

# ***Ocean of Milk***

**A Draft Novel**

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## *Attestation of Authorship*

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Candidate's Signature

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## *Abstract*

The exegesis, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Re-presenting the Lost Voice of the Vedic Version*, posits that Gramsci's term subaltern applies in three ways: to myself, my work and its themes. I discuss how my 'otherness' underlies my motivations for writing *Ocean of Milk* to re-present the Vedic version of precolonial India, whose original meaning and thus value, has all but been lost through British subjugation.

There follows a discussion of the thesis in the light of three areas of literary criticism:

1. Magical realism: in which I look at my thesis as cross-cultural and postcolonial, with an intention to subvert prevailing paradigms.
2. Feminism or magical feminism: which explores feminism in magical realist works and further extends the concept of feminism to 'subalternism'.
3. The unreliable narrator: in which I discuss whether an unreliable narrator might undermine the magic in a magical realist work.

I address how *Ocean of Milk* might be received in the world today in light of the reception of other magical realist works. The exegesis ends with Spivak's call to arms, 'the empire writes back' and a note of encouragement from the Vedic version regarding the importance of somehow communicating the message, however unqualified the subaltern speaker may be.

In the thesis, *Ocean of Milk*, I sought to create a protagonist who had no preconceived ideas; she would be able to see things afresh, like the people of Macondo, free from conditioning by prevailing paradigms. I wanted her to be exposed to representatives of traditional and alternative, metaphysical and rationalist viewpoints, to be an impartial observer and thus commentator of both.

As it turns out, she spends most of her time in search of herself and being pressured to conform by the different worldviews she encounters. Not knowing herself, she becomes subjected to all the establishment institutions: medical, legal and educational, and lurches from one disaster to another. When she finally discovers herself and her powers, she attempts to heal ancient conflicts between opposing parties and bring the opponents to a deeper awareness of unity in diversity. However, this requires the ultimate sacrifice, a sacrifice only she can make. The thesis also addresses current challenges of parenting and grand-parenting.

## *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

### *Re-Presenting the Lost Voice of the Vedic Version*

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population (Macaulay, 1835/1979, p. 359).

This imperialist statement from Macaulay's infamous *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), is cited in Gayatri Spivak's seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Spivak, 1988, p.282). It gives a hint of how ancient Indian culture has been undermined by colonialism. My thesis is an attempt to redress that undermining to a small degree by representing the lost voice of the ancient civilisation of India based on the Vedic version. I wanted my work to show how to some extent the original teachings of the Vedas could be relevant and beneficial in the current world situation.

I find the concept of subaltern applicable in several respects both to myself and to my work.

According to Spivak's definition of Gramsci's term subaltern (Gramsci, 1921/1978) the 'true subaltern' (Spivak, 1988, p. 285):

is not just a class word for "oppressed", for the "other", for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie. In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern— a space of difference— (others who are) within the hegemonic discourse, wanting a piece of the pie, and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern (de Kock, 1992).

In one sense then I certainly do not qualify for the status. However, I would argue that there are certain elements which apply, not only to me, but to my work, which might qualify us as 'subalterns'. As a privileged, western, white, first world, educated heterosexual etc., my claims to subaltern status clearly are not justified. I might as Gilbert and Gubar experienced, be attacked by Spivak et al as an imposter (Gubar, 2000, chapter 6). However, contrary to appearances, I do belong to an ethnic minority and a very marginal one at that because it transgresses many boundaries. For the last thirty five years, I have been a committed follower of Vedic culture, a practising Vaisnava, or in plain terms, a 'Hare Krishna', a true hybrid (Bhabha, 1994), an Indian in a white woman's body. Sure, I wasn't born into it, it's a choice, but still it carries its own stereotypes, judgments of homogeneity, stigmas as 'criminal', 'insane', etc. (Said, 1978), possibly more so because the alterity confuses boundaries. I am 'other', but not 'other'.

Furthermore, my adopted culture runs very much counter to the establishment norms of the rationalist narrative. For fear of judgement and for fear of running up against the prevailing ethos I see that I am afraid to speak out. Even during the course of writing this exegesis, I was counselled not to introduce certain topics due to their contentious nature. Therefore, I say, Can the Subaltern Speak? Will the subject matter of my thesis be accepted?

My identity as subaltern has impacted my work in three dimensions. The first of these relates to my motivation for the work. The second area touches on my experience of living in an imperialist mainstream culture as a subscriber to a minority precolonial ethic. The third aspect has to do with the major themes in the work.

My greatest influence over the last thirty-five years has been the study assimilation and practice of the 'Vedic Version'. I use the word version deliberately because in the present climate of deconstruction of grand narratives, a more acceptable way of presenting a worldview is as an addition to the 'polyphony' of voices (Bakhtin, 1981, p263) as against the hegemony of the monological Enlightenment narrative. Version is by definition: an account of a matter from a particular person's point of view, a rendition, interpretation, or explanation. It is also frequently referred to in the Vedic literature as such, viz: 'the Vedic literature or literature in pursuance of the Vedic version', 'The Vedic version that the whole cosmic creation is nothing but Brahman', 'According to the Vedic version' (Bhaktivedanta Swami, 2012)

My original research question proposed to examine the topic of how paradigms influence people and culture and how those paradigms are disseminated and maintained by the dominant culture through education, media etc. As subcategories of this main theme I wanted to explore how different world 'versions' gain their knowledge, how each might through careful listening to and empathy with the other in Carl Rogers' terms (Rogers, 1951) forge a new synergistic version, a 'third alternative' as Covey describes in his book *The 3rd Alternative* (Covey, 2011).

My main motivation for choosing this theme is my interest in presenting the Vedic version as one alternative to the imperialist mainstream scientific version since versions or paradigms have serious repercussions on culture. When I first read *The Bhagavad Gita* (Bhaktivedanta Swami, 1972/2012) and discovered the Vedic version, it fundamentally transformed, not only my paradigm, but my whole way of life. As the opening quote indicates, the British conducted a serious and systematic deconstruction of

the civilisation built on the Vedic version, such that few Indians these days believe their history. They accept the rationalist dogma that it is all mythology. I suggest that in so doing, the colonialists did a great violence not only to India but to the world, by suppressing this great legacy of wisdom. Maybe it is now my duty as a Britisher to set the record straight and make some reparation ('An Indian Politician', 2015). My (very presumptuous) idea then, was to follow in the footsteps of Srila Vyasadeva, the original compiler of the Vedic literatures, who embedded *The Bhagavad Gita* within the intrigue, diplomacy and romance of *The Mahabharata* (Vyasaadeva, ca 3000 B.C./2008), with the understanding that everyone loves a good story.

The second dimension of my subalternship pertains to the ability of my work to speak and be heard, which might render the work itself a subaltern. It concerns not so much my lack of access to educational privileges as my avoidance of them due to disenchantment. I experienced my studies at Cambridge to be unsatisfying. My newfound Vedic paradigm appeared to be much more rational and juicy. My recent re-entrance into academia then was accompanied by a profound dearth of knowledge in current theory and literature. Many of the choices I have made around my work have been unconscious. As James George (Master Class, 2015) and Siobhan Harvey (Mentor Meeting, 2015) suggested, elements have seeped into my work due to 'cultural osmosis'. The year has thus been a crash course in literary criticism, literature and learning to write with concomitant implications for my work.

The third subaltern aspects emerged as themes of my work. The subaltern concept inherently engenders feminist themes. However, my work expands the range of subalternship to include children, animals, the mentally ill and nature: the subalterns of the west, none of whom can speak.<sup>1</sup> All these elements were a sort of unconscious motivation for the work, springing not only from the Vedic version in which all 'prajas' or living beings are to be cherished, but also from my own life. My grandsons are Mattie and Sammie. Their situation is very autobiographical and holds deep significance for me as does that of the mentally ill man, Toothless, who is my brother. Neville and Nevaeh are/were my friends' children and my ex pupils; Nevaeh took her life as described in the work.

It seemed a natural choice for my work to examine it under the lens of the magical realist narrative mode, since the major theme addresses the opposition of the scientific and the supernatural. Secondly, the work is arguably ontologically postcolonial (Echevarria, 1974). I will then look at it in the light of

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<sup>1</sup> Neville's mother has been attempting to 'speak' for fifteen years now to get adequate treatment for her son within the hegemony, but to no avail.

two other areas of literary theory, which seem to proceed logically as subsets of the magical real and subaltern theme: feminism with particular reference to magical feminism, and the trope of the unreliable narrator.

## *Synopsis of 'Ocean of Milk'*

According to my passport, my first name is Amalia. Everyone calls me Ama for short. Amalia is the name of the wife of some famous scientist. Prof chose that of course. But Ama means mother. I decided I'd prefer to be known by my second name, Kali, the powerful goddess. Nani chose that for the Indian part of me. They weren't very happy when I decided to change my name. But I'd forgotten everything anyway. So why not reinvent myself and be who I want this time round?

But it isn't that easy to do, with a radical husband; two young sons, with very special requirements; parents, also with requirements; what to speak of the broader twenty first century urban society, in a first, world country, with all its requirements. The plot thickens, as the memories that start to return, do not fit with everyone else's reality. Then certain abilities, which feel so natural, are deemed so unnatural, that I am considered unfit to mother my children. Just when I was finally getting used to having, even loving, them and becoming their 'Ama'.

## *Magical Realism: Re-Presenting a Lost Voice*

It was first suggested to me that the novel was speculative fiction as it deals with a being from another planet, a so-called alien. However, it seems that the magical realist narrative mode is a more appropriate fit to suggest alternatives to the prevailing western enlightenment paradigm. I was delighted to find after my years of academic vacuum that this had been the whole thrust of post-structuralist, deconstructive and postmodern thought. The breakdown of western rationalism as the only access to the truth and the imperialist historical version as gospel had already been well instigated without any help from me! Indeed Faris suggests that magical realist rooms are located within the postmodern house of fiction (Faris, 1995/2012, p.175).

Furthermore, my desire to present the Vedic version as a valid alternative worldview could be viewed as a postcolonial intention. Boehmer, the postcolonial critic has suggested that magical realism and postcolonialist literature are 'almost inextricable' (Boehmer 1995, p 235). The genre has also been applied to other arenas addressed by or influencing my work:

the margins of political power and influential society, postcolonial countries that are battling against the influence of their previous colonial rulers, and consider themselves to be at the margins of imperial power; fictions written from the perspective of the politically or culturally disempowered, for instance indigenous people living under a covert colonial system such as Native Americans in the United States, women writing from a feminist perspective, or those whose lives incorporate different cultural beliefs and practices from those dominant in their country of residence, such as Muslims in Britain (Bowers, 2004, pp. 31-32).

Slemon (Slemon, 1988) has explained that magical realism is an ideal fit for postcolonial discourse because it is an oxymoron. He has simplified Bakhtin's model of dialogic discourse, (Bakhtin, 1981), to show how it recapitulates a dialectic between codes of recognition between the original world view of the colonised and the inherited codes, which creates what Tiffin calls a 'metaphysical clash' (Tiffin, 1983, p. 32). So in magical realist works opposition is shown by realism versus magic. Secondly, it is able to produce a text which reveals the tensions and gaps of representation in such a context. Thirdly, it provides a means to fill in the gaps of such a postcolonial context by recuperating the fragments and voices of forgotten or subsumed histories from the point of view of the colonised. Thus, the magical versus realism opposition creates a sort of Hegelian dialectic. It creates a third space beyond the conjunction of the two opposing worlds:

It facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction; boundaries to be erased, transgressed, blurred, brought together, or otherwise fundamentally refashioned in magical realist texts (Zamora & Faris, 1995/2012, p. 6).

Dash talks of an alchemical revisioning process coming out of the dialectic between the two opposing codes transmuting perception into new codes of recognition (Dash, 1973). This third space, refashioning of boundaries, fusion or alchemy is very much aligned with the Vedic concept of 'acintya veda aveda tattva' translated as simultaneous, inconceivable oneness and difference.

As discussed in the introduction, my original research idea was to highlight different paradigms by setting them in opposition to one another and then to discover a synthesis beyond the duality, the 'clash', through empathic listening: a third alternative, synergy or 'inconceivable oneness and difference'. In Lyotard's terms: to put 'forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself' (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 81).

In the various contexts outlined above, Magical realism's synthesising and transformative power is used to recapture the lost history and cultures of oppressed peoples, to revision lost identities after colonisation and to counter and heal from the violence of oppression. I will now look at magical realist literature, which exemplifies these themes, and see how my work may contain similar elements.

Toni Morrison has used magical realism to present the unrepresentable: the lost history of the African Americans brought to America as slaves. She suggests that in order to do this we need 'Another way of knowing things' (Evans 1985, p. 342). In other words, beyond the rational enlightenment tenets which give us the official version of history.

In *Beloved* (Morrison, 1987/2007), Morrison uses the magic of the original culture of the West African Yoruba myths in the form of a revenant or abiku ghost child to catalyse the telling of Sethe's story which is in opposition to the official history of the white slave owners. These were the 'gaps' in the representation of the slaves. As Slemon states, the telling happens in 'fragments' (Slemon, 1988), along the lines of the oral story telling tradition. Because the lost histories of the oppressed people have only survived in oral form and so are fragmented. The magic brings to light the truth for Denver who represents the African American descendants of the slaves. The ghost, *Beloved*, catalyses the telling of the true story. Before she comes, the family are isolated and rejected from society. After her

appearance, the women's harmony of voices, 'voice upon voice' (p.308) create a healing, a sort of baptism which forges new identities. Denver is then able to go out and take her place in the world, symbolising how the African American slaves once they know their true history can move on and stand in their truth within the greater society.

I have tried to follow Morrison's idea of finding a new way of knowing through magic or as I mention in my work through the 'Great Soul'. I have also used a young female ghost Nevaeh to catalyse the protagonist into acting and healing the situation, which ends with a harmony of voices. Furthermore, in some ways my work follows this pattern of gradually revealing the story of the goddess through fragments as she gradually regains her memory.

Salman Rushdie also uses the magic in his work to revision history, in his case of the post imperialist Indian nation. In *Midnight's Children* (1981/2010), he uses the magic of Saleem and the midnight children in opposition to the official version of history. The histories are finally pickled but their spicing is ever changing even though preserved. The pickling process can be seen as the amalgamating and revisioning process there are finally many differently spiced pickles evoking a heterogeneous view of history as opposed to the homogenous monology.

In *The Satanic Verses* (1988/2011), Rushdie addresses the development of new identities in the postcolonial situation of the immigrant in the homeland of the colonist. It 'celebrates hybridity' or 'mongrelisation' (Rushdie, quoted in Cooper, 1998, p. 20). Saladin is a hybrid in Bhabha's terms. He wants to be more British than the British and reject his origins. But the magical elements take him on a journey to refashion his identity. Prof in my work is in a similar mindset. I created Prof before I read *The Satanic Verses*, another case of cultural osmosis, but the relationship with his father, which spawned such a desire to reject his Indian identity, is uncannily similar. Gibreel the other character is a channel for magical forces, which oppose British hegemony and Muslim dogma. Rushdie uses Bakhtin's Carnavalesque techniques (Bakhtin, 1965/1968), to reverse the sacred and the profane, for example the ancient gods appear in the Bollywood movies and Rama is the bad guy. The angel and the devil both fall from the heavens. Finally, the opposition is resolved as Saladin comes full circle and returns to his origins in India. I have attempted to show Prof revisiting his past and becoming reconciled to a new more integrated identity.

Slemon suggests that post settler situations like Canada lend themselves to magical realist production in order to reconsider the identity of a nation after imperialism (Slemon, 1988). The concept of the liminal in between world of magical realism between two oppositions is featured in Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said* (1978). The placing of his narrative on the border of Saskatchewan and Alberta which is similar to how I have situated the magical element in my work out in the 'wop-wops' and the forest, as opposed to the Prof who lives in the suburbs. While the resolution occurs on an island away from everything familiar.

The fact that I am also part of a colonised nation, New Zealand has no doubt impacted my work. Prof has come from India, while Nani and Husband have come from UK. They are all hybrids. Indeed, I based Prof's physical appearance on Homi Bhaba. Amalia is of mixed race: the coloniser and the colonised; she is liminal. The cultural 'clashes' are inevitable and rife.

Kroetsch opposes the control in one dimension, which represents the inherited sure constraining codes of the imperial order, versus the incompetence and bewilderment in the other, which encapsulates the imagined precarious liberating codes of post colonial 'original relations'.

At the end of the story, Tiddy and Liebhaber come together in the 'naked circle of everything'. This represents an imaginative projection into the future where fractions of colonisation heal in an alchemical, inconceivable revisioning process (Slemon, 1988).

I have also used the concept of opposition in my work: the overarching oppositions between religion and science; the magic being with the subalterns: the women children, animals, nature, psychiatric patients and female slaves in the sweatshops, whereas the rationality and power is vested in the males and the women who are like men, like Irene and Renée. Furthermore, there is the Indian versus the Westerner. Dark versus fair: Mattie is angry while Sammie is gentle. The idea of greyness of the buildings is a compromise between opposites (Covey, 2011), whereas the inconceivable oneness and difference or synergy is the full spectrum of colour between black and white.

The resolution in my work comes in the arc of stones during the churning of the milk ocean, where opposing parties speak and hear each other to undermine their differences and are enabled to move on to envision new futures. Prof and Husband end up dancing together which is similar to Kroetsch's resolution.

Isabel Allende has used the dialectic possibilities of magical realism to counter and go beyond the atrocities of Pinochet's regime in her *House of Spirits* (1982/2005). She suggests that magical realism requires cultural mixing 'mestaje' in a violent climate (Foreman, 1995, p. 286). I would argue that violence is being perpetrated insidiously world wide including Western countries, by the multinational corporations which Spivak has identified as piggy backing on the imperialist structures (Spivak, 1988), dispossessing and making slaves out of third world subalterns while pharmaceutical companies wage chemical warfare on first world subalterns. My work attempts to address the violence currently perpetrated on subalterns, local and global in an attempt to bring it to light, counter it and offer some resolution.

As a postscript to this section, I have not included Maori elements which might be considered relevant in a postcolonial novel set in New Zealand. I didn't intend the setting to be New Zealand originally; I wanted it to have a more generic flavour. In addition, I felt it would have overcomplicated the work. Similarly, Maxine Hong Kingston has not addressed Native American issues in her work on Chinese settlers in America (1976/1981).

## *Magical Feminism or Magical Subalternism*

'If in the context of colonial production the subaltern has not history and cannot speak, the subaltern female is even more deeply in shadow' (Spivak, 1988, p. 287). Angela Carter refers to feminism in terms of 'decolonization' (D'Haen, 1995/2012, p. 200). Furthermore, Faris suggests that the subversive nature of magical realism has made the mode not only useful to postcolonial cultures but increasingly to women (Zamora & Faris, 1995/2012, p. 6). In relation to Allende, Hart identifies the feminist criticism of patriarchal control over women's lives as 'magical feminism' (Hart, 1989).

The inherent dialectic of magical realism lends itself naturally to the discourse of otherness propounded by the poststructural feminists Kristeva and Cixous (Carter, 2006). However to undermine the prevailing ideology, magical feminist texts tend to subvert the usual hegemonic oppositions. A salient example of such a magical feminist text is Angela Carter's *Wise Children* (1991), in which she uses magical realism to attack and overturn accepted gender and social roles in order to subvert the authority of the patriarchal upper class. The novel abounds with oppositions: rich poor, male female, upper class lower class, old young, legitimate illegitimate. The climax where the twins declare their parentage is an intentionally subversive act, revealing the interrelatedness between the oppositions which are reversed as in the Carnavalesque style of Bakhtin to subvert the prevailing ideologies inverting the sacred and the profane (Bakhtin, 1968). The person who has the final say is the coloured young woman, Tiff, while the powerful male Melchior is disempowered. Dora has union with Peregrine, who provides Nora with babies magically, thus subverting the need for fathering. This climax is also a resolution in the sense of synthesis in the heteroglossia style of a polyphony of voices: an inconceivable oneness and difference.

In *House of the Spirits* Allende has been criticised for apparently not subverting the oppositions. In this sense, the magic is not subverting boundaries but maintaining them. However, Hart sees this as a complex ploy by Allende for feminist purposes. The magical qualities of the female characters are purposefully undermined. She suggests this is a form of feminist criticism of the patriarchal control over women's lives: 'magical feminism' (Hart, 1995). "Women find other sources of power such as telepathy in the absence of access to any real power. Magic is used or withheld to make a point about the economic or emotional dependence of women" (ibid, p. 163).

I disagree with this. I feel it contradicts the very essence of magical realism. It suggests that telepathy, or magic, is not real power; only political power is real power, thus placing the magic lower on the hierarchy. These are not my norms. When I show Amalia getting in control of her power through meditation, that is for me the real power. Hart suggests this is Allende being honest. However I think that Allende does in fact subvert the oppositions. Clara's son always wants the female magical power and can never have it. The male territory is in the wilds and becomes increasingly disordered, while the female domain in the city under Clara is peaceful and orderly. Transito the prostitute, the non establishment female, acquires political power in the end, utilising it not for violence but with love, to liberate Alba; the former powerful Trueba being powerless to do so: a subversion along many axes (Smith, 2008).

Morrison in *Beloved* also subverts many of the oppositions. Baby Suggs is the leader of the community, a matriarch, in subversion of the patriarchal system. Sethe subverts the power of the male hierarchy by reclaiming her power over the life of her female child. The male schoolteacher commits atrocities and is illogical whereas the illiterate slaves exhibit kindness and logic, for example Sixo's killing to maintain his body for work. It is a female ghost who heals the situation and returns the child to the mother by catalysing Denver's development into maturity. The white slave owners' religion, symbolised by the four horsemen of the apocalypse arriving to remove the children from Sethe, becomes inferior to the magic of the African traditional beliefs.

I have subverted many standard oppositions: the western male is 'irrational', while the Indian male is 'rational', the woman Renee is rational and powerful, Priya takes over in saving Sammie, the drugging of the nurses and establishment, the triumph of the subalterns over the male search and rescue team. The final churning is a situation similar to Carter's climax with a multitude of voices while the final voice in the churning is the youngest female Indian girl the most subaltern of all. The protagonist holds the world to ransom and at the end the original Amalia trumps 'male' logic with 'female' empathy.

As discussed, the magic in Magical realism has been used as a way to heal and resolve the conflict of oppositions and find a synergistic revisioning. Gilbert in *Rereading Feminism* has suggested that a way that feminist writers have addressed challenging issues or presented the unrepresentable is by turning to fantasy and mythology (Gilbert, 2011, pp. 306-345). For the essentialist feminists, the issue of childbirth and motherhood has been problematic: woman's 'enslavement to the species' (de Beauvoir, 1961) and 'identification with nature which seemed logically to entail her universal subordination in

culture' (Gilbert, 2011, p. 308). Such writers as Ursula Le Guin and Marge Piercy for example have turned to fantasy, while other Western women have appropriated the Greek Maenads where women desert home and husband to perform Dionysian worship.

It could be said that I also have turned to 'fantasy' and 'myth' to deal with motherhood. The original Amalia was depressed because she was isolated at home looking after the children. One interpretation could be that she has taken on a hallucinatory existence through a dissociative personality disorder to cope along the lines of Marge Piercy's Connie in *Woman On The Edge Of Time* (1976), who enters a fantastic world where motherhood is no longer an enslavement perpetrated upon women. Indeed, I was fascinated to discover that I had unconsciously and thus inadvertently replicated the history of Sati from the Vedic cosmology in my work. The goddess Amalia became Kali, another form of Sati, complete with arms and weapons. The conflict between the father and son in law in the original story of Sati where the father in law Daksha is a materialist concerned with providing well for his family and rejects his renounced spiritual son-in-law Siva, whom he claims does not provide well for his wife, is echoed in my work, as is the final suicide of Sati. But can it be said that I am using myth or fantasy when I don't consider the above either myth or fantasy? When I consider it as real?

By another astonishing coincidence, the above is the very 'myth' which Spivak discusses in her subaltern essay. Could this be some 'magic' at work? However, Spivak finds the oppositions of the imperialist erasing of the 'luminous fighting Mother Durga', as opposed to the reverse ethnocentrism of adopting the ideology of sati from the history of the periphery or nostalgia for lost origins, both equally suspect as 'grounds for counterhegemonic ideological production' (Spivak, 1988, p. 307).

In my adherence to the pre-colonial Vedic worldview, am I guilty of nostalgia for lost origins, which won't be valuable in terms of countering the hegemony on behalf of the subaltern?

The subversions combined with the synthesis of the two worldviews in the churning discussed in the previous section may to some degree serve to offset the problematic simplistic opposition of ethnocentrism versus a nostalgia for lost origins. Moreover, my view of the Vedic lost origins may differ from Spivak's in that I see that they can be extremely valuable and not merely a utopian fantasy for the return to some preindustrial mythological realm.

## *Can the Subaltern Speak if She is Unreliable?*

I chose a first person point of view after James George's Master Class (2015) on the subject because I saw that it closed the psychic distance from my protagonist. It also fitted with the idea that she was a sort of anthropologist from another planet writing an auto-ethnographic diary, which had been part of my original inspiration. However, Siobhan Harvey pointed out that now I had an unreliable narrator on my hands. This might be problematic since my intention was for Amalia's version to be accepted as valid.

She might be considered reliable where reliability depends on the distance between the narrator and the implied author's norms (Booth, 1961/2010). She might 'however human and limited and bewildered, earn our basic trust and approval' (Booth, 2010, loc. 4441)<sup>2</sup> despite being 'decidedly inconscient about a lot of things' (ibid, loc. 5080-5082). However Booth has been criticised for relying too heavily on norms and ethics (Rabinowitz, 1977), while Nunning argues for more intratextual signs to indicate unreliability (Nunning, 1997). Does she contradict herself? Yes, she continuously doubts and denies her memories. Does she have memory gaps? Yes, she is suffering from fugue. Riggan (1981) provides further indicators: she is 'naïf' as she has lost her memory; her three-year-old son knows more than she does and she is considered mad by the establishment diagnosis of dissociation and alienation.

What distinguishes magical realism from other fantastical literature is that the magic is placed in a strongly realistic setting. Therefore, might narration by an unreliable narrator undermine the reality and therefore the acceptance of the magic? As Todorov explains, in fantastic literature there is constant faltering between belief and non-belief in the supernatural. Indeed, the fantastic relies upon the readers' hesitation between natural and supernatural explanations to produce a theme of ambiguity (Todorov, 1974). He discusses the fantastic in relation to Henry James' *Turn of the Screw*. In this work, there is hesitation. Either the governess is mad or there are ghosts. In my work if Amalia's madness identifies her as unreliable, the reality of the magical elements are undermined.

Chanady suggests that in magical realist texts the narrator and reader accept the existence of the magical realist elements. In contrast to the fantastic, 'The supernatural in realism does not disconcert the reader'. The same phenomena that are portrayed as problematic by the author of a fantastic

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<sup>2</sup> I have decided to use Kindle Locations despite not being standard referencing procedure as the APA alternative is not sufficiently specific.

narrative are presented in a matter of fact manner by the magical realist.' (Chanady, 1985 p. 24). Faris states that the magic should be 'an irreducible element' something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as we know them – magical things 'really' do happen (Faris, 1995/2012, p. 167).

In my work, I see that before studying magical realism I was very conscious that to make it realistic I needed to problematise the magic by showing different people's reactions to it as extraordinary, for example when Amalia floats up to the ceiling and Husband rationalises it by saying they didn't see the chair. Amalia ends up in hospital, as the establishment see the magic as madness. The magic is explained in this way as a hallucination. Amalia as an unreliable narrator may be more akin to Connie in *Woman On the Edge Of Time* in which it is never certain whether her travel to the future is hallucination or not.

Chanady (1985) suggests one of the criteria necessary for magical realism involves authorial reticence such that the narrator does not make the supernatural secondary by explaining it through unreliability, imagination, hallucination etc. so establishing a hierarchy of values ( Scholes, Kellogg, Phelan, 2006, Chapter 8). In order to resolve the antimony between the magic and the real, the supernatural is not problematic if integrated within the norms of perception of the narrator and the characters, if it is seen as part of every day life. The resolution is achieved by an absence of judgement about the veracity of events and the authority of the worldview expressed in the text.

In magical realist novels we can see the use of certain techniques to verify the reality of the supernatural elements. *Tracks* (1988) by Louise Erdrich is discussed by Sánchez (2002). There are two narratives, in Genette's terms, (Genette, 1980): intradiegetic and extradiegetic . Sánchez suggests the former problematises the coexistence of magic and reality since Pauline is an unreliable narrator who by imposing magic onto reality, closes the possibility of dialectic characteristic of magical realism. However the simultaneous presence of the extradiegetic narrative 'defamiliarises the reality juxtaposed with magic such that the juxtaposition is not problematised but allows for free movement between the magical and the real' (Sánchez, 2002, p. 96); it counteracts the undermining effect of the unreliable narration of Pauline. Moreover, the realistic details referring to a verifiable present and the numerous witnesses, both corroborate the overall veracity of the real and the magic.

Other authors have used such techniques to maintain the essential dialectic of magical realism. In *Beloved*, Morrison mainly uses the omniscient voice or extradiegetic narrative to frame the more

fragmented first person oral story telling mode of Sethe's memories and the voices of Denver and Beloved, to establish the authority of the story. She also uses many witnesses to corroborate the veracity of Beloved's existence, even the man without skin, Edward Bodwin. However, at the conclusion, the characters question the veracity of Beloved's existence and words, which could undermine the magical component.

Allende, like Erdrich, uses the technique of a dual narrative in *House of Spirits* to establish veracity (Smith, 2008). Esteban Trueba, the unreliable narrator, represents political tyranny and cruelty. He is far from the authorial norms of the work. His unreliability is counterbalanced by the evidence of Clara's notebooks, which represent the magical, feminine viewpoint and expose Trueba's dishonest glossing over and rationalisation of his atrocities. The dual narrative, also used by Garcia Marquez to question and to confirm political and magical realities, is a fitting technique for magical realism with its binary and dialectic nature.

In my work, I see that Amalia and other characters in my work do question the reality of the magic and in this I have undermined the veracity of the magic and made it secondary in the hierarchy, when I actually intended to make it intrinsic and of equal validity. Moreover, despite the many witnesses who see and accept the magic, which could be taken as corroborative, these tend to be the 'other', subaltern voices: the children, the mental patients, the animals, the ghost and Overalls (the outlaw). Even the Dean, who is a university authority, is seen by the establishment as alternative and therefore not reliable. However, at the end Prof, the rationalist like Allende's Trueba, shows himself to be unreliable as he admits that he never actually leaned his seventeen times table.

According to Nunning, a 'homodiegetic narrator who claims to read the thoughts of friends and foes would have to be considered unreliable' (Nunning, 2015, p.95). However in Alison Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* (2002), the first person narrator Susie is a ghost in the afterlife which allows her to witness others' internal lives. Similarly, Amalia is a goddess possessing psychic powers and as such, her somewhat omniscient status is coherent with the fictional world.

Rushdie also uses the technique of an omniscient homodiegetic narrator in *Midnight's Children*. Saleem is able to see into other minds, places and times using his nose and his radio beacon head. Rushdie's work might invalidate the premise that the unreliable narrator is incompatible with the realism requirement of magical realist texts. Booth discusses the use of 'unreliable narration in a

deliberate polemic against conventional notions of reality' designed to break down the reader's conventional notions of what is real' (Booth, 2010, loc. 4666-4667). Rushdie and other magical realists have used the trope as a postmodern device to replace a homogenous version of history, with a heterogeneous plurality. In *Midnight's Children*, there are many signs of unreliability from the intentional historical errata (Rushdie, 1991, pp. 22-25) to the plethora of allusions to unreliability:

'I'm tearing myself apart, can't even agree with myself, talking arguing like a wild fellow, cracking up, memory going, yes, memory plunging into chasms and being swallowed by the dark, only fragments remain, none of it makes sense any more!' (Rushdie, 1981/2010, loc 8636).

In *The Satanic Verses* the narrative veracity is undermined by continuous questioning: 'it was and it was not so, as the old stories used to say, it happened and it never did' (Rushdie 2011, p. 35). While Gibreel's dreams and actions are treated as schizophrenia and thus doubt is placed on the magic: did he actually create fire out of his trumpet?

It appears there are no clear-cut answers as to whether the magic in magic realism requires absolute confirmation of its authenticity. It depends what the author is trying to achieve. Or maybe a magical realist narrative, as the Dean says on *Omboat*, operates outside the normal laws of the world.

## *Did the Subaltern Speak?*

Mike Johnson discussed the difficulty of maintaining one's original vision for the work (Master Class, 2015), quoting Annie Dillard:

You are wrong if you think that you can in any way take the vision and tame it to the page. The page is jealous and tyrannical; the page is made of time and matter; the page always wins. The vision is not so much destroyed, exactly, as it is, by the time you have finished, forgotten (Dillard, 2009, loc. 588-590).

The process of rewriting alchemises the work into something else. Insofar as I have retained the original elements in my work, my concern is that they may be a bit forced and render it more like political polemic or allegory; the characters being stereotyped, the plot being overly simplistically binary: good verses evil.

Because of the unconscious, inexperienced way I approached the writing, I labelled the work as 'magical real' retrospectively, and have left out or insufficiently developed, many required elements. The 'real' requires far more attention to detail, even 'exuberance of detail' (Bowers, 2004, p. 40); a hallmark of magical realism is that 'descriptions detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world distinguishing it from much fantasy and allegory' by extensive use of 'sensory detail' (Faris, 2012, p. 169). Due to time limitations combined with the sheer volume of the work, I failed to add sufficient descriptive detail. Moreover, it was hugely challenging to speak from the point of view of an alien who had lost her memory. I felt very limited in my choice of vocabulary and possibilities for description; how could I use similes, the different senses etc when she didn't have anything familiar to compare things to?

I believe also that the magic needs work so it flows more seamlessly and matter-of-factly, so as not to appear extraordinary. The narrator requires more corroboration from other sources for the veracity of her experience.

The work is too dialogue heavy in the first half, although I tried to address this in the second half. In moving from telling to showing, it seems as though my playwriting background influenced the proceedings. My struggles to develop a coherent plot line, and to learn and establish my writing process, have trumped the finer developments, which I hope to achieve in further drafts. So did the subaltern speak? Maybe not yet.

## *Will the Subaltern be Heard?*

As far as marketing goes, there is no doubt about the popularity of the magical realist genre. Hart describes Paul Coelho's *The Alchemist* (1988) as a 'sociological phenomenon', 'one of the best-selling novels of all time' (Hart, 2004, p. 304). It contains magical realist elements, which Hart affirms have a 'broadly based public appeal' (ibid). He states that magical realism was the only foreign fiction genre chosen by the Bloomsbury publishers for their Reading Group Internet books on various aspects of world literature, while Harry Potter is now being marketed as magical realism.

But while publishers trade on the genre, writers like Morrison are rejecting it (Bowers, 2004). Has its popular appeal diluted its potential as 'ideological instrument' (Scholes, Phelan & Kellogg, 2006)? Postcolonial critics Cooper (1998), Brennan (1987) and Connell (1998) warn that the mode's inherent dialectic is in danger of reinforcing the irrational / colonised and rational / coloniser alignment. While the use of the genre by sophisticated first-worlders like Rushdie who do not necessarily subscribe to the mythology of the pre-enlightenment culture, is seen as exploitative third-worldism, which similarly perpetuates the colonialist stance. The subaltern they seek to represent in the aftermath of colonisation is treated flippantly. Cooper suggests that 'Dignity can only evolve if there is a lack of patronisation, which is dependent on a general faith in, and respect for, the beliefs portrayed' (Cooper 1998, p. 33). For as Faris and Zamora remind us:

Texts labelled magical realist draw upon cultural systems that are no less 'real' than those upon which traditional literary realism draws – often non-Western cultural systems that privilege mystery over empiricism, empathy over technology, tradition over innovation. (Zamora & Faris, 1995/2012, p. 3)

Morrison and Garcia-Marquez attest to believing in their magic (Bower, 2004), Rushdie possibly less so (Rushdie, 1990) as 'magic spells can occasionally succeed – But also fail' (Rushdie, 2010, loc. 7822). I hope the danger of exploitation or reinforcement of colonialism may be offset to a degree in my work by my faith in the magic I am presenting, which is according to the Vedic version. For example, the Goddess's powers are the 'eighteen types of mystic perfection' (Bhaktivedanta Swami, 2012, Canto 11, loc. 14395) ascribed to elevated beings of the cosmos.

The second hurdle faced by magical realism is its multi-perspective. The fact that it offers no judgement on either the magic or the real, leaves it open to any interpretation, which could 'in the future be its nemesis' (Bower, 2004, p. 124). Its latent liberating power is only activated by sympathetic

readership. It relies far more than most genres on the readers' response, their willingness to be open to alternative viewpoints. The danger is that the unfamiliar magic is treated by the sceptical western mind as exotic or escapist fantasy. My spiritual teacher, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, warned against trying to convey the Vedic histories in film because without the accompanying deep philosophical rationale, they would be considered mythology or fantasy like Gibreel's Bollywood enactment of the gods in *The Satanic Verses*.

However Bhaktivedanta Swami himself was able to present the Vedic version in the form of *The Bhagavad Gita* to a predominantly first world western readership and it changed lives fundamentally, whereas other translations which had treated the subject as allegorical or mythical had not had such impact. What made the difference? This example seems to support Booth's stance (1961/2010, Chapter 13), that despite the unpredictable response of the reader, the responsibility ultimately lies with the author to present the work in such a way that it will be understood in the light that it was intended.

So where does that leave my work? Can the subaltern speak? Having belief in what I am writing about I hope will help. However due to other aspects of my subalternness, the themes in my work may not be so simple to access for readers. It may come across as fanatical and having a conspiracy theorist agenda, thus not having the broad appeal that a work with more generic themes may engender. My subalternship in the academic arena means also that it is not sufficiently well written. However, Spivak concludes in her essay that 'the subaltern cannot speak' therefore 'the female intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish' (Spivak 1988, p. 308). In other words, this subaltern must try to speak for the sake of those who can't, even though I may not be qualified.

But will I be heard? The Vedic version gives hope:

That literature which is full of descriptions of the glories of the name, fame, forms, pastimes, etc. of the unlimited is a different creation, full of transcendental words directed toward bringing about a revolution in the lives of this world's civilization. Such transcendent literatures, even though imperfectly composed, are heard, sung and accepted by those who are thoughtful and open hearted (Vyasadeva, ca. 3000 B.C./2012, SB, Canto 1, Loc 4274).

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