re-examined and given new potentials through new symbolic narratives. Literature has the potential to create new symbolic gestures and codes born out of a sense of something which becomes political, breaks taboos and creates emerging new worlds. As linguists and literary critics of the 20th century assert, literature is not merely representation of the world in which we live, the words on the page also create our world. This is aligned with Christian doctrine which tells us that ‘In the Beginning was the Word’. However, authorship may be interpreted as a continuum, where beginnings are numerous and multidimensional, as a creative force in perpetual transformation. Deleuze and Guattari state that ‘writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, [and] mapping, even realms that are yet to come’ (2011, p.5). I suggest that they are referring to signifiers as fixed entities for, surely, within a text new signs and signifiers are created and used but only to put themselves again subject to the processes of evolution, reorganisation, re-evaluation and remapping through the duration of time. Therefore the process of unpicking an archetypal myth (such as that of the Virgin Mary) with the express aim of creating new narratives could be seen as a process of evolution regarding consciousness. Appreciating the development of understanding in human evolution is complex and more suited to this Deleuzian theory of becoming.

On the whole, as a creative writer, I have done the research at home, travelling into Cardiff for the support of my supervisors. I have occasionally interviewed acquaintances to deepen my knowledge but never in such a way that warranted the normal procedures of ethical consideration or health and safety. I have rarely used Research House as a base, as working at home in amongst the mayhem and chaos of my real lived maternal struggles is closer to the nucleus of my studies. The centre of family is, in my experience, the centre of that which is maternal; it functions by merging both the symbolic and the semiotic. It is a space from which we all came and are, in some ways, eternally bound. I address the subject in a creative form, because paradoxically, whilst the novel may appear to be the epitome of the symbolic (giving meaning), it offers an opening to use language more closely allied to the semiotic (the study of

10 Khora in Platonic terms a space where things materialise. Chora as used by Kristeva the pre-lingual stage of development.
meaning). It is therefore fitting that I am at work within my family home. It has become my laboratory, where I have nurtured my family and PhD alongside one another. I am at work creating a revolution of my own, within the confines of my domestic setting and have also spent periods of time working in my parent’s home, close to my own mother and father. This has proved to be an interesting dynamic as my mother seems to present the bitterness of a woman trapped in the conundrum of which I write and whilst both verbally and externally supportive of my immersion in such studies she is, at the same time, penetratively resentful of my attention to this thesis and suggestive of its destructive potential for my family relations. My thesis, in this environment, has also often been relegated and subjected to the view of women’s writing as something which takes place as a kind of hobby, feminine writing about family, love, relationships and so on. This archaic, narrow and limiting viewpoint is oppressive and I have at times also felt caught in it. I chose to place my creative writing laboratory in the centre of such narratives as it is the writing from within these conditions which may be the most subversive and the ‘most true’. This is because this environment lends itself to be the precondition for the ‘becoming’ or mapping out of different symbolisms. Shocks and tremors emanate from the epicentre of my family which are bound by underground and overland rivulets of ideas and thoughts which move in Deleuzian ‘lines of flight’ (2011, p.226) connecting and generating a system of revolutionary practice, i.e. the critical study impacts lived experience.

In concert with this, to have worked through my PhD within this family life has involved a rhizomatic methodology. Researching has been a process of grabbing moments and being flexible with time, it is a sort of ‘living form of theory’ (Stewart, 2003, cited in Boyd, p.12). Sometimes I have had to drop my work and change course without notice and consider many

11 Lines of flight reveal an infinitesimal possibility of escape. It is a term translated by Brian Massumi from the French “ligne de fuite,” where “fuite” means the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing or leaking. It is concept often used in gender studies to undermine the dualistic determination of the sexes. Deleuze and Guattari refer to it as a “geophilosophy” (Bonta and Protevi, 2004, p.1): which describes space as being continuously redesigned. This idea allows us to navigate gender as a nomadic landscape, with rippled plains, wilderness or desert and underground spaces, always on the move. This movement can be in a political sense as it displaces established viewpoints.

12 Rhizomatic Methodology is the idea that in the writing or construction of a text can pay self-conscious attention to the non-linear movement between ideas, their explication and discussion. Using a method of connections and associations, relationships and ties between various planes of thought, this can occur between fictional and theoretical texts under analysis. See Honan (2015) Thinking Rhizomatically: Using Deleuze in Education Policy cited in Gulson, Clarke and Bendix Peterson, (eds), p.208).

13 In (Re)inventing Artists’ Research: Constructing Living forms of Theory, Stewart discusses how ‘practice can embody and express theory’ (2003, p.2).
other processes at work around me, where planes of thought and fields of reference have shifted and moved at differing paces, making unforeseen connections. This methodology has worked for my practice and has also been fitting to my subject matter, as I have attempted to find new ways of evolving beyond the constraints of my situation and my own internalisation of the Virgin cult. This methodology may remain difficult to understand and not clearly defined as a research method to those who are not creative writing practitioners.

I have researched ‘like a writer’, in that I have lived the past three years in a state of ‘obsessive focus’ (Kroll and Harper, 2013, p.108). I have continuously been in a process of creativity, development and intellectual inquiry. The three years of study has enabled me to find distance and subsequently allow perceptual images to be assessed in relation to their continuing function or viability. The study dwells in a ‘narrow gap ... between fiction and autobiography’ (Shields, 2010, p.24) and at times my own voice is audible between the lines as if I too am squeezing into and out of the text. I enjoyed the way in The Map and the Territory (2011), Houellebecq introduced himself into his own narrative world and although it works for a controversial writer like him I could not perceive of using this device as he does. However, I chose to leave my voice in the text for similar effect (p.199-200), which is to draw it into the real, the present, to be self-conscious about the relationship between myself and the characters in the novel.

I began with an idea which had been with me since I was a child standing in St Mary’s Church, Charlcombe, near Bath. This developed through a story heard over a coffee with a neighbour regarding a surrogacy. I could not understand how forcing the birth of a child on a young woman, where, it seems she was given little choice in the matter, could be interpreted as ‘love’. As Romanyszyn suggests (2007, p.xi) this experience translated as a kind of calling to me. The process has not been confessional in any sense but rather has been a bringing forward and making philosophical meaning of age long questions which have troubled me – to retrace (research) some of the threads of my life and find breathing space. Although it has never been important to me to recreate or write down what happened in my life as a set of truths, my research has exclusively been instead making sense of what has happened, ‘it isn’t really me; it’s ... character[s are] based on myself ... I made [them] up in order to illustrate things I want to say (Shields, 2010, p.39-42). Through my Master’s degree, I began to live academically with these questions and the ideas began to flourish, blossom, twist and shoot off as lines of flight,
as they evolved and folded back on themselves. The research had begun expanding well before my Doctoral proposal was accepted and had become a kind of obligation, something vocational. I became driven to define my research as study intended to contribute to understanding and therefore affect the future. It is easy to apply this objective to the sciences and indeed many of the methodologies taught are designed for such creditable research. However, creative writing works not so much in the arena of the physical (although it may) it also functions through the use of semantics on the consciousness and unconsciousness of the reader through emotion, feeling, recognition and understanding. This force can dynamically change and affect ontology powerfully. I am interested in the radical power of writing and its potential influence over narratives and multiplicity within the Bergsonian concept of differing degrees of difference. Bergson believed that the arts, more than the sciences, represented these differing degrees of difference as they were not so bound by specific models and their potential constraining effects. The arts include the processes of intuition in the representation of real life and the receiving of this by the reader within, and subject to, the relentless forces of time and duration (Grosz, 2005). For example Shakespeare is constantly reinterpreted throughout duration and our present understanding of it throws new light onto the past. Morrison asserts that because something is written about, it does not remain as a trace in the past, it continues as a force which is active in the present (Hay-on Wye Festival, 2014).

I began writing about a surrogacy clinic in Mumbai. This was an unfamiliar space to examine as I have never visited a surrogacy clinic or India. However, the idea of an American citizen choosing to play God over the life of a woman in a postcolonial nation fitted my aim. I wanted to mirror her experience with that of the fictional virgin, Mary, dealing with unwanted ideologies, social and political systems, sexual abuse and the intrusion of a pregnancy. The juxtapositioning of these two characters shows repetitive behaviours, as well as difference within and through traditional patriarchal frameworks. As research, I read books at a rate of knots, including at this point, critiques of Asian Feminisms (Loomba and Lukose, 2012) and I was devouring new knowledge and making new connections, breaking new ground in my own mind. This was not a linear process. This rhizonomic methodology involved a conscious understanding of lines of flight as I took in information from academic texts, fictions and personal stories. I heard chance new information on the television, looked at related art works, revisited old memories and family information and discovered a new language for my creative
practice. Walking and sleeping also played a considerable part in the process of assimilating information. The process was one of discovery into every new moment, repeating and generating a productive creative impulse.

My novel has been deeply entrenched in the language of literary theory and I have written this critical commentary and the creative portfolio concurrently. The process of creative writing is also formed in an experience, the chora, pre-existing the creation. I was never able to focus on one aspect of the process by engaging myself purely on the symbolic/creative. My creative process was theoretical analysis and creative output both amalgamated and twisted in and out of one another in an eternal process of combined generation and evolution. A sentence read in theory, generated plot development and at the same time the critical commentary. Attempts to work on one at the exclusion of the other has been impossible so I have dipped and slipped between the two constantly. When I am at work my laptop has both screens open, *Folds Working Copy* and *Folds Critical Commentary*. I have used my phone for research at the same time, and also have a number of books open, with under-linings, turned down pages and scraps of paper marking ‘important bits’. My noticeboard is a mass of paper filled with words and images. I jump between them all, each fuelling and generating work for the others. Sometimes this involved a close immersion in the thought processes and the creation of my thesis and at others, it was based on intuition and distance so that the work could be cast in a new light, and some of the elements consigned to shadow. If, as Barthes suggests, the writing comes first or the author is in its anteriority then writing is research, and through the process of writing discoveries are made. This is why writing is research. Work to life, life to work in circularity (Foucault, Barthes and Derrida, cited in Moi, 2002, p.4).

The practice of this research methodology is what has created the new ideas. Assembling certain characters, such as the Virgin Mary, Mayarani and Jo together created a juxtaposition of ideas which developed further thoughts about women’s maternal experience. When I then included the idea of two gay male parents using Dr Patel’s developing reproduction clinic, the idea of a traditional model of parenthood became threatened. As my female characters began to write themselves more fully into the text, for example Mrs Prinash begins a creative writing course which takes precedence over her domestic role (p.186), it became apparent that David Marriot was left ‘holding the baby’ and would have to take on a maternal role. He seemed perfectly capable of this without the presence of female help.
The assemblage of underground and surface planes of geographical environments, where water permeates and erodes, reflected my plot lines and has generated ideas unique to the piece. The most striking perhaps the insertion of fluid concrete into the disused underground tunnels in New York (p.170). David Marriot’s instruction to set permanent, uncrackable foundations for the building of a medical clinic removes the space where rebellion has taken place, so it must relocate. His decisions also crush the mothering woman he thought he needed so much. Sometimes ideas require following through immediately in order for new ideas to come and sometimes they can wait and need a longer gestation. It is as if the ideas themselves are caught in a symbiosis with me, not unlike mother and child, joined with the umbilical cord of the PhD. Without writing the creative piece the new ideas would not come.

So, writing this thesis has not been just the recording of thoughts and information gathered. Writing itself has been the methodology, writing is the test tube. Knowledge and thoughts are the ingredients put into the experiment, shaken up and then observed. Writing is where the experiment with the ideas takes place. The process of then refining and redefining the writing again stimulates new processes; ideas overlap, connect, interact and react with one another. It is, as such, a thoroughly Deleuzian process of becoming where, what is contained in my novel follows lines of expression in areas, planes or territories, represented in spaces of place, time and geography, whilst at the same time these areas are also in perpetual movement, assembling, deconstructing, deterritoralising and breaking structures into new arenas of thought. I have been able to draw into it any number of contrasting, dissimilar or differing factors which have produced certain outcomes. These outcomes may constitute change from and into an infinitesimal number of possibilities. In the case of my novel I have moved in a process of becoming from the traditional strata of religious thought concerning parenthood, into the idea of multiple models of reproduction.

The three years of study have been a kind of gap taken out of my life, a delay, where I am considering my past and reforming the images out of it into something new. It has been time to consider and reconsider. My PhD has transformed the semiotic into symbol in the form of my novel. I have been enabled to look at things in a new light. By following the question about gender divide regarding childcare responsibilities, I have at the same time discovered how to release myself from my personal conundrum. My Viva is the due date, and no doubt I will feel a
loss, post-partum, maybe even a little post Viva depression, but of course this is what it is all for, the generation of a new life, and a new being. New ideas and potential emerges, I am pregnant still with this expectation as I write. Certainly, I feel the anxiety and excitement of an expectant parent as this particular phase of study comes to a close. It is no coincidence that as I enter the home straight of my PhD that the structure of my traditional marriage is finally dissolving and a new more positive model is emerging, albeit with continuing dogmatic and inflexible traditional restraints which continue to seep into the arrangements. This resolution, whilst not consciously sought for, may be the outcome I had desired on a personal level from my PhD, amongst a number of other tangible outcomes (including professional development). I have in part squeezed out from between the rock and the hard place of my own consciousness, not in 127 hours, but 1,095 days! And with this emergence the drive to write the piece changed from a personal intensity to a broader more universal objective viewpoint, as I further distanced and freed myself from my own enigma. The original passion for the subject matter has transformed as I am no longer in desperate need to discover a route away from my own wounds.

*Within the Folds* is a new myth for parenthood and parenting. I use the word myth in the sense that Barthes (Bogue, 2008) defines it, where the story is both real and invented and gives an opportunity to create a new meaning through which we can live our lives. The meaning might be presented as an ethos, ideology or a set of conditions as if they are the ‘natural’ conditions of life, whereas in fact they are constructed by human beings who have power over the images we use to make sense of the world.

I was particularly drawn to Kristeva’s *Stabat Mater* (1985), because it demonstrated to me how the debate about feminism, women’s rights, equality and freedom is still deficient without a full examination of the complexity of maternal experience.

The maternal is the ideal place to start to unpick myths which uphold binary systems. This is because pregnancy itself breaks down borders between such binary concepts as nature and culture, subject and object and offers a state within which two becomes one, and also where a process of splitting and evolution is continually in process. Like a pregnancy, the creative writing laboratory, where the initiation of new narratives is being nurtured, is an area of

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generation from one position (that of the writer), to a semiotic site of the conditions pre-verbal, pre-symbolic, pre-language, where ‘drives, signifiers and meanings join together and split asunder in a dynamic and enigmatic process’ to create something new (Kristeva, *Talking About Polylogue*, 1977, cited in Eagleton, 2011, p.284). Therefore my interest in examining methods of traditional parenting and my aim to put forward the possibility of a new symbolism concerning these binary role models, entwines and merges with my research methods of creative writing in a symbiotic relationship itself, where meaning and generation are interwoven and interlinked to produce novel narratives.

Women’s experience cannot be held in unity, it is multiplicitous, and hence I have created a narrative which demonstrates the experience of a number of hypothetical Mary figures. I have included Mayarani’s experience in the context of post-colonial criticism (i.e. her experiences at the summer camp encourage her to denounce the West, p.86, which is the political connection she has with her sibling, Kumar), because postcolonial theories have enabled thinking to expand and view politics outside of Eurocentric mythologies and to embrace multiplicity. This advance has influenced the feminist movement to become open to multiple experiences and not just one. What is important here, therefore, is that the experience of the maternal and women’s relations to it is also at the forefront of debate about parental responsibility rather than demanding that mother alone is subject to it. I hope that through all my plot structures and storylines this merging and process of generation is apparent, where the myth of Mary the Virgin is interpreted as never alone, never one thing, where she becomes a Hegelian fold-catastrophe,15 ‘never singular’ (Kristeva, 1985, p.142).

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15 **Fold-catastrophe** sometimes called bifaction, originating in the work of Rene Thom (1960’s). He described how small changes in a nonlinear system can cause equilibria to change habitual processes, leading to large and sudden behavioural changes in the system.
The Stabat Mater – A Hymn to Mary.

In mythology there have been many examples of children born out of the interaction of virgin and/or mortal woman and gods, but none remains as centrally located as Mary stands in the Christian church. We have heard much about her, but her voice, her narrative, is unknown (if indeed she existed at all). The appropriation of her apparent character and experiences has shaped and moulded our world and impacted generations of women whether they are mothers or not. The Christian fantasy, fixated on the representation of the maternal as virgin creates a conundrum, a puzzle, a mystery. To be a biological mother and virgin without the intervention of human male gametes is impossible (unless Mary was a partheogen as described in Aarethi Prasad’s Like a Virgin: How Science is Redefining the Rules of Sex, 2012). She has become a narrative, designed by others, set apart from the substance of any real historical woman, as Shields says ‘what actually happened is only the raw material; what the writer makes of what happened is all that matters’ (2010, p.204).

Kristeva, although originally from Bulgaria, writes as part of the French tradition of a post-structural literary philosophy, examining texts and specifically looking closely at language, semantics and semiotics. French thinkers, such as Kristeva and Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Wittig, generally believe that women’s experience has been systematically repressed by Western symbolism and Christian doctrine and that the processes of linguistic deconstruction give rise to a new space, gap or nick in time to resist and reinvent this. Like myself, Kristeva was steeped in this Christian orthodoxy as a child. She wrote Stabat Mater in 1977 (originally entitled Hérethique de l'Amour) after she had read Warner’s book Alone of All her Sex (1976). Warner documents a chronological history of the development of the cult of the Virgin Mary through a timeline, and examines a palimpsest of the various symbolic representations which have disguised the power relations at work in the social context in which the narratives were produced. Of course we do not need to be intellectuals to ascertain that the Virgin Mary is a social construct to organise community and family units. She is who to be, who to aspire to, and like the Roman goddess Hestia,16 who to expect in the home. Marxist theory, whilst seeking to overturn political oppression and allow each human being to develop their uniquely human qualities, still sought the mother as central caregiver as part of the work force and a

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16 Hestia – Roman goddess of the hearth, order in the home, domestic affairs and architecture. Later transmuting to Vesta, origin of vestal virgins.
given part of the revolution, subject to revolution, but without her own insurrection. Psychoanalysis too reiterates this bind of mother to home and mother to child. D.W. Winnicott makes no bones about referring to the good enough mother, one who is always present in the domestic setting for the child. His work *Attachment and Loss* (1997) serves to create significant guilt within mothers as does much parenting rhetoric, which is generally operating within a capitalist model, where productivity takes precedent. This often ignores practicalities and facts which support families and children (*Parenting Rhetoric Weekly Roundup*, Jennifer Anderson, 16.8.2013) and serves to reinforce and make socially acceptable the deep rooted virgin mythology of self-sacrificing mother. The legal system is still reforming itself in relation to maternal principles. Property Law has only just this century recognised the unmarried partner and primary provider of childcare to equal property rights (Kernott v Jones).17 I noticed recently a single mother was jailed for leaving her uncared for and dead baby in the cradle for months.18 She was sentenced for not looking after her child with due care. It may be true that she neglected him, but at least she was there to do so, obviously struggling and not coping. The father, however, was noticeably completely absent and therefore absolved of the crime. When a man or husband walks away from his children, whilst people may be angry and shocked, comparatively speaking it is understood to be ‘typical’ male behaviour, there is a compassionate understanding of his fear of commitment and responsibility, and it is in his nature to roam. Society is prepared for this eventuality; it is a fact of life. But if a woman walks away or cannot care for her children the stigma is greater, the perceived damage and danger to society far more alarming. This idea leaves women ‘slave’ to their children. In Morrison’s *Beloved* (2007), the family system is governed by a white male phallocentric economy which infringes on basic human rights. In this ‘market’ Sethe neither owns herself nor her children, and her experiences of the maternal are disturbing. However, it is from within these experiences that she offers resistance. Whilst the majority of women do not live in such overt systems of slavery, I believe some parallels can be drawn.

The symbolism of the Virgin myth has a universal religious, social and economic context, which has been duplicated or replicated by a dominant Christian philosophy. I have chosen to put

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Christianity central to my text as it is familiar to my own lived experience and therefore I feel most confident to unpick its ramifications, although I have deliberately incorporated other faiths and social hierarchies which may be subject to the same preconditions. My characters all show signs of dropping the grip of these traditional ideologies.

Warner considers how this Virgin myth has been appropriated and used to suit numerous historical and political agendas. My novel particularly exposes, via the story and character of the Virgin Mary within the biblical setting, the probable context from which the myth has been perpetuated. Within this structure, I examine the fear and repression of female sexuality, the youth of the women in question and the consequences metered out to women who do not live within these parameters. Often this involves making connections between literary works and other texts to examine the role of women textually and historically. This new historical approach has made its biggest mark on the literary studies of the Renaissance and Romantic periods and has changed the idea that texts are apolitical. As Jay Stevenson (2007) says, much new historicism focuses on the marginalized subjects. Subsequently, I not only give weight to the meaning behind the representations of Mary I also emphasize her marginalisation by drawing attention to the relative banishment of her voice from religious texts and art despite her colossal iconic function.

Representations of the Virgin mother’s voice in Christianity are infrequent. She is rarely mentioned in the biblical texts and then only limited third party testimonials regarding the Immaculate Conception, her subservience to the will of God and her divine relationship with Christ. We only know of her through the limited accounts of others, the earliest examples of which were written ‘40 to 110 years after the events in question’ (Shields, 210. p.9). Yet supposedly it is her mortal link to Christ that is central to the New Testament and that which makes him able to defend and display compassion for humanity. Astonishingly she is both marginalised and vastly deified in an idealised fantasy which has grown in grandeur and opulence throughout history beyond the scant references to her in the Bible. This seems to be descriptively a far cry from the humanity which lies underneath the symbolism. By using a fictional scriptural chapter, written in the first person, I place ‘my’ Mary back into the Biblical text as a voice attempting to be real within the confines of the symbolic. She resists being deified by exposing her bodily concerns, she licks at the wall because she is thirsty, she urinates,
she has sexual drives. She also reveals herself to be human and imperfect, she has friends whom she betrays, she abandons her child and feels hatred towards her oppressors. These are not the traits of a saint. If we deconstruct her traditional meaning she will need to return but not as before as ‘the uncanniest of guests’ (Burke, 2008, p.31), such has been recorded in sightings of her at Lourdes, Fatima or Medjugorie, but in a different guise where we have the freedom to make new meanings of her.

Mary slips out from the Biblical text and talks to Jo at the end of my novel (p.171), when all hope of survival is impossible, when death is so close to Jo and her love for Katy, her child, is not enough to redeem them. In my text, Mary is not divine but an oral, sexual, bodily driven woman, wandering the fields of consciousness, nomadically. She pulls no veil over death and Jo and Katy are crushed and left in the posture of a twisted pieta (p.179),19 shown as repressed and compressed. Later in the novel (p. 183) this image of mother and child is represented in plaster, twisted fibres of felt, concrete and fractured marble and displayed as part of Jac Costa’s Art installation at MOMA in New York (Art being the fertile soul of the symbolic). Here I subvert the traditional enigmatic sublimation of artistic representation of her from the Renaissance and Romantic periods and entrench her in concrete as a post-modern image of mother and child in parallel with the life of Mayarani, post-human mother and child. The death of the virgin (Jo, who has renounced a sexual relationship with David) must take place, so that motherhood can return but not ‘impinge’ on the birth of free woman. She is transformed into a woman without unity but a plural. She must die before she can return, like Christ and Dionysis (Burke, 2008, p.7).

The mistranslation of the word virgin, Kristeva and Warner suggest, is probably the strangest interpretation directly imbuing maternity and sexuality, controllable as fantasy. It would seem that the term (Parthenos),20 actually refers to the socio-economic rank of a young woman rather than her sexual status. David uses the word ‘virgin’ within my text to describe his perception of the surrogate mother’s bodily condition although this is not her actual bodily status.

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19 The Pieta – Renaissance sculpture by Michelangelo Buonarotti.
20 Ancient Greek.
He texted Jo.

‘Virgin Birth, V I R G I N’. He loved the irony

(p.18).

I ensure this, deliberately, within my text to emphasize Mayarani’s changing political and financial agency by the end of the novel. We discover that she has been coerced into a sexual relationship by her elder brother at a young age, when she was virginal, both physically and in a socio-economic sense. By the completion of the novel she is no longer ‘a virgin’ in bodily or socio-economic terms but has acquired sexual, social and political power. In Indian culture the virgin daughter is seen to be a guardian of paternal power which also gives Maya another context in relation to the Western patriarchy which she seeks to overthrow. The interpretation of ‘virgin mother’ as youthful and without maturity or adult sexuality is perhaps one of Christianity’s more suspect and corrupt positions and is one of the most powerful invented concepts ever in the chronicles of civilisations. Situated at the core of a major religion seems to be a legitimization of coercive sexual abuse. It seems that historically sexuality has been closely aligned to death and the lack of it was seen to be divine, mystical, pure and worthy of sainthood, beyond death, "for where there is death, there too is sexual coupling; and where there is no death, there is no sexual coupling either" (Warner, 1976, p.52). This gives sense to why Mary’s does not die in Christian faith but instead transforms through the assumption. Her sexual purity positions her as incapable of dying and gives her everlasting life. Her status in purity is no doubt necessary to communities for the same reasons Douglas puts forward in her anthropological work Purity and Danger (2002). The Virgin cult developed and has deified her as a virtual equal to Christ and as Queen of Heaven, although only in her state of virginity and also in silence. Yet again here there is an unsolvable trap, femininity represented by the maternal, both virgin and mother, both goddess and human, both sexual and chaste. Kristeva suggests that it is the mystical and holy elements surrounding the Virgin which are what makes her ‘tractable’ or controllable (Kristeva, 1985, p.134). It is in this state that my characters are squeezed, between a rock and a hard place.

I am crouching in a damp shaft between two slivers of rock

(p.2).
In Darwinian terms we can see how the myth generated a sense of respect and divinity for women and would therefore have proved useful for survival. Communities which revered mothers at their centre would protect women and children, thus enhancing greater possibility of endurance. So the importance of the myth within community may not be merely a male appropriation, but also a preferred chosen state by women in times where survival was paramount.

However women, not only men, are also subject to unconscious narcissistic drives resulting from their own relations with their mothers. The resulting psychic bonds for women may be even more complex than those of the male child, as the image of motherhood and how it constitutes femaleness is profoundly binding between mother and daughter, a sort of constant mirror at work which shapes the female viewpoint. To unpick this further, Kristeva goes on to examine why it might be that the Virgin myth’s representation of the feminine is deeply reassuring to both men and women and remains a fundamental bedrock to a mystical experience which is denied rational or logical explanation. Kristeva observes that the innovative feminisms of the 1960’s have resolved these problems too simplistically by denying or denigrating the maternal as a unique experience and rendering mothers as subscribing to a paternalistic flock. She believes this approach separates woman from herself (Coussin, 2006). She criticises ‘equality’ feminisms as well as ‘sexual difference thinkers’ as ‘the last of the power-seeking ideologies’ (1982) and essentialist. I have found myself slowly dipping into the kind of feminist viewpoint which Kristeva criticises, that which deserts and repudiates the maternal in the name of advancement. Kristeva, no doubt, sees this as yet another stumbling block which further marginalises the real lived experience of maternity. She suggests that ‘avant-garde’ feminists ignore the fact that women too are subject to the narcissistic fantasies of the mother and it is these underlying conditions which are ignored in any simplistic feminist interpretation. She poses the questions,

*what is it about the representation of the Maternal in general, and about the Christian or virginal representation in particular, that enables it not only to calm social anxiety and supply what the male lacks, but also to satisfy a woman, in such a way that the community of the sexes is established beyond, and in spite of, their flagrant incompatibility and permanent state of war? Second, what is it about this representation that fails to take account of what a woman might say or want of the Maternal, so that*
when today women make their voices heard, the issues of conception and maternity are a major focus of discontent? Such protests go beyond socio-political issues and raise "civilization's discontents" to such a pitch that even Freud recoiled at the prospect: the dis-content is somehow in the species itself (1985, p.135).

Kristeva questions whether the idea that women should free themselves from the maternal and seek equality is feminist dogma merely mirroring back phallocentric ideals. i.e. Women’s expression of sexuality and fantasy can unconsciously be subject to male ideals, lesbian relationships can replicate binary heterosexual stereotypes, and women in high positions may function in a male world still following male principles. Jo’s downfall in my novel is that she attempts to function as a man in a man’s world, by demanding to be free to work without the ties of childcare, and she is ultimately split between these two roles. The Virgin cult renders her unable to become fluid because there is no role modelling or inclusion of anything different.

The shaft they were in trembled. As Jo’s belly and breasts slipped forwards attached to the earth by the force of the narrow space, she also felt the skin on her back pulled away in conflicting parallel. The layers and strata shifted and diverged, her body, front and back, sliding in opposing directions

(p.170).

Jo’s trap is that she cannot both live in a man’s world and express her maternal function without the proper cooperation of her partner, which is impossible at the beginning of the novel as both she and David are still subject to Christian binary phallocentric frameworks. Kristeva examines and accepts the corporeal role of the woman in the process of reproduction but only as a ‘FLASH’ (1985, p.133), she also assigns time to the process of reproduction to which woman is not exclusively consigned. Male bodies may not be available in the process of gestation but their time is free to give in the role of childcare.

Kelly Oliver (1998) states that Kristeva suggests the maternal function cannot be reduced to mother, feminine, or woman. Anyone can fulfil the maternal role, male or female, since it is

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21 FLASH - instant of time or of dream without time. Kristeva is referring here to women’s time incorporating ‘monumental infinity and cyclical rhythm’ (Söderbäck, 2010, p.5).
driven by desire and love which are not exclusively female experiences. Maternity is a process and not fixed or unified. Maleness is also subject to such forces.

I emphasize here that without real appreciation of this and subsequent cooperation from male contemporaries, the struggle for a breakthrough is immensely difficult. The subversion in my novel then works from within, to create a place, a beginning, where the male can give meaning to and understand the voice of the maternal woman through his own lived experience and subsequent identification with it.

The novel opens where the care of Katy is ultimately Jo’s, David can walk away because he knows Jo will take care of Katy, and she is complicit in this arrangement through her own embedded fantasies of what it is to be maternal.

She wants her daughter out of that page, back at home, or at the playground, somewhere real, playing in the mud and sand with friends, baking cakes, dressing dolls. She wants her to be holding a floppy-earned bunny on her lap at a farm park. She wants to take her to church on Sundays and show her how to raise money for people poorer than herself in lands devastated by famine and earthquakes (p.13).

Mayarani, Dr Patel and Trace fare better because somehow they have understood how to internalise the predicament and subvert the power. By the end of the novel David has sole responsibility for the child he has produced. Michelle Stanworth in Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine (1987), suggests that men’s alienation from birth and parenting maybe the cause of his ‘desire to master nature, and to construct social institutions and cultural patterns that will not only subdue the waywardness of women but also give men an illusion of procreative continuity and power’ (p.16). The revelation of David’s past and personal wounding regarding the abortion of his first child, shows his susceptibility to the ‘chokeberry tree’ that Morrison uses in Beloved (2007). Symbolising how despite attempts to disregard lost children that their traces in memory persist and drive action. He visits the clinic and pays to have a baby, and is annoyed that Mayarani is not more grateful to him.
She was so cold and ungrateful, this girl. Her Asian eyes kept looking down and yet he
felt no subservience there

(p.124).

Trace has more agency over her desire and life represented by the jouissance that Kristeva and
the French feminist philosophers talk of. Her pleasure is devoid of pain, but emerges from deep
desires on the margins between binaries. She remains confused and without answers but not
subject to traditional ideologies about her body.

There was no question of domination or submission, like some of the punks out there, she
wanted a total giving, a sexual sacrifice, together. Something other than this eternal
active and reactive thing she saw in her friends relationships, which ultimately ended in a
negative will for power ... Opening herself to him, to change, giving herself up into the
force of evolution, where time past present and future fused, blended and divided. This
was the place she found inspiration. Trace didn’t want kids, she took the pill. Having kids
was not becoming. Having kids was having kids

(p.114).

Some critics observe that both Irigaray and Kristeva continue to idealise the maternal viewing it
as where the power of life exists. By creating life in a test tube, outside of a woman’s corporeal
existence, biomedical science is in the process of subverting or removing the fear of, and
reverence to the power that exists in the abjection of the maternal. This is probably as
significant a shift as when scientific thinking ceased to believe that the male planted all the
ingredients for life within the woman for gestation only and before her egg was discerned to be
50 per cent of the reproductive package. Due to potential and actual biomedical advancements,
reproduction is no longer limited to functioning within a woman’s body and therefore there is
an attempt to transcend both the abjection of the beginnings of life and provide the prospect of
medical intervention which may also transcend death. This brings us back, in a kind of
evolutionary spiral, to the Virgin myth, where the beginning of life’s reliance on nature’s design
is removed and human sexual intercourse again becomes superfluous, a kind of ‘divine’ birth
where carnal desires are unnecessary. Thematically Houellebecq addresses this in his novel, The
Possibility of an Island (2006) where Daniel, an artificially replicated clone of his original self,
conducts his sexual relationships via virtual processes. This again, in a post-human sense through medical advancement, replicates the religious adherence to concepts of eternal life with an absence of death and is reminiscent of the idea of autopoiesis being a process which moves like a spiral to create species diversification.  

My novel disrupts and deconstructs basic traditional ideologies and creates new narratives, whilst also acknowledging such forces of repetition in consciousness, examining what effects this may have on our conceptualisation of motherhood, parenthood and the consequent parenting models of the future.

Kristeva’s *Stabat Mater* (1985) challenges the narrative structures in traditional Christian heritage. She explores and observes the representations of the maternal within it and women’s subsequent alienation within phallocentric exemplifications. Kristeva’s essay is experimental, laid out in two columns, one an academic study of the development of the cult of the Virgin and the other, on the left, an account of her own experience of motherhood. This text inspired the layout of my final biblical section (p.199-200) and is a literary reference to Kristeva’s work, which has principally inspired the themes of my novel.

Kristeva draws on psychoanalysis and sociology in her work and is considered a feminist as she seeks a new language for women. Although she does not align herself with ‘feminisms’, her work is immensely valuable to the emancipation of women and it could be said that it is generated and accelerates from a philosophy which sees history as text; writing as production, not representation; and as an intertextual, and signifying practice. However the inclusion of psychoanalytic thought in her critique, which considers also the unique experience of the speaking subject activating and directing the text, removes her work from that of collective political gain to that of individual agency. She has criticised the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky remarking that ‘semiotics can only exist as a critique of semiotics’ (Moi, 2002, p.78). This places her in a linguistic philosophy in Deleuzian terms, ever generating, eternally subject to analysis without essential or finite conclusion.

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22 *Autopoiesis* refers to a system capable of reproducing and maintaining itself. See Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999).

23 **Saussure** - Linguist and semiotician (Swiss).

24 **Chomsky** - Linguist, philosopher, political and social justice activist (American).
Kristeva’s work on linguistics and the symbolic aims to disrupt the language of the father, seeking to recreate a new expression for women, and is present in the *Stabat Mater* (1985) particularly addressing that of the maternal. Her work has been described as revolutionary, not only in that it is ground-breaking, activist or progressive but in that it is also an attempt to understand the revolutionary, to offer a theory of the radical, the rebellious or the insurgent. In *Stabat Mater* she explores the idea that Christianity in particular (although it is true to say of many major religions), has ‘subsumed the maternal’ into a powerful symbolic culture, positing maternity as the ultimate goal for women. *Stabat Mater*, to me, epitomizes how Grosz describes Bergson’s view of freedom,

*Freedom in his perception is neither the absence of causes (as traditional proponents of free will assert) nor the range of options or possibilities available (free choice), but, [provides] the capacity to act in concert with one’s past to bring about a future not contained in it* (2004, p.168).

As a feminist, I am fascinated by how the pull of the Christian symbolism of the maternal, from both external pressure and from within my own psyche, has still rendered me subject to traditional systems. i.e. I have remained at home as the primary caregiver and homemaker, forfeiting a degree of financial independence and personal agency. It is a conundrum I observe in many of my contemporaries and those of my own mother. What is often expressed is a longing for what Carl Jung describes as the ‘unlived life’ originating from an unsettling set of pre-determined life designs within a symbolic framework. Jung suggests that we are the product of our long ancestry, a strata of life lived upon life, a lineage of many generations (1986, p.260). He also thought that the lives of ancestors and any mystical beliefs of the time repeat themselves in the lives of our present selves. It is this connection that I bring to the fore through the time frame of my novel. Mary represents the ultimate imaginary mystical mother. Essentialists make a case that women offer an alternative function to men by virtue of the fact that they are not required to separate from the mother, yet through this paradigm women are tied eternally physically and psychologically to the maternal function. Therefore historically women have been reduced to this archetype. Jung asserts that we are at the ‘mercy’ of it. Although we challenge and oppose what he calls these specific human ‘preformations’ we are all, to some degree, ‘possessed’ by them.
The danger is ... this unconscious identity with the archetype: not only does it exert a dominating influence on the child by suggestion, it also causes the same unconsciousness in the child, so that it succumbs to the influence from the outside and at the same time cannot oppose it from within

(1961, par 729).

As Gray says we might think actions and decisions are made in freedom but in fact they are borne out of ‘a structure of habits and skills that is ... infinitely complicated’ (2003, p.69). Jung here typifies my experience and epitomizes the horror I have of binding my own daughter in the same conundrum as presented by the myth. In my opinion, it is remiss to discuss feminism without an adequate investigation of the maternal encounter and its connection with this myth. As already mentioned, Kristeva suggests in her work The Powers of Horror; An Essay on Abjection (1982), that this reticence for discussion is because of the cultural consideration of the maternal body as a site of abjection, a place where there is no division, where there is a merging of two bodies, a dependence, the severing of which engenders real, albeit preverbal, pre symbolic fears of death. My thesis examines why it is that the myth seems to continue to have such a strong influence on traditional methods of parenting and how this may be transfigured.

Shulamith Firestone’s feminist politics of the 1960’s and 70’s shows relevance today although she was broadly rejected in her time. As we continue to enter an age of enormous genetic and biological growth and expansion in reproductive medicine, her work seems particularly significant. Following on from Marxist theories she categorized women’s maternal function to be contributory to their position as an ‘underclass’. She felt that in order to free themselves from oppression, women needed to take control of the narratives and sciences of reproduction, thus giving

full restoration to women of ownership of their own bodies, but also their (temporary) seizure of control of human fertility ... as well as all the institutions of child-bearing and child-rearing

(1979, p.19).
This would mean an end to ‘male privilege’ but also of gender distinction culturally. She suggests that instead of reproduction being the task of one gender for the benefit of both, children could be born artificially and independent of either. In this way the traditional divisions of labour would be united and ‘the tyranny of the biological family would be broken’ (1979, p.19). However these reproductive technologies are only of value to women if they have control of them. Any repetitions of male dominated reproductive technologies could be alarming. In her chapter, *Victorian Values in the Test-Tube: The Politics of Reproductive Science and Technology*, Hilary Rose asserts that any utopian view of this which ignores the historical facts of patriarchy is naïve (Stanworth, 1987, pp. 151-173).

Firestone’s work pre-empts Luciana Parisi who questions the dominant conceptions of sex, femininity and desire. In *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Biotechnology and the Mutations of Desire* (2004) she states ‘if molecular biotechnology is already detaching femininity from the imperative of sexual reproduction and genetic sex then why would a notion of femininity be relevant to the body politics?’ (p.81). Irigaray (1985) continues to locate childbirth as a female pursuit which fulfils the gaps in repressed female sexuality and male desire which for the present is still the accepted state of affairs. Women have yet to state themselves independently of male phallocentric ideas which, at present, make it difficult for them to exist outside of their relationship to the maternal. Irigaray believes women should be able to have another role other than any in relation to ‘mother’ and that the maternal function is not a gender specific role. Children will continue to be born and they will continue to need care but as Firestone says, as long as women are bound to this they will never be able to free themselves of the tyranny of family. Of course there will be objections, we love our children, we enjoy being with them, we want the best for them in every way, but this can be shared, childcare responsibilities do not have to be purely in the female domain. Women’s bodies give birth and men’s do not, but this does not determine caregiving.

Perhaps the rejection of Firestone was due to the innate human fear of all things ‘unnatural’ emerging from a state of potential human design. Most futuristic myths considering the post-human create nightmare scenarios of all things deemed unnatural. The more recent work of Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species* (2003), seeks to dispel our over-riding fears and cultural myths about genetic modification and reproductive practice. Like Hayles, she suggests that instead of viewing the resulting human beings as unnatural, inhuman and in extreme
current cultural myth, monsters, we need to find a way to explore finding a connection, a way of being in harmony with our cyber, genetically modified future selves. This may then safeguard life on the planet rather than cause the apocalyptic predictions which are so prevalent in current cultural myth about the post-human. Elton John was right to oppose Domenico Dolce when he made outmoded comments about in vitro fertilisation and same sex parents by referring to the subsequent offspring as ‘synthetic’. Reproduction no longer needs to be subject to monstrous ideas or myths concerning anything which opposes the ‘natural order’ of things. To consider a broader and corresponding question might be to query whether natural life has any evolutionary advantage over any other.

The past lived experience of motherhood and the maternal has been usurped by the Virgin myth and made an implausible and impossible goal for mortal woman. It is just this tractability of its existence that I explore and attempt to find new positions. As discussed, my representation is another misrepresentation. Yet, I seek to free the representation of womanhood from the paradoxical trap and psychotic impossibility, via the vehicle of biomedical innovation. I hope to bring women out of this limiting enigma and give us new voices embracing the paradoxical.

Of course my interpretation remains a narrative, still a fiction, but it is with consciousness that I evaluate and re-evaluate the Virgin and examine her symbolic power in a new light alongside these innovations of biomedical science. I do not purport to have been able to research and examine the real life of any historical biblical mother, this would be impossible; I only aim to examine her in the light of my current observations of femaleness and maternity. I do not attempt to find a finite narrative nor do I attempt to discover a particular woman’s voice in my novel. Rather my characters voices grow and develop alongside one another through plot and setting. As Kristeva says in her essay Talking About Polylogue, there is not so much a specifically female voice or way of writing … it is not fixed but ‘constantly remade and reborn through the impetus provided by a play of sign’ (Eagleton, 2011, p.268).

Language is a symbolic cultural structure which Kristeva, Irigaray, Cixous and Wittig regard as phallocentric, the past throwing a dark shadow over the present in an ‘enforced impotency’ (Grosz, 2004, p.135) encumbering possibility for change. So the challenge was to find a new

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25 BBC news, 16.03.2015.
voice for my character, Mary, which was not subject to its masculine foundations. My first choice was to use a biblical format, to underline the notion that ‘her book’ is a missing text from the Bible, and so to place her within phallocentric foundations as a radical force acting from the inside. Using the configuration of language to expose traditional structures proved a conundrum yet I quickly began to see that this functioned fittingly for my purpose. Her voice as one which exerts itself from within the mechanisms of patriarchal structures worked. It was preferable to one which toiled in conflict outside of them. She became a voice from within the structures to which she is subject and at the same time one which subverts them. My geological metaphor of water creating veins of instability or leaky, spongy permeable matter shows how rock can be eroded from within. I address this as a radical form of subversion in other ways in my text to accentuate its power, for example, Mayarani deliberately becomes pregnant with the ‘oppressors’ child and Kumar, at the end of the novel, moves to the West with the aim of undermining the systems he feels oppressed by. Jo has ingested the systems which oppress her and regurgitates them back into the narrative.

*Jo bent double under the flow of words and felt all her ideals and dreams of being a wife and of motherhood gag at her and spew themselves into the tunnels. She threw up into the trolley of tins and rotting food. Her body folded. She felt Katy back at her legs like a once warm animal and understood with a particular knowledge of her own. The ground shifted as if realigning itself, slowly* (p.179).

This intramural life of the narrative of Mary within language fitted my aim as it seems that the problem with the myth is that it lives within the female psyche and is not merely an external enemy, therefore it requires transformation from within. This may be why Kristeva uses the format of two voices speaking at once in *Stabat Mater* (1985). She suggests that the myth of the Virgin is not merely inserted into the female psyche by external forces but has generated there too. So the cry is not only ‘stop doing this to me’, it is also ‘understand me’. Jea Suk Oh in her paper *A Study of Kristeva and Irigaray’s Critiques on Phallocentrism* (2005), suggests that it may not be that women cannot speak, or that there is no language but that in fact she is screaming, yelling and crying out, but is not heard.
'Help'. She heard nothing, no footsteps or voices. Just stillness and a steady blue-white light. She waited in the interlude, still breathing sparingly until her chest was so constricted she gasped and reached for air

(p.118).

I have also chosen to write Mary in the first person, which is an unusual expression for Scriptural texts. Interestingly it felt blasphemous to give the Virgin such a voice as she is mythologically consistently self-sacrificing to the extent that she seems to willingly forfeit her ability to give voice to her experience. This sense of committing heresy by giving her a first person voice, and using a biblical format within which to do it, is better described as what Kristeva terms as ‘herethics’ (1985, p.152), a splintering, a destroying, fragmenting action, which could be viewed as more ethical than any adherence to outdated codes of ethics. Gray (2003) states that ‘progress is a fact … there is progress in knowledge, but not in ethics. This is the verdict both of science and history, and the view of every one of the world’s religions’ (p.155). Without progress one might be tempted to continue to portray her as an innocent, with a great and secret gift, that of being the chosen one. In this interpretation her body is not entirely her own but used as symbolic of something else, created sublime for narcissistic and community delusion. This is the tractable position from which female experience is governed, from the position of victim, sinned against, suffering at the hands of others and without agency. In this place she remains controllable, dominated and reacting only to the patriarchy at large. In my text she persistently desires that her voice be recorded in symbolic marks,

I bent to dip my finger in the damp pool to write something on the rock but when the sun comes round, the rocks will dry and my handprints will be gone

(p.6).

Her writing and her ability to make marks in history, within the folds of her life, on her own geological landscape, within her historical moment, is the new narrative which she creates. She lives symbolically in the desert, ‘the arid millennial ground’ which Cixous addresses in The Laugh of the Medusa (1976, p.875).
Cixous asserts that ‘Woman must write herself ... Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history’ (1976, p.875). This particular task has been addressed by many writers since asserted by the French feminists but rarely in the form of Mary herself, although Colm Toibin’s novel *The Testament of Mary* (2013) gives an interesting and contemporary new political voice to her as she describes and makes sense of the events leading to her son, Christ’s death. Toibin gives a dimension to her whereby she is no longer the silent, selfless, ‘long-suffering’ woman as represented in religious narratives but instead displays elements of anger, not only at the political powers of the time but also at the stupidity and misguided behaviour of her son and those with whom he is associated. Via this narrative, Toibin gives a new language to Mary which has flashes of dissident potential. Given that Kristeva aims to disrupt the language of the father and produce a new language for women, I have chosen, like Toibin, to strike at the centre of religious phallocentricism by giving the Virgin this voice and in doing so, giving her the potential to subvert the word of God or the word of The Father. Her voice subsequently becomes multidimensional without an underlying substance, it is devoid of hypostases.\(^{26}\) She does not represent the essence of reality but becomes multifaceted, denying that there is one essential nature of holiness, or even one part of a feminine holy Trinity. This concept of multiplicity is intended to undermine the essential nature of monotheism. Jim Crace applies something similar in *Quarantine* (1998) where, although not writing in the first person he develops the character of Jesus in alignment of our modern experience of humanity. We follow Jesus’ experiences in the Judean desert during his forty day fast in a narrative of cruelty and despair.

Gayatri Spivak’s essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) based on the work of Ranajit Guha, considers Subaltern Studies in India in the early eighties. Spivak questions the idea that subaltern studies seek to allow the previously ignored voice of the subordinate figure finally to be heard and purports that its objective is to "establish true knowledge of the subaltern and its consciousness". She suggests however, that subaltern is not a collective individual, but that this representation is in order for the oppressor to continue to dominate. This is why it is essential that I create many voices of Mary and not one.\(^{27}\)

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\(^{26}\) Hypostasis – Underlying state, fundamental reality, sometimes attributed to the Holy Spirit.

\(^{27}\) Spivak’s work focused specifically on Imperialism in India.
Although, Mary has always been represented as central to New Testament texts she articulates very little, there is no book of Mary in authorised versions of the Bible. This has left no known account of events from her viewpoint and rendered her a symbol of the similarly collective subordinate feminine voice that Spivak writes of. So as a conscientious feminist literary critic, bound to examine the substance behind the absence of texts as well as those which stand before me, I have opened up this possibility and developed her first person voice into one which becomes, not one shared collective articulation but instead, multi-dimensional, plural and inconstant, which by the end of the novel splits dynamically into two. Each character in the novel also represents Mary’s voice, repeating and re-interpreting her ongoing status through the bodies of successive women and men. My choice to give her a voice in the first person, was in order to ‘unsilence’ her. She is a new author at the centre of the text, as if we have a new women’s Bible written from the perspective of the multiple generative New Testament characters. I approach her as ‘Potentia Gaudendi’, something capable of erupting still more substance (Preciado, 2013, p.49). Mary’s writing in the first person deconstructs the omniscient voice of the author. This does not signify the death of the male author in this context but a partial castration, repositing him in a world where she has control over reproduction.

Again he couldn’t masturbate. Something was blocked, there was no proper relief (p.60).

Deborah Tolman in her article Female Adolescents, Sexual Empowerment and Desire: A Missing Discourse of Gender Inequity (2011) explains that female sexuality is not adequately addressed beyond the mechanics of reproduction and male desire. Certainly any sexual desire that Mary may have felt is completely castrated from the Biblical sources revealing that the underlying cognitive power of the Virgin myth has driven historical approaches to sex education. In a dichotomy of virgin and mother, there is certainly no space for an independent sexuality, so this too becomes subject to male desire and control. My character Trace, however, expresses her sexuality and unlike David she is free to masturbate at any time.

Women’s subjectivities, regarding maternity, have been silenced and their words and actions reduced to madness or meaningless babble to maintain this Christian symbology. Women have long been deemed mad when displaying normal characteristics of expression, pain and grief
regarding their sexuality or emotions connected to childbirth. A recent example of this is concerning a custody ruling in Bristol. When the mother discovered she had lost, she withdrew with her son into hiding immediately, and was described as ‘irresponsible’. The emotions of having her child taken from her were legitimate and the suffering undoubtedly very real, the description of her as ‘irresponsible’ reduces her maternity to something childish and infantile. It is as if the strength of the bond between mother and child is unbearable to hear, engendering complex, uncontrollable emotions and therefore it is left alone as untouchable or reduced to psychological issues. This powerful bond certainly would account for why many women choose to give up financial independence in preference to childcare. This intense corporeal bond and fear of its rupture is also coupled with the complex relationship a woman has with the visceral necessity to fulfil the legitimate physical and wider emotional needs and desires of her offspring in an affiliation which is made up of both altruistic and egocentric forces.

My body is no longer mine, it writhes, suffers, bleeds, catches cold, bites, slavers, coughs, breaks out in a rash, and laughs. Yet when his, my son’s, joy returns, his smile cleanses only my eyes. But suffering, his suffering - that I feel inside; that never remains separate or alien but embraces me at once without sin

(Kristeva, 1985, p.138).

Yet there is also a self–satisfaction at being ‘God’s chosen one’ therefore a pay-off in maintaining of woman’s special bond with her offspring. The problem may not be that maternity has no voice due to the phallocentric system (of which both men and women have been complicit in generating) but that they cannot hear it or refuse to listen. Thus it is important to speak in a language which can be heard, that can explain the preverbal drives. My novel attempts to find this language via the characters’ descriptions of their relationship with one another and is particularly tackled in the long central poem, In the Beginning (p.105-111). The problem is to find and expose that language to both men and women. Obviously to find expression for pre-language via language is challenging but not impossible. I drew upon the work of Tom Phillips, especially his literary/art work A Humument (1966). Through this work,

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which he calls ‘mind art’, he attempts to explore thoughts, feelings and emotions which are
difficult to explain, random and appear to have no sense. Examining the question of what
literature is, he has taken a Victorian literary text by W.H. Mallock (1892) and cut it and re-
formed it into a new work which is constantly being renewed. In this way he also shows us the
importance of past literature and the impact of it in the present and the impact of the present
on it. In retrospect it might have been interesting to examine the nature of my character
David’s pre-verbal relationship with his mother in this way and in more depth, and to evaluate
this in contrast to that of Jo and her mother.

Unlike my reading of Warner’s *Alone of All her Sex* (1976), which clearly delineated the growth
of the cult and left space for hope beyond this, as I read Kristeva’s *Stabat Mater* (1985), I
become increasingly trapped by her concepts. The text is in two columns. On the right she
describes the various cultural anomalies and religious edits, exploring, as Marina Warner does,
the history of the cult of the Virgin, whereas, alongside, to the left of the text, she also writes
her lived experience of maternity. Although in some ways this releases me from the religious
dogma, described on the right, as it is closer to my lived experience, it still appears subject to
the cult and reveals the intertwined nature of experience with cultural expectation. The
presence of this to me as a woman was that I felt increasingly squeezed by the ideas she
exposed as if the text on the right hand side of the essay pressed back on Kristeva’s lived
experience. Initially I was left disappointed that Kristeva’s *Stabat Mater* is not a political rallying
cry, revealing and subverting the oppression of thousands of years but more one which
matches Judith Butler’s interpretation of the ‘compulsory obligation of women’s bodies to
reproduce’ (1999, p.115). Butler says that women still appear subject to the symbolism of the
maternal body and its ‘pre-cultural’ distillation in what is natural and biological and that Kristeva
does not go far enough to subvert the dogma and free women from reductive expectations.

*Stabat Mater* is uncomfortable reading in that it reveals a complexity which asks the reader to
examine how their own personal and unconscious drives are interwoven in a more complex
relationship with the maternal experience, Christian creeds and doctrines. The real experience
of the maternal is one on the margins, she even writes it on the left, in the margin, yet the
ideas, like the myth, are constantly seeping out sideways into the theoretical text and vice
versa, neither independent of the other. Kristeva appears to suspend binary oppositions, such
as male oppression and female subservience, and explores the human relationship with
motherhood in the margins of this dualism. She does not attempt to reject the symbolism of
the virgin altogether as the myth continues to shine through the many layers of historical
interpretation. Kristeva embraces the maternal function and its relationship with Christian
ideology and seeks to subvert from within that experience. She explores motherhood within
the linguistic and patriarchal climate of Christian philosophy and rejects clear-cut ideas of
equality and emancipation. She seeks to explore a more complex level of interpretation of the
cult of the Virgin which has a historically concrete notion of the maternal in one image. She
utilizes the past to create more alternatives, to influence and activate a response to the past
and thus open more possibilities for the future. The increasing layers of interpretation and
subsequent power or masochism exposed within the essay began to render me crushed and I
felt progressively forced into what Kristeva refers to as a ‘catastrophe fold’. She takes this
concept from that of Rene Thom who describes mathematically, a fold which occurs under
extreme pressure (1985, p.142). As women crack and bend under this pressure, ultimately a
fold or gap may occur and, in the subsequent delay or hiatus, change becomes possible. It
creates a space where distance occurs allowing perceptual images to be assessed in relation to
their function or utility for the subject (Grosz, 2004, p.168). I will come back to this concept as I
explore time, history and the geological metaphors I have used in the novel, where the
experience of immense pressure may cause a turning or a change.

As women’s experience is not homogenous, but heterogeneous, Kristeva embraces the
maternal and at the same time rejects it as the high point of femininity. The cult of the Virgin
enfolds the female experience as that of three in one, mother, daughter, and wife. This trinity
actually ignores the notion of spirituality and individual agency and my character Mary is
initially fixed within it, crouching ‘between two slivers of rock’ (p.2), caught between her
rational thought and her subjectivity to narcissistic demands. She is unlike Christ (who is never
husband), also rejecting ideal love, ideal sexuality, mother unconditional and she gives up
kneeling before her son, sacrificing herself and her body to her child. She gives up hopes that
maternal love is so strong and absolute that it overcomes death. Through such a sacrifice the
majestic figure of this virgin woman is twisted one way by desire for the death of her child and
original freedom resumed, and the other by a denial of death completely (Kristeva, 1985 p.144).
She gives up subservience to her child and with it a profound secret knowledge of her own.
Kristeva suggests that the giving of oneself up to the experience of the maternal is one made in
the knowledge that no other human relationship matches this. All others are a mere representation of this maternal bond. The Virgin is smug in the eternal, unvoiced, silent, preverbal power of her position as mother and it is this bond which is so difficult to break or usurp. As if although seemingly dominated she has the ultimate power of creation and generation of life. Kristeva, I think, suggests that if we continue to see the trap as only an intentional political system of enforced slavery by a selfishly patriarchal system that we only superficially address the point. Deleuze indicates the resulting ‘will to power’ of the oppressed only serves to act as a converse reaction resulting in dominating other forces, it ‘means to impose forms, to create forms in exploiting circumstances’ (cited in Bogue, 2003, p.12). It is a power which is acting in reaction to other forces out of ‘sensibility’and ‘sensation’.

All bodies are comprised of a multiplicity of forces and thus necessarily of a combination of active and reactive forces...what differentiates the affirmative from the negative will to power, then, is not the absence or presence of reactive forces within a body, but the way in which reactive forces play out their relations (Bogue, 2003, p.12).

This I address in the closing scenes of the novel as Jac Costa approaches the two men waiting to assassinate her.

An inability to tackle the more profound, underlying and unconscious forces at work renders us still subject to the magical belief and philosophy of superficial political viewpoints and cultish philosophies. As Evelien Geerts suggests

Kristeva wants to emphasize the idea that signification doesn’t only consist out of the intentional act of a subject that is consciously attributing signs to objects, but that there are also unconscious elements at work in the sign system that exceed, or at times even disrupt, signification. This makes her semanalysis into an “analysis of the remainder or residue left over in sign systems [...]”, namely the semiotic” (2010-2011, p.6).
The enduring overlooking of these conditions within the ‘chora’ or preconditions for the symbolic, continue to locate the female as a victim within the narrative of motherhood, rather than provide her with responsibility and agency. Contrary to the idea that the cry for equality creates immediate freedom, the crushing force is enhanced by feminist demands for equality and that under such force the pressure becomes greater. There is not a standardised or instantaneous liberation through equality politics. However this is not necessarily a negative pressure, but it is one which further forces possibilities for an explosion of new potential, or political evolution. This evolution will be unlikely to find a linear resolution or grow arboreally but instead will be rhizomatic.

On a superficial reading of Firestone (1979) one might be forgiven for suspecting her to be one such feminist and her critics have certainly suggested that she aims to demolish sexuality altogether, homogenising gender. However her dictum also suggests the controversial and revolutionary idea that women need to take control of reproduction, thus the maternal, and therefore not demonise or renounce it and in this way create a new multiplicity of alternatives. It may seem arguable that women already have control of this sphere of life but as it still lies symbolically under the auspices of the Virgin mother cult, which is at present still subject to masculine appropriation and, both male and female, narcissistic fantasy. It is this I wish to find a way out of by naming the existence of those ‘unnameable’ truths of female maternal experience in my novel.

As gender progressively no longer matters culturally, and, increasingly, parenthood is experienced as a multiplicitous activity, then true liberation and diverse parenting models can emerge. Maybe Firestone is right, that women need to take control of the maternal narratives and generate new shifts in roles regarding parenting responsibilities. It is important to consider that this understanding of these roles is not just subject to Western analysis and to examine them in the light of other cultures and nuances as the interpretations cannot be flattened, they will always be universally corporeal and in relief, different from each perspective, reacting and reactivating as concepts change and mutate. There is no one common woman’s experience of the maternal, or experience of parenting. Multiplicity and diversity is fanning out and rhizomes do not grow as trees.
In the light of Kristeva’s work on women’s time (Moi, 2002) I hope to transform the symbol of the Virgin into a revolutionary signifying space. What Kristeva calls ‘a third generation’ (cited in Geerts, 2010-11, p.15). The novel is neither set in a linear (commonly viewed as masculine) and nor circular (feminine) time, but in the audaciousness of Deleuzian time which is ever evolving and re-evolving. Time in my novel folds in a Bergsonian sense where it is re-theorized as a force and therefore has the potential to be used politically (Grosz, 2004, p.158).

I examine reproductive advances, in this novel, as we face changing times where sexualities are fluid. It seems to be a moment or what Grosz names The Nick of Time (2004) in history where we could take the Virgin mother myth and throw it out with the bathwater, keeping the baby firmly cared for in all aspects by both or all parents involved. Male and female bodies are not subject to a binary in Deleuzian time. It seems to me that in the light of huge changes in reproductive technologies it is the time to form new concepts of parenthood and parenting before the emerging narratives are again appropriated by traditional thinking. As Firestone says, women need to take control of the reproduction process for a while, hence the characters in my novel Mayarani, Jac Costa, Trace and Dr Patel. This is not to say women will not choose to be primary caregivers, or that women would all choose to reproduce outside of their bodies in artificial wombs, but it is the possibility of making real choices which removes us from the assumed natural function which gives freedom from assumed childcare, homebuilding and unpaid work. As Haraway states, she would rather have the choice of being a cyborg than the limitations of being a goddess (1991). Women need to be able to abdicate their total control of that deified position, and demand to share the parenting roles freeing themselves from guilt, raised eyebrows and shame.
Chora – Pre-symbolic to symbolic.

My text begins in a hollow, an incline, a crevice in the desert. The female biblical scribe, Mary, whose voice we hear, is in a state of ‘inbetweenedess’. Her voice speaks to us immediately, in the first person, from this place (p.2). I particularly drew upon readings of the poetry of the nomadic peoples of Somalia (1993) for this perspective. The Somali people live across geopolitical boundaries into Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti. This wandering existence interested me as I wanted to use nomadic systems as a metaphor for evolution in order to expand Deleuze’s theories about the smooth and the striated (2011). The term smooth, describes nomadic movement which sees no boundaries or limitations, and striated, the delineation of areas or planes. Deleuze’s ‘political anthropology’, proposes a driving force which he names ‘the nomad’. This agent moves against the set state of affairs. Deleuze sees the force of the nomad as ‘aggressively creative’, while the normal state of affairs is continually consolidating, establishing and firming up matters. Establishment persistently captures nomadic innovations and transforms them to fit its own needs, precisely in order to strengthen a certain state of affairs.30

The nomad can never be categorised or fixed but is in perpetual motion in incomplete philosophical, political or artistic business. The nomad cannot even be reduced to a metaphor and may be regarded as dangerous, outside of reason and threatening the status quo. This process in memory (nomadic) means that real historical events, are sometimes assimilated into a textual or narrative structure that is not about accurate historical representation but more to do with securing the accepted viewpoint. However it is also recognised that nomadic art is also influenced by settled peoples and contains geometric lines. The interrelationships between smooth and striated conceptual spaces can behave as an evolutionary force through duration. This is why I have used geological metaphors as they provide a rich seam of representative expression through images of shifting plates of rock, friction, instability, pressure, the erosion by water, wind and eruption of molten rock through fissures, in a continuous process of transformation.

These ideas of the nomad also give themselves to freedom of thought beyond constrained traditional indoctrinations. To ‘free’ oneself from the trap of belief systems could be seen as a

30 It will be interesting to examine the effects and political responses to the present ‘migrant crisis’ in Europe (2015).
Deleuzian nomadic process. As nomads do not only move constantly they actively lay down areas for existence which fan out and are ‘determinational’. This is the new metaphorical space I wish to create in my novel releasing a different political freedom from ‘striated’ traditional maternal narratives. I was also interested that Somali nomadic people regard life as similar to one long poem. This resonated with my central section In the Beginning (p.105-111). Thematically the biblical sections I set in the desert are closely akin to the work of Somali author, Nuruddin Farah, who in his novel The Crooked Rib written in 1970, through the eyes of an illiterate nomadic girl examines patriarchal nomadic Somali culture from a feminist point of view.

But that is what we women are – just like cattle, proper-ties of someone or other, either your parents or your husband...We are human beings...But our people don’t realize it. What is the difference between a cow and yourself now? Your hand has been sold to a broker (2006, p.80).

This desert land in my novel is the place which underlies the symbolic representation of the Virgin, the chora, the underlying conditions which generate the symbolism of the myth. Unlike Christ, Mary has no death, no tomb. Her assumption is relatively recent dogma. She is forever walking or passing over the earth like a nomad, persistently reborn and regenerated, as if in a Deleuzian permanent state of becoming. She is constantly in motion, always pushing forward into repeated time, yet never the same. In my novel she says

You and me were alike crossing time leaving leaving always moving on on like roots pushing their little white heads probing like worms into more time waiting for us, go, no beginning, no in the beginning

(p.173).

Kristeva describes the chora as the place where life is generated and also the place where it is negated. My character, Mary, is part at work in generating life and also involved in the
processes of dying, losing herself. Her voice is thanatographical,\(^\text{31}\) she speaks about self as if dead or almost dead. (This is also true of Jo’s experience in the tunnels and of her mother, revealed in her lists). She stands inside the pages of the Bible, a great symbol of culture, urinating, wondering whether she is free and progressing, or trapped and dying. She cannot tell if the sun is ‘rising or setting’ (p.2). Later, as she gives birth in the cave, I focus on her bodily drives and also how she makes sense of these in relation to how those in the wider community make sense of her (p.78). She is making meaning of her circumstances through her own writing in the first person (‘I’ being the politics of individuality as opposed to political alliances and party revolution), and yet outside of her lived experience, meaning is also being made by the history writers, the religious philosophers and political forces, across time. Kristeva uses the term ‘chora’ to describe the place underlying the symbolic.

The chora is not yet a position that represents something for someone (i.e., it is not a sign; nor is it a position that represents someone for another position (i.e., it is not yet a signifier either); it is, however, generated in order to attain this signifying position (Oliver, 2002, p.35).

The chora is not aligned only to female symbols, it is where the preconditions of the symbolic exist. It is essential to the semiotic, where action with potential may occur, where perception takes place, where knowledge is still in the process of making sense of things, ‘utilizing the images that are the world itself for ... needs and activities’ (Grosz, 2004, p.164). A symbol is created as a result of an intertwining of these preconditions and signification. My novel begins in this chora, and returns to it repeatedly in endless beginnings as I aim to generate an examination of the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic. I return to it thematically in the central part of the novel in a long poem, significantly Chapter One, In the Beginning (p.105-111) where a river of language overlays Genesis, a formal Christian Biblical text, threatening it and yet still bound within it. It is not a chaotic space but a womblike site of pre-representation, situated at the dawn of time, in the cradle of humanity, where we believe human consciousness was developing and experimenting with the use of symbol, in cave art, jewellery and music.\(^\text{32}\) It is the time Morrison refers to when she says ‘memory, prehistoric memory has no time’ (1987, cited in Hirsch, p.92). It is also a place of maternal essence, where

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\(^{31}\) Thanatographic – An account of a person’s death or description of their thoughts and feelings while dying.

things are unspoken, preverbal, nameless, ‘no word for dying so no end’ (p.108). Attempting to create the conditions of pre-language in a creative writing piece was obviously problematic. The concrete poetry overlaying the formal, ordered and numbered biblical text addresses this pre-symbolic space, pre-language and pre-signification. Wittig attempts a similar thing in *The Opoponax*\(^\text{33}\) (1976) where she breaks from traditional narrative and in order to explain the workings of a child’s mind, pre adult logic. She writes the novel with no paragraphs, no chapter numbering or headings. Wittig also uses a style where she, the author, speaks to the protagonist as "you" to describe the events of the book. I have also drawn on this technique in my central poem, i.e. ‘not made for you’ (p.106). My characters in this novel also appear to be functioning in a parenting model which is pre any heterosexual contract.\(^\text{34}\) This is a literary nod to Wittig’s essay *One is Not Born a Woman*, written in 1981 (2013).

The language overlays language in eternal beginning and an endless twisting of the two linguistic surfaces alongside and entwined together in relationship. Here ‘language precedes subject at times and creative writing becomes a language not flattened or linear but rather rhapsodic, poetic or lyrical’ (Burke, 2008, p.34). As Cixous describes

> A feminine textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always endless, without ending: there is no closure, it doesn’t stop, and it’s this that very often makes the feminine text difficult to read. For we’ve learned to read books that basically pose the word ‘end’. But this one doesn’t finish, a feminine text goes on and on and at a certain moment the volume comes to an end but the writing continues and for the reader this means being thrust into the void. These are texts that work on the beginning but not on the origin


So the work on the central pages is also a palimpsest where the past glows through behind the text as well as at the same time is over-written by the text. Language here subverts language as it continually and concomitantly undermines attempts to control via language. I do not so much wish to create a condition of naturalness in this section, nor suggest that such writing is exclusively feminine, but rather I wish to create the conditions which are pre-verbal and pre-symbolic, through the creative writing. This represents the conditions of maternity before the

\(^{33}\) *Opoponax*, Incidentally a resin similar to Myrrh imported from Somalia.

\(^{34}\) *Heterosexual contract* – a phrase coined by Monique Wittig.
symbolic structures of the cult of the Virgin. The relationship between the conditions which are pre-symbolic and the representation of these in my novel is complex, a twisting of the semiotic with the symbolic, in some kind of eternal evolution. Mind and matter are neither exclusive of one another, nor different. They are intertwined, ‘mind or life partakes of and lives in as matter’ (Grosz, 2004, p.167).

Morrison also used a similar technique in Beloved to illustrate the breakdown of language into something preverbal as the ghost of the baby speaks,

\[
\text{there is no one to want me to say me my name I wait on the bridge because she is under it there is night and there is day}
\]

(2007, p.251).

I have used this stream of consciousness and breakdown of punctuation and logic in the scenes where Jo meets the apparition of Mary on the underground tunnels in New York.

\[
\text{I covered my eyes and watched between fingers at the dismemberment of her face as stone upon stone hit her eyes became asymmetrical and bulged and some of her teeth were knocked out blood pouring under her nose was a gouge of brown red blood and bone matted hair covered the wounds stickily her legs crumpled}
\]

(p.178).

This illustrates a kind of oral tradition in storytelling before the written word, which underlines Mary’s inability to write and her subsequent silenced voice in the biblical text. However it also shows the political power of storytelling as it works underneath the approved texts. Morrison is a great example of a writer who works politically from within the systems. As a Nobel Prize winner she is part of the canon of literature and yet at the same time undermines political status quos. Beloved (1987) unfolds to the reader in a sequence ungoverned by chronology and linear understanding in a process of rememory which I will expand in my section, Time and Duration (p.61).

As the chora characterises these preconditions for an expression or development of the symbolic, it can be present at any time, where any kind of dawning is taking place. The chora is
an important condition necessary to becoming and potential action (towards and out of many futures) becomes possible via this route. Kristeva addresses the preverbal condition and how this affects the woman carrying a child. She describes the pregnant mother’s communication with her child as outside of any signifying structures,

a mother-woman is rather a strange "fold" (pli) which turns nature into culture, and the "speaking subject" (le parlant) into biology
(1985, p.149).

Kristeva suggests it cannot be set into signifying language until the child is born and then, like an explosion, nature and culture divides, where the body that was one becomes split into two (or more) giving an opportunity of self and other. Kristeva goes on to say that

These peculiarities of the maternal body make a woman a creature of folds; a catastrophe of being that cannot be subsumed by the dialectic of the trinity or its supplements
(1985, p.149).

In my novel, I focus on Mary’s story and tell it from her perspective, as if she were speaking to us out of the folds of history, the wrinkles of subconscious, the pages of the Bible, the layers of geological landscape and the bends of time. She slips out into the near future towards the end of the novel, as if in a ‘Bernadette moment’ as Jo hallucinates where she lies dying (p.170-179).

Jo’s body in death is used as symbolic not only by the artists working with Jac Costa but also for my own conceptual purposes. Her ‘real’ body is left folded and cracked in the concrete under the surface of the ground in the enigmatic posture of a pieta and yet she is a flesh and blood representation.

The exhibition opened at MOMA in November. By then Maya was bigger. She sat in the room with the incubators, but only as an observer now. Jac had crafted the most wonderful three dimensional sculpture entitled Lilith which she hung in an indent on the wall at the north end of the room. It was a pieta, made in plaster and felt. She loved these crushed figures in cracked concrete and hung on fractured marble, clothed in the
twisted fibres of felted wool. The pieta was distorted, their bodies flattened like the body found of the bog man Maya had seen in the natural history museum in London. The teenage child was coiled, his arms and legs entwined around his mother. Her stone lips cracked as if trying to speak. The folds of their clothes were twisted, exquisitely formed in the marble but their bodies deliberately crushed and flat like punctured tyres. On the marble was written a quote by Shulamith Firestone (p.183).

If the adulteration of women’s experience of maternity via language has placed it in the symbolic, by denying the underlying ‘lived experience’ in the chora, that place of instinctual drive, then it merely places woman as an idea. Shields states that ‘it is out of the madness of God, in the Old Testament, that there emerges what we, now, would recognise as the ‘real’; his perceived insanity is its very precondition’ (2010, p.9). I aim to expose this and at the same time in my footnotes which include ‘real’ events, I hope to bring this novel into a more universal experience than an autobiography but to make its fiction closer to and affiliated to reality.

My text aims to kill off the authority of the author (Barthes, 1967) and therefore it is not written from one omnipresent voice. Mary splits at the end of the novel (p.199-200) and is represented throughout my text by a multiplicity of potential Marys. It refuses God and any underlying substances or structures as homogenous, permanent, unchangeable or subject to reliable truths, as they too are subject to evolutionary shifts and changes. Mary is not, however, banished to the natural forces and therefore denied any agency of signification. She is writing herself as an individual into the text, biblical or other; she is able to create her own destiny out of the chora. She continually writes in the sand, on the rocks, via surrogacy, art, and finally, at the end of the novel, in her own untold story. She is eternally twisting in revolution and evolution, the forces constantly bubbling under the more seemingly concrete structures of human design and symbolism. She is eternally becoming, her symbolic language and position, shifting, mutating, amending, adjusting and reworking from inside language (written or symbolic). Her voice ceaselessly breaks into the linear time of the text. She disrupts, not to step out of it, nor to create a different time, instead she reveals the ‘eternally occurring maternal function’ (Geerts, 2010-11, p.16).
Mayarani, a surrogate mother in Mumbai, India, somewhere in the near future is similarly neither muted, or in a state of ‘non-dit’, by her biological position, nor her mystical spirituality. She is powerful beyond rationality, she is the radical force of the feminine voice. Her choices, such as placing the package under the rocks in the initial pages, her decision to become a surrogate mother, her role in the art works at MOMA and finally her job in a women’s organisation, are all strategic. She is not subject to but actively resistant. The position of David’s child within Mayarani’s body is a symbolic and working generative mutation of traditional symbolic parenthood roles from the inside out. The Kristevian chora inside Mayarani’s body is the condition of subversiveness. This ‘disruption’ of meaning through her surrogacy, gives her power and agency in maternity and is probably more in line with Kristeva’s position, and more revolutionary than equality politics, it seeks a different evaluation of motherhood. She totally appropriates the idea of mother as masochistic and self-sacrificing, as pro expectations of the Virgin cult and finds material subjectivity, paradoxically in choosing to represent herself as a new idea later in the art galleries of New York and then abdicates from this to a new role as proxy voice for individuals in a global women’s network. Mary through a rewriting of her possible individual story and contrastingly, Mayarani, who has agency and power over how she uses her body reproductively, demands to be an idea of her own making, of her own fantasy. Mayarani and Mary have agency over their symbolic power which the traditional Virgin mother does not have. Neither of my characters reject the symbolic, as to do this would be impossible, rather they embrace its potential. Mayarani, despite taking in the sperm and seemingly associating herself with white male phallocentrism (as symbolised in Christianity) is in actuality a subversive character and with political agency. She ingests the matter, with the help of Dr Nandini Patel’s biomedical interventions, into the chora (her womb) to gain control. She is not working as part of a group of feminist women, although she chooses to become connected to such groups at times. She is a woman alone acting out her own personal revolution.

David didn’t notice the woman creeping up the hillside alone, through the palms and trees away from the seafront. Her belly bulged under her clothes. Mayarani went far beyond the buildings and stood looking down. From this high up she could see the waves lapping, folding the sand over and over like pages in a book laid down, one over the next. The arteries of cars and rickshaws, people and beasts, throbbed below as her heart beat.
On and up, her feet slipped on stones, and pebbles dislodged and rolled down the hillside.

She unstrapped from her belt the hidden large packet and wedged it between two rocks.

Damp dripped and soaked the sand. The packet hung in stasis

(p.7).

The package hangs in stasis as something unformed, yet the reader feels it has some explosive capacity. Later we discover it to be the unformed and miscarried baby she conceived with her brother Kumar.

Both Mayarani and Mary describe a lack of division between themselves and the child they carry, and yet at the same time show themselves to be in a state of ‘continuous separation’ from that child, Flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood (p.37). In the same way the semiotics of the maternal can never remain stable but are always shifting, burgeoning forward generating new symbolic structures out of the multiplicity of conditions for signification, particularly in the new atmosphere of biomedical innovation. Mayarani’s position is clear, she chooses her symbolic representation out of the semiotic, she acts strategically. She lies about her virginity. Even Jac Costa does not choose her position for her, in fact she guiltily confesses she is concerned that she is using the woman’s vulnerability for her own work. But Mayarani has agency and came into the relationship with Dr Patel and Jac Costa with it. She is not the vulnerable, naïve girl lost and wandering in a metaphorical desert of symbolism, where there is no real place for her. She is not ‘other’, she is not exploited and used in some kind of post-colonial manipulation (and it is clear within the text, she does not want to be viewed as such), instead she chooses her own political power. She is not subject to David’s demands or narcissistic fantasies about her virginity, nor is she a form of healing from his teenage loss of power when his unborn baby was aborted. She is anti-phallocentric, she upsets the nature/culture binary and posits herself as a new idea. She is evolution and revolution and finally invites Kumar (whose complicated political leanings may also be anti and pro Christian dogma at the same time) into dialogue. Sometimes the subversive action is only ‘part of a larger legitimization process, while an attempt to stabilize the order of things may turn out to subvert it’ (Greenblatt, 1990, p.74-75). Only time will tell whether Mayarani and Jac Costa’s attempts to subvert are more evolutionary/revolutionary than David or Kumar’s attempts to
stabilize power relations and play God. Most likely they work together as a dynamic, opposing evolutionary force.

As an amalgamation of female post-modern artists such as Marina Abramovic, Jenny Holzer, Mireille Suzanne Francette Porte (Orlan), Sarah Lucas and Tracy Emin, my character Jac Costa is the conduit for giving a new symbolic status for the maternal by re-visioning the maternal function in art. She wears a veil at all times in public and her group of protégées often wonder as to who she might be. To them she is faceless, unseen and enigmatic. She is maternal in her role towards her working artists and this is particularly revealed in her relationship with Mayarani. Like the author of a novel, the artist works towards the notion of the Platonic chora (a space in which forms take shape) her imagination is the initially formless container of ideas in the art work or sculpture. She, like Mayarani, gives women their own space to be individual. The women bond on this issue, although many of them leave the project when faced with death threats. Mayarani insists she remains an idea, a symbol throughout the text.

Jac Costa sweeps though the novel as if in a flowing mantel embracing all the characters. Her character works behind, underneath the text to alter the symbolic, she exposes it as it is, twisted, deformed, and trapped in an impossible conundrum (p.183) and she offers an alternative through her synthetic womb installation (p.52-54).

The chora is not only a feminine place by the end of the novel, it is an environment which is the preconditions for the generative task of childbearing beyond the merely feminine. In it and at the centre of it are other characters/individuals who no longer inhabit the margins of parenthood but stand firmly within the centre of a richly fertile symbolic precondition, in David himself, Ethan and Nick. The conclusion is not finite or closed but a gaping philosophical question, another beginning. However, by the end of the novel, within this generative chora of reproduction, masculine subjectivity is included. As my female characters take control of the symbolism of reproduction they do not exclude male unspoken subjective experience but make it welcome and seek to contain it in new narratives.
**Time and Duration.**

Openness to change could be considered a precursor of politics, yet without time and duration there would be no change. Culture is constantly being made and remade through time or as a result of the force of time. Aristotle recognised this in relation to the human psyche in his theories of motion, causality, ethics and physiology. Later, mathematician and philosopher, Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) developed these ideas in his concepts of energy, dynamics and entelechy\(^{35}\) although both believed that by harnessing these forces, reactions and futures could be predicted and measured. In this critical commentary I want to bring together this relationship between political change and time and examine it in a new light as offered by Grosz in *The Nick of Time* (2004). I would then like to combine this theory with the developing discipline of creative writing as a research method.

In Grosz’s analysis of Darwin, Nietzsche and Bergson she puts forward a feminist Deleuzian politics connected to time focusing on difference, duration, intuition and becoming. She relates time and evolution to the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and reveals what she calls a ‘politically necessary path’ for ‘becoming woman’ in emerging feminist theories and politics (Grosz, 2005). With the understanding that woman is not the negative of man but that it is patriarchy which interprets this as so, she addresses the eternal battle of the sexes and the rhetoric of gender which desires homogenous equality politics. This attempt to merge two into one, can be reframed as a difference, not between two dualistic opposite entities but rather as an energy or force between ‘fields, strata and chaos’ (Grosz, 2005, p.6). The friction between which creates energies defining infinite possibility. Splitting into two may take place but not with the result of finite dualisms.

Marge Piercy addresses some of these issues in her novel *In Woman on the Edge of Time* (2001). Her work could be seen as dystopian but where the dystopia is the ‘present’ day and the utopia the future. Her protagonist, Connie visits a future where motherhood and parenting have been transformed by the processes of reproductive biomedical science. When Connie slips into this potential place and time, Mattapoisett 2137, and encounters a

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\( ^{35} \text{Entelechy - beginning as a single-celled organism, the entelechy of the human being ever unfolds as from a hidden centre. (www.thefreedictionary.com/entelechy). A realization or actuality as opposed to a potentiality or (in vitalist philosophy) a vital agent or force directing growth and life.(dictionary.reference.com/browse/Entelechy).} \)
world within which gender difference has been eliminated and children are developed in artificial womb-like pods, she is initially afraid. However she comes to see that this development frees women from their role as second class citizens through a system of shared parenting (three co-mothers, male or female). Every child is wanted as mistakes do not happen, both sexes receive equal maternity leave and, via hormone treatment both can breastfeed the child. This ‘edge of time’ in Piercy’s novel could be seen as similar to Grosz’s ‘nick of time’, a place where the virtual future stands before Connie to defend for the sake of her daughter. I have established that the symbols of the Virgin myth and the narratives of the Virgin Mary still persist in this present. It seems that such myths perpetuate the world from within, and those who do not conform to the mythical ideals live in the margins, as does Connie and the other inmates incarcerated and drugged in Woman on the Edge of Time (women, gay men, minorities, lower-class individuals, and those who rebel against the status quo).

These echoes of the myth are examples of past accounts continuing to have virtuality in the present and biomedical advancements have the potential to transform these. It is a past unfinished with. This representation of the past (for indeed we cannot be sure if it is a real past, in the sense that it represents actual events rather than an archetypal set of truths), and the effects of interpretations made of it in the past, exist with present interpretations of this past and could be viewed as a political force. This correspondingly exists in a virtual state of becoming into the future, different from the past but as a result of it. Such a way of approaching the cult of the Virgin in feminist politics is still a fertile seam. The constraints and freedoms this powerful myth has endowed, have been rearranged, restructured and reinterpreted repeatedly and in duration to fit archetypes in consciousness or religious and political agendas of the time. These continue to deeply impact concepts of what constitutes woman or appropriate methods of parenthood and parenting. My novel repeats this process, re-visioning the Virgin myth to fit contemporary post-human concerns.

Mitchell begins his novel Cloud Atlas (2004) with an initial narrative which breaks off and shifts to another moment in history. My novel opens in a similar hiatus in time. This fissure is enveloped in the novel’s pages representing a past, present and future existing in one moment, in a kind of delay or nick of time. Like Mitchell I also have also utilized a centerpiece at the
middle of the book. Both my and his text unfold and double themselves repeatedly by not only representing a moment of time but by also using the gap or discontinuity to create a new vision, a new actuality which is already in virtual discourse. Mitchell particularly addresses a continuity of prejudice. In his novel, these themes are tackled in the context of duration and time, functioning as a folded mosaic which reverses itself in a kind of loop. Time, in *Within the Folds*, is similarly pleated in a rhizonomic process of fanning out, where new visions are more than possible. I have conceived or perceived that, as biomedical science progresses and there are more and more choices of methods of reproduction, that this might be a moment where, by connecting these developments with a deconstruction of the layers of the myth, there is the possibility for another re-evaluation. As Smith writes in *How to Be Both* (2014) where two artists are discussing the nature of painting and memory, peeling away layers of paint from the wall,

> But then the roof, or the same old picture, lands right back on top of me again? I said.
> Yes, but by the time it does you’ve had the moment without it, your clean moment, Barto said … After that the memory can’t hurt you any more


Smith’s novel also addresses the concept of time and plays with it by not offering a narrative with a linear chronology. Her novel, like mine, is set in two moments of history, the past and present and she also has two possible beginnings to the novel, which, depending on chance, affects the experience of the reader. She challenges these traditional concepts of time as her character, Francesco del Cossa, slips out of the past into the present, where the dead exist with the living in a palimpsest represented by the layers of paint on an artwork. George’s mother at one point asks

> Do things just go away? … Do things that happened not exist, or stop existing, just because we can’t see them happening in front of us?


Through her dual narrative, Smith explores many perspectives of time as well as challenging the binaries through which we live. In her novel gender does not matter.
Stopping to appreciate awareness of the power of the Virgin myth in relation to advances in reproductive technologies and gender studies may give space to take a breath, time to create new visions, before the traditional ideology of the myth drops down or squeezes in again. These new visions might incorporate the inclusion of gay couples, disabled women, single women/men being able to have the choice to ‘mother’ and not having to forego parenthood under the auspices of ‘in the best interest of the child’. My research takes the premise that current biomedical advances are unstoppable and have an already virtual potential to redefine the current conceptual framework surrounding models of parenthood. The possible conceptual and actual consequences coupled with emergent contemporary gender politics constitute the preconditions for such a new vision to be possible. It is this breach between nature and science where genetic modification and innovations in technology have the potential to change concepts of parenting into many other virtual and/or actual realities which is of interest to me. Grosz explores the evolution of thought and biology as intertwined, ‘the intermingling of, mind and matter, and how they implicate the operations of time and space respectively’ (2004, p.157). “Deleuzian politics” or feminist politics does not have to be in contradiction or an opposition to the Virgin myth. The marrying of the two creates a new chora, or chora’s (pre-conditions for a new symbology). The conditions for evolution and becoming are not set, they are also constantly fluid.

Contrary to Aristotle and Leibniz, Deleuze takes the process of becoming as being a random process without the rational, optimistic external engineering of an all knowing, powerful, intentional deity. Current parenting practice is only part of a virtual reality possible as a result of the past, not a predetermined moral code. John Gray in *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (2003) considers moral codes to be human deceptions. He says ‘Morality is a sickness peculiar to humans’ (p.116). There are and always have been potentials for other virtual practices in perpetual states of becoming. This ‘unactualized potential of the virtual’ (Grosz, 2004, p.253) which is the condition of a change in concepts of parenting is what makes a radical shift in sexual politics possible. If concepts of parenting have been overpowered by the concept of the Virgin mother as the moral image of perfection, there must have been other forms and methods of parenting which have remained latent, unrealised in their development and which do not fit this code of ethics. It is in the break, the gap, the breathing in, in this delay that other virtual realities may become actualities. The delay being the moment at which a
choice to re-evaluate and create a different future is possible. My section on Mary revives and re-writes the past. My work seeks not only to revive the past for future re-evaluation, I seek to revive it to put it to some use as a form of resistance and radical change. Juxtaposing the past with present innovations is in pursuit of actualising a virtual and new conceptual future. Like Piercy’s novel (2001), I aim at insurrection through writing.

Kristeva asks in the *Stabat Mater* (1985) what future might be possible for women’s relationship with the maternal, given the history of the Virgin’s place in society to fulfil economic, social and psychological conscious and unconscious needs which have relied upon patriarchal systems

*Now that this once carefully balanced structure seems in danger of tottering, the following question arises: to what aspects of the feminine psyche does this representation of the maternal offer no answer, or at any rate no answer that is not too coercive for women in this century to accept?*

(1985, p.149).

It is clear that in many instances this representation is limiting to the real lives of many women, and it is this that I address. My work is unashamedly the product of many links and connections made from the writing, thoughts, actions and innovations of others and I would expect it in its own turn be part of the continuity of the emergence and extension of the unpredictable future. I recognise that the narrative of Mary is not exhausted in its potential virtualities and my interpretation is just one more. This I show in the final section of the novel by splitting her voice and bringing to consciousness the re-written nature of its existence and indeed the quality of its unfixable form. It is not a narrative born from verified fact but a continuing re-writing and re-interpretation used to create new actual realities in living matter (i.e. families). This has a fundamental impact on the evolution of our human state in political and social environments inherently in perpetual habit, instinct, memory and learning. The question of Mary still remains a politically ‘volatile’ subject in feminist enquiry, hinting at yet unlived futures, which in the light of Jung’s assertion regarding the unlived life is ‘the greatest burden a child must bear’ (1986, p.22).
As Grosz says writing and rewriting our past is a way to begin new futures in a political sense. When we write down the past it is not fixed, rather it is, the striving to understand it in the light of the present which serves to open new possibilities for the future. Writing history within the forces or folds of time is an ‘inexhaustible enterprise’ because of the many positions which can be taken. She says

*History is not the recovery of the truth of bodies or lives in the past; it is the engendering of new kinds of bodies and new kinds of lives. History is in part an index of our present preoccupations, but perhaps more interesting, the past is as rich as our futures allow* (2004, p.255).

When looking back at history as a means of unveiling or uncovering the inequalities of the past, Morrison stated in conversation at the Hay-on–Wye festival (May, 2014) that to tell a story and put it into the past as a terrible event that happened then, is to understand it to be over and no longer relevant in our present or to still have implications for the future. She highlights how, through historical interpretations, it is possible for culture to draw a veil over painful or shameful pasts. She compares her novel *Beloved* (2007) with *Twelve Years a Slave* (2014), adapted from the diary written in 1853 by Solomon Northup, and suggests that the nature of the latter lends itself to the notion that these were events that happened in the past and are therefore complete, no longer seeping into the present and visions of a virtual future. In contrast to this, Morrison, through her fluid language and unfolding plots, gives the sense of a state of being which, although historical, still throws a residue of the past over the present, pervading and emerging through the duration of time into the present and consequent futures. I have attempted to emulate this fluid style throughout the whole of my novel, at times more markedly than others. This feature is in pursuit of a similar end to that of Morrison although, in retrospect, I consider my style may continue to need refining. Morrison draws attention to a process of rememory, which serves as resistance and not a mere explanation of ‘what happened’. As Marianne Hirsch states ‘Rememory is neither memory nor forgetting, but memory combined with (the threat of) repetition’ (*Maternity and Rememory: Toni Morrison’s ‘Beloved’,* accessed: 2015). Past social constraints still leave a trace which influences politics now. This is so of all history as time is in constant repeating motion and duration, the task is to find a way to remember which does not seek to repress, but to redress and therefore be
capable of political change. Morrison is an enigmatic speaker who communicates in flights and lines of thought. This is her great strength as one has the sensation she is writing from a place of intuition, alongside great intellectual thinking, neither being more prominent. Her narratives are circular, repeating and returning to the beginnings but carrying more and more truth each time they return and at the same time opening the readers mind to more and more possibility. Virginia Woolf suggested in 1929 that ‘we think back through our mothers if we are women’ (*A Room of One’s Own*, cited in Hirsch, p.92), and I guess this is also an ongoing process. I touch on this concept via the inclusion of Jo’s mother’s shopping lists. The items to be purchased repeat themselves, i.e. toms, pots, greens, and are also items which still manifest on current domestic shopping lists but they also mutate and transform into the future. The inclusion of David’s lists towards the end of my novel accentuates changing gender roles, Nappies, E45, Buggy ... (p.195).

In my work, in order to continually reference the lingering constraining impact of the Virgin myth, I include footnotes of current events which represent this connection the present has with the past. These show how the overlapping power of past thought and logic persists in our present and therefore future potential lives. The footnotes work with the text rather like a crossword, where the real and current content of them seeps up vertically into the horizontal fiction. I hope this gives another perspective which is no longer linear, but that opens up space for something different.

Grosz (2004) reconceptualises time through her study of Darwin, Nietzsche and Bergson and re-frames it through the lens of Deleuze and Irigaray, the two thinkers who she calls her ‘ghostly guides’. She states that according to Bergson, past, present and future have a relationship which is not linear, but is part of an evolutionary movement between the actual and the virtual, including the spheres of intuition or the unspoken. My work capitalises on ellipses – gaps and unformed things, the gaps, being the ‘nicks’, the moments when change is possible. The gaps in between thought/stimulus and response/action, are the places where the subject or human being can coordinate a ‘selection of those elements’ relevant to that human beings’ interests (Grosz, 2004, p.168). The realisation of these in form or action is what constitutes change. As I write from the influence of Deleuze and his narrative of becoming and rhizonomic growth, time in my text is neither linear nor cyclical.
It adheres neither to the chronological, nor to the natural seasons. Time folds, repeats and folds again. Writing this text enabled me to assemble a connection between Grosz’s assertions about time and geological metaphor within the novel.

My research methodologies, creative writing project and critical appraisal are congruent with this, being examples in themselves of ‘becoming’, with ‘increasingly ... emergent properties’ over time (Grosz, 2004, p.248). The investigation through the emerging discipline of creative writing as a research method has enabled the conditions of irreversible evolution in my research and understanding of ontology, it is both an example of life and an exploration of life. The critical and creative components converge, in that I address with awareness, the political issues and creative forces that they are themselves and also subject to. The creative piece is never complete in its journey as it continues to impact the present and has a virtual presence always in the future. A piece of creative writing, or any artistic project, is always in a state of becoming, even beyond its completion, in that its journey continues as it is read, impacting the thinking and actions of others. This is so in virtuality as the future consequences of reading and research are always latent and multiplicitous, ‘becomings are un-programmed as mutations, disruptions, and points of resistance. Their time frame is always the future anterior, that is to say a linkage across present and past in the act of constructing and actualising possible futures’ (Braidotti, 2002, par 29).
Writing Geography - Landscape, Time and Becoming.

The landscape of my novel is not flat, nor linear. The sedimentary layers are not set. Instead, like Michelangelo’s Pieta in Vatican City, they are in relief, not one dimensional. Creative representations have been carved out of and into the landscape by human lives. They are constantly laid down and continually open to alteration. This is the design of the physical world which my characters inhabit.

Deep set within my text are potent metaphors of geological change. The sand, rock, water and landforms are constantly shifting and sliding. I use these metaphors to represent the Deleuzian exploration of planes, strata or fields constantly in duration and flux. As Grosz asserts (2004, p.221-222) life is an eternal ‘fanning out’, she states that this concerns not only material systems, including significant geological shifts, but that this can also be applied to instinct, intelligence, intuition and lethargy which take place as a sort of eternal disruption. As mentioned previously this interior pressure creates a bending as in Thom’s mathematical formula, pressure so great that what he describes as a ‘catastrophe fold’ or new direction takes place. This great internal force of evolution, linked to Bergsonian concepts of time as force, create constant growth, and an ‘uninterrupted continuity of unforeseen novelty’ (Grosz, 2004, p.236). I address Naomi Klein’s theory (2008) in my novel, where the Mumbai inhabitants suspect that even major disasters, such as earthquakes might be orchestrated by political and economic powers and not the forces of nature.

Some more radical Indians even thought the disaster was not so natural, something designed to create a new void to fill.
(p.189).

My maternal characters are constantly twisting towards and away from desire in their role as mother. The new vision of birth and parenthood shakes the traditional masculine, Western, Christian thought, and agitates it as if in an earth tremor. Life in an unsettled cradle of humanity becomes unbound from binary and phallocentric order. This opens up gaps for new potentials for parenting and change becomes possible.
As she shone the light, quivering in her unstable hand, she saw the fronds splayed off and twisted, winding in alternate directions, some tapered to a tip, while others furrowed on out of sight. She had been bending and taking detours all her life too. Creeping into corners, running close to the edges of buildings, making tenuous friends, avoiding them, cutting ties, moving on, submerging herself in children, dipping into pleasures, yielding under pressures, flexible to circumstances, getting stuck and somewhere down the line she had made choices which had ended up here, at an impasse. Here she was caught in a dead end, her life narrowed, tailing off to a point. Like the tunnels around her, life seemed to have meandered, criss-crossed, touched others and flown off clattering into different realms (p.115).

I have reclaimed the symbol of rock, normally viewed as constant and immovable, and reinterpreted it as matter constantly in motion, subject to liquidity and fluid movement. As described in Shelley's *Ozymandias*, what appear to be monolithic structures are inevitably changeable via the processes of evolution. My metaphors disrupt the normal binary of water (female/changeable) moving over rock (male/constant). Following on from Sadie Plant’s exploration in *Zeros and Ones* (1998), I smash the binary code. The resulting image is one of movement within movement. Like ‘water in water’ (p.109), liquid in liquid, with no binaries or opposites. My novel is not split into two or chronologically linear but rather a palimpsest of overlapping narratives and histories, folded and refolded, like waves, ‘recurring patterns of human experience’ (Dunn and Morris, 1995, p.77) echo throughout my text, where old stories can be ‘glimpsed’ through time. Time works through this metaphor as a force, folding and refolding and, as such, I reject the idea of beginning and end. Bergson describes time as a force behind ‘processes of development, processes that induce change, that demonstrate time’s forward direction, and in a future that is based on the resources of the past while it inevitably surpasses them, that involve innovation, emergence, and the creation of the new and the unforeseen’ (Grosz, 2004, p.157-8). Rock too moves through time and space, being matter subject to the forces of Deleuzian time. Rock develops fault-lines, where contradictions collide and rub against one another, where cracks appear in ideological ‘facades’ within which it

36 *Ozymandias* – 1818 by Percy Bysshe Shelley.
37 Ie. The coffee machine bubbles in the background (p.205) in the same way as Makaah hears the water underground (p.2).

I had begun with a palimpsest image of geological strata, which within its layering I could initially document a chronological sequence of historical events, in the same vein as Ackroyd’s *Hawksmoor* (1993), where he uses the layering of dead bodies in graveyards under the streets of London. This became less and less adequate as my work progressed. So drawing on Ackroyd’s sense of the past seeping into the present, Mitchell’s unfolding of a single story in repetition over time in *Cloud Atlas* (2004), and later encouraged by Smith in *How to be Both* (2014) where she examines chronology through layers of paint, I was able to develop a more complex relationship with time,

*It is like everything is in layers. Things happen right at the front of pictures and at the same time they continue happening, both separately and connectedly, behind, and behind that, and again behind that, like you can see, in perspective for miles* (2014, p.53).

I began to experiment with folding concepts of time in pleats. As I did this I began to see how the myth of the Virgin has replicated and been utilised to interpret and reinterpret female social roles.

Grosz’s concept of time gives us a politics which lies underneath our symbolic structures. She maps out a past of evolution which is not arboreal, but rhizonomic. Evolution occurs in stops and starts, duplications, echoes and reverberations, nature and culture are combined, thinking is being, not functioning independently, and both contribute to life and ontology. I show this with the image of layers of rock formations and sediment shot through with rhizonomic networks of tunnels, river beds and root systems. Grosz, like Kristeva, appears to understand a political feminist agenda subject to, and working from within given systems as well as in opposition. Deconstructed concepts of linear time and hierarchies are emerging as only strands of thought and practise and there are other conglomerations or means of composite thought. Like Kristeva, Grosz suggests surfaces and planes are of many beginnings, open to an infinite number of possible evolutions. They are nomadic and constantly in motion.
Conclusion – Generation Within the Folds.

Although it is clear to me that the writing and research process for this thesis was born out of personal circumstances, I deliberately chose to avoid writing autobiographically. I agree with Shields when he says ‘one gets so weary watching writers’ sensations and thoughts get set into the concrete of fiction that perhaps it’s best to avoid the form as a medium of expression’ (2010 p.23). However as Burke says

*the removal of the author opens a provisional space wherein the methodology can be developed, but once the methodology has been established, it must return to take stock of that which it has excluded, make reparations, revisions, or continue to neglect the question of the author at the cost of remaining regional, selective, inadequate to the literary object’* (2008, p.48-49).

As I evaluate the autobiographical component inherent in this work I wish I had paid more attention to the poetry of Anne Carson particularly *The Beauty of the Husband* (2001). I will revisit this in my next draft to support and strengthen the characters of Jo and the lists written by her mother. Carson’s description of the progression of a woman’s feelings within marriage is sensitive and the idea of her husband stealing her writing for his own professional gain, interesting. She examines memory and she unfolds story in her narrative via the medium of poetry, equating intimate feelings with ancient myth. Having returned to ‘take stock’ of the autobiographical elements of my work it might be beneficial to rethink and give more fluid depth to my characters.

Exploring the power of the myth of the Virgin Mary in this thesis and investigating the rhizonomic nature of feminist rebellion using a number of theoretical and critical approaches has been an exciting project. Correlating these ideas within my text with those of creative writing processes as an academic and philosophical research subject has been stimulating and enhanced my writing practice and confidence. I have no idea what impact, if any, this thesis will have, although it has certainly touched the deeper machinations of my close family, friends and associates. From this there will be an inevitable fanning out, and changes have been made as to how I parent my own daughter. Paul Man writes (Burke, 2008, p.30) we assume that life
produces the autobiography as an act which produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life ....’ He even suggests that ‘to be real can even ... be harmful’ (p.30). We cannot decide or govern what is ‘good for’ future generations, we just act in accordance with a desire for positive political change as one of the numerous forces driving action out of the past, through the present and into the future. As Smith writes in How to be Both, there is

*...a lot more world: cause roads that look set to take you in one direction will sometimes twist back on themselves without ever seeming anything other than straight, ... many things get forgiven in the course of a life: nothing is finished or unchangeable except death and even death will bend a little if what you tell of it is told right* (2014, p.281).

The philosophy, still prevalent in post-modern thinking, that ‘everything happens for a reason’ we cannot be sure of. The inherent ‘nomadic’ nature of rhizomes which consume, emerge out of and are the creative force behind my novel, representing upheaval, revolution and insurgency, are powerfully at work in modern life through the internet and cyber communication. It could be said that the overthrow of the Egyptian government\(^{38}\) was caused by such processes and we see current revolutionary groups using the dynamic rhizonomic potency of the internet to radicalise and recruit support.\(^{39}\) These revolutions take on a random form of their own, in an affiliation between what is haphazard and deliberate. Connections are made, some fall dead and others keep persisting. Revolution or re-evolution occurs in the eternal repeating and reconstituting of the past, into the present and possible virtual futures. Evolution through rhizonomic forces is a political force. Generating new things is always embryonic, doubling and splitting. Many embryos have perished in the cause of reproductive progression, many seeds of ideas have fallen on barren earth. New ideas, like true nomadic life, may appear attractive, although not conclusively revolution to better things, “one may be empowered or beautified by [a Deleuzian nomadic subjectivity], but most people are not; some just die of it” (Braidotti, 2002, p.3). Perhaps Braidotti’s assessment is overly cynical, perhaps not, however it makes the point that with change, there are often casualties.

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\(^{38}\) BBC news 2011

\(^{39}\) How ISIS is spreading its message online, BBC, 2015.
Planes of perception are altering in my private life and in the wider public sphere. Without demystifying the bonds between mother and child and a provision of a deeper understanding and cooperation to share this unique status by both men and women, the economic and political divide will perpetuate. Firestone’s assertion that women take control of the conceptual framework of the maternal process is still an open page, the enigmatic dilemma is unresolvable by concrete, traditional, dualistic solutions. However, tides have a chance to turn, instead of the ‘distinction dictated by nature’ (Smart, cited in Stanworth, 1987, p.98) which enables men to be more detached from their children, women may be able to choose to walk away from that special status as more men become able to familiarize, acclimatise and get used to that bond and its ramifications. Even the corporeal experience of parenthood may yet be available to them which will dramatically change social ordering and paternity rights.

As I complete this thesis, biomedical advancements provide a real possibility of this and we stand on the edge of what is virtually visible as cracks appear in traditional methods, revealing that giant shifts are occurring. In relation to these biomedical advances, Braidotti says (2002) Donna Haraway’s work *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991) and *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness* (2003) are of great relevance to rhizomatic philosophy. She also suggests that the enhancement of the body via biomedical science is the ‘dominant social and discursive figuration for the interaction between the human and the technological in post-industrial societies’ (2002, par 12), such biomedical innovations are living or active. This new state of desire to procreate with technologies beyond the natural could be viewed as a new spirituality in search of transcendence of death.

Although Deleuze and Guattari say, men and women ‘cannot be understood in terms of production, only in terms of becoming’ (2011, p.267) these advancements are materialising within capitalist frameworks with thought-provoking consequences. The forces of capitalism and patriarchy may be at work within these expansions, and care must be observed with these new evolving narratives that both men and women take on new authorships of reproduction to avoid replication of further gendered constraints. Mary’s biblical voice, in my novel, speaks out of the folds of this text, politically and actively towards change. Mrs Prinash too, takes a creative writing course and is no longer a nanny and David proclaims towards the end of the novel to his daughter, ‘I want to tell you a story, the story of how you were born’ (p.198) highlighting his fundamental involvement in the nurture of his daughter.
Liberal Humanism states that good literature celebrates an organic unity between form and content. Despite the urge to break ranks from this liberal humanist approach to literature, paradoxically taking a rhizomic route to my creative process has bound me by these tenets. Like Norbert Weiner, I wanted to reconfigure this approach. I wanted to suggest that biomedical technologies have the potential for freeing women from their ‘natural’ maternal function but at the same time create a world which ‘would preserve autonomy and individuality’ (Hayles, 1999, p.140). The research content inherent in the novel and the investigative process are bound by the metaphors of rhizomic evolution in a kind of glorious and inadvertent unity. Ironically a harmony subsumed in the organic unity of divergence is inherent in what I have created. The model of connection and disconnection as I have written, by finding my way in, through and out of plot lines, was intended to challenge traditional concepts of unification. However, omitting and providing an absence of plot lines felt too risky. These sticky bonds to traditional methods of writing novels, like strings of mucus or twisted images of DNA, mirror the conundrum of the maternal, especially concerning the bond of mother and child. The pull or desire to return to or repeat past models is powerful.

I can never know the long term impact of my research although forces are inevitably in motion and unstoppable. There is no clear, clean answer which can be folded away, instead just ever increasing lists of questions and new ideas to add into the pot. My novel, however much it may seek to overthrow the machinations of patriarchy, is merely another example of language at work, entwined and in synthesis with the work of equality feminisms, revolutionary politics, academia, intellectual thinking and traces of biblical texts. It is palimpsest evolution, eternal revolution, always ‘subject in process/on trial’ (Moi, 2002, p.91). I begin and frequently return to the gap which Derrida describes, the gap between all things binary, and especially between the symbolic and linguistic representations of the maternal. I search for not only meaning but also how meaning is made of the maternal experience, in the light of philosophy and psychoanalysis. For the major part of this study I have worked with the premise that the story of the Immaculate Conception was a make-believe told by a complex and multifaceted young woman. I portray her as a sometimes sanctimonious thirteen year old, pregnant and driven by a fear of execution to give a passionate and deceitful account. This novel gives only one explanation and apology for the possible untruths she told due to the circumstances she lived

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Norbert Weiner - American mathematician.
in, and how they have been misused throughout history and the consequences of this for generations of women. Her presence within the text does not serve to negate the experience of motherhood, or to shelve it in the vast catalogue of works demonstrating female repression. Mary is designed to disrupt the text, to give revolution, to shine a light on aspects of parenting from inside the language and create an opportunity for change. Her Untold Story (p.174-177) is perhaps the greatest gift she could give to Jo as she dies, as it constitutes possibility of freedom by re-representing origins. Like Morrison’s Sethe in Beloved (2007), ultimately, I hope she is big enough to encompass all of women’s differences, and in my novel, those of the male parenting experience too. As Mary splits into many Marys she does so, not in opposition to phallocentrism but in an expansion multiple and different. Through a rhizonomic and new assemblage of ideas, combined with an in depth study of Kristeva’s Stabat Mater and chora I have created conditions for a new beginning. Ultimately, I have not rejected the Virgin myth, as I originally expected, I have begun to rewrite it, thus changing our relationships with her. I have applied the written word as an evolutionary activity (Kroll and Harper, 2013, p.4) where the contexts are multidimensional. The act of creativity and the receiving of art works functions on many levels, there is no one voice to hang onto.

Between structuralism and phenomenology there was an era where the death of the author came into being, where language became the destroyer of all subject – including the author of literary studies, the transcendental subject of all philosophies of consciousness, the subject of political theory, psychoanalysis and anthropology. So, in a similar way, as monotheism, dualism and the trinity are increasingly rejected in post-modern philosophies and we embrace the emergence of multiplicity and difference (la difference, difference in degree, Bergson, 2004) in post-human futures of increase, we are going to have to rethink many of the humanist myths we live by and deconstruct the philosophies we adhere to.

If the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington and the recent discoveries on Pluto show us anything, it is that we do not live in a stable world and that the universe within which we dwell is continuously changing and subject to formidable evolutionary force. Post-humanism is here, and despite the obvious fears which lie in human consciousness about this, there is also possibility for rethinking what it means to be human and dispelling some of our age old myths.

There is a shift taking place from set truths, which bear coherence to something more random
and unstable. As Hayles says (1999) this does not mean the end of humanity, but offers opportunity for rethinking what it is to be human.

So why read, why write? Dian Elam asks what the uses of the literary are and explains it is

\begin{quote}
a rethinking, a literary questioning that continues to question the question, including the question of literature itself.... [T]he nothingness and potential uselessness of reading keeps thought open as a question, as questioning, so that even answers are part of questioning
\end{quote}

(2000, par 18).
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