

Debating Water: Posthuman Watery Relationality as an  
Alter-Imaginary to Neoliberal Capitalist Individuality  
in Ali Smith's *Girl Meets Boy*

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In this thesis, I examine Ali Smith's novel *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015). The novel is part of the Myths series, published by Canongate. The Myths series contains retellings of myths written by contemporary authors. Set in Scotland in 2007, *Girl Meets Boy* is a retelling of the myth of Iphis and Ianthe from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. I am interested in the critique of neoliberal capitalism in the novel, articulated through the material substance of (bottled) water. Following the socially conscious Modernist literary tradition and as part of the relational turn in literature, *Girl Meets Boy* utilises the contemporary debate surrounding water and its meanings to critique neoliberal capitalist ideology and practices.

My approach is influenced by critique of neoliberalism and capitalism, and posthuman feminism. A theoretical framework for posthuman relationality and interconnection is provided by a consideration of Astrida Neimanis's figuration 'bodies of water,' which I utilise to investigate the ethics of posthuman watery relationality in *Girl Meets Boy*.

On the basis of my analysis, I argue that *Girl Meets Boy* focuses on the debate surrounding water and its meanings in order to critique neoliberal capitalism. Furthermore, I argue that the novel presents an ethics of posthuman watery relationality as an alter-imaginary to neoliberal capitalist individualism.

Keywords: Ali Smith, *Girl Meets Boy*, water, bottled water, relationality, watery relationality, interconnection, neoliberal capitalism, neoliberalism, capitalism, individualism, posthumanism, posthuman

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# 1 Introduction

In this thesis, I analyse watery relationality and interconnection in Ali Smith's novel *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015; henceforth abbreviated as *GMB*). The objective of my thesis is to explore the possibilities of literature to create alter-imaginaries and alter-figurations that can challenge dominant political imaginaries, like neoliberal capitalist ideology. In this analysis of *GMB*, I focus specifically on water in the context of a neoliberal capitalist society where private companies, built on global capitalist exploitation, expand to bottled water markets through the commodification of water. *GMB* stages the contemporary debates surrounding water and its meanings in this neoliberal capitalist context. Through these debates, different figurations of water and ethics emerge, and it is these figurations in which I am primarily interested in this thesis.

Set in Inverness, Scotland, in 2007, *GMB* is a contemporary, queer retelling of the myth of Iphis and Ianthe from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The novel is a part of the Canongate Myths series, which contains retellings of mythology by various contemporary authors, including Margaret Atwood (*The Penelopiad* 2005) and Jeanette Winterson (*Weight* 2005 on Atlas and Hercules). *GMB* consists of five chapters alternating between the narrative voices of two sisters, Anthea and Imogen "Midge" Gunn, who work in the marketing team of a multinational company Pure that is planning to expand to the bottled water market. The novel provides the perspectives of both sisters on the events that unfold in the novel. Anthea falls in love with an anti-capitalist, feminist graffiti artist named Robin, who is protesting the commodification of water by Pure and also trying to draw attention to violations of women's rights in general. Anthea and Robin's budding relationship causes Imogen to confront prejudices she has about sexuality and gender. Throughout the course of the novel, Imogen is also forced to re-evaluate her own place as an employee in the neoliberal capitalist company Pure that fosters a highly sexist, competitive, and individualistic work environment and that profits off of dubious and harmful practices.

To support my analysis of *GMB* in this thesis, I use a variety of sources critical of neoliberalism and capitalism, ranging from literary studies and sociology to political science and business studies. My theoretical framework is rooted in Marxist/socialist and socialist-feminist/Marxist feminist theory and research. Moreover, I draw from posthuman feminist theory. My emphasis is on the debates over the meanings of water and how these meanings are linked to material realities and consequences.

In this thesis, I argue that *GMB* portrays neoliberal capitalist ideology and practices as a dominant narrative that is the cause of harmful practices. This is primarily exemplified in the novel by the problematisation of the marketisation and commodification of water by the multinational company Pure, but also by how the novel interrogates the company's promotion of neoliberal capitalist individualism. Following this, I show how *GMB* stages the debate about water and its meanings. Prominently, *GMB* explores the neoliberal capitalist conception of water as a profitable resource that is "out there" and should be used for profit. However, the novel also brings in alternative imaginaries of water. First, *GMB* presents the 'water is life' discourse that emphasises an understanding of water as a human right. Second, and more importantly for my thesis, *GMB* includes a posthuman figuration of water as a relational substance that contains the possibility for transformation and empathetic connection.

In the next two chapters, I lay out the theoretical basis for my analysis. Chapter two is about neoliberal capitalism and marketisation, and it is divided into two subsections, both of which cover a specific characteristic of neoliberal capitalism. The first subsection is centred around capitalist individualism, and the second subsection around the commodification of nature, specifically the commodification of water by the bottled water industry.

My second theoretical chapter, chapter three, concerns responses to neoliberal capitalism, and it is also divided into two subsections. The first subsection covers the basis for understanding fiction as a mode of political activism. There, I consider *GMB*'s context as a contemporary social novel, and Ali Smith as an author who uses socially conscious modernist techniques in her writing and who can be counted as taking part in the relational turn in literature. In the second subsection, I focus on explaining Astrida Neimanis's posthuman feminist figuration 'bodies of water.'

Chapter four contains my analysis of *GMB*, based on the preceding theoretical chapters. The chapter is divided into four subsections. In the first subsection, I explore the mode of neoliberal capitalist individualism as exemplified in the novel by the multinational company Pure. In the second subsection, I cover the marketing strategies of Pure, which promote a neoliberal understanding of water as a profitable resource. Moreover, I analyse how the novel stages a debate of the cultural meanings attached to water. In the third subsection, I move on to the thematics of relationality and interconnection in the novel, with a particular focus on the narrative strategies of the novel. In the fourth subsection, I interrogate the idea of "going beyond one's self" that can be found in *GMB*, which I consider in the light of the posthuman feminist figuration 'bodies of water.'

The scope of my thesis, then, is on analysing the critical response to neoliberal capitalism found in *GMB*. I focus particularly on (bottled) water, the debate surrounding water, the use of water, and the cultural meanings attached to water. The novel has already been studied with regard to its intertextual references, queerness, and connections to Antiquity and the Ovidian myth of Iphis and Ianthe. However, I have found that, besides explorations of water's connections to fluidity and queerness in the novel, there has not been enough attention paid to the novel's specific preoccupation with water, and especially water's material, economic, and political dimensions and how these dimensions intersect with the production of cultural meanings and imaginaries.

My objective in this thesis, then, is to bring to the centre of an analysis of *GMB* the novel's key focus on water and the political dimensions of the meaning-making surrounding water. I argue that *GMB*, through its focus on the debates surrounding water and its meanings, critiques neoliberal capitalism ideology and practices. Furthermore, through a posthuman interpretation of *GMB*'s articulation of the ethics of "going beyond one's self," I investigate a mode of posthuman watery relationality found in *GMB*. I base my interpretation on and conduct my analysis of the ethics of watery relationality in *GMB* in the light of Astrida Neimanis's posthuman feminist figuration 'bodies of water.'

## **2 The Problems of Neoliberal Capitalism: Marketisation, Individualism, and Commodification**

The term *neoliberalism* refers to the belief in the existence and operation of a market in such a way that the operation of a market is taken as an ethic which guides all human action (Treanor 2005). Neoliberalism was first formulated as a philosophy in the 1930s and 1940s as a reinvention of liberalism (Davies 2012, 769). In neoliberalist thought, the key to advancing humanity is seen to be the liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills (Harvey 2007, 2). This liberation is achieved through institutional means with an emphasis on free markets, free trade, and strong private property rights (*ibid.*). The role of the state is understood to be limited in the sense of free markets, which the state should not touch. However, in reality, the state has a strong role in guaranteeing an institutional framework for neoliberal practices, for example the maintenance of market operationality and the protection of private property through defence and legal structures (*ibid.*). From the 1970s onwards, neoliberalism has emphasised efficiency and incentives over economic freedoms (Davies 2012, 769). Moreover, from the 1970s onwards, championed by persons such as the US President Ronald Reagan and the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, neoliberalism has since gained a hegemonic status as a combination of political-economic practices and ideology (Harvey 2007, 2).

In fact, this hegemony of neoliberalism is such that neoliberalism has become an unquestionable and unacknowledged part of many people's common-sense understanding, worldview, and way of life (Harvey 2007, 3). Neoliberal hegemony – or, one could argue, the hegemony of any other set of ideology and practices – is created through a “circular strategy of the self-fulfilling prophecy” (Hall and O’Shea 2013, 8). That is, popular opinion is invoked to support neoliberal ideology and practices, while advocates of neoliberalism, in fact, shape and influence popular opinion so that they can use it for their own ends (*ibid.*). This is to say that tactics such as claiming to speak with the voice of the people, or appealing to common-sense and the ‘wisdom of the past,’ are used to frame neoliberal ideology and practices as something with which the popular opinion already is in agreement (*ibid.*). However, these tactics are utilised precisely with the aim “to produce agreement *as an effect*” (*ibid.*, original emphasis).

As neoliberalism has taken on the appearance of common-sense, the same can be said of *capitalism*. The hegemony of capitalism has made it so that “all social and political possibility is seemingly bound up in the economic status quo” and capitalism appears as the only possible political and economic system (Shonkwiler and La Berge 2014, 2). Indeed,



neoliberalism is “the contemporary mode of existence of capitalism” (Ayers and Saad-Filho 2015, 603). In this thesis, I use the term *neoliberal capitalism* to highlight both the neoliberal and the capitalist aspects of a society, while primarily emphasising their fundamental link to each other.

Characteristics of contemporary neoliberal capitalism include individualism, competition, marketisation, commodification, anti-labour and social welfare strategies, deregularisation, and privatisation. Out of these characteristics, important to my thesis specifically are *marketisation*, *individualism*, and *commodification*. Therefore, in this chapter, I explore these three characteristics in more depth in the following two subsections, with particular attention to the commodification of water.

## **2.1 Marketisation and Entrepreneurial Individualism**

In neoliberalism, market exchange is valued as almost an ethical belief since it is seen to possess the capacity to guide all human action (Treanor 2005). The strength of this belief is even so substantial that all human action must be brought into the domain of the market (Harvey 2007, 3). What follows is that “if markets do not exist [...] then they must be created” (Harvey 2007, 2). Marketisation, then, refers to the constant expansion of the market at its margins. In the words of Paul Treanor (2005), “there is only market: market society, market culture, market values, market persons marketing themselves to other market persons.” Thus, neoliberalist thought promotes an understanding of the world through the logic of market in such a way that anything that can be imagined to be sold for profit should be sold for profit. As such, market appears to – and neoliberal capitalist forces work for it to – expand everywhere.

The reason for the ever-expanding markets lies, according to Ernest Mandel ([1975] 1980), in over-capitalisation. Over-capitalisation refers to how innovations in production and management technologies lead to immense productivity gains, which result in excess capital (Brei and Böhm 2011, 238). This excess capital must then be reinvested for new profits and capital to be gained, so subsequently, new markets that offer new products are created (ibid.). Of course, “an expansion of production requires an equivalent expansion of demand,” that is, products always need their consumers, so marketing must step in to create a demand for existing or new products (ibid.).

To make products enticing and attractive, marketing attaches symbolic meanings to products. As such, marketing has a political function because it has the capacity to dominate

and legitimate the social order and to construct meanings (Brei and Böhm 2011, 239). For this reason, it is important to problematise the processes of meaning-making in marketing and the roles of those actors who are part of the marketing process.

The role of private companies is central to marketisation, as they innovate and market existing and new products to consumers. Furthermore, because neoliberalism favours limited government, state-led public services – for example, the delivery of drinking water – are reduced. The gap in the provision of core public services caused by the withdrawal of the state is then filled by services run by private companies and non-governmental organisations (Brei and Böhm 2011, 237). Since this development is accompanied by the reduction of state-regulation of markets (Brei and Böhm 2011, 246), and private companies are less transparent because they are not elected by, and thus not responsible to, the public, this shift poses a worrisome predicament.

Another worrisome symptom of neoliberal capitalism is the idea(l) of individualism, which is connected to entrepreneurialism. Since the market is the central concept in neoliberalist thought, the profession of the entrepreneur is of key importance to neoliberalism. The central function of enterprise is to respond to market forces: in theory, an entrepreneur adjusts their activities to the demands of the market (Treanor 2005). In neoliberalist thought, this “theoretical flexibility should become standard practice” (ibid.), not necessarily limited to just entrepreneurs. Echoes of this thinking can be seen in phenomena like the promotion of continuous learning, and the consequences of flexibility in the erosion of job security and the spread of precarity.

Entrepreneurialism can be understood to be a consequence of the way that the market principle is being extended into the non-economic area of life (ibid.). Shaping one’s life in order to maximise one’s advantage on the labour market, becomes “a moral duty of human beings” (ibid.). This moral duty redefines individual human beings “as quantum of human capital rather than subjects of interior development or political representation” (Deckard and Shapiro 2019, 2). In neoliberal thought, then, it becomes more important to transform oneself into a work-ready cypher rather than to cultivate one’s personhood and social being.

There is, indeed, a certain hostility towards society and the social in neoliberalist thought. In effect, Thatcher and Reagan put to work “a programme of far-reaching economic, social and political reforms which can be effectively understood as a reimagination of the role of sociality in relation to capitalist and democratic structures” (Ely 2019, 8). Stuart Hall and Alan O’Shea (2013, 19) conceive this “dismantling of any collective social responsibility,”

represented by, for example, anti-labour and social welfare strategies, as the “success” of the Thatcherite neoliberal project. Moreover, it can be argued that this dismantling, “far from retreating after her [Thatcher’s] premiership, has arguably continued and even intensified in subsequent governments” (Ely 2019, 10). Indeed, Peter Ely (2019, 212) argues that there is a contemporary crisis in the “representation and political being” of community, and this crisis is connected both to neoliberalist practices and to capitalism in general, because the negation of community is “a core function of its [capitalism’s] operation.”

Neoliberal capitalism, then, in its promotion of individuality, erodes feelings of community and solidarity, leading to an inefficiency and lack of power within the civil society. Neoliberalist ideology and practices form a “large-scale retreat of society and community as political modalities” and decrease the chances for individuals “to form collective, communal, and cooperative modalities which can exert any form of significant political power” (Ely 2019, 10).

In this thesis, I utilise Colin Hutchinson’s (2008) term *individuation paradox* in order to highlight the problems of neoliberal capitalist individuality as explained above. Individuation paradox, to Hutchinson (2008, 11) signifies the way in which “capitalism, while claiming that individualistic economic and social activity is the basis of a healthy and prosperous society, seems to many to represent only the erosion of individual sovereignty and selfhood.” As argued in this subsection, neoliberal capitalism, in emphasising the freedom of entrepreneurial individuals to participate in market exchange, simultaneously undermines their capability to have an effect on how their society works and how to live their life. In chapter four, I argue that this individuation paradox can be seen in work in Ali Smith’s *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015).

## **2.2 The Commodification of Natural Resources: Marketing Bottled Water**

As stated, marketisation is characteristic of neoliberal capitalism. This includes the expansion of markets to cover natural resources, like water. In this subsection, I consider how water is commodified by neoliberal capitalist forces in the bottled water industry. This commodification of water has changed the meaning of water and created a neoliberal capitalist understanding of water as a profitable, exploitable resource.

Water is both a banal, everyday substance as well as an essential necessity for life. No biological being can survive without water, and thus it is fundamental for societies to provide their inhabitants with access to water. Water is also a material substance to which we attach

cultural meanings, for example, in marketing. Because of the essentiality and vitality of water, “figurative and symbolic uses of water can be assumed to carry a great deal of political significance” (MacLeod 2013, 57). Water as a figuration and a symbol can be employed both to confirm and to challenge current operations of power (MacLeod 2013, 40). It is this potency that has led me, in this thesis, to interrogate different figurations of water.

In neoliberal capitalist discourse, water is a commodity that can be used for profit. According to Vandana Shiva (2002, 27), globalisation has eroded collective ownership of water and, instead, the exploitative privatisation of water has become more common. In a globalised economy, water has become a private good that can be extracted and traded freely (Shiva 2002, 32). For Silvia Federici (2019, 21), globalisation generates “a need for an unlimited exploitation of [...] the natural environment,” including bodies of water. Water becomes commodified when its value is seen to rest solely on its market value. In a neoliberal capitalist society, water is seen as a lucrative business investment in a world that is battling water scarcity, but this water scarcity is partly caused by capitalist development and market approaches, of which the water industry is a part. For example, the water industry causes problems such as plastic waste and chemicals contaminating the environment, including bodies of water, and big dams and water reservoirs have destructive consequences on people’s living areas, for example flooding. Because neoliberal capitalism emphasises “anthropocentric logics of efficiency, profit, and progress,” water acquires the passive role of a resource in neoliberal thought, “subjected to containment, commodification, and instrumentalization” (Chen, MacLeod and Neimanis 2013, 3).

The role of the private company in the meaning-making surrounding water is central. The global bottled water market is “increasingly dominated by a handful of multinational companies” (Brei and Böhm 2011, 234). Indeed, the private company is

one of the main institutions through which most people encounter the concrete effects and modalities of neoliberalism – whether it be through work, consumption or as they deal with the more indirect but no less crucial aspects of corporate production such as pollution, political influence or advertising. (Cahill and Koning 2017, 57)

Because of “the brutal withdrawal of the state from all social obligations (except surveillance and policing)” (Harvey 2007, 203), through privatisation and deregularisation for example, the scope of activity of private companies has expanded (Cahill and Konings 2017, 58).

Privatisation includes the transfer of activities previously under the purview of the public sector to the control of private, for-profit companies (Cahill and Konings 2017, 58). An

example of this can be seen in the delivery of water: for example, private companies can take over the delivery of tap water, and the erosion of the public tap water networks bolsters the bottled water industry. There is a danger that, if comprehensive, safe tap water systems are left to decay, bottled water will not be a choice anymore, since the bottled water industry seeks to capitalise from that decay (Gleick 2010, 171). This is already reality in places where there is no safe tap water (ibid.). The bottled water industry, then, aspires to profit “from socially produced pollution and scarcity” (Chen, MacLeod and Neimanis 2013, 4).

One way, that the bottled water industry shifts the meaning of water, and seeks to undermine the public sector, is through opposing bottled water to tap water. During the early 1990s, bottled water markets grew rapidly as water was transformed into a vital commodity (Hawkins 2009, 185). Notably, bottled water is marketed as being more convenient, healthier and safer than tap water, and these claims of quality “implicitly problematize and devalue the tap” (Hawkins 2009, 187). However, bottled water is often not markedly different from regular tap water, just “filtered or ‘purified’” (Hawkins 2009, 185). In fact,

[b]ottled water is essentially a banal product. It is something that has no special physical or chemical attributes if compared with the good-quality tap water that is available in most of the developed world for often hundreds of times less than the price of water sold in bottles. To our knowledge, no serious research to date has proven that one will have any kind of additional physical benefit by drinking water bought in bottles. (Brei and Böhm 2011, 246)

There is, then, no substantial backing to marketing-claims that bottled water is superior to tap water, but these claims still contribute to a change in the meanings surrounding water, as water is transformed into a commodity. A similar case to the commodification of water is the commodification of infant formula in developing countries. Infant formula is marketed as a better alternative to breastfeeding despite the problems of this claim (see Brady 2012). This example brings into even clearer focus the gendered structure of market economy.

Undeniably, then, the success of the bottled water markets “signals important shifts in the technical delivery and cultural framings of water” (Hawkins 2009, 187). The bottled water industry can be understood to be changing the values and meanings attached to water as the marketing of bottled water transforms how we understand and interact with water. Vinicius A. Brei and Steffen Böhm (2011, 246) explore how associations to ethical practices in the marketing of bottled water afford competitive advantage, and in that vein conclude that “[t]he ethical marketing campaigns we have studied are essentially aimed at transforming the symbolic value – that is, the cultural meaning – of water without modifying its material nature.”

Marketing of water can thus effect “a symbolic transmutation of the cultural meaning of water,” transforming it “from a banal, life essential good into a consumer product that connects to a range of different cultural images of aid, development, environmentalism, etc” (Brei and Böhm 2011, 246).

However, there is also resistance to this change to the meaning of water. The first ever reported decline in the sales of bottled water was in 2008 (Gleick 2010, 145), which might indicate a change in public perceptions (Gleick 2010, 161), even if the sales have since risen again. Indeed, the growth of the bottled water market has been met with vocal opposition to bottled water, which can take the form of various different movements. However, without exploring these different movements at more length here, in the end,

[a]t the heart of these fights is a fundamental difference in philosophy between those who see a free-flowing river or a pristine groundwater aquifer as a wasted resource begging to be exploited, and those who value resources left in place to provide for natural systems and aesthetic benefits or to satisfy local community needs. (Gleick 2010, 155)

In actuality, then, the debate about bottled water is notably also a debate about the value and meaning attached to water.

If we situate this debate about water in its context of neoliberal capitalism, which is hostile to the concept of society and the social, as explored in the previous subsection, it becomes important to consider the social aspects of the debate. One way, then, to look at the question of the marketisation and commodification of water, is to utilise the concept of the commons. Commons are land or resources for public use, like bodies of water. In *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, Peter Linebaugh (2008) sketches the history of the rights to the commons in Great Britain through a look at the history of the Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest. He articulates the threat to the commons in the UK as the enclosure of the commons and the expropriation of the commoners. The fight for water rights and the resistance to the neoliberal capitalist understanding of water can, through this point of view, be considered a matter of a defence of the commons.

The concept of the commons is of interest to my thesis mainly because of how Linebaugh (2008) has developed the discourse around the commons further and popularised the term *commoning*, meaning the activity of living in connection to and interacting with the commons. Making a verb out of the noun ‘commons’ emphasises the role of the subject of the verb and the nature of the action of commoning as dynamic interaction, in contrast with the noun which suggests a static natural resource that is available for exploitation. Cristy Clark

(2019) develops the idea of commoning further by envisioning activism as a form of commoning.

In the next chapter, then, I move on to political activism. My specific aim is to put Ali Smith's novel *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015) in its context as a contemporary social novel engaged in the question of political activism. Moreover, I explore the possibility of alter-imaginaries to oppose and disrupt dominant narratives, like the figuration of neoliberal capitalist water.

### **3 Challenging Neoliberal Capitalism: Relational Existence as an Alter-Imaginary**

Because the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism is so thorough, it is essential to develop the capacity to imagine alternative ways of organising a society and living life. There has been resistance to, and criticism of, neoliberal capitalist thought and practices in the currents of multiple different ideologies, for example (neo)communitarianism, collectivism, feminism, Marxism, socialism, etcetera, and in the form of all kinds of political activism, like social movements. An important approach to constructing alternative visions of life is writing, whether that be writing fiction or non-fiction.

In this chapter, I consider some ways that words and writing can participate in the creation of alter-imaginaries, that is, alternative imaginings of existence. First, I introduce the possibility of fiction to constitute a form of political activism in the shape of a contemporary social novel, like Ali Smith's *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015). Then, I introduce Astrida Neimanis's posthuman feminist figuration 'bodies of water' as one option for an alternative understanding of water, in opposition to the neoliberal capitalist conception of water as a profitable resource and commodity.

#### **3.1 Ali Smith's *Girl Meets Boy*, Contemporary Modernism, and the 'Relational Turn'**

Ali Smith's *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015) is a 21<sup>st</sup> century British social novel that, following the Modernist tradition, shows a predilection towards social consciousness and change. There is a long history of proletarian, social realist writing from which Smith's novel emerges. Smith appears to particularly follow "a style of committed literary writing" typical of the Modernist period that "saw literary production as itself a political actor" (Ely 2019, 176). In this vein, *GMB* is a novel which critiques contemporary neoliberal capitalist thinking and envisions an alternative to it.

It is my intention, then, in this thesis, to consider the way in which Smith's novel imagines an alternative to neoliberal capitalism. Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Clare La Berge (2014, 6, 2) emphasise "the necessity of using fantasy to imagine other alternatives" to "the market-dominant present that forms the limits of our imaginaries." Similarly, for Sharae



Deckard and Stephen Shapiro (2019, 3), because of its “constitutive role in generating and stabilizing the socioeconomic relations on which neoliberal hegemony depends,” culture – including its textual forms – contains the possibility for “periodic outbursts of revolutionary resistance that seek to refashion the world.” Deckard and Shapiro (2019, 26) call these outbursts “the culture of discontent that seeks to imagine an exit from the neoliberal era.” In this thesis, I follow this line of thinking, of interrogating alternative figurations opposed to the neoliberal capitalist present.

Through my analysis of *GMB*, then, my aim is to engage in “analysis of the culture of neoliberal discontent” (Deckard and Shapiro 2019, 15). This aim is also partly inspired by how Smith herself has emphasised, in an interview, the constructed nature of the world and the way fiction “can ask questions of the construct and [...] suggest ways to change the construct [because] things aren’t fixed” (Laing 2016). This, then, makes the analysis of *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015) particularly fruitful from the point of view of how fiction can construct alternative imaginaries and figurations to current states of existence.

Indeed, in *GMB*, a prominent theme is the political importance of words and their material consequences. This theme comes up in the novel, for example, when Anthea and Imogen’s grandfather tells them about his past as a political activist:

So did I never tell you about the time they put me in jail for a week when I was a girl? our grandfather says.

For what? I [Anthea] say. [...]

For writing words, our grandfather says. [...] NO VOTES NO GOLF [...]. They put us in jail because we wrote it into the golf green with acid, me and my friend. (*GMB*, 6)

Here, we see how the idea of words and writing being used for political purposes is introduced early on in *GMB*. The theme continues on in the novel as, later, Anthea and her lover Robin engage in feminist, anti-capitalist graffiti activism. The novel’s characters are adamant in their belief that they can change the world by the use of their voice and words. When Anthea is asked whether she thinks that she’ll “make a single bit of difference to all the unfair things and all the suffering and all the injustice and all the hardship with a few words,” she answers emphatically in the affirmative (*GMB*, 142).

As seen, *GMB* as a novel, and Smith as an author, are invested in the power of words and imagination. To be specific, Smith is connected to a political and ethical tradition of Modernist writing. In fact, Mary Horgan (2016, 167) has coined the term *numismatic modernism* to denote Smith’s specific brand of contemporary modernism, which Horgan sees

as “an ethical, committed modernism.” Horgan’s term is based on the way that Smith often utilises money as a motif in her novels, like *Hotel World* (2001), which Horgan analyses to make her case. According to Horgan (2016, 156), numismatic modernism is “a model of modernism that constructs a creative, critical response to capitalist modernity by closely engaging with its materials and contexts, carving out an alternative to the marketplace from within it.” Horgan (2016, 168) goes on to explain that numismatic modernism is a mode “that uses formal experimentation, aesthetic play, and other modernist strategies to construct a critical, interventional response to capitalist modernity in its current incarnation.” While, in *GMB*, money itself is not materially present, as it is in *Hotel World*, I argue that, in *GMB*, water is similarly used as ‘numismatic’ material in a neoliberal capitalist context in order to formulate a critical response to neoliberal capitalism. I explore this at more length in chapter four.

Through its critique of neoliberal capitalism, *GMB* brings in alternative understandings of society and relations. This is connected to a shift in values which Hutchinson (2008, 12) calls the “communitarian turn.” According to Hutchinson (2008, 92–93), notions such as community, family, public life and its institutions, history, and tradition have been re-examined by the left and have gained new prominence as a consequence: they have been re-evaluated as sources of identity, support and protection, and even as “a potential source of resistance” against contemporary neoliberal and new-right values.

The communitarian turn might alternatively be referred to as the *relational turn*, as it is termed by Ely (2019, 24) who recognises it as

a much wider trend [...] where novelists have been interested in deploying literary and formal experimentations in order to explore the possibility of thinking and representing community and subjectivity in new ways, against the increasing individualisation and monadic character of contemporary life.

Indeed, the alternative to neoliberal capitalist individualism and to the neoliberal capitalist expansion of markets envisioned in *GMB* is connected to community, interconnection, and relationality. I explore these connections in chapter four of this thesis in more depth. As such connections are apparent, *GMB* is one example of the literature taking part in the relational turn. Ely (2019) explicitly identifies Ali Smith as belonging to this trend that has developed from 1980s onwards. For me, the idea of *relationality* is key to my analysis of *GMB* and the alter-imaginary which the novel holds up to neoliberal capitalism.

In chapter four, I conduct my analysis proper of *GMB* by further exploring the political vision related to relationality and interconnection in the novel, with particular attention paid to

water. Before that, in the next subsection, I turn to the figuration ‘bodies of water,’ which will heavily inform the analysis of *GMB* in chapter four.

### 3.2 ‘Bodies of Water’: Posthuman Relationality

In her book *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (2016), Astrida Neimanis, building on the works of Luce Irigaray, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Gilles Deleuze, introduces a new mode of posthuman feminist phenomenology. In this book, Neimanis (2016) envisions embodiment as fundamentally part of the natural world and watery embodiment as a possibility for reimagining ethics. Of particular interest, and as the central concept in the book, is the figuration ‘*bodies of water*’, which Neimanis has already used in previous articles such as an article with Mielle Chandler (Chandler and Neimanis 2013). ‘Bodies of water’ as a concept is significant to my thesis, because it parallels some of the ideas of posthuman embodiment found in Ali Smith’s *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015) and, thus, helps bring these posthuman aspects of the novel into focus in my analysis.

Neimanis (2016, 41) proposes the figuration ‘bodies of water’ to encompass the idea of watery milieus and the cycle of water, where different bodies of water constantly become anew “as part of an always emergent planetary hydrocommons,” so that water cycles from body, to body, to body. The idea is that the water is the same but also different in each new instantiation. Neimanis (2016, 2) conceives of bodies and embodiment as watery in a specifically posthuman way: “For us humans, the flow and flush of waters sustain our own bodies, but also connect them to other bodies, to other worlds beyond our human selves.” The “hydrocommons” that she envisions is “more-than-human” (ibid.).

‘Bodies of water’ as a figuration draws on the queer qualities of water. As Neimanis (2016, 66, 67) notes, “water is evidently both finite *and* inexhaustible; both the same and always becoming different, too” and “water is both exquisitely specific, yet also entirely mundane, and ubiquitous, and common.” Water is transformative, it is a shape-shifter – capable of being solid, liquid, or gas – and it is marvellously fluid, capable of residing in bodies of all kinds (Neimanis 2016, 80). Water is characterised by its queer fluidity, its ability to be many things at once, especially its ability to simultaneously be the same and yet different. This fluidity is, then, precisely what makes water a relational, connecting substance, because “water can only serve as a connector *because* it expresses or facilitates difference” (Neimanis 2016, 67).

According to Neimanis (2016), these aforementioned queer qualities of water can form a basis for an ethics that we can implement. This is precisely what I am most interested in for the purposes of this thesis. For Neimanis (2016, 45) proposes that, “if to be human means also always to leak beyond the limits of that humanity, then our embodiment affords the possibility of more-than-human contact with the world.” Existence as ‘bodies of water’ implies a shared way of “being and becoming, in relation to others” that is common to all bodies of water, human or otherwise (Neimanis 2016, 111), that is, a “shared aqueous kinship between all bodies of water” (Neimanis 2016, 142). Because of this “embodiment-in-common,” we can “understand ourselves as bodies of water as meaningfully (ethically, politically) implicated in other bodies of water into and out of whom we flow (ibid.). This is to say that, through a relational understanding of water, we can articulate a relational, ethical politics of existence that contests the hegemony of neoliberal capitalist conceptions of existence as entrepreneurial, individual, disconnected, and marketable.

The figuration of ‘bodies of water,’ then, contains a possibility for social and political transformation. For Neimanis (2016, 156), “[p]henomenologically crafted alter-imaginaries [...] can be a part of making other worlds possible.” ‘Bodies of water’ is an alter-figuration to “the dominant neoliberal paradigm of normative embodiment – discrete, zipped-up, free” (Neimanis 2016, 16). Thus, Neimanis’s figuration is in direct opposition to the neoliberal capitalist understanding of the human being as an entrepreneurial individual.

Furthermore, ‘bodies of water’ is constructed against the concept of “modern water,” which “sees water as something ‘out there’” (Neimanis 2016, 21). Indeed, the purpose of the figuration is “to intervene in, and disturb, this hegemonic worldview” (ibid.). By analysing the ways that we imagine water, and by creating alternatives to dominant imaginaries, we can develop “better ways of living with water *now*” (ibid., original emphasis). ‘Bodies of water’ contests the concept of global/modern/Anthropocene/neoliberal capitalist water, and in this opposition, this alter-imaginary engages in a debate and contest for a different meaning for water that can be capable of cultivating “a more capacious aqueous imaginary for being responsive to other human and non-human bodies with whom we share a planetary existence” (Neimanis 2016, 183).

In its oppositional capacity, the figuration ‘bodies of water’ can also “resonate with other alternative imaginaries, such as ‘water is life’, despite the risks of co-optation that this involves” (ibid.). The figuration ‘bodies of water’ is then a very productive concept for exploring relationality, interconnection, and water in Ali Smith’s *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015).

Indeed, in the next chapter, I argue that *GMB* presents one such alter-imaginary to the neoliberal capitalist concept of modern water, and that this alter-imaginary present in *GMB* is similar to, and can effectively be brought forth in the context of, Neimanis's (2016) figuration 'bodies of water.' First, however, my analysis of the novel also explores the ways in which the dominant narrative of neoliberal capitalism appears in the novel.

## 4 “THIS MUST CHANGE”: Disrupting the Dominant Narrative of Neoliberal Capitalism in Ali Smith’s *Girl Meets Boy*

The neoliberal capitalist society portrayed in Ali Smith’s novel *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015) is characterised by individualism, disconnection, and attempts by a multinational company to create a monopoly and to profit from all aspects of people’s lives. In particular, neoliberal capitalism is concentrated in *GMB* in the form of the multinational company Pure.

In *GMB*, the multinational company Pure poses a threat through its marketisation practices: the company plans to expand its markets to water in multiple countries. This is harmful because the only thing that is important to Pure is profit. The reality of water scarcity is acknowledged by the company, but instead of this posing a preventing obstacle, it is instead the central reason for the company’s plan to enter the bottled water market. Pure categorises water as a human need that can be profited from and does not care about the impact of the company’s practices. Through its practices, the company exhibits a penchant for neoliberal capitalist individualism, a disregard for social responsibility, and a demand for conformity.

I argue that, in *GMB*, the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism, exemplified by Pure, is presented as the “dominant narrative” (*GMB*, 128–29). This narrative is then contested by alter-imaginaries, like the “water is life” discourse, but most importantly by the posthuman alter-figuration of watery relationality.

In the following four subsections, I analyse four different aspects of *GMB*. In the first subsection of this chapter, I explore how neoliberal capitalist individualism is present in the neoliberal capitalist society portrayed in *GMB*. Then, in the second subsection, I analyse the multinational company Pure from the point of view of how Pure creates, through the company’s marketing tactics, a dominant neoliberal capitalist narrative, which figures water as a profitable resource and commodity.

The third subsection is where I shift my focus to relationality and interconnection. In that section, I explore *GMB* as an example of the “culture of neoliberal discontent” (Deckard and Shapiro 2019, 15) through its function of interrupting the idea of a singular dominant narrative through the use of narrative modes of relationality and interconnection. Finally, in the fourth subsection, I bring in the posthuman feminist figuration ‘bodies of water’ and explore how it can be used to bring into focus a similar alter-imaginary of water that is presented in *GMB*.

## 4.1 The Constrains of Neoliberal Capitalist Individualism: Solving the Individuation Paradox in *Girl Meets Boy*

In this subsection, I explore how neoliberal capitalist individualism in *GMB* is exemplified by the multinational company Pure. Moreover, I analyse the effects of neoliberal capitalist individualism on the characters of Anthea and Imogen. I argue that the company Pure requires its employees to conform to the company spirit and exhibit a form of entrepreneurial individualism by being above all responsive to the company's needs even when this requirement is in conflict with their own inner development and political opinions. However, in the end, neoliberal capitalist individualism constitutes a very narrow, limited sense of individuality that has very little to do with freedom of being. There are certain parameters of "normalcy" that the characters feel that they are supposed to meet but that they are incapable or unwilling to do.

Neoliberal capitalist individualism appears as a central part of the dominant narrative of neoliberal capitalism in the novel: the primary goal in life is to succeed by advancing in one's career and making money. The keywords are "I" and "me": how am *I* going to succeed, how can *I* make more money, how can *I* get a promotion, how will my actions affect *me*? The impact of one's actions is not encouraged to be analysed further than that. In *GMB*, we can actually see the individuation paradox at work. That is, while neoliberal capitalist thought would want the characters of the novel to believe that they are free, sovereign individuals with the possibility and capability to pursue whatever they want, they are in many ways trapped by the dominant logic of neoliberal capitalism and the narrative of neoliberal capitalist individualism with its implicit obligation to conform to "normalcy."

While Anthea and Imogen are employed as Creatives – designers making products lucrative – in Pure's marketing team for bottled water, there is a distinct lack of creativity and imagination at play. In particular, the atmosphere at Pure is characterised by competition that causes friction among the employees. For example, when one of the employees, Paul, is complimented on his ideas by the managing director Keith, "[t]he whole room turned and bristled with jealousy at Paul" (*GMB*, 39). This shows the competitive side of neoliberal capitalist individualism, which creates hostility among communities.

All of this is a prominent reason for why Anthea does not enjoy her job at Pure. She feels stifled by the competitive and hostile work environment and the rigid demands on her time. At one point, Anthea is questioned by a co-worker: "I'm just wondering what could have

caused you not to be able to meet the same standards everybody else manages to meet. Any idea, Anthea?" (GMB, 33). This shows how Anthea is made to feel like an outsider, because she is someone who cannot make herself fit in to the dominant logic of the workplace. Because she is not able to perform to the standards of Pure, she is pushed out.

The neoliberal capitalist society in *GMB* is, indeed, very hostile to alternative imaginaries and ways of being, and to anyone who cannot fit in. The company is primarily characterised by uniformity and conformity. This goes as far as uniform haircuts adopted by the male employees, causing Anthea to nickname them "shaveys." This uniformity is further exemplified by how two of the employees – aptly named "Dom" (Dominic) and "Norm" (Norman) – are even referred to with just the amalgamation of their shortened names, "Dominorm." Moreover, Pure excludes anyone who does not conform to the company's ideology and practices. This exclusion happens to both Anthea and Imogen, who feel that their only option is to quit.

Anthea feels particularly uneasy over the dishonest and harmful marketing schemes of the company. Her feelings prompt her to speak up against the company practices in a Creative marketing meeting, where they are brainstorming ideas for the brand name for Pure's bottled water:

You could call it Affluent, I [Anthea] said. That pretty much sums it up. [...] You could call it Main Stream. On the lid it could say You're Always Safer Sticking With The Main Stream.

The whole room was silent, and not in a good way.

You could call it Scottish Tap, I said into the hush. That'd be good and honest. Whatever good means. (GMB, 40)

Here, Anthea is clearly criticising Pure's lack of transparency and the company's unethical marketing ploys to sell something that Anthea feels ought not to be sold for profit. Moreover, Anthea clearly feels discomfort towards ideas of conforming to the norm, as she exhibits antagonism towards the idea of "Sticking With The Main Stream."

Furthermore, as a queer woman, Anthea's existence is in direct clash with the values of some of the other employees, who express sexist and homophobic rhetoric:

Like, what gets me, there's nothing to do the job. Nothing to do the jiggery-pokery with. And that's why Queen Victoria didn't make ragmunch illegal. [...] It was on Channel Four. Apparently she said there was no such thing, like, it didn't exist. [...] [W]omen. It's, like, how can they? I just don't get it. It's a joke, Dominic says. (GMB, 70)



As we can see in this excerpt, the dominant narrative does not have room for a person like Anthea, who only exists in it as a joke, as lacking something, or as being under threat of being erased out of the narrative entirely. This leads her sister to fear that because Anthea is queer she will end up “a dissatisfied older predatory totally dried up abnormal woman like Judi Dench in that film *Notes on a Scandal*” (GMB, 56) or dead because “[g]ay people are always dying all the time” like the lovers of “that gay woman doctor character on ER” (GMB, 58). Because of the poor representation of queerness in mainstream media and discourse – that is, because of their near total exclusion from the “dominant narrative” – Anthea finds it problematic to fit herself in the neoliberal capitalist model of existence offered to her by Pure. There is simply no room for Anthea there.

This is why Anthea turns away from the company and allies herself instead with Robin in extragovernmental political activism in the form of feminist graffiti. The purpose of their graffiti activism is to promote social and political change by pointing out flaws in the neoliberal capitalist society. The graffiti messages are always followed by the tag “THIS MUST CHANGE.” With their graffiti, Robin and Anthea also want to inspire political and social awareness in the people reading the messages. Robin and Anthea’s graffiti, then, offers an alternative narrative to the dominant narrative of neoliberal capitalist discourse.

Similar to Anthea, her sister Imogen changes during the course of the novel as she finds the demands of the dominant narrative too rigid for her also. To Imogen, the competition that is part of neoliberal capitalist individualism becomes too much. Throughout the novel, Imogen is in constant competition as she aspires to embody entrepreneurialism and neoliberal individualism. Not only does she exist in a competitive relationship with others, like her sister, over whose performance at Pure Imogen initially worries because it might affect her own status at Pure, too, but above all, Imogen is in competition with herself to be the most successful and the most “normal” human being that she can be.

“Normalcy” for Imogen means that she has to prove herself by being a successful, beautiful woman. She engages in “capital accumulation of affects and ontologies of the entrepreneurial self” (Deckard and Shapiro 2019, 2). To her, this means being thin, pleasant, and always ready to provide for the company, so that she can be “Pure material” (GMB, 126). Imogen’s striving towards “normalcy” is present in her individualistic and materialistic sense of self (Calvo Pascual 2018, 16):

I am putting on my Stella McCartney Adidas tracksuit bottoms. I am lacing up my Nike runners. I am zipping up my Stella McCartney Adidas tracksuit top. I am going out the front door like I am a (normal) person just going out of a (normal) front door on a (normal) early summer day in the month of May and I am going for a run which is the kind of (normal) thing (normal) people do all the time. (GMB, 49)

Imogen's intrusive thoughts appear in the narration inside brackets, and through that we can here see that she is particularly preoccupied with the appearance of normalcy. Moreover, Imogen is materialistically fixated on brand names and her own looks.

However, being "Pure material" requires Imogen to strip away her personhood and to be of maximum use to the company. This requirement is articulated by Keith, the managing director of Pure:

[R]ight now we need a woman's touch on the team, ah, ah. We need that more than anything, and at Pure we will reward more than anything your ability to look good, look right, say the right thing, on camera if necessary, under all pressures, and to take the flak like a man if anything goes pear-shaped. (GMB, 121)

Notable here is the gendered way that Keith phrases these demands to Imogen. Being a woman, the most important function of Imogen to Pure is her looks, her "ability to look good."

Indeed, the commodification of women's bodies has made slenderness and beauty into signs of female success (Calvo Pascual 2018, 15), which can be seen in Imogen's celebration of her thinness: "I am down to just over seven stone. I am doing well" (GMB, 52). Imogen equates thinness to well-being and success. However, Imogen suffers from anorexia, exemplified by her weight loss, compulsive exercising, and throwing up. Despite the fact that Imogen is supposedly realising her individuality through loyal work at Pure, she is actually not feeling that good at all.

In fact, in order to fit in at Pure, Imogen makes herself small, inconsequential, and subordinate, as when she is out in a pub with her co-workers:

I can't drink all that, I [Imogen] say. I'm only out for one or two, I've got to get back.

Yes you can, Norman says. He fills the glass up past the little line, right to the very top, so that it's almost spilling over onto the table, so that to drink anything out of it at all I'm going to have to lean over and put my mouth to it there on the table [...].

I drink four glasses filled to the top like this. It makes them roar with laughter when I bend right down to drink it. Eventually I do it so that that's what it will do, make them laugh. (GMB, 66)

To Imogen, success means being pleasing to others even when it does not make her feel good or even when it demeans her, as when she here opts to lean over to drink out of a pint of beer just to make others laugh.

In effect, because of these habits and because Imogen compromises on her values to work at Pure, Imogen loses her voice. She would even rather talk to an answering machine than have an actual dialogue with another person:

(She [Anthea] won't ever hear that message. That message'll just delete itself off Orange in a week's time.)

(But it was nice to be talking on my phone here, made me feel a bit safer, and though I was ostensibly just saying stuff for no reason it kind of felt good to.)

(Maybe it's easier to talk to someone who won't ever actually hear what you have to say.) (GMB, 113)

Imogen has things to say and she wants to say them, as the excerpt shows, but she feels unable to actually voice them in a manner that makes others hear them.

Significantly, this loss of Imogen's voice is complemented by Imogen's struggles with anorexia. Her loss of weight is directly connected to her inability to get herself heard, as when she is trying to give her input at a Pure Creatives meeting:

Water is about well-being, Midge said. About being well.

*Nobody heard her.*

It's all about well-being, an unfamiliar Creative said on the other side of the room.

I like that, Keith said. Very good point, Norm.

I [Anthea] saw Midge look down, disheartened, and in that moment I saw what it was that was different about my sister now. I saw it in the turn of her head and the movement of her too-thin wrist. How had I not seen it? She was far too thin. She was really thin. (GMB, 39; emphasis added)

Here, we can see that Imogen's voice is not heard, her values are compromised, and she is "far too thin." Essentially, Imogen is diminished in her pursuit of neoliberal capitalist "normalcy."

The most dangerous aspect of Imogen's diminishment due to her attempts to fit the dominant narrative of neoliberal capitalism is the way that she compromises on her values in order to work at Pure. This she does for the sake of money:

I get paid thirty-five thousand before tax.

I can't believe I'm earning that much money. Me!

I am clearly doing the right thing. There is good money in water. (GMB, 52)

The money in water is just simply too good, and so the neoliberal capitalist metric that equates money with success and good life validates Imogen's choice to continue working at Pure despite her doubts.

Especially characteristic of Imogen is her fixation on herself as an individual. This fixation is symptomatic of how neoliberal individualism is built on the negation of community. Imogen's fixation on herself can be exemplified by her periodic half-shocked, half-pleased exclamations of "Me!", as seen in the previous excerpt from the novel. Another instance of this exclamation happens as Imogen is travelling by train to London to the Pure headquarters to a meeting with Keith about a promotion. Imogen muses: "First class all the way. I was the only person in Carriage J when we set off. Me! A whole train carriage to myself! I am doing all right" (GMB, 109). Success is once again understood by Imogen in terms of individual affluence, and the exclamation of "Me!" emphasises Imogen's self-preoccupation.

In fact, Imogen does not see or does not *want* to see the structural inequalities around her, just because she feels that she personally is succeeding in life:

Thirty-five thousand, very good money for my age, and for me being a girl, our dad says, which is a bit sexist of him, because gender has nothing to do with me being a woman or not, the fact that I am the only woman on the Highland Pure Creative board of ten of us – it is because I am good at what I do. (GMB, 57)

On some level, Imogen seems to be aware that the fact that she is the only woman on her level at the company is not exactly a benign fact but a direct result of Pure's sexist practices. Yet, she is initially unwilling to truly bring this to her conscious understanding.

However, Imogen breaks through the constrictions of neoliberal capitalist individualism after an uncomfortable meeting with Keith. In the meeting, Keith sexually harasses Imogen by deliberately getting her alone in an office and showing her his clothed erection, before using the fact that she is the "only girl this high in management" (GMB, 124) to flatter Imogen so that she will accept a promotion to the Pure Dominant Narrative Department. This is finally enough for Imogen, and she refuses to comply to Pure's practices. Imogen voices her doubts and finally gets herself heard. However, Keith does not hesitate to conclude that this means that Imogen does not fit in at Pure. In voicing her misgivings about Pure, Imogen has become useless for the purposes of the company, and thus is "not really Pure material," which is a "[p]ity," because she "looked just right" (GMB, 126). Thus, Imogen is immediately cast as "not really Pure material" when she dares to contradict the company line, even though her pursuit of the right look has succeeded.

In the end, Imogen does not feel sad about failing to meet the Pure standards, however, because she has finally recovered her voice. Now, she “can say as loudly as I possibly can, everywhere that I can, that it shouldn’t be happening like this, until as many people hear as it takes to make it not happen” (GMB, 125). She hears “her own voice get louder and louder” (GMB, 125) until, on the return trip from her meeting with Keith back to Inverness, Imogen is “near-shouting about the ways of the world at a few strangers in a near-empty railway carriage” (GMB, 127). After Imogen has discarded the pursuit of neoliberal capitalist success in the form of a promotion at Pure, she is once again in control of her own voice.

Importantly, the finding of Imogen’s voice is coupled with her finding more meaningful connection to other people. Immediately after getting back to Inverness from her meeting with Keith, Imogen confesses her feelings to her co-worker Paul. She has not felt confident enough to properly talk to Paul before, but now, after quitting at Pure, she feels like “[w]ords are coming out of me like someone turned me on like a tap. It’s Paul. He – turns me on!” (GMB, 131). Significantly, Imogen conceives of the sudden influx of her words in watery terms: she is like a water tap that has now been turned on. I come back to the connections between water and relationality and interconnection later in this thesis. After quitting at Pure, Imogen also transfers her marketing skills to the good of Anthea and Robin’s feminist graffiti project, finding another way to connect to her sister in a more productive way than as co-workers at Pure.

This is, then, the solution to the individuation paradox in *GMB*: relationality and interconnection. For Hutchinson, (2008, 11) the individuation paradox finds resolution through the notion that “the individual self can only be defined satisfactorily in relation to others.” Imogen find her voice and herself again by acknowledging and thriving in her relationships with Paul and Anthea, and by acknowledging the impact of her actions on other people than just herself. True individuality is thus always dependent on one’s relation to others. Imogen relinquishes the stifling neoliberal capitalist individualism by quitting at Pure, and instead she adopts an individuality that is built on her relationships to the people around her and on care for the world around her. What is of importance to her is not success and money, anymore, but instead ethical existence with others.

## **4.2 Water Matters: The Different Meanings Attached to Water in *Girl Meets Boy***

In this subsection, my analysis is centred on the neoliberal capitalist imaginary of water promoted by Pure in *GMB*. This imaginary conceives of water as a commodity whose only value is the profit that can be made from it. However, there are also alternatives to the neoliberal capitalist imaginary of water, to which I turn to towards the ends of this subsection.

Pure is a multinational company that engages in marketisation. Pure is planning to expand its markets to bottled water and to new countries because of lucrative opportunities. Important for this is to find the right marketing narrative. The vision of the company is to provide Pure Product everywhere in order to have absolute control of people's everyday lives, so that it is "not just possible but natural for someone, from the point of rising in the morning to the point of going to sleep again at night, to spend his whole day, obviously, in Pure hands" (*GMB*, 117). In the Pure vision, Pure products would cover the range from tap water, food, and newspapers to Internet servers, medicine, and porn, covering any and all types of everyday needs and activities.

This marketisation of all aspects of human lives would maximise Pure's profits, but it also has its downsides. The goal of the company is to be able to present "Pure Product everywhere" so that "Pure is massive throughout the global economy" (*GMB*, 119). This monopolisation, however, diminishes the imagination and worldviews of the human beings whose lives Pure is planning to profit off of. Pure promotes a single dominant narrative, which is a narrative of singularity and control. The effects of this dominant narrative of neoliberal capitalism are already explored in the previous subsection from the point of view of neoliberal capitalist individualism. However, in what follows, I explore the effects of the dominant narrative as it pertains to a neoliberal capitalist imaginary of water.

In *GMB*, Pure has an integral part in shaping the neoliberal capitalist dominant narrative surrounding water through the company's marketing strategies. This, however, is a complicated and worrying development, because of the lack of transparency in the company's practices and the company's unethical motivations.

The practices of Pure exemplify the erosion of social responsibility due to the company's unethically motivated quest to expand to the bottled water markets and the company's wish to take on the role of the distribution of tap water, transforming it from a public service to a private enterprise. However, Pure is only interested in profit, not the provision of

an essential need, like water, to human beings in a safe manner. Pure's approach to the bottled water markets is motivated by a desire for profit and oriented by an understanding of water scarcity, as we can see in the following excerpt:

Team, fresh water. The world is running out of it. Forty per cent of all the world's freshwater rivers and streams are now too polluted for human use or consumption. Think about what that really means. [...] What it means is that water is the perfect commodity. Because water is running out. There will never, ever, ever again, not be an urgent need for water. So how will we do it? [...] How will we bottle our Highland oil? (GMB, 37)

To Pure, an imminent water crisis brought on by water scarcity is not a crisis at all, but instead an opportunity to profit. Moreover, Pure's interest in water safety is negligible, since bottled water uses "much less stringent testing than tap water" (GMB, 122).

The Pure approach to water is an example of the imaginary of modern water, or Anthropocene water, since neoliberal capitalism sees market value as the only value of water. Through marketing, Pure can construct meanings and affect social order to facilitate their practices in profiting off of water by promoting the concept of water as a commodity that can be sold in bottles.

In the marketing of their bottled water, Pure plans to use images of health, purity, nature, and Scottish nationalism. In a brainstorming session, the Pure Creatives marketing team cycles through images of Scottish castles and bridges, archaeological sites, whales, lochs, islands, the River Ness, and, of course, always, "very blue" and "shimmering" water (GMB, 34–35). According to Gay Hawkins (2009, 190), "health comes from accessing purity; that is by fetishizing water's source." Through connecting Pure water to images and ideas of purity by highlighting the water's source as being the Scottish Highlands, Pure marketing wants to make their bottled water feel "'natural', meaning uncontaminated and unmediated" (ibid.).

However, this emphasis on the natural source does not come without a price. The natural source is stressed while "the messy realities of production and packaging" (Hawkins 2009, 190), like the resistance to Pure projects in India, are faded out and reports of them discredited. Moreover, the fetishisation of the natural source of bottled water "implicitly devalues tap water, rendering it both ordinary and suspect" because it is not similarly associated with a natural source and purity; tap water just anonymously comes out of the tap (ibid.). This opposition of bottled water to tap water creates a lucrative tension between tap and bottled water, which the marketing of bottled water capitalises on.

Pure also, in a way, acknowledges politics in their marketing. However, this naturally happens in a very diluted form. This is best exemplified by the following excerpt from a meeting between the Pure Creatives marketing team:

Transparency, Midge said quick. [...]

[I]t combines honesty and nationality in the same throw. Honest Scottishness. Honest-to-goodness goodness in a bottle.

It takes and makes a stand, Midge said. Doesn't it? [...]

Where you stand lets you know what really matters. If we suggest our bottled water takes and makes a stand, it'll become bottled idealism, Paul said.

Bottled identity, Midge said.

Bottled politics, Paul said. (GMB, 41)

What the employees of Pure are here thinking is that by being “transparent” in their marketing, and so naming their bottled water something like “Affluent,” “Main Stream” or “Scottish Tap,” as Anthea has previously sarcastically suggested, they can actually be, in a sense, honest and ethical in the marketing of their bottled water. Ethical marketing transforms bottled water into “the material expression of a cultural disposition through which one can articulate one’s desires for ethics, charity, help, and, more generally perhaps, a better world” (Brei and Böhm 2011, 247). By suggesting to market their bottled water as bottled idealism and politics, Pure’s marketing team considers using, as a marketing strategy, a pre-emptive move to co-opt possible criticism and concerns they might face in their quest to turn water into a profitable, bottled commodity.

This co-option of critical discourses is also seen in Pure’s co-opting the slogan “Water is life,” which is often used against neoliberal capitalist formulations of water. Keith says, “Water is life. [...] Water is where we live. Water is here and water is now. Get the message. Get it in a bottle” (GMB, 35). As such, a “refrain aim[ed] to strengthen an alternative to modern/global water, and Anthropocene water, where water is abstracted as nothing more than a resource for human use and human control” (Neimanis 2017, 177) is co-opted by “ethically” branded bottled water.

Pure’s awareness of the competing narratives or imaginaries surrounding water and neoliberal capitalist practices is made apparent in other ways, too. The Pure Dominant Narrative Department is in charge of keeping the company image clean and favourable. The department’s motto is “Deny Disparage Rephrase.” The most important function of the department is to control the narrative and stifle alternative viewpoints, by any means necessary. Keith explains this strategy to Imogen as follows:



Deny Disparage Rephrase, Keith says. Use your initiative. Your imagination. So many of those so-called regulated tests on tap water useless [sic] and some of them actually harmful. Science insists, and many scientists insist. Statistics say. *Our* independent findings versus *their* crackpot findings. You pen it, we place it. [...]

Your second brief is a little tougher [...] Small body of irate ethnics in one of our Indian sub-interests factioing against our planned filter-dam two-thirds completed and soon to power four Pure labs in the area. *They say*: our dam blocks their access to fresh water and ruins their crops. *We say*: they're ethnic troublemakers who are trying to involve us in a despicable religious war. Use the word terrorism if necessary. (GMB, 122–23)

Here, we can see how the Pure narrative makes use of methods such as spinning the truth, division, and racist othering and stereotyping. Pure will not hesitate to use any means available to keep in control of the narrative.

In juxtaposition to the company line, we see the alternative narrative provided by the feminist graffiti activism of Robin and Anthea with slogans like “DON'T BE STUPID. WATER IS A HUMAN RIGHT. SELLING IT IN ANY WAY IS MORALLY WRO[NG]” (GMB, 43) and “WOMEN OCCUPY TWO PERCENT OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT POSITIONS IN BUSINESS WORLDWIDE. [...] THIS MUST CHANGE” (GMB, 137). These bring up the problems in the neoliberal capitalist society that Anthea and Robin inhabit and which the dominant narrative of neoliberal capitalism championed by Pure is trying to erase. The main point of the graffiti is to articulate a demand for change.

In essence, *GMB* portrays some of the different conceptions of water at the time the novel was being written and published, and the debate surrounding the meanings attached to water. Because cultural meanings can be used to support or challenge operations of power, this debate of course has material consequences, too. The debate about water is, then, simultaneously about the material realities of water distribution and about the metaphorical and ideological aspects of water, which can support or contest the material realities. The central questions of the debate are: what is water, and how should this life-enabling substance be made available to us?

In bringing to focus this debate surrounding water and its meanings, *GMB* highlights the marketing processes at play with regards to bottled water. In these processes, a symbolic transformation of water from a life-essential substance into a profitable commodity is enacted. This symbolic transformation is the process through which an imaginary of modern, global, Anthropocene, or neoliberal capitalist water is created, and this practice is what *GMB* critiques through its portrayal of it. In utilising Horgan's (2016) concept of 'numismatic modernism,' I argue that, in *GMB*, Smith uses water as a 'numismatic' material in the context of neoliberal

capitalist commodification of water. Therefore, water in *GMB* becomes a material through which a critique of neoliberal capitalism can be articulated.

However, as part of the critique of neoliberal capitalist conceptions of water, *GMB* also illustrates the possibilities of emergent new ways to imagine water, which can contest the neoliberal capitalist imaginary of water. In this subsection, I have detailed the neoliberal capitalist marketing narrative of water, and briefly touched upon the human rights-oriented “water is life” discourse and how it is connected to neoliberal capitalist understandings of water. However, these are not the only ways to understand water. Neoliberal capitalism hinges on individualism and profit-seeking at the expense of everything else. Following this neoliberal capitalist ethos, Pure the company lacks an understanding of empathy and the relationality of water, which is required, in *GMB*, in order to imagine water differently, in a way that challenges the neoliberal capitalist conception of water. This is what I now turn towards, in the next subsection, when I examine interconnection and relationality in *GMB*.

### **4.3. Relationality and Interconnection in *Girl Meets Boy***

In *GMB*, the beginning of political and social change is rooted in relationality, empathy, and awareness of things beyond one’s self – simply, the interconnection of all things. In this subsection, I argue that *GMB* portrays an alternative imaginary to neoliberal capitalist existence. This alternative is rooted in relationality and interconnection, and it is played out both on the plot-level but also on the level of the narration, which is my primary focus in this subsection.

The political activism that Anthea and Robin engage in can be understood as a form of commoning as explained in chapter two. An apprehension towards the use of water for profit awakens feelings of concern for and belonging in a wider community in the characters of *GMB*, which are channelled into political activism that fights for the water and human rights of the whole community, and even of humanity in general. The slogans of Anthea and Robin’s graffiti activism showcase a connection to humanity as a whole with their focus on human rights issues “ALL ACROSS THE WORLD” (*GMB*, 134).

Significantly, the graffiti raise the issue of morality into the conversation about problem areas in global neoliberal capitalism which they claim to be “MORALLY WRO[NG]” (*GMB*, 43) and “NOT FAIR” (*GMB*, 134), like the gender wage gap or the commodification of water. Anthea and Robin’s morality and ethics, which power their activism, are deeply connected to a sense of empathy and relationality towards all. Moreover, as explored in subsection 4.1, Anthea

and Robin are not the only ones who adopt this relational ethics: Imogen also experiences a transformation where she detaches from neoliberalist individuality in favour of a more empathetic, ethical, and relational existence in the world.

Correspondingly, interconnection and relationality play out on the narrative level, too. First, *GMB* tells a socially conscious story. In the spirit of Smith's numismatic modernism, in *GMB*, (bottled) water appears as a neoliberal capitalist material and Pure the company as a neoliberal capitalist context, which are utilised in order to offer a critical response to contemporary neoliberal capitalist ideology and practices. As stated, this criticism is rooted in the characters' feelings of relationality, interconnection, and empathy in the face of neoliberal capitalist injustice, and these feelings transform into an ethics that can be called watery relationality. I explore this watery relationality in more detail in the next subsection.

Second, in keeping with the relational turn in literature, Smith makes use of "modes of narrative relationality which displace the historical centrality of individualizing modes of characterization" (Ely 2019, 82). That is, Smith employs socially conscious modernist strategies in *GMB*, and these strategies are used to emphasise relationality and multiplicity over individualism. The most prominent strategies, and thus, the most important for the purposes of my analysis in this thesis, are intertextuality and polyvocality. In what follows next, I will explore these two strategies at a bit more length, beginning with intertextuality.

There is plenty of intertextuality in *GMB*. The novel is a retelling of the Ovidian myth of Iphis and Ianthe, and the myth is told a couple of times in-story. The myth is heavily interrogated, the novel thematises story-telling and myth-making, and the novel abounds with allusions to pop culture. I will not be going through these intertextual allusions, since they are beyond the scope of my thesis and already extensively covered (see Ranger 2013 and Ranger 2019). Suffice it to say, that the novel is heavily preoccupied with retelling and reshaping stories, myths, and narratives.

There is also some narrative uncertainty, as different versions of events and stories coexist in the novel, as when, after an evening out with some co-workers, Imogen wonders whether she "made up the whole evening, if I invented the pub, the curryhouse, the whole thing" (*GMB*, 75). Furthermore, the narrative takes on a mythical, even magical, dimension, as the last chapter of the novel contains a fantastical wedding with mythological characters and dead relatives in attendance, while "the old cathedral itself on its fixed foundations leap[s] and caper[s]" (*GMB* 158). The novel, then, puts into question the validity of a single dominant narrative and voice.

Importantly, much attention is placed in *GMB* upon the importance of dialogue with, and the interrogation of, narratives, as opposed to consuming them without critical thought. A moment of retelling the story of Iphis and Ianthe by Robin to Anthea becomes an in-story dialogue and negotiation between Robin and Anthea and between the original Ovidian myth and the novel, which is itself, lest we forget, a modern retelling of the myth.

The novel also makes use of multiple voices. The story is polyvocally narrated by Anthea and Imogen in alternating chapters. This makes the story not a narrative of a singular, dominant voice, but a narrative shared by the sisters. It is not just Anthea's or Imogen's story, but both of their stories, interrelated. The chapters alternately narrated by the two sisters are interconnected and cannot stand on their own, but their meanings and events mingle and thus shape each other. Notably, there is also no hierarchical relationship – neither of the sisters is “more right” than the other. Much has been made already of Smith's “democracy of voice” (see Smith 2010), and that can be seen in play also in *GMB*, which is a masculinist, ultimately heteronormative story from Antiquity as retold and remixed to modern readers with a queer, working-class, female focus. The politics involved in how Smith constructs the narrative of her novel thus tie into the politics portrayed in the novel itself.

The use of intertextuality and polyvocality in *GMB* highlight the themes of empathetic connection, relationality, and (re)imagination found in the novel. These two tactics “reflect the crumbling of singular, authoritarian voices in contemporary discourses” (Lea 2016, 27). This is further emphasised by the chapter titles of *GMB*, which demonstrate a movement from individualism to an understanding of relationality and interconnection during the course of the novel. The first chapter of the novel is titled with the most individualistic pronoun “I,” and it is followed by chapters titled “You,” “Us” and “Them,” before the novel ends with the chapter “All Together Now.” The chapter titles parallel the journey of the novel's characters, summed up in the last chapter by Anthea and Robin's promise “to go beyond our selves” (*GMB*, 159). This notion of “going beyond one's self” signifies the appreciation for empathy, for caring about others, and for seeing oneself in connection and in relation to other beings in the world. I elaborate on this topic more in the next subsection.

I, thus, argue that *GMB* constitutes a part of the “culture of neoliberal discontent,” (Deckard and Shapiro 2019, 15) and is an attempt to refashion the world by emphasising the constructed nature of the world through interrogating the dominant narrative of neoliberal capitalism and how that narrative is shaped. This is emphasised by the techniques utilised by Smith in the writing of the novel, such as intertextuality and polyvocality. Underlying these

techniques and the themes of neoliberal capitalist critique and water, which Smith takes up in *GMB*, is “her message of interrelatedness: of humans to each other, of all living things to their environment, and of text to life” (Kostkowska 2013, 147). Through this message of relationality and interconnection, *GMB* posits that there are alternatives to the dominant narrative of neoliberal capitalism, and that because of the existence of these alternatives, which promote relationality, and because of the constructed nature of the dominant narrative, the world can be changed.

In the next subsection, I will add to this thematics of relationality and interconnection coupled with the interrogation of dominant narratives by exploring the figuration ‘bodies of water’ in the context of *GMB*. I argue that by analysing *GMB* in the light of the figuration ‘bodies of water,’ the possibility of a posthuman alter-figuration to the neoliberal capitalist imaginary becomes apparent in *GMB*.

#### **4.4 Going beyond One’s Self: Watery Relationality in *Girl Meets Boy***

Through its critique of neoliberal capitalist ideology and practices, *GMB* articulates the need for a new imaginary of society that must be sought through political activism and awareness of one’s interconnection and relationality to other beings. I argue that the novel imagines water as a uniting force that can nourish empathetic connection and political activism. Through collective identification and interconnection based on a watery ethics of relationality, existence in the neoliberal capitalist society that the characters inhabit can be re-imagined and transformation becomes possible. The novel also opens up the possibility of transformation and of alternative ways of existence to the reader’s world.

In this subsection, then, I explore the possibility of using Astrida Neimanis’s figuration of ‘bodies of water,’ as explained in subsection 3.2, in an analysis of *GMB*. My claim is that by considering the novel with this figuration in mind, the posthuman alter-imaginary to neoliberal capitalism in *GMB* becomes noticeable and able to be articulated.

In *GMB*, water is recognised as a resource for all, a resource that should not be used for profit, as is expressed in Robin’s graffiti: “DON’T BE STUPID. WATER IS A HUMAN RIGHT. SELLING IT IN ANY WAY IS MORALLY WRO[NG]” (*GMB*, 43). Water is seen as a collective natural resource that is not there to be extracted for money:

We roll slowly past the Lowland sea, and the sea belongs to all of us. We roll slowly past the rugged banks of lochs and rivers in a kind of clearness of fine early morning summer light, and they're full of water that belongs to everyone. (GMB, 129)

These understandings of water correspond to the “water is life” discourse, i.e., the conception of water as a human right. However, as I have previously argued in subsection 4.2, this conception can easily be co-opted by bottled water marketing strategies, as is the case with Pure.

However, there is yet also a different figuration of water that is bubbling under the surface in *GMB*, fighting to emerge: a posthuman imaginary of relational, transformative water that finds common ground with Neimanis's (2016) figuration of ‘bodies of water.’ This figuration challenges the dominant narrative of the neoliberal capitalist water exemplified by the company Pure in *GMB*. The queer qualities of ‘bodies of water’ can be seen to inspire a watery ethics in the novel's characters.

This posthuman figuration can already be glimpsed slightly in Robin's graffiti, as quoted above, which stresses the moral and ethical dimensions of selling bottled water. There is clearly an understanding of the connections between human beings at play there, as the assumption is that by profiting off of bottled water, Pure will cause harm to some humans, and also to the environment. My fascination with the figuration ‘bodies of water,’ and my use of it in this analysis of *GMB* can best be understood, however, by comparing it to the ideal of “going beyond one's self,” which is articulated in *GMB*.

I argue that, in *GMB*, “going beyond one's self” signifies the act of being in interconnection to others and to the world, and acknowledging one's watery relationality. In the last chapter of *GMB*, Robin and Anthea promise “to go beyond our selves” [GMB, 159], and this promise is acted out in many instances throughout the novel. This promise brings in to focus the significant role of embodied connection and identification with not just other people but with nature and with the whole world, as is the case with the figuration ‘bodies of water.’ Moreover, the concept of “going beyond one's self” is connected to water. Let me, however, first begin by exploring some of the queer, relational qualities of water as portrayed in the novel.

In *GMB*, water is used as a motif throughout, recurring at several key moments, and implying transformation, change, fluidity, rebirth, and (re)imagination. Water is associated with transformation and change, as it is characterised as being something that is fluid and in a constant state of flux: water can “slip through fingers” (GMB, 12), it can “change shape and form” (GMB, 38), and it can “change yet stay the same” (GMB, 27). These match the queer

fluidity of water which underlies Neimanis's figuration 'bodies or water,' and which, for Neimanis, signify water's capability to act as a connector (Neimanis 2016, 67).

In *GMB*, the fluidity of water is linked to the fluid nature of story-telling and myth-making. This link can be seen, for example, in the dialogue in which Anthea and Robin engage, concerning the Ovidian myth of Iphis and Ianthe of which they are a modern retelling. Anthea and Robin disrupt the original myth and transform it, both in their in-story dialogue and in the way that they are reliving the myth in a different form in the novel's retelling of the myth. Like water, myths and stories cycle from one telling to another, simultaneously and fluidly both staying the same and becoming different.

The novel's title, *Girl Meets Boy*, is another disruption and transformation that is linked to watery fluidity. First, it reverses the heteronormative "boy meets girl" set-up of a romantic narrative. Second, from the first line of the novel – "Let me tell you about when I was a girl, our grandfather says" (GMB, 3) – there is an alternative reading of "girl meeting boy" at play in the sense of the embodied existence of someone who is a "boy-girl or girl-boy" (GMB, 95), like Anthea and Imogen's grandfather or Anthea's love interest Robin.

Water's connections to transformation and change are emphasised in the novel in another way also. By specifically centring the image of bottled water, water encased in plastic, the novel evokes notions of something lively being enclosed and trapped, as when nature and life are commodified. However, when the novel reframes bottled water as bottled imagination, as "bottled idealism [...] bottled identity [...] bottled politics" (GMB, 41), bottled water becomes a signifier of neoliberal capitalism's incapability to imagine another way of living, a trapped imagination under neoliberal capitalist hegemony. What is under threat is not just a life-giving, essential, material substance, but also the capability to defend that substance by imagining life and society differently in an alternative mode.

Most importantly, water in the novel is connected to imagination and specific moments of connection, epiphany, and transformation. Anthea goes to the riverside and muses that it is something that is not usually done: "People went past on the pavement above. They looked down at me [Anthea] like I was mad. [...] Clearly nobody ever went down the riverbank. Clearly nobody was supposed to" (GMB, 26). In this instance, free-flowing water is connected to something outside the norm. After sitting by the riverside, Anthea does not immediately go to work despite being already late; in the closeness of the freely running water in the river, she has become freed from the pressures of her job marketing bottled water at Pure, and she has already begun detaching herself from the neoliberal capitalist mentality.

Moreover, the water at Pure tastes “plastic” (GMB, 41), but the glass of tap water which Robin offers Imogen tastes “beautiful, of clearness” (GMB, 75). In this contrast, the bottled water marketing strategy of elevating bottled water by denigrating tap water is reversed, and tap water becomes preferable. Imogen identifies that glass of water which was “given in kindness” (GMB, 144) to her by Robin as the precise moment that is the catalyst for her transformation into broader awareness of her relationality to the world surrounding her and its other inhabitants. When Paul questions Imogen’s uncharacteristic loquaciousness after she has quit at Pure and asks Imogen whether she has been drinking, Imogen responds with: “Just water” (GMB, 130). Clearly, in *GMB*, water becomes a source of empathy, relationality, and interconnection. At the end of the novel, Robin and Anthea’s wedding also happens at the side of the River Ness, and it is there where Robin and Anthea make their promise to go beyond their selves, a scene of high import for this analysis.

Another important scene in *GMB*, is the end scene of the novel, where Anthea has a stone in her hand, and she prepares to throw it. As Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos (2013, 297) note, this scene is an intertextual allusion to the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In the myth, Deucalion and Pyrrha throw stones which are transformed into the early members of the human race. So, the throwing of a stone symbolises a new beginning, the beginning of a (new) society. As such, we can interpret Anthea as being prepared to reimagine her society as she prepares to throw the stone. Moreover, the open-endedness of the scene – Anthea does not yet throw the stone, she is only preparing to do it, and the reader is not privy to what happens after the stone is thrown – opens the story up to the reader. Is the reader also prepared to throw a stone? What would the reader want to happen after the stone is thrown? This invitation to the reader to participate in the story is also encouraged by other means, for example, by thematising the interrogation of narratives and the “authorial” interruption of the story, like with the intertextual – albeit queerly modified – allusion to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*: “Reader, I married him/her” (GMB, 149).

The interpretation of the throwing of the stone as the beginning of a reimagining of a society gains strength from the fact that the throwing of the stone is also a reference to two earlier events in the novel. The first event is a memory of when Anthea and Imogen’s grandfather tells them the story of Burning Lily, when the girls are still children. Burning Lily is a revolutionary cross-dressing activist, who threw a stone through a window as a twenty-first birthday present to herself because she had “had enough of this” and she was “going to change things” (GMB, 10). Anthea was inspired by this story and threw a stone through a kitchen



window herself. The throwing of the stone at the end of the novel is then a restaging of that memory. The second event is when Anthea, still working at Pure, goes to the riverside before work and throws a stone into the River Ness, and

[t]he river laughed. I swear it did. It laughed and it changed as I watched. As it changed, it stayed the same. The river was all about time, it was about how little time actually mattered. I looked at my watch. Fuck. I was an hour and a half late. Ha ha! The river laughed at me again. (GMB, 28)

After this, Anthea decides not to go to work immediately, instead ending up at a second-hand bookshop. As previously stated, in this scene water is connected to Anthea's detachment from the neoliberal capitalist ethos, and through the throwing of the stone also connected to the idea of reimagining a society.

Thus, water in *GMB* has connections to both personal and political/social change and transformation. Water is a life-essential, material substance that, if threatened, can awaken a person to political activism; water is a catalyst for re-imagining a society. Water is also a metaphorical source of connection between people, bringing me back to Neimanis's (2016) figuration 'bodies of water.'

In *GMB*, water is tied to moments of interconnection, and water's relational qualities are transferred to the relationships of the characters. Water, thus, initiates a transformation in the characters' selves and their relation to others and the world. For Ely (2019, 209), the characters of *GMB* form "a community ordered only by [an] indeterminate capacity for transformation, by this radical openness which allows for a sense of 'the real' to be founded on nothing but its potentiality for change." This potentiality for change is rooted in an ethics of watery relationality.

In *GMB*, connection to other beings is sketched out in watery terms. Anthea longs for a connection with another person so that her bones would be, like those of her grandparents, who were lost at sea, "mingling, picked clean by fish, with the bones of another body, a body my bones and heart and soul had loved with unfathomable certainty for decades, and both of us down deep now, lost to everything but the fact of bare bones on a dark seabed" (GMB, 24–25). When Anthea first meets Robin, "a storm at sea happened" inside her head and "the ship that I was opened wide inside me and in came the ocean" (GMB, 45). Anthea calls their nights together "underwater nights" (GMB, 81–82), and has found that, through her relationship with Robin, she is capable of being "so much more than myself" (GMB, 81). Through the presence of watery metaphors, water is key in Anthea and Robin's relationship, which is based on

relationality and interconnection. In Robin and Anthea's wedding at the end of the novel, which happens next to the River Ness, the traditional wedding vow "I do" mutates to: "we said yes. We said we did. We said we would" (GMB, 151). Once again, we can recognise the shift from individualism to a consideration of one's relationality to others.

In the novel, then, through watery relationality, embodiment becomes multiple and shared:

We were tangled in each other's arms so that I [Anthea] wasn't sure whose hand that was by my head, was it hers or mine? [...]

It's yours, she [Robin] said. I mean, it's on the end of my arm. But it's yours. So's the arm. So's the shoulder. So's everything else it's connected to.

Her hand opened me. Then her hand became a wing. Then everything about me became a wing, a single wing, and she was the other wing, we were a bird. (GMB, 101)

Here, embodiment not only becomes shared, but posthuman as embodiment extends metaphorically even to nonhuman embodiment.

The posthuman ideas of embodiment in *GMB* are connected to political and social transformation. Alissa G. Karl (2014, 65) writes about how "forms of embodiment" in Ali Smith's novel *Hotel World* (2001) "are metonymic and also metaphorical of social entities" as "textual bodies themselves break apart and also break apart the national, state, and social forms within them." I argue that, in *GMB*, we see the obverse: instead of bodies breaking down, signifying the breaking apart of society, bodies come together and even blend into each other in posthuman ways, signifying a reimagining of society, as the characters incorporate to their ethics political attitudes based on empathy and a more encompassing understanding of the self.

This is best exemplified by the pivotal sex scene between Anthea and Robin in the middle of the book:

I was a she was a he was a we were a girl and a girl and a boy and a boy, we were blades, were a knife that could cut through myth, were two knives thrown by a magician, were arrows fired by a god, we hit heart, we hit home, we were the tail of a fish were the reek of a cat were the beak of a bird were the feather that mastered gravity were high above every landscape then down deep in the purple haze of the heather were roamin in a gloamin in a brash unending Scottish piece of perfect jigging reeling reel can we really keep this up? (GMB, 103)

Sex between Anthea and Robin is a fundamentally transformative experience, which changes the characters' feelings towards their own embodiment. It is "a moment of embodied transcendence during with the limits between the human, the animal, the earth and the inanimate are crossed and blurred" (Calvo Pascual 2018, 21). This is a posthuman sex scene, where "the

distinction between human and nonhuman is symbolically blurred” (Kostkowska 2013, 146). All hierarchies between human and nonhuman beings disappear, and bodies transform fluidly into all kind of animate and inanimate, human and nonhuman, bodies.

The sex scene is followed by Anthea going to the kitchen to drink a glass of water from the tap. As she fills her glass with water, she looks out of the window at the world and

wondered why on earth would anyone ever stand in the world as if standing in the cornucopic middle of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon but inside a tiny white-painted rectangle about the size of a single space in a car park, refusing to come out of it, and all round her or him the whole world, beautiful, various, waiting? (GMB, 105)

Thus, posthuman bodily connection and transformation is interlinked with the presence of water and the idea of the multiplicity of ways to exist in the world. The tiny rectangle could be the parameters afforded by the dominant narrative of neoliberal capitalism, and the cornucopic view the imaginaries that do not fit into that rectangle.

Just as Neimanis (2016) theorises on a hydrocommons that has its basis in the hydrological cycle, in *GMB*, watery imagery gives way to an understanding of the cyclicity of nature and existence. This is best exemplified by the following lengthy excerpt:

*Rings* that widen on the surface of a loch above a thrown-in stone. A drink of water offered to a thirsty traveller on the road. Nothing more than what happens when things *come together*, when hydrogen, say, meets oxygen, or a story from then meets a story from now, or stone meets water meets girl meets boy meets bird meets hand meets wing meets bone meets light meets dark meets eye meets word meets world meets grain of sand meets thirst meets hunger meets need meets dream meets real meets same meets different meets death meets life meets end meets beginning all over again, *the story of nature* itself, ever-inventive, making one thing out of another, and one thing into another, and nothing lasts, and nothing’s lost, and nothing ever perishes, and things can always change, because *things will always change*, and things will always be different, because things can always be different. (GMB,160; emphases added)

This cyclicity of all things, the cyclicity of life, as articulated in *GMB*, is based on the interconnection of all things and beings. This cyclicity opens up the possibility for transformation and change. *GMB* constructs “a model of a diverse, inclusive world governed by ecological principles of the connectedness of all things” (Kostkowska 2013, 145). Watery relationality, thus, creates an ethics in opposition to neoliberal capitalism for the characters in *GMB*, not unlike that ethics visioned by Neimanis and incorporated in her figuration ‘bodies of water’ (2016).

In *GMB*, then, the characters seem to acquire a watery ethics of relationality by incorporating some of the queer qualities of water, like fluidity, relationality, and

interconnection. This presents a similar posthuman alter-figuration of water to that which Neimanis (2016) explores with her posthuman feminist concept of ‘bodies of water.’ In *GMB*, this relational alter-figuration of water presents an interruption and an alternative to the dominant narrative of neoliberal capitalist water as exemplified by the company Pure and its practices. Both the alter-imaginary in *GMB* and Neimanis’s figuration ‘bodies of water’ are built on a more-than-human contact with the world and meaningful political connection to all other bodies of water, with the purpose of presenting a challenge to the neoliberal imagery of water.

## 5 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analysed Ali Smith's novel *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015). My central focus has been on the critique of neoliberal capitalism in the novel and on the way that the novel contests dominant narratives by offering opposing, alternative narratives and imaginaries. My particular focus in this thesis has been on water and the way that it is both a material, life-essential substance but also a site for debates over its cultural meanings, very much in part *because* of the vitality and essentiality of water. In this thesis, I have argued that *GMB*, through its centring of the debate over water and its meanings, presents a critique of neoliberal capitalist ideology and practices and the individualism neoliberal capitalism promotes. Moreover, I have argued that *GMB* introduces an alter-imaginary to neoliberal capitalism in the shape of relational water as a basis for an ethics of watery relationality.

To conduct my analysis, I have presented my arguments in the context of multidisciplinary critique of neoliberal capitalism. In particular, I have utilised Astrida Neimanis's posthuman feminist figuration 'bodies of water' to tease out the ethics of posthuman watery relationality, which I argue can be perceived in *GMB*.

In chapter two of this thesis, I have explored the theoretical and research basis for my analysis of the critique of neoliberal capitalism in *GMB*. In particular, I have concentrated on three characteristics of neoliberal capitalism: marketisation, individualism, and commodification. I have explored the problematic aspects of these characteristics, and I have drawn particular attention to the commodification of water by the bottled water industry.

In chapter three, I have delved into the possibility of contesting the hegemony of neoliberal capitalist ideology and practices. In the first subsection of the chapter, my focus has been on contextualising *GMB* as a contemporary social novel that is part of the relational turn in literature, and I have highlighted the novel's political dimensions. Moreover, I have claimed that Smith makes use of socially conscious modernist tactics in the novel. In the second subsection, I have introduced Astrida Neimanis's posthuman feminist figuration 'bodies of water' as an alter-imaginary to neoliberal capitalist water. 'Bodies of water' is based on water's fluid, transformative, and relational qualities, which can form a basis for an ethics that can challenge neoliberal capitalism.

In chapter four, I have analysed *GMB* in the light of the theoretical and research basis explored in the previous two chapters. First, I have argued that, in *GMB*, the individuation paradox caused by neoliberal capitalism is solved by acknowledging one's connection to others.

Second, I have claimed that *GMB* portrays the debate surrounding water and its meanings, and in particular, critiques the neoliberal capitalist conception of water as a profitable, exploitable resource. Third, I have shown how relationality and interconnection are emphasised in *GMB*. Fourth, by using the figuration ‘bodies of water,’ I have argued that an ethics of posthuman watery relationality is present in *GMB*.

The primary aim of my thesis has been to elucidate and analyse the connections of neoliberal capitalism, understandings of individuality and relationality, and water and its meanings in *GMB*. As a thematically rich novel, *GMB* contains many avenues for analysis, and my thesis has only pursued some of these avenues due to the fact that I have limited the topic of my thesis to water and its participation in the critique of neoliberal capitalism and in the creation of alternatives to neoliberal capitalism.

A possibility for further research on *GMB* could be found in focusing more on a specifically posthuman queer feminist approach to analysing how the neoliberal capitalist society portrayed in the novel colludes with sexist, racist, and queerphobic rhetoric. I have briefly remarked upon this in this thesis, but the scope of my thesis has not afforded detailed analysis of the gendered, racialised, and sexualised aspects of the neoliberal capitalist ideology and practices in *GMB*.

Another intriguing possibility for further research would be to compare and contrast *GMB* with other books that similarly take up the topic of neoliberal capitalist reality, water, and/or relationality and interconnection. What other imaginaries of water and relationality are there? In this thesis, I have used only one primary source, *GMB*, as the object of my analysis of the “culture of neoliberal discontent.” However, in order to further contest the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism, more exploration of different alter-imaginaries, with a larger selection of primary sources, would unquestionably prove effective.

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# Appendix 1: Finnish Summary

## Johdanto

Pro gradu -tutkielmassani tarkastelen vettä ja veteen liitettyjä merkityksiä Ali Smithin romaanissa *Girl Meets Boy* ([2007] 2015). Väitteeni on, että *Girl Meets Boy* esittää neoliberaalin kapitalismin ideologian ja käytännöt hallitsevana kertomuksena (dominant narrative) ja kohdistaa siihen kritiikkiä. Tutkielmassani suurennuslasin alle on päätenyt vesi. Tarkastelen vettä sekä materiaalisena aineena ja neoliberaalin kapitalismin toiminnan kohteena että symbolisuuden ja metaforisuuden lävistämänä merkityskimppuna. Neoliberaalin kapitalismin kritiikkiä *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanissa tarkastelen nimenomaan veden kautta, ja analyysissäni nousevat keskiöön erityisesti pullovesi ja sen markkinointi sekä veden yhdistävät ja muutosta aikaansaavat ominaisuudet.

*Girl Meets Boy* on skotlantilaisen Ali Smithin kirjoittama pienenisromaanin, joka on osa Canongaten Myytti-sarjaa. Myytti-sarja koostuu eri nykykirjailijoiden kirjoittamista vanhojen myyttien uudelleentulkinnosta. *Girl Meets Boy* on nykyaikainen queer-uudelleentulkinta Ifiksen ja Ianthen myytistä, joka on peräisin antiikin roomalaisen Ovidiuksen eepisestä runoelmasta ja myyttikokoelmasta *Muodonmuutoksia*.

Smithin *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanissa ääneen pääsevät siskokset Anthea ja Imogen ”Midge” Gunn. He työskentelevät Pure-nimisessä monikansallisessa yrityksessä, joka suunnittelee laajentavansa toimintaansa pullovesimarkkinoille. Anthea ja Imogen työskentelevät Puren pulloveden markkinointitiimissä. Anthea kuitenkin rakastuu antikapitalistiseen, feministiseen Robiniin, joka protestoi Puren harjoittamaa veden hyödykkeistämistä sekä kaupallistamista ja joka lisäksi pyrkii kiinnittämään ihmisten huomiota naisten oikeuksien rikkomuksiin ympäri maailmaa. Anthean ja Robinin suhde saa Imogenin kyseenalaistamaan omia seksuaalisuuteen ja sukupuoleen liittyviä ennakkoluulojaan. Lisäksi Imogenin täytyy harkita uudelleen omaa osallistumistaan neoliberaalin kapitalistisen yrityksen epäeettiseen toimintaan, koska yrityksen seksismi, kilpailuhenkisyys ja individualismi ovat kuluttaa Imogenin täysin loppuun.

*Girl Meets Boy* osoittaa, miten vesi voi saada monenlaisia merkityksiä. Väitän, että romaani nostaa keskiöön aikansa kamppailuja veteen liittyvästä merkityksenannosta esittääkseen kritiikkiä neoliberaalia kapitalismia kohtaan. Romaanissa veden merkitys voidaan

neoliberaalin kapitalismin hyödykkeistämisen prosessissa muuttaa vain markkina-arvoon perustuvaksi. Toisaalta romaani esittää neoliberalin kapitalismin vaihtoehdoksi veteen ja veden kiertokulkuun perustuvan etiikan, joka korostaa kaikkien olentojen yhteenliittymiä ja yhteisyyttä.

Tutkielmani koostuu kahdesta teorialuvusta ja yhdestä analyysiluvusta. Ensimmäisessä teorialuvussa käsittelen neoliberalin kapitalismin ongelmakohtia. Toisessa teorialuvussa tarkastelen mahdollisuuksia luoda vastakuvia ja vaihtoehtoja neoliberalille kapitalismille. Analyysiluvussa käsittelen *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanin teorialuvuissa käsittelemäni teorian valossa. Kummassakin teorialuvussa on kaksi osaa ja analyysiluvussa neljä osaa. Näiden teoria- ja analyysilukujen osien välillä on löyhää vastaavuutta käsiteltyjen aiheiden osalta.

## **Teoria: Neoliberaalin kapitalismin kritiikki ja vaihtoehtojen mahdollisuus**

Perustani *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanin analyysille on neoliberalin kapitalismin kritiikissä. Käytän analyysissani lähteitä, jotka edustavat kirjoja kirjallisuuden tutkimuksesta ja sosiologiasta politiikan ja liiketoiminnan tutkimukseen. Analyysini teoreettinen viitekehys on kuitenkin selkeästi marxistisessa/sosialistisessa ja sosialistis-feministisessä/marxistis-feministisessä teoriassa ja tutkimuksessa. Lisäksi eräs tärkeä osa analyysiani paikantuu posthumanin feminismin kentälle.

Tutkielmani toinen ja kolmas luku ovat teorialukuja. Toisessa luvussa tarkastelen neoliberalin kapitalismin ideologiaa ja käytäntöjä kolmen keskeisen käsitteen avulla: marketisaatio, individualismi ja hyödykkeistämisen. Neoliberalismi tarkoittaa ideologiaa ja käytäntöjä, jotka perustuvat markkinoiden keskeiseen rooliin. Markkinoiden toiminta muodostaa neoliberalismissa lähes kaikkea ihmistoimintaa ohjaavan etiikan, jossa yksilön vapaudet ja kyvyt tulee vapauttaa vapaiden markkinoiden, vapaakaupan ja vahvojen omistusoikeuksien avulla. Neoliberalismin keskeinen toimintastrategia on marketisaatio eli markkinaehtoistuminen, markkinoiden laajentuminen – kaikki elämänalueet ja ihmistoiminta pyritään saamaan markkinoiden alaisuuteen.

Lisäksi markkinoiden keskeisyyden takia neoliberalismille tärkeää on yrittäjyys. Yrittäjän keskeinen tehtävä on suhteuttaa toimintansa markkinoiden vaatimuksiin, ja neoliberalismi pyrkii laajentamaan tämän joustavuuden kaikkiin työntekijöihin, jopa ihmisiin yleisesti. Näin neoliberalismin käsityksessä ihmisyydestä korostuu näkemys ihmisistä pääomana, eikä yksilöiden sisäiselle kehitykselle tai poliittiselle toiminnalle anneta suurta

merkitystä. Lisäksi neoliberalismi karsastaa yhteiskunnan, yhteiskunnallisuuden ja sosiaalisuuden käsitteitä. Neoliberalismiin liittyikin kollektiivisen sosiaalisen vastuun murentaminen, esimerkiksi sosiaaliavustusta vastustavien strategioiden avulla. Neoliberaali kapitalismi siis pyrkii heikentämään yhteisöllisyyttä ja solidaarisuutta, mikä johtaa kansalaisten poliittiseen voimattomuuteen. Neoliberaalin kapitalismin ongelmaa voi tarkastella individuaatioparadoksin käsitteen avulla: neoliberali kapitalismi muka painottaa yksilön oikeuksia ja yksilöllisyyttä yhteiskunnan hyväksi, mutta oikeastaan se edesauttaa yksilön suvereniteetin ja minuuden murentumista.

Neoliberaaliin kapitalismiin liittyvän marketisaation pohdinnassa keskityn tutkielmassani luonnon(varojen) tuotteistamiseen ja kaupallistamiseen, ja erityisesti pullovesiteollisuuden harjoittamaan veden hyödykkeistämiseen. Veden hyödykkeistäminen tapahtuu muuttamalla veden merkitys vain markkina-arvoon perustuvaksi. Vaikka veden niukkuus muodostaa maailmassa uhkan, neoliberalia kapitalismia edustavat yritykset näkevät veden houkuttelevana sijoituskohteena ja mahdollisuutena rikastua. Yritykset osallistuvat veden hyödykkeistämiseen markkinoinnillaan, jossa korostuvat muun muassa terveellisyys, puhtauden ja luonnollisen lähteen ihannointi. Samalla arvotetaan huonommaksi (julkista) vesijohtovettä, vaikka pulloveden paremmuudelle ei ole takeita.

Kolmannessa luvussa käsittelen mahdollisuuksia vastustaa neoliberalin kapitalismin hegemonista asemaa. Luvun ensimmäisessä osassa käyn läpi *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanin kontekstia avaamalla romaanin asemaa nykyaikaisena yhteiskuntaromaanina, joka on osa kirjallisuuden yhteisöllistä käännettä (relational/communitarian turn). Lisäksi tarkastelen Ali Smithia kirjailijana, jonka voidaan katsoa edustavan nykyaikaista poliittista ja eettistä modernismia. *Girl Meets Boy* on esimerkki sellaisesta fiktiosta, joka toimii poliittisena aktivismina nostaessaan esille yhteisöllisiä ja yhteisyyteen liittyviä teemoja vastakohtana neoliberalin kapitalismin yksilökeskeisyydelle.

Kolmannen luvun toisessa osassa avaan Astrida Neimaniksen posthumaania feminististä käsitettä ”bodies of water”. Neimanis viittaa tällä käsitteellä ruumiiden vetiseen tai vesiperäiseen (watery, aqueous) koostumukseen. Hän näkee kaikkien ”vesiruumiiden” muodostavan vedestä koostuvan yhteismaan tai -varannon (hydrocommons), jossa vesi siirtyy ruumista toiseen jatkuvassa kiertokulussa. Näin veden kiertokulku ja veden paradoksaaliset ominaisuudet – vesi on eri muodoissaan sekä sama että eri, rajallinen sekä ehtymätön luonnonvara, tavallinen sekä erityinen neste – muodostavat perustan posthumaanille etiikalle. Kaikkia olentoja yhdistää veden elintärkeys ja vesi osana ruumiita. Koska ”bodies of water” -

käsitteen mukainen näkemys vedestä ja vesiperäisyydestä on vaihtoehto neoliberaalin kapitalismin näkemykselle vedestä kaupallisena hyödykkeenä, ”bodies of water” on poliittisesti latautunut käsite ja siihen liittyy sosiaalisen ja poliittisen muutoksen mahdollisuus.

## **Analyysi: Neoliberaalin kapitalismin ongelmat ja vaihtoehtona ”vesiperäinen yhteisyys” *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanissa**

Tutkielmani neljännessä luvussa keskityn romaanin analyysiin edellä käsittelemäni teorian valossa. Analyysini perusteella väitän, että *Girl Meets Boy* esittää neoliberaalin kapitalismin kritiikkiä kuvaamalla veden ja sen merkityksiin liittyvää kamppailua. Romaanissa ongelmallistetaan neoliberaalin kapitalismin käsitys vedestä hyödykkeenä. Tämän rinnalla on olemassa myös toinen diskurssi, joka painottaa veden asemaa elämän ehtona ja ihmisoikeutena. Pullovesiteollisuus voi kuitenkin omia tämän toisen diskurssin omiin tarkoituksiinsa. *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanissa pulpahtaakin esille myös kolmas näkemys vedestä: käsitys vedestä yhdistäjänä. Vesi voi näin ollen toimia perustana yhteisyyteen ja yhteenliittymiin rakentuvalle etiikalle ja muutokselle, jota kutsun tutkielmassani posthumaaniksi ”vesiperäiseksi yhteisyydeksi” (posthuman watery relationality).

Neljäs luku jakaantuu neljään osaan. Ensimmäisessä osassa tarkastelen, miten neoliberaali kapitalismi, ja etenkin neoliberaali kapitalistinen individualismi, näyttäytyy *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanissa. Neoliberaali kapitalismi, ja erityisesti tätä ajattelusuuntaa edustava Pure-yritys, korostaa tietynlaista ideaalia ”normaaliudesta”, johon tulisi mukautua. Tämä ideaali kuitenkin osoittautuu romaanissa saavuttamattomaksi. Anthealle tämä ilmenee etenkin hänen seksuaalisen suuntautumisensa ja hänen neoliberaalin kapitalismin käytäntöjä vastustavan asenteensa vuoksi. Imogenin osalta taas kilpailuhenkisyys ja individualisuus kuluttavat häntä fyysisesti ja henkisesti aiheuttaen hänessä anoreksian ja viemällä hänen kykynsä saada oma ääni kuuluville.

Neljännän luvun toisessa osassa keskityn Puren markkinointistrategioihin, jotka symbolisesti muuntavat veden – elintärkeän ja toisaalta kuitenkin hyvin arkisen aineen – kaupalliseksi hyödykkeeksi. Pure edustaa *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanissa hallitsevaa neoliberaalin kapitalismin kertomusta, ja veden hyödykkeellistäminen on osa tätä kertomusta. Pulloveden markkinoinnissa korostuvat muun muassa puhtaus ja luonnollinen lähde. Lisäksi Puren viestintäosasto, Pure Dominant Narrative Department, pyrkii korostamaan yrityksen omaa

kertomusta toiminnastaan ja häivyttämään samalla toiminnan epäkohtia esille tuovat vastakertomukset.

Kolmannessa osassa siirryn käsittelemään *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanin yhteisyyden ja yhteenliittyvyyksien tematiikkaa. Tarkastelen erityisesti romaanissa käytettyjä harkittuja, yhteiskunnallisesti tietoisia modernistisia taktiikoita, kuten intertekstuaalisuutta ja moniäänisyyttä. Korostamalla yhteisyyttä, yhteenliittyvyyttä ja moniäänisyyttä sekä juonen että kerronnan tasolla *Girl Meets Boy* ongelmallistaa ajatuksen yhdestä hallitsevasta kertomuksesta. Muun muassa intertekstuaaliset alluusiot alkuperäiseen myyttiin ja keskittyminen myyttien sekä tarinoiden kertomiseen ja niiden kanssa dialogin käymiseen korostavat ajatusta kertomuksien kyseenalaistamisesta. Anthea ja Imogen vuorottelevat kertojina ja tuovat esille eri asioita ja kokemuksia, mutta tarina rakentuu silti yhteisenä, vaikkakin myös ristiriitoja ja epävarmuuksia sisältävänä. Lisäksi romaanin viisi lukua ovat nimeltään ”I” (”Minä”), ”You” (”Sinä”), ”Us” (”Me”), ”Them” (”He”) ja ”All Together Now” (”Nyt kaikki yhdessä”). Näin romaanissa siirrytään yksilöllisimmästä pronomiinista näkemykseen yhdessäolosta. Romaanin rakenne siis kuvastaa romaanin hahmojen läpikäymää muutosta yksilökeskeisyydestä yhteisöllisyyteen.

Neljännessä ja viimeisessä analyysiosassa tarkastelen *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanin Astrida Neimaniksen ”bodies of water” -käsitteen valossa. Tämän posthumaanin feministisen käsitteen avulla tuon esille romaanin posthumaanin ”going beyond one’s self” -etiikan. Tämä etiikka korostaa itsen tai minän ulkopuolelle, yli tai ohi käymistä ja muista välittämistä. Nimitän tätä etiikkaa posthumaaniksi ”vesiperäiseksi yhteisyydeksi”, sillä tämä yhteisyyden etiikka juontuu vedestä ja sen ominaisuuksista, kuten juoksevuudesta (fluidity) ja muuttuvaisuudesta. Tässä vesiperäisessä yhteisyydessä korostuu posthumaani näkemys kaikkien olentojen samankaltaisuudesta kaikessa eroavaisuudessakin. *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanissa ruumiillisuus näyttäytyy posthumaanina moneutena, jaettuna jopa ei-inhimillisten olentojen ja elottomien asioiden kanssa. Lisäksi romaanissa vesimetäforat ja veden korostunut läsnäolo liitetään yhteisyyteen ja muutoksen mahdollisuuteen, esimerkiksi ystävällisesti tarjotun vesilasin tai vesioikeuksien puolustamisen muodossa. Täten vesiperäinen yhteisyys ja yhdistävä vesi voivat toimia vastavoimana neoliberaalin kapitalismin hegemonialle.

## Lopuksi

Pro gradu -tutkielmani tavoite on tuoda aiempaa, *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanin koskevaa tutkimusta vahvemmin esille romaanin keskittyminen veteen ja veden määrittelyyn poliittisiin ulottuvuuksiin. Tarkoitukseni on havainnollistaa ja analysoida neoliberaalia kapitalismia, yksilökeskeisyyttä ja yhteisyyttä sekä vettä ja sen merkityksiä *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanissa ja osoittaa yhteydet näiden välillä. Keskeistä tutkielmassani on *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanin poliittisten ulottuvuuksien tarkastelu ja veden keskeinen asema näiden ulottuvuuksien kannalta.

Osoitan tutkielmassani, miten *Girl Meets Boy* -romaanissa vesi saa monenlaisia merkityksiä. Väitän, että romaani kohdistaa kritiikkiä neoliberaalia kapitalismia kohtaan esittämällä veden materiaalisena aineena neoliberaalin kapitalismin kontekstissa, missä veden merkityksistä ja määritelmistä käydään kamppailua. Lisäksi väitän, että *Girl Meets Boy* tuo esille neoliberaalin kapitalismin eetokselle vaihtoehdona ja haastajana posthumaanin vesiperäisen yhteisyyden etiikan.