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Posthuman Morality and the Graphic Ontology of Becoming in Chicken with Plums

أخلاقيات ما بعد الإنسانية والأنطولوجيا التصويرية للصيرورة في دجاج بالبرقوق

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Abstract:

In posthumanist terms, the thesis proposes that the character of Nasser Ali cannot be analyzed in isolation as a self-sufficient entity; instead, it comes into being through his contact with music, tar, love, family, sensations, and memory. The thesis analyzes posthuman ethics and the role of being in the story of *Chicken with Plums* by Marjane Satrapi. The fallout of the loss of the instrument can be seen as more than merely an object that is lost; it is a rupture in the links and relations, which provide meaning to a life. Moreover, poetical images depict memories, silence, absence, and death, making the process relating to identity inseparable and flowing. The paper refers to the ideas of posthumanism and shows how Satrapi develops the ideas of interrelations, embodied existence, and evolution, suggesting that death does not destroy a person, but only leaves memories behind.

Keywords: Posthuman Morality; Becoming; Graphic Ontology; Memory; Material Entanglement; Relational Existence

المخلص:

من منظور ما بعد إنساني، تقترح الدراسة أن شخصية ناصر علي لا يمكن تحليلها بمعزل عن غيرها بوصفها كيانًا مكتفيًا بذاته؛ بل تتشكل وتتحقق من خلال تفاعله مع الموسيقى، والعود، والحب، والأسرة، والأحاسيس، والذاكرة. وتحلل الدراسة أخلاقيات ما بعد الإنسانية ودور الوجود في قصة دجاج بالبرقوق لمارجان ساترابي. ويمكن النظر إلى تداعيات فقدان الآلة الموسيقية بوصفها أكثر من مجرد فقدان لشيء مادي؛ إذ تمثل قطيعة في الروابط والعلاقات التي تمنح الحياة معناها. علاوة على ذلك، تجسد الصور الشعرية الذكريات والصمت والغياب والموت، مما يجعل عملية تشكل الهوية غير منفصلة عن هذه العناصر، بل عملية متدفقة ومستمرة. وتستند الدراسة إلى أفكار ما بعد الإنسانية، وتوضح كيف تطور ساترابي مفاهيم الترابط، والوجود المتجسد، والضرورة، مشيرةً إلى أن الموت لا يقضي على الإنسان بصورة كاملة، وإنما يترك ذكرياته باقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أخلاقيات ما بعد الإنسانية؛ الضرورة؛ الأنطولوجيا التصويرية؛ الذاكرة؛ التشابك المادي؛ الوجود العلائقي.

1. Posthumanism and the Reconfiguration of Morality

Posthumanism is a crucial theoretical challenge to classical humanism. The ideas of humanism suggest that human beings are the focal point of everything that signifies man and attributes such as truth, morals, and anything else that underlines life and living. The perfect subject of humanism is the postulate of being rational being, autonomous, conscious, and self-regulating. The individual is imagined as possessing sufficient autonomy to distinguish between right and wrong and to act according to rational principles. Critical posthumanism challenges this model because it asserts that there is no human being who stands entirely separately from everyone else. Human identity is formed through one's contact with other human beings, institutions, environment, animals, technologies, artifacts, culture, feelings, and body.

Thus, posthumanism does not claim that humanity has disappeared or has been replaced. Instead, it questions the privileged position that has been assigned to "the human" in the history of philosophy and begins to study the relations through which humans are constantly produced. Rosi Braidotti points out that posthuman subjectivity is relational, embodied, embedded, affective, and interconnected with human and nonhuman beings. This conceptual transformation also changes the meaning of morality

because ethical responsibility can no longer be restricted to the isolated rational individual. Ethics becomes a question of relations: how different beings, objects, environments, and affects increase or decrease one another's possibilities for existence and transformation (Braidotti, 2019,p.77).

Marjane Satrapi's *Chicken with Plums* presents a remarkable literary space in which to explore the transition from humanist ethics to posthuman ethics. The plot revolves around Nasser Ali Khan, an exceptionally talented Iranian musician who decides to end his life after the destruction of his beloved tar. This decision appears to be overwhelmingly individualistic, suggesting that he is the master of his own fate since he has determined that he will no longer live. Most traditional humanist readings would see this story as primarily a psychological one, reflecting on whether Nasser Ali has a right to choose death and whether his choice is self-centered or whether he is to be considered morally responsible as a father and husband (Satrapi, 2006,p.56).

These questions remain relevant, but Satrapi's narrative gradually demonstrates that Nasser Ali cannot be adequately understood as an isolated moral agent. His decision emerges from a much larger network involving his broken instrument, artistic identity, lost relationship with Irâne, unhappy marriage to Nahid, memories, children, cultural expectations, bodily exhaustion, food, music, disappointment, and the accumulated emotional pressures of his life. The destruction of the tar functions as the immediate event that causes his withdrawal, yet the narrative progressively reveals that his desire for death has deeper relational origins. His apparent individual decision is therefore generated by an entire assemblage of human and nonhuman relations (Braidotti, 2013,p.78).

The tar plays a key role in this new understanding of morality because it complicates the traditional separation of active human agent from passive material object. From an anthropocentric standpoint, any musical instrument is seen as merely an object owned and controlled by a human musician. Its worth is fully reliant on human intention. However, the link between Nasser Ali and his tar adds nuances to this understanding. The musical instrument is involved in his artistic persona, emotional expression, memory, social recognition, and perception of the world. He does not just play the tar; he has become a musician through long-term physical and emotional interaction with it.

When Nahid destroys the instrument during an argument, the act therefore carries significance beyond the destruction of private property. A material relationship essential to Nasser Ali's sense of self is violently interrupted. As he cannot find any suitable replacement for the tar, he shows that the original tar is irreplaceable due to its unique character. His importance, therefore, comes from the history of his relation to a musical instrument. From a posthuman standpoint, therefore, identity is distributed across this relation. Nasser Ali understands part of what he calls "himself" through music, as well as through the object responsible for creating music. His downfall after the destruction of the tar illustrates the instability of an independent human being, as well as the extent to which any subject depends on material relationships. (Bennett, 2010,p.49).

This relational perspective also complicates moral judgment concerning Nahid. If the narrative is approached only through individual moral responsibility, Nahid may appear to be the person whose destructive action initiates Nasser Ali's death. Yet Satrapi does not reduce either character to a simple moral category of victim or offender. The marriage exists in a web of frustrated expectations, uneven emotional investments, societal norms and pressures, and unresolved pasts. Nahid loves her husband but is unable to achieve her desired relationship because his emotional life is still entangled with Irâne and with his own history as an artist.

Likewise, Nasser Ali's anguish does not relieve him of his moral obligations toward Nahid and his children. His death has repercussions on the whole relational web he is part of. The posthuman ethics is relevant here because it avoids the reduction of the narrative to the issue of moral guilt. Responsibility becomes distributed without becoming meaningless. Nasser Ali remains responsible for the effects of his withdrawal, while his behavior is simultaneously understood as emerging from relations that precede and exceed his conscious decision (Braidotti, 2013,p.69).

The novel consequently moves from a morality of autonomous choice toward an ethics of interdependence. Nasser Ali's tragedy demonstrates that human existence cannot be separated from the relations that sustain it. Love, artistic creation, family, memory, material objects, and bodily experience are not external additions to an already complete individual. They constitute the subject itself. When these relationships become damaged, the subject also changes. Satrapi's narrative thus creates an ethical problem more complicated than the question of whether suicide is morally right or wrong (Satrapi, 2006,p.55).

It asks what makes a life sustainable and what occurs when the relations through which a person experiences meaning begin to collapse. Posthuman morality directs attention toward these sustaining and destructive relations. Ethics is about the ability to stay in touch, change, and live within networks of dependence. "Chicken with Plums" thereby challenges the illusion of total human independence and presents moral life as fundamentally relational. The tragedy of Nassen Ali's death is that his life shows that no one dies alone. The disappearance of a person restructures the emotional world and the material world of everybody connected with him (Haraway, 2008,p.88).

2. The Graphic Ontology of the Posthuman Subject

The notion of graphic ontology gives insight into how the formal properties of Chicken with Plums contribute to its philosophical representations of existence. Ontology deals with questions about existence: what things exist, the way existence is arranged and the meaning of something having an identity. A conventional prose narrative usually portrays the characters' consciousness in language, while graphic narratives merge existence representation through visual and verbal axis. Characters presented on the panels as bodies, objects exist as visible items, silence can become real through empty areas, and time is capable of being divided, repeated, compressed and extended through panels. Consequently, graphic narrative does not simply illustrate a pre-existing verbal story. The visual aspect creates its own ontology that combines words, human bodies, images, objects, spaces, and absences. Scott McCloud's theories about comics are pertinent to the concept of meaning being formed not only by particular images but also by the connections between the panels. The reader makes a connection between stand-alone visual images and creates a continuity between these gaps. The significance of this structure for posthuman theory is that it challenges the notion of a single and whole subject (McCloud, 1993,p.66).

Satrapi uses this fragmented visual form to construct Nasser Ali as a subject who exists simultaneously across different temporal and affective states. Although the primary narrative concerns the eight days preceding his death, the text repeatedly moves backward into memories and forward into imagined or narrated futures. Consequently, Nasser Ali cannot be reduced to the physical man lying in bed waiting for death. He also exists as the young lover of Irâne, the musician searching for artistic perfection, the husband of Nahid, the father remembered by his children, the disappointed artist, and the future dead man whose story is reconstructed retrospectively.

The structure that is nonlinear provides the identity of the subject across time. His present physical form exhibits the remnants of prior experiences, while the events ahead influence the reader's understanding of his present actions. This fragmentation of time is consistent with the posthuman idea of the subject as becoming. The subject is not something stable and constant over time. It is just a temporary arrangement that is constantly changing with the aid of certain encounters, recollections, losses, desires, and material conditions. The construction of the graphic novel makes this idea visible, as different variations of Nasser Ali coexist in the framework of the narrative (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987,p.78).

The visual representation of the body further destabilizes the concept of an autonomous self. Nasser Ali's body becomes increasingly passive as he approaches death. He lies in bed while the narrative universe expands around him through memories, dreams, fantasies, and stories. Here we see powerful opposition between lack of movement in the physical sense and constant movement in ontological terms. The character's body is static, while his personality is in perpetual motion in the flow of time, in the streams of human relationships and imagination. The graphic technique allows Satrapi to show these stated different types of being. The memories become visible, the imagination gets visual form, and even death is represented. The end result is that the reader can find various levels of existence but is not required to take one definite type as the only true one. Such interaction is important to posthuman ontology because it challenges rigid binary divisions between mind and body, reality and imagination, materiality and representation (Braidotti, 2013,p.49).

Objects also acquire unusual ontological visibility within the graphic form. The tar is not simply mentioned linguistically; it appears materially within the visual world of the text. The reader sees Nasser Ali handling instruments, searching for replacements, and responding physically to their sound and presence. I The graphic panels contain not only human figures but also objects including food, furniture, pictures, clothes, and musical instruments. The presence of the human figure in the graphic panel is not given top privilege or the ontological position. As a broken instrument has as much importance as a human face. This works in favor of Satrapi, enabling her to create her narrative based on the interaction between human beings and objects than relying entirely on human consciousness. The theory of vibrant materiality put forward by Jane Bennett applies here as it allows addressing the potential of non-living material things in formation of events and influencing human behavior. Its agency is relational rather than intentional. The instrument becomes part of an assemblage involving Nasser Ali's hands, musical knowledge, memory, sound, emotion, and artistic identity (Bennett, 2010,p.59).

Silence is equally important to Satrapi's graphic ontology. Comics can represent silence not merely as the absence of speech but as visible duration. The use of panels without words, emotions shown by expressions, body positions utilized, negative spaces, and transitions in narration conveys emotion without words being involved. This is applicable to the case of Nasser Ali, whose suffering is often too intense for him to convey in words. Hence a person's subjectivity is greater than just their self-representation. This requires the reader to understand the meaning of the body and any physical appearance. The meaning is spread around in the visual story. This shows that meaning is not accumulated in language and speech. Visual storytelling assumes that people communicate a lot through gestures, environment, silence, and emotional relationships with people. The ontology of *Chicken with Plums* Oko mis consequently graphic in a strong philosophical sense: the form itself demonstrates that being is relational, fragmented, embodied, temporal, and dependent upon interactions between heterogeneous elements (McCloud, 1993,p.72).

3. Death, the Body, and Posthuman Becoming in *Chicken with Plums*

Death is not merely the conclusion of *Chicken with Plums*; it is the narrative principle through which Satrapi reorganizes the meaning of Nasser Ali's entire existence. From the beginning, the reader knows that Nasser Ali has decided to die. The narrative therefore reverses the conventional structure in which death functions as an unexpected ending. Instead, death becomes a process occupying eight days, and each day creates an opportunity to investigate another dimension of the protagonist's life. This structure transforms dying from a single biological event into an extended ontological condition. Nasser Ali embodies a paradox in his existence by being both alive and at the same time moving towards his own demise. He isolates himself from normal life, avoids food, is confined to bed, and lets nature take its course. While his body moves towards death, it leads to a remarkable broadening of Nasser Ali's memory and imagination. The nearer he approaches the end, the more experiences and stories come back to life in his mind (Satrapi, 2006,p.62).

This representation becomes particularly significant when examined through posthuman theories of embodiment. Humanist philosophy has frequently privileged consciousness and rational thought over the material body. The Cartesian division between mind and body contributed to the idea that authentic human identity resides primarily in rational consciousness, while the body functions as its biological container. Posthuman thought rejects this hierarchy by emphasizing that subjectivity is always embodied. A person does not simply possess a body; bodily sensations, limitations, desires, illnesses, pleasures, aging, and material needs participate in the production of the self.

The choice made by Nasser Ali to die comes not from intellectual deliberation, but from aspects relating to his body. The process of dying involves rejecting concrete acts of the body necessary for keeping it alive: hunger, fatigue, tiredness, and changes that lead to physical decline. Even though his decision is supposed to guarantee his freedom of choice, his body will not immediately follow the direction imposed by consciousness (Braidotti, 2013,p.69).

The dying body is also a place of becoming. At first glance, the term 'becoming' might seem paradoxical when used in the context of death since becoming is related to growth, evolution or something new emerging. However, Deleuze and Guattari used it in order to criticize the definition of identity. According to them, 'becoming' denotes processes that occur when given categories and stable forms of life get destabilized as a result of relationships, movements, tensions and encounters between diverse entities. In her posthuman theory Braidotti elaborates on similar ideas, emphasizing that subjectivity is a process and not an accomplished fact. Therefore, from this perspective, Nasser Ali's dying does not represent sheer motion towards nothingness.

It is a process through which his identity is repeatedly reconstructed. As his physical capacities diminish, different versions of his life become narratively active. Lover, musician, husband, father, child, artist, and dying body overlap. Death paradoxically multiplies the subject before eliminating his biological existence. Nasser Ali becomes increasingly difficult to define through any single identity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987,p.79).

His link to Irâne plays a vital role in this process. The existence of his lost love makes the reader reconsider his attitude towards art, family, and death. Irâne is more than just a female figure from the past of Nasser Ali. Her lack of presence stays in his consciousness for the rest of his life. This shows that absence has ontological value. Something does not have to be in the dimension of reality in order to change the being. The memories of missing people, the dreams that did not come true, the future possibilities that were abandoned, and the emotional stimulation take their place in the reality. His

subjectivity contains the traces of a relationship that historical circumstances prevented from continuing. Posthuman becoming can accommodate such temporal complexity because it rejects the self as a self-contained present entity. The subject is produced through past encounters and future possibilities as much as immediate physical circumstances (Braidotti, 2019; Satrapi, 2006).

Death destabilizes social identities of Nasser Ali. Since his identities as father, husband, artist and family member are tied to him being active in relationships. Once he satisfies his decision to withdraw from life these roles change before his biological death. Though present physically, his children have a father who withdraw socially. Nahid has a husband who denies future of their relationship. His identity as musician ceases to exist after destruction of the instrument he uses for expressing his ideas. Thus, death precedes physical death. Satrapi's illustration shows that identity is not just in a person. If identity depends upon relations, then changing or refusing those relations necessarily transforms the subject. Nasser Ali's dying is consequently an ontological dismantling of the assemblage called "Nasser Ali." The biological organism remains temporarily alive while the networks sustaining its previous identity gradually disappear (Haraway, 2008,p.58).

Yet Nasser Ali does not disappear completely when his body dies. The graphic narrative itself preserves and reconstructs him. Readers encounter him through Satrapi's visual representation, through family memories, through stories about his past, and through the consequences of his actions. This situation leads to a different posthuman aspect of death. Biological death doesn't stop someone from having a existence in relation to others. Through memories, creative art, and actions the deceased individual keeps making an impact in the world. That is why the death of Nasser Ali becomes a new change instead of a total disappearance of his presence. The musician transforms himself into a memory, the real-life experience of the person becomes a narrative, and the private pain changes to a picture. Satrapi becomes able to convert the death of the individual into a series of images and stories affecting the readers who have nothing in common with the story. This is one of the most powerful posthuman implications of *Chicken with Plums*: mortality destroys the fantasy of permanent individual identity while simultaneously revealing the persistence of relational traces beyond the boundaries of biological life (Braidotti, 2013,p.81).

4. Affect, Memory, and Human–Nonhuman Entanglements

Affect provides one of the strongest connections between *Chicken with Plums* and posthuman theory because Nasser Ali's behavior cannot be adequately explained through rational intention. Affect is used in general terms to talk about the ability to affect and be affected. Consequently, it shifts critical emphasis from understanding a self-conscious being that consciously regulates feelings to understanding the forces circulating between people, things, places, memories, and sensations. Nasser Ali's being is highly affective. Music influences his body and mood; the tar makes it possible to express himself in an artistic way; the memory of Irâna changes his attitude to the present; the actions of Nahid lead to anger and despair; food brings certain emotions as well; the domestic environment is connected to unpleasant and limiting feelings. These things do not only refer to feelings which are already in Nasser Ali; they take part in creating those feelings. His subjectivity emerges through encounters rather than preceding them as a complete psychological entity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987,p.67).

Music is perhaps the most important affective force in the narrative. For Nasser Ali, music is not merely entertainment or professional activity. It provides a mode through which his body, memories, desires, and artistic identity become connected. Sound crosses the boundary between human and environment.

Unlike an object that can remain physically separate from the observer, music literally reaches the body through vibration and hearing. It transforms mood, evokes memory, and generates emotional responses that may exceed rational explanation. Therefore, Nasser Ali's identity as a musician rests upon an affective circuit including the body, instrument, sound, audience, memory, and cultural context. Any one thing by itself is incapable of producing music. Because the music comes into being as a result of their relationship. This gives a clear example of posthuman assemblage theory whereby agency does not belong exclusively to human agents. The musician needs the instrument, but at the same time, the instrument needs the body to make sound, while the sound needs a material medium to travel through, and meaning comes about due to reception in culture and emotions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987,p.87).

The tar therefore possesses a central position within the human–nonhuman entanglements of the text. Describing the instrument as nonhuman does not mean attributing human consciousness to it. Posthuman Materialism does not need to regard those objects as entities possessing capacity for thought and desire like human beings. The materialists acknowledge that objects possess abilities to be a part of events and change relationships. Bennett interprets materiality as vitality, which draws attention to the possible actions generated by objects that form an assemblage. Nasser Ali's tar definitely has such relational power.

When it is whole and thus playable, it has a potential of artistic creation, emotional transfer, social recognition and personal continuity. When it is damaged, it produces a new material state of its own changes possibilities for actions regarding Nasser Ali. It intensifies the conflict between Nasser Ali and Nahid, initiates his search for a replacement, produces disappointment when replacement proves impossible, and contributes to his eventual withdrawal from life. A supposedly passive object therefore becomes central to the causal structure of the narrative (Bennett, 2010,p.69).

Memory functions as another non-linear force that unsettles the boundaries of the autonomous subject. In *Chicken with Plums*, memory is not simply an internal archive from which Nasser Ali retrieves information. Time and again in this narrative, the past both breaks into and changes the present. The memories of Irâne contain both the past relationship and the present emotions connected with it. Even if she does not exist anymore, Irâne is present in the memory of the dying Nasser Ali. The past is embodied in the absent presence of a person. In this case, the distinction between the past and present becomes blurred. The events of the past are part of the making of the contemporary subject. Satrapi is employing a nonlinear narrative technique which visually connects the past and present in a way that allows one to see that the past has not come to a closure. Memory becomes a form of becoming through which earlier experiences are continuously reconstructed according to present circumstances (Satrapi, 2006,p.59).

Food, particularly the titular chicken with plums, extends this relational logic into ordinary material life. Food is simultaneously external matter, cultural practice, sensory experience, bodily necessity, family activity, and emotional sign. Once consumed, the distinction between external materiality and internal body becomes literally unstable: what was previously nonhuman matter becomes incorporated into the biological organism. In Satrapi's narrative, food has a subtly contrasting role to that of the idea that a person is defined by their body and body alone. Life demands from people constant interaction with the surrounding world. The dish has emotional significance as well. While preparing Nasser Ali's favorite dish, Nahid expresses her wish for Nasser Ali to be back by showing that care can manifest itself in tangible ways. The dish is where such aspects as bodily existence, memory, desire, domestic chores, love, and conflict coexist(Satrapi, 2006.p.95).

The idea of “becoming-with” as advanced by Donna Haraway is relevant to understanding the interconnected mechanisms. Haraway’s theory contradicts the conception of existence as one in which beings have complete existence beforehand and then enter into relationships. In contrast, beings become what they are through relations. Although Haraway’s thought is usually employed in the study of multispecies relations, her idea can also help interpret Satrapi’s idea of subjectivity. For instance, Nasser Ali becomes a musician due to his instrument, then turns into a lover thanks to Irâne, and later becomes a husband due to Nahid, a father thanks to his kids, an artist due to music, and, eventually, a historical figure because of death and storytelling. None of these identities exists independently. Even his most apparently private emotions emerge through encounters with people, objects, sounds, images, and memories. The “human” at the center of the narrative is consequently never purely human in the sense of being autonomous and self-generated. His identity is an assemblage created through continuous entanglement with a world that exceeds him (Haraway, 2008,p.67).

The tragedy of *Chicken with Plums* can therefore be understood as the breakdown of affective and material entanglements that once sustained Nasser Ali's capacity to continue living. His issue does not merely involve the fact that he has lost an object. Instead, the tar's destruction reveals the weakness of a full system linking artistic identity, memory, lost love, bodily expression, and significance. In this way, his relationship with the world changes dramatically once this system is no longer feasible. Posthuman analysis helps see this process because it does not separate psychology from materiality. The hopelessness of Nasser Ali is neither entirely “in” him nor entirely external. It comes about in the space between these two extremes. His tragedy is thus relational, and Satrapi's graphic novel illustrates how seemingly insignificant things and feelings can contribute to significant ontological changes.

Conclusion

Marjane Satrapi’s *Chicken with Plums* presents death not as a simple ending, but as the final revelation of how deeply human life depends on relationships, memory, objects, and affect. Nasser Ali’s downfall after losing his tar illustrates that identity is always relational. Music, lost love, family, artistic aspirations, and material possessions shape Nasser Ali’s identity. The novel challenges conventional humanist morality and moves toward a posthuman ethics of relations through this relational model. Nasser Ali’s tragedy is not just the loss he suffered, but also his failure to imagine something else after the loss of his tar. However, Satrapi does not allow him to disappear completely from existence. Through the graphics, memory, and story-telling, he continues to exist after his death. In the end, *Chicken with Plums* offers a moving truth: we do not live alone, and we do not vanish alone; we continue through the relations we leave behind (Braidotti, 2013, 2019; Haraway, 2008; Satrapi, 2006).

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1. Posthumanism and the Reconfiguration of Morality

Examining posthuman ethics and the movement beyond traditional human-centered concepts of morality, identity, and subjectivity.

2. The Graphic Ontology of the Posthuman Subject

Exploring how the graphic novel form constructs being through images, fragmented narration, embodiment, memory, and visual representation.

3. Death, the Body, and Posthuman Becoming in *Chicken with Plums*

Analyzing Nasser Ali's relationship with bodily decline, mortality, and death as processes that destabilize the idea of a fixed human self.

4. Affect, Memory, and Human–Nonhuman Entanglements

Investigating how objects, music, food, memories, spaces, and emotions participate in the formation and transformation of subjectivity.

5. From Human Identity to an Ethics of Becoming

Examining how *Chicken with Plums* challenges stable identity and anthropocentric morality, presenting existence instead as relational, material, and continuously becoming.