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## **Man in the Anthropocene and His Transformation: An Ecocritical Reading of *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh**

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**Abstract:** Amitav Ghosh's novels have frequently addressed environmental issues and the current ecological crisis. In this regard, one of his most famous novels is *The Hungry Tide*, set in the Sundarbans. In his novel *Gun Island*, environmental themes are tackled with renewed strength and impressive imagination, granting the book the status of a fully-fledged ecocritical novel. This paper will investigate two aspects of man's behaviour in the Anthropocene as portrayed by Deen, the main character of *Gun Island*. Firstly, his rationality and fear of the supernatural will be analysed and explained, by making reference to specific passages of the novel. The analysis will also revolve around some of his reactions to the legend of the Gun Merchant and will try to explain them by making reference to Deen's behaviour towards the supernatural. The second aspect of interest is Deen's tendency to marginalise nature and consider it a mere backdrop of his life. Therefore, by quoting passages of the novel, his attitude towards nature will be underlined and brought to the foreground. In addition, light will be shed on his multi-layered, gradual personal evolution throughout the plot, which changes his beliefs, certainties and behaviour. This paper will also highlight the importance that Deen's metamorphosis may have on readers.

**Keywords:** Amitav Ghosh, nature, supernatural, rationality, Anthropocene

*Tutting, he wrenched at a snarled root of dead crabapple.*

*It rose against him.*

*(Mercian Hymns by Geoffrey Hill)*



## Introduction

In recent times the relationship between humanity and nature has been mainly characterised by a clear-cut distinction between the two dimensions. Such fracture finds further confirmation in the concept of ‘agrilogistics’ discussed by Morton. According to the scholar, agrilogistics is a kind of “logistical mode of agriculture” (Morton, “She Stood” 92) and a “violent understanding of capital-N Nature, against which the notion of human progress defines itself” (Morton, “Spokes vultures” 159). Agriculture, civilization and domestication are opposed to Nature (Morton, “Spokes vultures” 159). In fact, the non-human dimension is fraught with dangers which constantly threaten the very existence of humans and hinder their survival. Nevertheless, this distinction affects other fields as well, such as culture. In the introduction to *Ecologia letteraria*, Iovino states that the idea of culture fostered by our society is aimed at engendering a conceptual divorce between humanity and nature (14). She then goes on to warn us about the danger of this way of thinking. Indeed, in Iovino’s view, the pressing ecological crisis is rooted in a cultural crisis (14). Interestingly, Amitav Ghosh seems to agree with her when he maintains that contemporary culture struggles to reckon with climate change and points out that “the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination” (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* 9).

Being concerned with “the deep and abiding theme of [...] anthropogenic environmental damage” (Thomas 929), Amitav Ghosh’s works frequently deal with ecological themes and tackle environmental issues. Such topics are timelier than ever, since the author himself admitted that we are facing changes of “tectonic scale” (Kooria 16). Since he delves “into the challenges facing humanity in the era of the Anthropocene” (Suhasini 12), his fiction is riddled with “green streaks” (Hasan 182), one of the main lenses through which his multifaceted and multifarious works can be read. In this paper I am going to trace the ‘green streaks’ woven through *Gun Island* – whose plot addresses issues with “masterly sensitivity” (Varma 90) – by centring my analysis on two main areas of interest. Firstly, I would like to read the main character’s attitude as exemplifying two aspects of man’s behaviour in the Anthropocene, namely the elevation of rationality to an almost-worshipped, protective ideal and the marginalisation of nature. It will become clear that these attitudes are intertwined and both are a powerful expression of the aforementioned cultural and conceptual fracture between humanity and the non-human world. Furthermore, the paper aims to highlight



the radical change occurring in Deen's personality and mindset in the arc of the novel, and its powerful meaning potentially affecting the world outside the narrative framework.

### **Man's Rationality and the Fear of the Supernatural**

When examining Deen's character, his most outstanding features are his relatability and humanity, inasmuch as he is extremely sensitive, touchy and sometimes even goofy. Being familiar with anthropology and history (Kooria 9), Amitav Ghosh is an interdisciplinary writer and this adds to his characters' charm and three-dimensionality. By portraying a character that readers can empathise and identify with, Ghosh aims not only to draw them in, but maybe also to accomplish an important goal of the novel itself, which will be revealed later on. Before starting the analysis of the remarkable main character of *Gun Island*, it is important to point out that some of his features exemplify mankind's behaviour in the Anthropocene, although Deen does not *purposefully* pollute the environment or taint it. As a result, a line must be drawn between his marginalisation of nature and the ruthless behaviour of the refinery mentioned in the novel, which releases effluents into the water, thereby poisoning it.

Nevertheless, Deen shows two interesting aspects of man's attitude in the Anthropocene, namely an extreme rationality and the tendency to marginalise nature. From the very beginning, readers are presented with an exhaustive description of his life, which tells worlds about his personality as well: "I spared no effort to live a quiet, understated, uneventful life" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 8). Hartman and Degeorges maintain that in the Anthropocene "A deep and intractable sense of foreboding, bordering on panic, has taken hold, except where denial and escapism provide a temporary alternative" (457). It is exactly this sense of foreboding, coupled with uncanny coincidences and the mythic legend of the Gun Merchant, that disrupts Deen's placid and stuffy existence by marking the presence of the theme of the supernatural in the novel. Being steeped in rationality, Deen forcefully refuses to believe in whatever veers from reason and he is therefore particularly shaken by uncanny, seemingly inexplicable events. An analysis of some adjectives and adverbs that refer to Deen's reaction regarding what contradicts his rationality might well provide a clear picture of how profoundly uncomfortable he is in those circumstances. 'Panicky,' 'a little shaken,' 'deeply unsettled,' 'defensively,' 'shivering,' 'frowning' and 'far out of my depth' are self-evident and therefore do not require clarification. As far as verbs are concerned, whenever someone hints at the supernatural, he 'yelps,' 'recoils,' and 'snaps.'



From this broad range of expressions, it can be shown that his categorical rejection of supernatural events stems from fear, as his faith in rationality wavers. Quite surprisingly though, in some passages it is as if Deen wished to be proven wrong. For instance, during his conversation with Tipu about *bhuta* (an existing presence) and shamans, Deen acknowledges that “I found, to my puzzlement, that I was sitting on the edge of my seat as I waited for his response” (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 116). As disturbing as these conversations may be for him, Deen finds himself strangely drawn to them: “For several months Tipu disappeared from my screen. I began to think that he had at last tired of his pranks – this should have pleased me but instead I felt just a little disappointed” (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 120). Thus, his unexpected interest exemplifies a twofold inclination. On the one hand, he firmly rejects the supernatural as it does not fit his rational frame of mind, on the other he unconsciously longs for proof that supernatural phenomena exist and that they do not happen by coincidence – or chance.

Chance is indeed another telling aspect of Deen’s rationality, even its shield. After unexpectedly and serendipitously bumping into Rafi in Venice, he is rattled by this mysterious coincidence and is only able to compose himself thanks to his blind reliance on chance, to which he desperately – and a little bit comically – clings:

all of this was pure coincidence, of course it was. To lose sight of that was to risk becoming untethered from reality; chance was the very foundation of reality, of normalcy. There was absolutely no reason to imagine, as I had done, that such an encounter, in such a place, was outside the range of the probable.

(Ghosh, *Gun Island* 201)

Chance is therefore woven into the very fabric of everyday rational life, where the supernatural finds no place. However, Deen goes even further and seems to compare it to a deity which provides safety, security and reassurance. No wonder, then, that he states that he has ‘faith’ in chance.

Foreboding and uncanniness are not the only elements which put Deen’s rationality under pressure, though. At the beginning of the novel, the Bengali comes across an ancient oral legend from which his adventure across the world ensues. The legend is concerned with Manasa Devi, the goddess of snakes, and the Gun Merchant, who flees from and disregards her. In Kupferschmidt’s opinion, contemporary literature has failed to grasp and productively portray environmental issues – as Ghosh similarly states (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* 32) – because the perspectives offered by literary works are either too optimistic or



pessimistic (Kupferschmidt 102). No wonder, then, that in *Gun Island* the perfect story to get to the root of the environmental crisis and explain it springs from the past in the mysterious form of an ancient, far-reaching legend. Showing the aforementioned fracture between humanity and nature, the story demonstrates indeed that the Merchant's misfortunes were ultimately caused by "his own arrogance, and his conviction that he was rich enough, and clever enough, to avoid paying deference to the forces represented by the goddess of snakes" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 60). As a result, the story is a parable of man's greed and has therefore the power to "open up a world that we cannot see" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 18) – namely a world where nature is credited with agency and demands recognition.

As far as Deen's opinion about the supernatural and the possible veracity of folk legends is concerned, he speaks his mind clearly – and rationally – by claiming that: "I will not, on any account, go along with a whole lot of superstitious mumbo-jumbo" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 36). Such overt hostility is particularly puzzling, since Deen wrote a research paper concerned with a version of the legend of Manasa Devi and the Merchant. The riddle is easily solved, though, when Cinta – who acts as Deen's foil throughout the novel – asks him, flummoxed, whether the legend he chose to analyse did not mean anything to him and was only "A lifeless fragment that is of interest only because it can be carbon-dated" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 35). Once again, Deen's rational approach is laid bare to the readers and is unmasked by Cinta's incisive remarks.

Folk legends are dismissed as mere tales because they put rationality to the test in countless ways. First and foremost, they are deeply rooted in the primordial natural world, in which man was an animal who was on equal footing with other creatures. Moreover, it was a period in which nature – and not rationality – was in charge. Indeed, as Cinta points out, something "elemental and inexplicable" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 141) runs through those stories and they might be the "last remnant of our animal selves" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 141), dating back before civilization. Believing that humans' storytelling faculty is linked to their primeval animal selves, Cinta echoes Graham Swift's opinion. In fact, the famous Booker-prize-winning writer maintained that "man [...] is the story-telling animal" (Swift, *Waterland* 85) and that "There's something primitive and magical about it [storytelling]" (Swift, "Interview with" 61). Stories are therefore a magical element characterising the primordial lives of men, when nature was still pristine and wielded considerable influence over humankind. At the time, rationality and safety did not reign: human beings were at the mercy of the natural elements and the havoc they could wreak. It is not a case that stories sprung up like mushrooms in



antiquity. In fact, they were used to keep at bay the fear of death, “conjoined [...] with the fear of nature” (Deyo 446).

However, the meaningfulness of stories and their relevance with regard to Deen do not end here. In ancient legends, animals were given agency, namely the power to act according to reason, and therefore had man’s same status: man was not hierarchically superior to other creatures. As Ghosh maintains, those stories recently dwindled (Ghosh, “Amitav Ghosh on ‘Gun Island’”) and faded whereas hierarchies favouring humans over animals and vegetation emerged, thus creating a sharp distinction between human and non-human. His interest and respect for lore legends is further witnessed by the fact that he recently published *Jungle Nama*, a poem in poyar verse, which is, in the author’s own words, “much more than a story” (Ghosh, “Amitav Ghosh”). Since ancient stories question the fact that rationality and agency are humans’ exclusive prerogatives – and therefore undermine the cultural fracture with nature – Deen instinctively rejects their potential deeper meaning and prefers to technically analyse their surface only, shunning every emotional involvement.

As imbued with magic as stories can be, the Gun Merchant legend turns out to be a real event that happened in a remote past. When Deen starts to realise that the legend might not be wholly unfounded but actually firmly rooted in reality, he feels deeply unsettled. This comes as a surprise: after all, it is proven that there is nothing really ‘magical’ in stories. We would expect Deen’s rationality to be reassured, as the story is subtracted from the realm of the supernatural and grounded in reality: the Gun Merchant may not be a legendary character but someone who really existed, exactly like Captain Ilyas. The mysterious places that embellish the story have the reassuringly familiar names of Sicily and Venice. Nevertheless, his reaction is radically different. Again, the verbs used to convey his demeanour perfectly exemplify his state of mind. When Cinta solves some of the riddles of the story, he ‘gasps audibly,’ ‘stutters,’ and has to ‘take a deep breath.’ With sparkling eyes and excited by a ‘childlike delight,’ Cinta’s reaction could not be more different. As puzzling as it may be, Deen’s behaviour can be explained through his fear of nature’s unpredictable power. In fact, the Gun Merchant story did not involve just human characters, who seem to have really existed. More importantly, the legend celebrated nature – in the slithering form of Manasa Devi – and its far-reaching power which no human, even a rich one, could escape. If the story does not stem from superstition and is actually true, Deen must come to terms with nature’s real, pervasive power. Far from



being a mere character relegated to a story of fiction, nature exerts influence over real life as well – as the natural disasters with which the novel is dotted demonstrate. Exactly like the Merchant's, Deen's life – however modern and rational – is steeped in nature and therefore subjected to it. Instead, from some details in the plot, it can be seen that Deen is used to marginalising nature and ignoring it. When the story turns out to be true, it raises his awareness of nature's power and awakens worries. This leads us to the second section, which deals with the marginalisation of nature.

### **Marginalising Nature**

In the opinion of the English Romantics, an encounter with nature is characterised by the experience of the sublime, an awe-inspiring beauty which went hand in hand with terror and personal belittlement. With respect to this, Ann Radcliffe drew the line between the terms terror and horror, by asserting that horror crippled and paralysed individual faculties, while terror resulted in an expansion of the soul and heightened skills (Sanders 347). Needless to say, her fictional sublime had the power to elicit the beneficial terror, rather than the freezing horror (Sanders 347) – exactly like nature did. Being respected and even considered a manifestation of God, nature consisted of interconnections between different creatures, including humans, as Wordsworth wisely points out in 'Tintern Abbey':

[...] a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

(48)

Far from eliciting terror, in recent times nature is rather overlooked and even ignored, reduced to a mere backdrop of civilization and modern man's rationality. As a result, its marginalisation is coupled with mounting unawareness of ecological problems. Having frequently "examined the inability of the present generation to grasp the scale and violence of climate change" (Suhasini 2), Ghosh admits that "There is no





awareness of the nature of the catastrophe that is approaching” (Kooria 16) as far as cultivation in the Sundarbans is concerned. Similarly, Clark denounces that “We exist in an ongoing biodiversity crisis – but register that crisis, if at all, as an ambient hum of guilt, easily faded out” (12).

Far from lying in the background of the narration, in *Gun Island* nature breaks its shackles and shows all its might. At the beginning of the novel, Deen leads a peaceful life as a bookish man, but his lifestyle is forcefully shattered by the clash with the mighty nature embodied by the swampish region of the Sundarbans, a setting Ghosh is particularly fond of. Apart from framing the narration of *The Hungry Tide*, they figure in his recent book *Jungle Nama*:

*Thousands of islands rise from the rivers' rich silts,  
crowned with forests of mangrove, rising on stilts.  
This is the Sundarban, where laden waters give birth;  
to a vast jungle that joins Ocean and Earth. (Ghosh, Jungle Nama 1)*

The garbled forest is at the antipodes of civilization because of countless reasons. In *The Hungry Tide*, the Sundarbans is depicted as a “‘you-kill-me or I-kill-you’ theatre” (Hasan 185). In this wild jungle, time and space – the typical coordinates of contemporary life – are based on natural data, rather than man-made ones. In terms of space, the environment is an “indeterminate fluid fictional space” (Suhasini 5) and Ghosh himself describes the fluidity of its landscape, since “Overnight a stretch of riverbank will disappear, sometimes taking houses and people with it; but elsewhere a shallow mud bank will arise and within weeks the shore will have broadened by several feet” (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* 5). Every landmark is temporary and precarious, like a desert whose dunes are constantly moved and reshaped by the wind. Time as well flows differently and does not bend to clocks and calendars, a flagship of civilization. While sailing towards a shrine in the Sundarbans, the boatman Horen recounts to Deen various natural disasters which struck those areas and Deen realises that “Storms, I soon discovered, were Horen’s measure of time” (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 59).

Another vital element has to be taken into account while considering the wild nature portrayed by the Sundarbans, namely its fleetingness and the impossibility of understanding it though modern means. Upon



reaching the ancient shrine with the inscriptions illustrating the legend of the Gun Merchant, Deen realises that he is hard-pressed to decipher some symbols (much to his dismay!). Not having a notebook with him, he cannot scribble them on a sheet of paper. Indeed, writing is not allowed to enter the hallowed realm of the oral legend or the Sundarbans, whose contorted mangroves may also represent a loss of straightforwardness and clarity, a detour from rationality and its clear-cut trains of thought. The impossibility of writing down the symbols is even more meaningful if we consider that Deen is used to recording. Being an “avid note-taker and journal-keeper” (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 27), Deen’s fondness for registered data and information pops up when he re-reads his painstaking old journal and when he records Nilima’s memories of the Gun Merchant legend. Nevertheless, the story was meant from the start to be transmitted solely orally and never to be written down. However, this is no coincidence: writing is deeply entwined with civilization, so much so that written records mark the difference between history and pre-history. As a matter of fact, Deen feels pulled back to a more primordial period by the elements of the Sundarbans: “it was as if my body were being reclaimed by the primeval ooze” (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 73). His impression finds further confirmation by his fall into copious mud (which may be a ritual return to the origins) and the flow of chilly water which washes the dirt away from his face – almost a symbolic baptism or initiation to a new dimension.

Due to the strength of nature in the plot, Deen’s marginalisation of it is even more glaring. From the very beginning, he tries to steer clear of the “wild tangle of mud and mangrove” in the Sundarbans (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 111) and his initial disappointment at the idea of going there is hilarious. In Deen’s self-reassuring view, nature can be said to be nothing more than a mere setting for his modern, rational and civilized life. After meeting the poisonous spider in Venice, he is panic-stricken and undergoes extreme stress, since up to that point “Spiders were everywhere; they were just a part of the texture of the world, like flies and ants” (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 215). Crediting animals with agency and reason, the whole story of the Gun Merchant reverses this idea.

Yet, an even more striking example of Deen’s attempted marginalisation of nature is the fact that he does not even realise that he is a stone’s throw away from a venomous king cobra, while entering the shrine. After Rafi’s intervention, the penny drops and Deen is flabbergasted. He immediately thinks that the young boy



must be ‘deluded’ – an interesting choice of adjective: the exact opposite of ‘sane’ and ‘rational.’ As he claims, “such things just don’t happen to people like myself – reclusive antiquarians who spend most of their waking hours staring at screens and old books” (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 83). I claim that Deen’s reaction and his unaware encounter with the cobra stem from his disconnection from nature. Further strengthening this hypothesis is the character of Rafi: he is perfectly in tune with nature and immediately notices the presence of the cobra, since he has lived in the forest all his life. The young boy’s ties with the surrounding environment are self-evident not only from his acute sense of observation and his prompt reaction at the cobra’s attack, but most importantly from his physical aspect. In fact, Rafi’s outward appearance brings together the human and non-human dimensions: “With his mop of unkempt hair and glistening, watchful eyes, he was at once feral and delicately graceful, like some wild, wary creature that could at any moment take flight” (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 79).

In the previous section, I deemed it necessary to specify that Deen does not *actively* cause damage to the environment, unlike the refinery which ruthlessly poisons water with effluents. Similarly, it must be acknowledged that although Deen unconsciously marginalises nature and considers it a mere backdrop to his comfortable life, he does not show symptoms of ecophobia – a far more disquieting issue. Discussed by Estok, the term indicates “an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world” seeping into our daily lives (Estok 208). Despite the fact that Deen himself does not exhibit ecophobic behaviour, in my opinion a noticeable ecophobic bent can be seen in a pivotal episode in the novel, namely the conference in LA. Held in spite of horrific wildfires engulfing the area outside the city, the conference takes place in a sleek building where crackling flames are visible from the panoramic view – never was a term more inappropriate:

a dark cloud had reared up above the horizon, taking the shape of an immense wave, complete with a frothing white top. From where we stood it looked as though a gigantic tsunami were advancing upon the distant outskirts of the city. (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 134)

Needless to say, the situation is extremely dire. Utterly incapable of understanding the danger, the conference attendees shallowly gaze wide-eyed at this landscape marked by a toxic sublime “so riveting that ushers had to be sent to herd us into the auditorium for the opening event” (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 134). Despite having serious environmental problems literally under their noses, the attendees are sceptical about the possibility



that natural disasters worse than those that struck the Earth in the 17<sup>th</sup> century – the theme of the first keynote address of the conference – could happen in the near future and rather poke fun at the lecturer, a sort of ecological Cassandra. When at last the organizers have to adjourn the conference because the wildfires are drawing near, they triumphantly inform the attendees that the conference will be moved to their hotel, pompously adding that “We’ve got to show Mother Nature that we’re not quitters!” (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 138). As Estok points out, defining the natural world as an “angered Mother Nature” belongs to the language of ecophobia (211).

### **The Spheres of Deen’s Evolution**

After having mentioned every possible environmental disaster – beaching of dolphins, wildfires, tornadoes, dead zones – Amitav Ghosh decided to end the novel on a brighter note, where the hope of transformation figures. Far from being a whirlwind process, Deen’s constant evolution can be glimpsed from numerous elements in the story and references to specific traits of his personality, which changes from that of a bookish man to that of a newborn Gun Merchant. In fact, his travels are defined as a “quest” (Joshi 98) – for new certainties, identity and beliefs.

The first transformation concerns the abandonment of his compartmentalised mind which surgically separates nature-steeped countries from Western ones, as if the world were not interconnected. Indeed, “in the era of global warming, nothing is really far away” (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* 26). It takes a while for Deen to realise this, though. Far too eager to leave the Sundarbans and Calcutta, at the airport he beamingly declares that:

I stepped on to the plane with a great sigh of gratitude: it was as if I had entered an impregnably metallic, mechanical, man-made womb, where everything served to protect me from that world of mud and its slithering, creeping inhabitants. (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 111)

Interestingly, the reference to a womb echoes a rebirth, exactly like his mock baptism in the chilly waters of the Sundarbans. The theme of rebirth is further picked up when Deen admits that travelling between Calcutta and Brooklyn is like switching between two different states of mind. Different places entail different mindsets and identities, but is there really a chasm between the two cities? As the plot unfolds, “The landscapes [...] seem to blur into one another” (Newns 17). As a result, this rational, man-made separation starts to collapse when Deen compares Venice to Varanasi. The ‘crooked’ houses and ‘tunnel-like’ lanes of



the Italian city almost resonate with references to the contorted mangroves with which the Sundarbans teem. Exactly like the mangrove forest, Venice rests on mud and its wooden structures are eaten up by worms.

As far as Deen's personality is concerned, it undergoes a radical transformation, insomuch as at the beginning his constant hesitancy is highlighted by his own words: "something held me back" and "The offer was tempting but I hesitated" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 20, 47). His self-initiative is particularly wanting, in that he is often spurred and dragged to act by either Cinta or Piya, almost guides for him and vital primers for the development of the story. It is no wonder, then, that his enthusiastic decision to embark on a journey on the *Lucania* to rescue the migrants of the Blue Boat perplexes the reader. The situation is now reversed: he is ready to leave behind an injured Cinta, his former guide, and set out alone. As if that were not enough, he goes one step further and eventually takes on the role of guide himself by inducing Cinta and Rafi to join the expedition.

As thought-provoking as the previous changes might be, the most striking and profound transformation is represented by the ultimate recognition of the supernatural, which is embraced from a twofold perspective. "But don't you think it's strange, Piya, all of this happening at the same moment?" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 309) – asks Deen, while witnessing the unusual mass migration of schools of whales, dolphins and fish abreast of the *Lucania*. Indeed, he accepts that some events slip through the close-knit net of his rationality, but he is not unnerved by them anymore. Nature has agency and acts accordingly. Most touchingly though, his recognition of the supernatural involves even invisible presences of beloved, deceased people. Indeed, the novel ends with Cinta's sudden and abrupt death, which nobody expected (especially readers!). After her death, Deen feels a whisper of wind stroking his cheek as if it were Cinta's last caress and he seems to recognise his friend: "Then I felt something like the touch of a hand, brushing gently against my cheek. My eyes flew open and I began to say – 'Cinta?' – when I realised that it was just a draught, created by the opening of the cabin door" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 312).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Deen's metamorphosis is pervasive and multi-layered. Apart from making the main character's personality more dynamic and underlining his evolution, the change might entail a far-reaching consequence that overcomes the borders of the novel. Not only do readers follow the collapse of Deen's



certainties and their reconstruction in an ecological vein, they might also empathise with him, due to his flaws and relatability. In particular, the fact that his change peaks in social commitment and activism is notable. Indeed, it is as if Amitav Ghosh were using his character as a role model to inspire many people who are used to living like Deen did before the beginning of the adventure: ignoring nature and entrenched in their sterile, division-ridden rationality. If even the bookish Deen, who used to be buried in archives among dusty, rare books, can metamorphose into a newborn Gun Merchant, there is hope that readers might change their behaviours as well, however slightly. A similar aim was pursued in *The Hungry Tide*, at whose end “Ghosh wants us to act affectively and socio-politically” (Tomsy 64). Activism is indeed paramount to solve the environmental crisis and is a core theme in Ghosh’s novels. Despite not recognising himself as an activist, Ghosh stated that he admires environmental activists (Ghosh, “Amitav Ghosh”). Starting from Deen’s rationality and unconscious marginalisation of nature, Ghosh depicts a process of awareness-awakening that not only spurs the evolution of the character but may also serve as a call-to-action for readers. Once again, through his masterly novels Ghosh shows us that in the Anthropocene “We are called to live within faith that there are patterns beyond our known patterns and that, in the midst of all that we do not know, we also gain knowledge” (Bird Rose).

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