

# “EFFABLE NATURE IN UNHEARD STORIES”

Tishani Doshi’s Poetics of Discovery<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article aims to study the multiple nature metaphors used in Tishani Doshi’s poetry to convey messages of understanding and epiphany. Born in 1975 in Madras (now Chennai), Doshi is an Indian author and academic who has gained indisputable reputation as a novelist and poet, with other cultural and artistic interests like dancing and writing journal articles. She is especially devoted to narrating the urges of contemporary human existence, and to defending class, gender, and racial rights violated by capitalist patriarchal anthropocentrism, all while embracing the aesthetic beauty of artistic creation as a weapon to change the world. Therefore, in her writings, Doshi makes use of subtle environmental elements (with an emphasis on animal and vegetal metaphors) to be able to speak about the ineffability of being, without discarding ideological urges and liminal tensions. Thus, Doshi pushes to the limit the essence of poetry in a self-quest to discover essential truths and cultural nuances. Hers is therefore a poetics of revelations, darkened by the oxide patina of everyday conventions and stereotypes, that needs to be polished and moulded in the hands of bards.

## Keywords

ecopoetry, ecotones, environmental drives, permabodies, poetics of revelations, rhizomatic nature, Tishani Doshi

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## INTRODUCTION

This article analyzes the natural elements, tropes, and personae in the poetic production of Indian writer Tishani Doshi, through the theoretical lens of Ecomaterialism. In effect, the connectedness and, inversely, the specificity of being-in-the-world shown in the rhizomatic elements of Doshi's texts are proofs of the "fungal arborescent" condition of the Indian Ocean, so that it stands as a (de)unifying—both real and symbolic—tree that grows organically into diversity and difference. As Deleuze and Guattari articulate in their proposal, "a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance" (25). This particular in-betweenness that characterizes the sense of belonging among Indian Ocean writers works very well within the framework of the "tentacular" networking theories of the latest Material Ecocriticism—especially with the "making kinship" strategies of the Chthulucene, articulated by Donna Haraway—since the permeable density of its waters calls for travelling in-and-abroad physical territories, past-and-present experiences, and artificial inter-and-intraspecies hierarchies.<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, the School of Thought of Ecocriticism emerges in the late 1980s in the US, building upon the contributions of earlier figures such as Rachel Carson and the Modern Environmental Movement of the 1960s, as well as conservationists from the 19th century onwards, such as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Aldo Leopold. It is devoted to the interdisciplinary analysis of the environment in literary texts, drawing on the links between scientific and arts and humanities discourses, and showing concern for natural preservation and the position of human beings in a sustainable planet. Some of the main original turns were Ecojustice (Environmental Justice and Toxic Discourse) and Ecofeminism, with initial goals in the tackling of (post)pastoral milieus, the false divide between wilderness/urban spaces, and voicing or giving agency to nature, among other issues. Later on, other branches emerged—like Postcolonial Green and Ecomaterialism—to study, respectively, environmental subalternity and Otherness, and the physical and corporeal exchanges between human and natural bodies.

As a Madras-born poet with Gujarati-Welsh descent, Tishani Doshi has produced poems that are rich, intense, and nuanced. The author shows an interest not only in unveiling social concerns and gender violence but also in being aware of the rhizomatic natural environment around her. Gifted with a sensitive gaze, accompanied by intellectual curiosity, Doshi draws on classic literary sources, both oriental and occidental, while creating a unique body of work that ultimately stems from direct observation of the surrounding reality. As a writer and academic (she obtained her Bachelor's Degree in Queen's College, North Carolina, and her Master's in Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, and is currently teaching

Literature and Creative Writing at New York University, Abu Dhabi), Doshi has won distinctions like the Eric Gregory Award for young poets in 2001, and has written nine books so far. They include four poetry collections—*Countries of the Body* (awarded the Forward Poetry Prize for first collection), *Everything Begins Elsewhere*, *Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods* (shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Award in 2018) and her latest collection *A God at the Door*—and three novels—*The Pleasure Seekers* (longlisted for the Orange Prize and shortlisted for the Hindu Best Fiction Award in 2011), *Fountainville*, and *Small Days and Nights*.

In addition to several collaborations as a journalist and essayist, her creative talent is also showcased in dancing, where she has the opportunity to perform worldwide as lead dancer of famous Indian choreographer Chandralekha's troupe. This signifies her connection with the body, conceived as a holistic unity with the soul: passions, emotions, feelings—as well as thinking and art—arise from breathing, sweating, and other organic functions that complete one's physicality. This concept is well supported by artists like Juliana Spahr who, in her book *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*, stated that pain, for instance, can be identifiable and accumulative between species (one of the mottos, almost rhizomatic, of Ecofeminism). In consequence, Doshi is well aware of the corporeal selves that surround our habitats, without forgetting racial, social, and gender troubles. This blending is an identity sign in her writing, making her an engaged activist both *pro natura* and *pro vita*—including environmental issues, sense of place, and belonging—and at the same time a civil rights militant, denouncing violence exerted upon women or racial discrimination, among other issues. This last characteristic is defined by Diego as a capacity for "transformative resilience" (109). A third aspect that is inherent in her poetry is a metaphysical, transcendental vein that comes from the visual impact of witnessing with a tender, empathetic gaze. By doing this, Doshi tries to capture the ungraspable and the ineffable in every actual situation, using the strategy of semiotic accumulation, and the polysemy of diachrony and cohabitation. Thus, real bodies carry with them a patina of remembrance, suffering, ghostly presences, past emotions, etc. and this delicate framework is revealed through unveiling their true essences.

The analysis of nature in this study covers four of her representative poems, and is divided into two different sections: the meaningful presence of vegetal elements is tackled in "Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods" and "Every Unbearable Thing," while the visibility and agency of non-human animals are deconstructed in "Buffaloes" and "Ode to Patrick Swayze." This choice effectively implies reductionism: there are obvious references to both realms, vegetal and animal, in the four texts, but their importance for the research varies. In the cases of "Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods" and "Every Unbearable Thing," the pertinent appearance of fowls is treated as a separate item in the animal section. Something similar happens with

the theoretical approaches used: the concepts of "permabodies" and "ecotones" overlap in both sections but, for the sake of structural organization, the analysis favours one over the other, respectively.

Like the rhizome itself, both terms are loans taken also from Biology and connect with recent Ecomaterialist literary theories, inscribed in the growing terrain of the field of Environmental Humanities (a broadening term that is favoured nowadays in detriment to that of Ecocriticism). In this sense, *ecopoiesis* and *permapoiesis* refer to the study of poetry with an ecological bias, both in its content but also in the form the analysis takes shape. In other words, to peep into the materiality of an eco- or perma- poem, one should employ tools that facilitate the process and distance from ideological or structural slants.

Therefore, it will be easier to dismantle all sorts of false divisions present in our mental paradigm and recognize the interconnectedness of all beings. The notion of "hu-Man-ity" as the central authority, designated by an anthropomorphised white male god to rule over the Others, including racialized subalterns, females, other species, nature, and the planet, contributes to these divisions. In this sense, *Ecopoetry* testifies to the damage caused by human animals in a patriarchal system against the natural order of things (Arigo). From an *ecopoetic* viewpoint, consequently, a poem is aware of the tight and indissoluble fungal link established between bodies and their surrounding nature, that proves itself to be sometimes hostile, but in many cases complicit and porous. Thus, natural elements have meaning in their tangibility, weight, or smells. The analysis is usually horizontal and synchronic and transcends the merely poetic or mental to think-feel holistically (Moraes and De la Torre).

Going a step further, *permapoetic* analysis is usually vertical, centripetal, or concentric. Materiality is ascertained through physical sedimentation, caused by the passing of time and the accumulation of rhizomatic (hi)stories, events, spatiotemporal chronotropes. Thus, corporeal and sensory metaphors (of density and dissolution) mix one over the other, like successive palimpsests. Cleaning the patina of those multiple layers leads to the uncovering of essential bodies and identities. Nature transforms into a place for unity and revelation, a physical space for never-ending changes. Through multiple cellular essentialism, the state of *anagnorisis* and *transfiguration* is reached. To sum up, *permapoetry* conceives poetic creation as a biological entity, one that is born, grows up, breathes, transpires, evolves, dies, weighs, decomposes, lightens, transforms and is born again. Material relationship revolves around the creation of poetry as a sort of poetic gardening where sedimentation, fertilization and, above all, breathing and exudation, are the elements of lyrical fabrication (i.e., see Patrick Jones's *Permapoesis* blog).

The theory of ecotones offers a good alternative to the study of borders and boundaries, and it is inextricably related to the very concept of the rhizome and to other similar concepts such as liminality, interstices, in-betweenness, or Bhabha's "third space," to name the best known of them. Biologically speaking, an ecotone is a zone of ecological tension between two neighbouring and diverse habitats, also called biomes. Their points of contact create a gradation of tensions, from soft to abrupt. This gradation depends on the level of systemic opposition between them. It is especially relevant that the more opposite they seem, the more actively they can become an "ecocline," or transition zone between two contact biomes (or "ecotypes"). In sum, theory of ecotones constitutes an excellent way to peep into the arborescent "roots and shoots" of the rhizomatic complexity of cultures and individuals (Deleuze and Guattari). Taking this as a starting point, the possibilities it can provide for the study of not only physical borders (say, the problematic Mexican-American, Indo-Pakistani, Israeli-Palestinian frontiers, etc.) but also mental barriers (i.e., the ones that transcultural citizens suffer, or the mediatized interspecies relationship and so on) are wide enough and open up new pathways to the study of materiality. It can also interact with many concepts in ecofeminist and postcolonial-green theory, including surfacing, visibility, the pathetic fallacy, the amphibian condition, monochrome-vs-polychromatic identities, homesickness, mimicry, dislocation, displacement, among others. Some specific examples, regarding the connection between human and non-human animals and plants, will be found later on, in some of Doshi's poems.

## PERMABODIES IN THE VEGETAL REALM

### The Alchemy of Woods

In "Girls Are Coming out of the Woods" (*Girls* 36-38), Doshi makes a firm statement against gender violence by using nature not only as setting but rather as an omnipresent leitmotif that covers the text like a patina. The poem is a diatribe against the violence imposed (exerted, covered, and many times blurred) against women. She had real violent traumas in mind, such as the rape and death of Jyoti Singh in the streets of Delhi in 2012, which became a turning point in the country's femicide cases (see the controversy raised about Udwin's documentary film *India's Daughter*). Additionally, the poem is dedicated to Monika Ghurde, a close friend of Doshi's who was killed after being assaulted in her home. The poet unwraps rage, using it as a cathartic transformative power that originated in the accumulation of shame. Therefore, personal and public experiences of being a woman in a hostile

environment converge, as she affirms, in an interview about the reason for writing this piece: "I think it has to do with being a particular age, and feeling as in the first canto of Dante's *Inferno*, that you're standing in a dark wood in the middle of your life" (Pariat).

In accordance to this, the metaphors of the woods are multifaceted and ambivalent, as they are fusing the negative connotation of sublime wilderness and dark places with the natural habitat for magic, witches, ghosts, etc. Indeed, forests tend to be presented as loci mediated by horror stories, fairy, and other cultural stereotypes, where scared amateur travelers must go through ordeals while they are facing nature; not as an ally that gives answers to their quests, but rather as a jigsaw puzzle where disorientation and all kinds of menace appear. Additionally, literary forests serve as recipients of complex rhizomatic networks extant between the artifact and the natural world (Knickerbocker). Here, their real physicality clashes with the stereotyped imagination in films, novels, and other cultural representations. In the same way in which postcolonial critic, Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, dismantles the construction of a fake Orient by the Occident; and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in *Decolonizing the Mind*, warns about the further need of "decolonizing the mind," once territories have been physically decolonized. This becomes most patent when the background of the lore and fairy tales is acting as a sub-reading of the story.

Bearing in mind Yi-Fu Tuan's definitions of "topophilia" and its opposite "topophobia" (in *Topophilia*), Doshi's woods present a dual perspective that fosters an empathetic and complicit gaze towards the girls that are coming out. Their attire implies non-realist metaphors that allude to their condition as ghosts, witches, or priestess of an unknown ritual, reviving them and granting them a renewed existence, whether physically or as preternatural beings. Unburied bodies, disguised and masked in rags, or rather hooded with cloaks, represent a force that seems to come out precisely from the very nature of the forest itself. They are not only fleshy, but vaporous and untouchable: again, a *conjunctio oppositorum* between the body and soul to prove their powerful reincarnation (Plumwood's "material spirituality"). The unique matter comprising of the bodies of the girls and the woods serves as a mighty image to speak about the relational complementariness of the females and the woods where they have been living/hiding/being relegated to: the woods in this sense become the alchemical recipient in which girls are reborn and empowered. That is, they come out from the tomb of oblivion to the cradle of *logos*, becoming visible to "tell" their unheard stories: how they died and who their victimizers were, and, especially, to proclaim a new realm of justice, a place for women to reign (Oliva).

Thus, language becomes prophetic and expresses the urge for a change in society: a change that resides in the reconnection between earth and humanity as a sort of telluric justice. The overshadowing feminine acts as a catalytic filter, precisely working toward the renewal of the heteronormative canons that are perpetuating violence. The entire text serves as an epic chant to visibility, akin to Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," cleansing the filthiness of the surface, sweeping away dead leaves, clearing bodies from sediments, and, what is more important, washing the brains away from cultural maculae. Paradoxically again, their disguise as witches, a fact that can be seen in a negative way due to our gender-biased knowledge of the cultural folklore, is described here as a positive empowering image to express the rebirthing phenomenon: they come visible and agentic, capable of fighting back and showing off; their presence as superhuman creatures acts as a retaliation and a drive in the long line of discriminations imposed upon women through history. Therefore, Doshi engages actively and politically, while simultaneously describing the pathos that involves the scene, depicting it as gloomy, humid, but refreshing atmosphere of mourning that is tainted with logocentric weaponry. And the poetic voice (being one of them in complicity and sorority) is seen as empathetic and messianic.

### A Proper Gardening

Similarly, in "Every Unbearable Thing," a utopian postpastoral scenario (Gifford) effectively portrays women's position as subjected to social oppression in an unfair patriarchal system. Conceived as an additional and positive response to the peer movement of #MeToo, this text speaks on behalf of the voiceless females who were victimized by years of latent violence against them. The presented natural background aligns with their physicality and follows the atavistic condition of Earth as Mother, but dismantling the term from serendipity and using it as a vindication for empowerment. From the very beginning, women are attached to the land, despite religious or scientific discourses that situate them in a subaltern position: the expression, "say you began as rib or clod" (line 1), implicitly states their condition as derivatives from an original primary source, be it from dogmatic male creationism, or as a biological geological sample under a patriarchal plantation system. Therefore, the fact of being a recreation taken from a prior creation suggests that the new creature should be taken care of and that, consequently, lacks agency and capacity to decide about her growing. In other words, the text suggests that external forces, visibly hostile, possess the ability to either nurture the "rooted graft" into blooming with suitable fertilizers or let it wither as the result of bad gardening in a wasteland. Thus, like in "Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods," the references to "a weakened epidermis" (11) prove that, not only in



outdoor plantations but especially in domestic milieus (that could be represented as greenhouses where these flowers should be more protected), masculine urges act as pests that weaken, if not ruin completely, the flowering cycle. In this sense, Doshi remarks that the only remedy to mitigate the pain comes from the complicit gaze of their family, social and non-human animal peers: "mother friend cat" (14), that can recognize without words the origin of such violent infestation. Once again, this process works rhizome-like: unpatterned, uncontrolled, inexorable, without a specific point of origin, and simply growing to show its over-ground shoots after the job of empathetic fertilization is done.

Like a specimen that thrives in an inhospitable habitat, the second stanza describes how survival, strength, and resilience come from proper spatial arrangements: using others' shadow for protection from ruthless sunlight, and contact zones that enhance photosynthesis. Here, the author emphasizes the importance of endangered species sharing their painful stories, that is, harnessing the entropic energy of traumatic implosions to reconstruct and empower their identities. Subsequently, the collective retelling of experiences, stories, and legends serves as a catalyst filter to reconstruct herstories with new truths, seeds, and weapons. Particularly significant is the metaphor that hides behind the expression that once "women were keepers of the universe / when gardens proliferated / between our thighs" (24-26). Hence, an inversion in the traditional power roles that started the poem makes women the priestesses and rulers who made the universe: a primeval female creation from a sacred womb. Implicitly, the male seminal force proves secondary to the big bang, and the real transformation arises from uterine physicality to such extent that the only means of granting new life after a catastrophe lies in the "bits of [scattered] us" (29) when we are "hacked."

The third stanza recedes into a more melancholic tone where nostalgia for such a splendid past is the predominant note. Back to normality, a longing for a better habitat finds its summit with a watery chain of metaphors that reshape the wasteland allegory that tinges the text: the sterile soil of this immense plantation land hides a great amount of liquid beneath its surface. In other words, the female potential, with its energy and charisma akin to the secondary imagination in Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan," resides within the subterranean caves of enslaved identities, as if burdened by the curse of patriarchal oppression for centuries:

and we have grown silent  
like an underground stream  
and every now and again  
one of us would amass enough  
steam to plunge off a cliff  
like a waterfall shouting a name

and even though the noise she made  
was thunderous nobody heard. (40-47)

These lines are inextricably connected to the feminist concepts of "surfacing" and "voicing" which describe women living under layers of social invisibility and fighting to appear with a voice of their own. Apart from the multiple possibilities of water as symbol—positive, like regeneration, purification or catharsis, etc. and negative, like oblivion, drowning, deceit, etc.—here, Doshi uses transubstantiation to cope with the problematization of the women victims. Following Tuana's notion of "viscous porosity," which she introduced in reference to the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe in New Orleans to describe the difficulty of crossing over border zones that are simultaneously thick and penetrable, Doshi presents individual evaporation into mist as the sole means of ascending to the surface. This process involves passing through the pores of the land, piercing, drilling, and boring it until the humble stream comes out with great force, transforming into a waterfall of agency and energy, unveiling its beauty visible like a miraculous oasis. Notwithstanding the ethics and aesthetics of the effort, this is nothing but a short-term mirage; however promising this image may be, pessimism reigns at the end of the stanza. Due to customary systemic blindness and deafness towards subalterns, the act will not produce any results.

In the next lines, the ideological message of the metaphor mentioned earlier is explained, providing a definitive meaning to the title: the emerging waters stand for the violence exerted upon women, that which is unsaid and that remains silenced by orthodoxy. The only way to override this situation is by naming—in numbers, in a sort of collective communion to exorcize evil—"every unbearable thing" that has not been uttered before, so "we must listen to every / unbearable thing until we too / can name our unbearable / things until the sound of / unbearable is deafening" (62-66). The sound of an ever-growing litany, like the breaking of the rocks that reveals the hidden waterfall, will inevitably produce the awakening.

The last stanza encapsulates the political message (using the fairy tale of "Sleeping Beauty" as intertextual reference): "and it is like the fairy tale / after a long spell of sleep / it is wake up people it is / time to find our way back" (67-70). Again, like in "Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods," the association with witches (getting rid of any pejorative meaning and defining them as sorceresses, alchemists, healers, etc.) is a powerful manifestation of both empowerment and direct empathetic contact with the land. Finally, the only way to keep going derives from being at ease with themselves, knowing that, like the phoenix, rebirthing comes after those flames in which many of them were historically and unfairly burnt. With the promise of a forthcoming new reality, the concluding ceremony in the text serves as a poignant expression of self-affirmation through multiple revelations: thinking-feeling

holistically the unity of women; mourning the sisters dead in the battle; recognizing their contribution to the task of liberty; and showing off, and bragging about the scars of the wounds inflicted in their newly-born-to-the-world visible bodies.

## ECOTONES IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

### Natural Antidote for Systemic Fatigue

"Buffaloes" (*Everything* 34) is Doshi's praising song for nature par excellence. Within it, the image of the wild mammal epitomizes the universal force of life, providing stamina to a humanity that has lost relationship with the environment and its own animality. From the beginning, these creatures are bestowed with mythical qualities that exceed their physical shape. Their stature and dimensions become symbolic and they seem to incarnate the essence of nature itself; "bodies like continents" (4) with their "coats thick with rain" (3), as if they were earth sponges that absorb the liquid element to fecundate the land. Intriguingly, these buffaloes embody the kinetic agency of a past time that is acting as a palimpsest in the text, which superposes this age-old legendary epic space to the modern, urban bone-idle living habitat.

Furthermore, in this primal space, the landscape is adorned by both vegetation (the scandal of bright yellow Indian laburnum) and human creatures (with rudimentary weapons, sticks and pebbles), belittled in the company of the buffaloes. A nostalgic tone tinges the poem with the sounds of "amusement parks at dawn, / pianos, bedrooms, gods" (8-9), all of them begone in past memories of good times; all sounds stifled by the "thundering" of the stampede. They are described as "a whole world" running, like the rush of love with its vicissitudes, as the poetic voice utters in the last lines. The simile creates a potent metaphor that intertwines the corporeal and the ethereal, the tangible and the abstract:

When I see buffaloes run  
 I think of love—how it is held  
 in the meaty, muscled pink  
 of the tongue; how quickly  
 it is beaten from us—  
 all that brute resolve  
 disappearing  
 in the undergrowth. (16-23)

A prophetic undertone suggests the farewell of passion, conceived as an instinctive, extremist feeling. The synecdoche of the tongue, assimilated to the massive animal

in its meaty characteristic, is proof of the down-to-the-earth quality of all emotions, highlighting their physicality (for "material really matters," one could say).

The last three lines possess a very cinematic quality, resembling a fade-out scene that gives an account of the end of the epic, as the final flicker of this misused promethean flame is extinguished. The undergrowth, colored like a sublime far-beyond, turns into disappearance and oblivion in the aftermath of wilderness. After all these explanations, the text can be understood as an ode to the essential truths that lie in the disintoxication from superficiality, vanity, and social ornaments, to return to the beginning, when human impulses were spontaneous, intense, and natural. This backward glance aligns with the imperative sustainable environments, degrowth, and essentialism, which are vital for humanity's survival and the preservation of the planet from extinction.

### The Epiphany of Fowls

In "Ode to Patrick Swayze" (*Girls* 21-22), Doshi goes a step further in the use of the animal trope with ecofeminist touches. Written in the first-person, the poem creates a pseudo-dialogue with Patrick Swayze, centering on a teenager's attraction to the famous actor, who is the protagonist in hits like *Ghost*, *Dirty Dancing*, among other films. The sex-symbol, who died of pancreatic cancer aged 57 (this fact is key at the end of the text), represents the ideal of male beauty for a girl in the process of development into adulthood, who feels physical insecurities regarding her body while she dreams of romance in the awakening of sexual attraction. The story unfolds through a tapestry of reveries and identifications, urges and drives, encompassing rituals, ceremonies, and several kinds of possessions (that go in crescendo from serendipitous flirting to hints of cannibalism). The poem starts with the stereotype of a young girl who dreams of having some kind of affair with the famous idol. In this sense, physicality is very important throughout the text, as the first line states: "At fourteen I wanted to devour you," transforming the metaphor to the extreme at the end, when, it is literally performed: "who'd offer me .../... his yellowing pancreas, / and say, *Here, baby, eat*" (30-33). In the meantime, several scenes are represented to obtain accumulation: male corporeal descriptions, tutoring guidance of an adult to a teen, physical insecurities of the female body, naïve jealousy felt towards the female partner in *Ghost*, philosophical and religious overtones, sexual hints, empathetic identification by putting herself in the shoes of the actor, etc. The result describes perfectly well the intense feelings of early young age, gifted with agency and sensitive awareness.

But what is relevant in the poem for this specific study is the way in which the presence of a northern shoveler becomes climactic and epiphanic:

only yesterday, when I rescued a northern shoveler  
from crows on the beach, his broken wing  
squished against the crockery of my ribs,  
only after setting him down at the edge  
of a canal, where he sank in to the long patient  
task of dying, that I realized what I'd wanted  
most was to be held by someone determined  
to save me... (22-29)

This intimate and serendipitous encounter with the non-human animal can be seen as a correlate of the girl's wish to be "saved" by Swayze. Additionally, the act of saving, initially seemingly anecdotal, as the girl behaves like a good Samaritan, results in a form of unspeakable connection between both creatures. The key moment of the physical contact between them—their bodies pressed together in a sort of embrace—and, above all, the urgency of preventing the animal from being killed by predators, becomes a catalyst for a revelation. An emphasis is put on the bodily: "his broken wing / squished against the crockery of my ribs" (23-24)—what is more, the break in the wing and the creaking of ribs can be easily associated to show not only physical coincidence but also emotional breakdown for the two of them. This can also stand as a good sample of the interdependence and unbreakable condition of "material spirituality" (or else, "spiritual materiality," making it no different), stated by ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood. It should also be noted that the broken wing is a way of remaining aware of the fragility of life and freedom, when one is incapable of flying, and that the contact is the product of the disability of the wounded shoveler. This contact, between different ecotypes in tension in very disparate ecotones, would not have been possible without the trauma inflicted on the bird. In that regard, the certainty of fragile physicality produces an empathetic encounter between the girl and the shoveler—a connection that goes beyond words and is imbued with profound semiotic significance, and that avoids the pathetic fallacy and turns to interspecies transcreation instead. Finally, the empathetic identification process evinces the proximity of species in biological terms and, hence, favors their kinship and recognizance to be able to work together sympoietically and with response-ability (Haraway).

### Fowls for Thought

A subtle reference to the near-extinct species of the great auks is present in "Every Unbearable Thing," to exemplify the need to fight back for jeopardized women: "say all this has vanished / like the great auks / those awkward flightless birds / mistaken for witches" (34-37). Understanding the parallelism between women and auks is crucial, as they both face endangerment as "species" and endure the disparaging naming of the subaltern other. In that regard, as aforesaid, the comparisons "auks like witches" and "women witches" turn out to be revealing, and this identification process is a patent sign of the entangled transcorporeal fluidity between them (Kuznetski and Alaimo).

Birds also appear in "Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods," to exemplify empathetically the surging of women to make their anger visible. Especially touching and depicted with clear sensitivity, the scene in which morning birds confront glassy windows proves relevant. Not only does it make use of a metaphor that is both clarifying and significant, but it can also constitute a good example to analyze the dividing lines between species:

...Girls are coming out  
of the woods the way birds arrive  
at morning windows—pecking  
and humming, until all you can hear  
is the smash of their miniscule hearts  
against glass, the bright desperation  
of sound—bashing, disappearing. (34-40)

This image is a clear example of the ecotones between human animals and non-human animals, not only in physical terms but also in the spatial occupation of the territory. The clashing of birds against the cold windows—that isolates all kind of edifices, buildings, homes and houses from outside, to protect them from adverse weather, hostile situations and/or attacks from external forces—evidences the (im) material barriers that separate nature from human constructs.

In this specific case, birds symbolically approach a glass barrier, which is deceptive to our/their eyes—simultaneously impassable and invisible—exposing the proximity and the distance that separates humans from nature.<sup>3</sup> Again, to this respect, Nancy Tuana's concept of "viscous porosity" comes inevitably to mind. It can be extrapolated to the difficult permeability of all types of contact zones, whether physical or abstract. Metaphorically, the division resembles a simile that portrays women as unprivileged and outsiders from their own society, like birds pecking, humming, and their hearts beating against that dualistic dividing line. Women clash against the imperceptible

window wall of neglect and oblivion, a double victimization after gender violence has taken place. Morning birds manifest subtly through little actions, almost inaudible but, in numbers, they make themselves heard. Girls emerge from the woods in silence, uniting as a collective force comprised of ghosts, witches, and embodied specters, and together, they will shatter the glass into pieces. Thus, as ecofeminism proclaims, interspecies parallelisms go hand in hand with the awareness of Otherness and subalternity. Also, the a-linear indistinction between the individual and the collective of the rhizomatic reproduction is evidenced by the inorganic multiplicity of the bodies. And, following Donna Haraway's tentacular networks of the Chthulucene, the kin relationships between all beings (in terms of biology, genetics, instincts, cohabitation, etc.) should be identified and favored.

## CONCLUSIONS

The selection of these four poems by Tishani Doshi, which undoubtedly exemplify of her writing style, facilitates an ecomaterialist analysis. This is attributed to their peculiar blending of social concerns, bodily drives, and environmental awareness. The poet employs nature images and metaphors to aid in comprehending ideological slants and discriminatory biases. In other words, in line with Ecofeminism, the anagnorisis of the subaltern condition coincides with an interspecies connectivity in terms of oppression. This is demonstrated through similar violence exerted upon them. Accordingly, bodies suffer, are transformed, and react in the same way, thus proving both the rhizomatic spread—without boundaries, centers or margins—of material fluidity and the tight tentacular relationship between species (Haraway's "making kin" in the Chthulucene). Consequently, their corporeality can be transcended, appropriated and "felt" in an empathetic way, to reunite them in the same biosphere (Alaimo's "transcorporeality"). It is made clear, at the same time, that immaterial reactions (emotions and thoughts) should not be split apart from their physicality (Plumwood's "material spirituality"), and that even emotions and thoughts form part of the same unit: to feel-think, in a holistic approach to unveil the true meaning of our existence in the planet (De la Torre's "holomovement").

To restart an empathetic egalitarian relationship between human and non-human animals—and between them and the environment—links of affection, recognition, and justice should be established, to be able to regain a healthy sense of place and of belonging (Tuan's "topophilia" vs "topophobia"). Furthermore, the utilization of the fungal rhizome system, which appears to be inherent to the lands

of the Indian Ocean, provides a good ally to understand the decentered growth of invisible roots and shoots among species. On the contrary, if human-made natural destruction keeps on—by the agency of poverty, wars, wild exploitation of resources, plastic toxicity, global heating, chemical and nuclear danger, and a long list of many other present menaces—it will result in profound place detachment and spatial nomadism, which is connected with class, gender and race issues (Buell's "toxic discourse"). In a sense, Doshi's texts, despite not written for this specific purpose, follow this pathway into the discovery that culminates in the revelation or epiphany of a truthful rhizomatic inhabitation and cohabitation with nature. Her artistic-holistic background makes her aware of Haraway's "response-ability" to "live-with" specific habitats.

Considering this, the analysis specifically focuses on two items: "permabodies" and "ecotones," which function as catalysts for other imageries and acts of protest in the poems. Definitely, permabodies are very appropriate to reveal the sedimentary condition of both physical and psychical bodies; how they interact and stay as filters, albeit shadowy ones, in a definite spatiotemporal location. Similarly, ecotones describe too well the physicality, mediatization, and level of strength of all sorts of dividing lines (corporeal, material, political, social, mental, etc.), especially the ones among species in terms of discrimination, invisibility, and agency. Doshi's pieces serve as a resource for this objective, as they show a special perceptive power to observe and grasp environmental layers and nuances.

Within the vegetal realm, "Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods" employs the forest as a palimpsestic terrain, where the bodies of gender victims are interred. As their corporeal forms slowly decay and dissolve, a powerful energy emerges, akin to compost nurturing new life, fueled by the accumulation of rage and shame. That is, all the violent acts and inappropriate words thrown to them sediment and give birth to a troop of ghost-like "witches"—a derogatory word resignified to highlight women's empowerment and connection with the land instead. Especially significant is the equal requalification of woods as a complicit womb for rebirthing, or so to say a comfort place for new fertilization, not a place for oblivion, thus getting rid of the stereotyped hostility of wilderness. Dismantling the subtext of darkness, horror, and the underworld, nature becomes magic, agentic, and force-giving. The most revealing aspect in the text lies in the discovery of material interconnectedness and positive feedback.

"Every Unbearable Thing" participates of the living-with nature process, depicting violence against women in a seemingly bucolic scenario that favors healing and regeneration. Once again, the unification into a collective force privileges a change of the patriarchal paradigm into a motherly telluric and sustainable space that seems to be intrinsically female. Thus, she-metaphors of the land are devoid of clichés



and prejudices and show once again their tentacular and rhizomatic porosity. The permapoetic analysis proposes the allegorical use of gardening—watering, taking care of, fertilizing, and so on—to facilitate the growth towards activism that Doshi offers as a giveaway to the #MeToo movement. Using the motto: “united we stand, divided we fall,” the text articulates the familiar-to-all pain inflicted with every “unbearable thing” uttered by women as if they were drops—or rather poisonous weapons—to fight back and contest. Therefore, through the subversion of gender-biased negative images of nature, materiality converges through the accumulation of sediment, and the compost produced from the mountain of trash transforms into a fertile botanical garden, serving as a wellspring of energy for change.

The animal kingdom also aids in uncovering essential stances about the physicality of our species and the true dimension we occupy on Earth. The first poem of this section, “Buffaloes,” pictures a timeless scene with epic tones in which the wild animals blur or minimize every other creature appearing in it (including vegetation and humans), due to their mythical grandiosity. In a series of hyperboles, they have come to represent the land they inhabit—they *are* the land—and, consequently, stand as a promise for human animals to return to their origins. Tinged with nostalgia for lost times and spaces, the text creates an invisible and soft ecotonal barrier between the splendor of a passionate and legendary past and the uncertainty of a prosaic and loveless future. The final lines of the poem suggest a life out of balance and the cutting of the bond with deep nature, represented by the buffaloes quickly vanishing from our sight.

Finally, in “Ode to Patrick Swayze” (and to a lesser extent in “Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods” and “Every Unbearable Thing”), fowls are used to meaningfully ascertain physical empathy and interspecies contact. In effect, the three of them (northern shoveler, morning birds, and auks), embody contradicting images of fragile bodily existence and wide spatial freedom. The dying northern shoveler, rescued by the adolescent girl (in “Ode to Patrick Swayze”), represents an epiphanic revelation of not only physiological materiality—through the creaking of bones and the close contact between them—but also urgent physicality—in the rhizomatic connection between the body urges of the teen girl and the awareness of the inevitable outcome for the duck. A tense ecotone (almost an ecocline) creates transformative power to transubstantiation and sacrifice that results in the cannibalism metaphor. Through the offering of the pancreas—the organ that processes insulin to help the body with the absorption of sugar, say, the place where sweetness is chemically operated—the ceremony of possession is carried out. The knowledge that Swayze suffers from pancreatic cancer turns this solemn ritual into a sacrifice act, causing the yellowish organ to become poisonous.

In addition, the image of morning birds that appears in "Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods" exemplifies transcorporeal possibilities and revelatory experiences. The gentle pecking, humming, and smashing sounds they make against the window glass serve as an awakening to life that can be easily assimilated to the girls' exit from the woods, almost in silence, accompanied by soft noises. They warn against a "second coming," in droves, carrying weapons, to obtain retaliation from violence and, ultimately, social transformation. The ecotone represented in the glassy dividing line between the human and the non-human realms is powerfully tense. It embodies the invisible yet palpable barriers established between two opposing and conflicting ecotypes, due to the system of patriarchal anthropocentrism. Acting against the rhizome and basing on false divides (human / animal, civilized / instinctive, master / servant, refined / primitive, etc.), it is the reason for environmental neglect and a faulty sense of place that leads to the serious actual planetary decay.

To conclude, the reference to great auks in "Every Unbearable Thing" comes from the physical comparison of this species to witches, a symbol that the author frequently uses to depict women's empowerment and their connection with the hidden magical forces of nature. At the same time, the fact that auks are on the verge of extinction serves to emphasize the need to act urgently, extrapolating it to the survival of women under attack. All these instances of interspecies relationship, from non-human animal and vegetal to human animals—underwent by Doshi in her unique poetics of discovery—relocate our position in the world with a sensory empathetic gaze. The rhizomatic links established in the texts act as transformative resilience in a de-unified-but-integrating inhabiting locus. What lingers after reading them is a combination of environmental awareness and epiphanic revelation that emerges from bodily conscience. It can constitute a good starting point for the real transformation of our prejudiced mental system into healthier paradigms for the sake of surviving with the planet.

## Notes

1. The author acknowledges the help granted by the Spanish MICINN through two competitive research projects: 1) "Rhizomatic Communities: Myths of Belonging in the Indian Ocean World" [PGC2018-095648-B-I00], IP Felicity Hand, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; 2) "Aesthetics, Ethics and Strategics of the New Migratory Cartographies and Transcultural Identities in Twenty-First-Century Literature(s) in English" [PID2019-109582GB-IOO], IP José Manuel Estévez-Saa, Universidade da Coruña.
2. Donna Haraway's concept "making kin in the Chthulucene" (in *Staying with the Trouble*) describes the indissoluble relationship extant between spaces and species, inside habitats formed by all sorts of interdependent nets: physical, corporeal, biological... A theory easily comparable to the de-unifying familiarity of the rhizome, that can also be extrapolated to situations of racial, social, sexual, or ideological discrimination in specific spatiotemporal settings. In this sense, Haraway stands up for a recognition of the invisible interspecies and intranature kinship that generates parentage in a "sympoietic" way. That is, a need to making-with, generating-with, evolving-with, composing-with... the Others, to find solutions to the environmental trouble human animals have created and are nowadays facing, to the verge of a not-so-improbable extinction in the near future.
3. Irish poet Eamon Grennan's "On a Cape May Warbler Who Flew Against My Window" offers a similar image, but in this case the collision of the bird against the glass of a window cottage ends with the death of the animal. The ecotone here proves radically unsurmountable, but a sort of familiar relationship between human and non-human animals is established, though the burial rituals indicate the anthropomorphization of the warbler:

She's stopped in her southern tracks  
 Brought haply to this hard knock  
 When she shoots from the tall spruce  
 And snaps her neck on the glass.  
 From the fall grass I gather her  
 And give her to my silent children  
 Who give her a decent burial  
 Under the dogwood in the garden.  
 They lay their gifts in the grave:  
 Matches, a clothes-peg, a coin;  
 Fire paper for her, sprinkle her  
 With water, fold earth over her.  
 She is out of her element forever  
 Who was air's high-spirited daughter;  
 What guardian wings can I conjure  
 Over my own young, their migrations?

The children retreat indoors.  
Shadows flicker in the tall spruce.  
Small birds flicker like shadows—  
Ghosts come nest in my branches.

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