

# End of the Line: The unpublished novels of Anita Mason

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## Abstract

*Anita Mason was a Booker Prize-nominated novelist who taught Creative Writing at the University of Warwick from 2007 until 2009. At the time of her death in September 2020, she left behind three unpublished short novels that provide a powerful, if disturbing, coda to the main body of her work. The novels are typical of Mason in that their settings are diverse: *Chuichui* is set in Haiti; *Suppose* in contemporary Israel; and *Andromeda* in a dystopian south-west England. Thematically, their concerns are contemporary and seem equally varied: political violence and corruption in *Chuichui*; the falsifying of history and culture in *Suppose*; and the consequences of the abuse of the natural world in *Andromeda*. This article contends, however, that beyond this diversity these works share deeper concerns that indicate a darker authorial outlook than that suggested by Mason's published work, and that amount to a crisis of faith in artistic representation and even in human civilisation itself.*

**Keywords:** Anita Mason; contemporary fiction; British fiction; dystopian novel; ecological fiction; political novel

## Introduction

At the time of her death in September 2020, the British novelist Anita Mason left behind three unpublished works that function as a fascinating coda to her underrated but substantial body of work. Mason, a Booker Prize nominee for her 1983 novel *The Illusionist*, published eight novels with a wide variety of settings, from first-century Judea through Nazi Germany to 1970s Cornwall. Her final published novel, *The Right Hand of the Sun*, a retelling of the conquest of Mexico by Hernan Cortés, was published in 2008 and represents her longest and most technically ambitious work. Then in her early sixties, Mason seemed set fair for a sustained period of mature, fully realised creativity. Sadly, following a visit to Haiti, she contracted polymyositis; the disease that eventually took her life. Her friend, the writer Christine Cohen Park, attests that, although Mason's ambitions remained undimmed, the condition robbed the author of the emotional energy required to realise full-length novels in a similar register to her earlier work. What followed were three novellas – the longest stretching to no more than 47,000 words. This enforced brevity did not restrain Mason from continuing to provide wildly different settings for these final pieces: *Chuichui* (2009), set in Haiti, is ostensibly an homage to Graham Greene's 1966 novel *The Comedians*; *Suppose* (2015) is a haunting parable set in contemporary Israel; and *Andromeda* (2017), set in the south-west of England, is a dystopian eco-fantasy about the mass suicide of animals.

This article will give a brief outline of these unpublished works and will demonstrate that, as with all of Mason's novels, similar themes and motifs recur beneath the diverse settings. After an analysis of the three texts in relation to Mason's full-length works, the article will contend that the overall mood and convictions presented by the former signify a profound break with the latter. The energetic authorial voice and the belief in the value of intellectual aspiration, aesthetic shaping, and human agency that is evident in Mason's published novels is superseded by a pessimistic tone that goes beyond what might be attributed to autobiographical factors to present the reader with a sense of ineluctable enervation and collapse that affects all of human culture. When coupled with the themes of ecological crisis and human abuse of the natural world, it is *Andromeda* that among these works has the most contemporary resonance, and that deserves a wider audience – possibly through cinematic adaptation.

Despite their diverse settings, most of Anita Mason's published novels begin with one or more principal characters becoming marginalised from mainstream society, either through accident or design. What follows is that these protagonists gravitate toward some form of alternative community that, initially at least, promises greater fulfilment. Yet the need

for individual self-determination shared by these characters is frequently shown to be at odds with the impulse for a more satisfying collective life; and collective spaces, both mainstream and dissenting, are shown to be vulnerable to manipulation by tyrannical individuals. In *Angel* (1994), for instance, the only means by which Frederika Kurtz can escape her domineering, traditionalist father in order to fulfil her ambition of becoming a pilot is to join the Luftwaffe, but she eventually realises that the means by which she achieves her own liberation contributes to the oppressive order of Nazism. A similar dynamic occurs among the leaders of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement in *Perfection* (2003) and, albeit on a much smaller scale, among the members of a rural commune in Mason's first novel, *Bethany* (1981).

In these novels, a tentative sense of resolution arrives in the form of a persistently dynamic negotiation with failure and futility. Characters in Mason's most openly philosophical works, such as *The Illusionist* and *The Right Hand of the Sun*, emphasise the essential 'doubleness' of the nature of this negotiation. In *The Illusionist*, the title character Simon Magus, having led a life of opportunistic self-gratification, eventually rails against singular assertion and belief in favour of perpetual activity:

*The true abyss ... is that there is no point in trying to do anything and yet we have to try. Our effort is required, although it means nothing and will come to nothing. It will be negated, but also it will negate. It will hold the world in balance, and ensure that, for a little while, nothing happens. For if we stopped acting, the world would end. (Mason, 1994: 277)*

This emphasis on a constant struggle with a protean reality is revisited in *The Right Hand of the Sun* when the principal narrator Geronimo converses with the indigenous ruler Moctezuma about the twin gods of the Meshica people who are said to represent 'all that can be thought' (Mason, 2009: 497). It is significant that Geronimo himself has a twin identity, being Spanish but also having spent years living with an indigenous tribe when he was known as Muluc. The notion of reality as something divided yet fluid haunts Geronimo who, at the end of the novel, sees the land on which he lives as 'a double thing that presents itself to me with first one face and then the other, like a sword hung twisting from a branch whose two surfaces in turn reflect the sunlight' (Ibid: 500). He contemplates the idea of land as both 'a dead thing parcelled up, a net of ownership' and as 'the true and everlasting earth out of which the maize springs and into which ... we descend and are reborn ... forever' (Ibid), while experiencing both agitation and peace as he moves constantly between the two states. Similarly, he becomes acutely aware of the contrast between the European and indigenous models of time in the

same way that, at the climax of *The Yellow Cathedral* (2002), the character of Benito is seduced by the circular nature of time expressed in the traditional songs he hears.

Within these novels, Mason's evident attraction towards the atavistic is recruited into a project of energetic engagement with a bewildering reality in a way that is intended as a challenge to power and oppression.<sup>1</sup> While the 'posthumous' works do not venture far from these themes and plot trajectories, they share a much bleaker and pessimistic outlook in which characters fail to adopt the confidence in human intellectual agency that permeates Mason's earlier novels. Moreover, the emphasis on the importance of creative representation – through language and art – that is so crucial a part of Mason's project also enters a sense of crisis, as if representation itself were part of that crisis, propelling a sense of collapse and failure that finds ultimate representation in the events that conclude her final work, *Andromeda*.

### Three Tales

Pessimism and atavism are rarely far from European commentaries on Haiti, and Mason's *Chuichui* (the Haitian Creole for the word 'whisper') is no exception to this. The connection with Greene's *The Comedians* is made explicit during a passage in which the narrator, a British author named Claude, says of another character, 'He had read his Graham Greene. Haiti for him ... had been the nightmare republic' (Mason, 2009: 95). Yet Mason does not demur from this notion of Haiti. In fact, Greene's work is employed by Mason as something of a template: in both novels, the country is ruled by a corrupt and ruthless dictator (in Mason's case, the fictional Jean-Luc Théophile, known colloquially as 'Timoun'); both are set in a near-empty, foreign-owned hotel; and both feature a dissolute narrator who, while initially scornful of well-intentioned newcomers, is eventually impressed by the integrity and resourcefulness of those who pursue a purpose beyond their own appetites. In *The Comedians*, the hotelier Brown comes to admire an American philanthropist couple (the Smiths) as well as the con-man Jones, who dies after deciding to help the rebel forces fighting 'Papa Doc' Duvalier. In *Chuichui*, Claude is initially sceptical of the attempts of the Englishman Michael Syme to find his niece Jo, an adopted Haitian orphan who has disappeared while working for a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Haiti. In time, Claude assists Syme and involves him in two aspects of Haitian life that also feature in Greene's novel: Haitian art and voodoo (referred to as 'vodou' by Mason).

The presence of art – and art forgery – in *Chuichui* is unsurprising given Mason's interest in the problematic nature of representation that is especially evident in her short story 'Irma' (1990), and in her novel *The Racket* (1990). Like *Chuichui*, both tales are set in Latin America and both

feature references to religious and indigenous art. Moreover, all three works warn that the relationship between art and the world it attempts to represent is perilous: in *Chuichui*, Claude introduces Syme to the thriving Haitian art world, but he is aware that forgeries are rife, and is assaulted by a hustler working for a transsexual forger named Maxine. Furthermore, Jo is alleged to have a boyfriend named Hector, but an artist named Hector claims not to know Jo, while another Hector is no more than a child and a former neighbour of Jo's.

Significantly, it is the world of voodoo that is the more fruitful than art, both in terms of Syme's search, and with regard to Mason's wider thematic interests. Although a voodoo ceremony takes place in *The Comedians*, Mason provides a narrator who is clearly more engaged and sympathetic with the religion and its practices than Greene's protagonist, who expresses only disgust. Claude makes approving references to the works of the occultist William Seabrook and the anthropologist Alfred Métraux and, after seeing a photograph of Jo, recalls seeing her at a ceremony. He then persuades Syme that a consultation with a *houngan*, or voodoo priest, will help to find Jo. Syme obtains the information he needs but is profoundly disturbed and bewildered by the experience. Claude attempts to explain the means by which the *houngan* divines information from celebrants and spirits: 'a space opens up. The space is inside everyone...The God enters' (**Ibid: 58**). Like Haitian art, voodoo is depicted by Mason as a means by which Haitians, besieged by foreign intervention and by their own corrupt ruling class, can communicate within an alternative collective space that represents a challenge to traditional Eurocentric notions of logic, perception, and personal identity. Towards the end of the novel, Syme has to accept that his confidence in the stable world he knows – that of self-knowledge and of the authority of white men like himself - has been eroded not only by his experience of voodoo, but also by Jo's refusal to return to Britain and her unswerving faith in Théophile and the people of Haiti. In fact, the Théophile regime is doomed, and the novel ends in a babble of fragmented telephone conversations that prefigure the sense of social and linguistic collapse that haunts Mason's two final works.

In terms of atmosphere and thematic concerns, *Suppose* is reminiscent of Michael Haneke's 2005 film *Hidden* (*Caché* in the original French). Haneke's film uses the long aftermath of the post-war Franco-Algerian conflict as the basis of an investigation of post-colonial guilt and selective memory. Its claustrophobic feel – which begins with a bourgeois French couple being sent surveillance films of their own home – is intended to foreshadow eventual breakdown and crisis. In the same way that *Chuichui* employs *The Comedians* as a source text, *Suppose* appears to draw upon the influence of *Hidden* in order to address the Israel-Palestine conflict. It

is the story of Max Guzman, the director of a 'Museum of Reconciliation' in (an unnamed) Israel, who finds that the carapace of well-ordered material and aesthetic satisfaction that he has constructed around his life is being continually ruptured by disturbing elements from the past and present.

The novel begins with a much-anticipated trip by Max and his companion Leyla to an ancient archaeological site and a tea-room run by an elderly woman that Max admires for having 'overcome' (Mason, 2015: 4) unspecified adversity. The site is a disappointment, however, and Max sees, in Leyla's presence, that the refreshments at the tea-room are inferior and that the elderly woman is a bitter matriarch. Matters deteriorate further when the pair argue, and Max assaults Leyla. Max makes the acquaintance of a (nameless) shopkeeper who is a member of a persecuted minority, the Hariph, and who is upset by a photograph on the wall of Max's apartment that depicts the homeland from which he alleges that his family was forcibly removed – an accusation that Max patronisingly denies. The narrative then transforms the shopkeeper into the ghost of Max's deceased father, who recalls his experiences of atrocities committed against Jews by the Nazis. Towards the end of the novel, Max discovers that a valuable painting in the museum has been damaged after being dropped and finds that his position at the museum is untenable. The tale ends with the suicide at the museum of the shopkeeper, who has seemingly been following Max.

Mason's narrative constantly undercuts Max's assumptions and assertions, not only about his role in the national project of reconciliation – represented by the museum he directs – but about his own character: against Leyla's accusation that he is a bully, he protests that he is 'the mildest of men' (Ibid: 8). During the visit to the tea-room, Max adopts a proprietorial view of 'a delightful spot I ...had come to think of as in some way "mine"', extending this view across the landscape and contrasting its 'careful and assiduous irrigation' with earlier times when 'as everyone knows, the land had been allowed to fall into ruin' (Ibid: 2). His attitude becomes more explicit in a subsequent passage:

*A country can't exist without borders. If nothing else, it can't exist without that which it excludes...The founding principle of our state concerns what it is and what it is not, which translates naturally into whom it is for and whom it is not for. Various things follow from this: citizens' rights, military service, educational opportunities, housing. The allocation of land. The allocation of water. But all these things, these facts, are secondary. They result from the initial conception. The initial conception concerns purity. Most states arise on the same basis. (Mason, 2015: 12)*

'Purity' is always a dangerous concept in Mason's work: from the fanaticism of the Anabaptist zealots in *Perfection* to the Nazis in *Angel*, the imposition of abstract ideological constructs upon a world that resists those constructs inevitably leads to atrocity. This is made explicit during a later passage in *Suppose* when Max's father claims that a Jew shot by the Nazis had offended the latter's ideas of 'purity' (Mason, 2015: 51). The spectral father represents the return of the repressed, and frequently acts as a rebuke to Max's suppressed conscience. Indeed, it is through the voice of his father that Max is forced to confront the notion that what Max's nation has done to the Hariph is equivalent to what the Nazis did to his father's generation. Under such pressure, Max eventually suffers a breakdown that represents a crisis related not only to the principle of reconciliation that has provided a foundation for Max and his nation, but also to Max's confidence in accepted notions of time.

The notion that the conventional model of linear time is problematic appears in much contemporary fiction (Dillon & Marques, 2021, and the chapter 'Time and narrative' in Morrison, 2013) and is apparent from the beginning of *Suppose*. At the archaeological site, Max expresses frustration that he can only look at the past through a disappointing pile of stones: 'Time is a perception, I thought. What is it really? Perhaps there is no "really". But what does that mean?' (Ibid: 6). Later, when discussing Nazi atrocities with his father's ghost, Max notices that the ghost switches from the past to the present tense. Max invokes T S Eliot's *Four Quartets*, concluding that 'time is an illusion ... all time is present ... all time is unredeemable' (Ibid: 24) and begins to fear that the idea of the museum, along with the national project of reconciliation, is doomed and futile. The eighth chapter of the novel is actually entitled 'time' and concerns Max's advocacy of a controversial art installation that features an elderly watchmaker take apart a watch and then reassemble it – except that the reassembly stage involves no more than the film being run backwards. Max believes that the film is intended to subvert conventional notions about time but acknowledges, upon viewing the piece once more, that there 'was no reconciliation in that piece, either, and certainly there was no hope' (Ibid: 36). It occurs to Max that his father has been reincarnated as the Hariph shopkeeper and that irredeemable atrocity has damned the nation to a form of eternal recurrence – a similar anxiety about time and history having been expressed in relation to Haiti in *Chuichui*.

Events come to a head at the meeting of the museum board during which Max expounds his new ideas about time by referring to the practices of the Mayan civilisation and invoking the idea of 'anti-time' (Ibid: 85) as a correlative to the concept of anti-matter. He argues to the bewildered board members that the present is used to manipulate the past and the future, and that this manipulation creates a damnable circularity in which



redemption becomes impossible. Max appears to have surrendered to a mood of passive nihilism that assures his dismissal from his post. In the final chapter, Max is called to the museum to witness the aftermath of the suicide of the Hariph man, who had hanged himself from a steel bar that, earlier in the tale, Max had indicated was a symbolic feature of the museum (it is worth noting that *Hidden* also ends with the suicide of the colonised subject). Faced with the collapse of all his certainties and haunted by the notion of damnation through eternal recurrence, the only feasible resolution for Max appears to be the obliteration of self. Believing himself twinned to the Hariph man who is also his revenant father, the novel ends with Max contemplating the loaded pistol in his office desk.

The themes invoked by *Suppose* - the obliteration of identity, the questioning of time and representation, and the suggestion that humankind will inevitably return to a primitive state - reach their ultimate expression in Mason's final novel, *Andromeda*. For the first time in Mason's work, the principal character is not a conflicted adult thinker but a child: a ten-year-old boy, Davey Hickling, who lives in a Devon village with his parents and his beloved pet dog, Jack. Davey sees a herd of cattle break out of their field and drown themselves in the sea, only to discover later that this behaviour has been repeated across the world: animals that are held captive or otherwise exploited by human beings for food, work or entertainment, commit suicide or allow themselves to die. Food shortages are followed by economic collapse, and Davey's parents are killed by a marauding gang. Dogs have remained loyal to humans and so Davey and Jack start to wander the countryside, foraging for food and sleeping rough. The novel tilts into the picaresque as Davey comes into contact with a series of alternative communities that have always been a feature of Mason's fiction: a party of 'hippies' trying to buy food; a group of 'lunatics' who flog themselves as they wander the roads; and a Christian farming community known as Mallow that offers shelter to Davey in return for work. Davey's insistence on sharing food and a sleeping space with Jack angers the leaders of Mallow who explain their conviction that humans are meant to have dominion over animals. Davey leaves Mallow and meets Smithy, an animal rights activist who lives a nomadic lifestyle from an old van. Along with other 'vanners', Smithy has dedicated her life to rescuing wild animals from being used as a food source by humans. The vanners are similar to the alternative communities in *The War Against Chaos* in that they lead unstructured lives unencumbered by hierarchies and are led by a combination of principle and pragmatism rather than hard ideology. Nevertheless, like those groups from the earlier novel, they run into problematic territory. Smithy is uneasy at the decision of the group to rebuild an abandoned house and settle there while locking a rescued deer and fawn inside a stockade to prevent them being killed and eaten by local



villagers. She believes that, however well-meant, enclosing animals in the interest of their welfare and preservation is at odds with the group's beliefs and will lead inevitably – as a character in *The War Against Chaos* puts it – 'to the place where all the old mistakes would again be made' (Mason, 1989: 177).

After an episode in which Jack kills the fawn, Davey and Smithy leave the group and resume their nomadic lifestyle. Smithy finds occasional work at a community that consists of a patch of land next to a functioning set of wind turbines. Like Mallow – and possibly the vanners - this community appears to be reconstructing the ills of civilisation in that the power it generates through technology obliges it to seek more and more labourers in order to carry on growing. Smithy is offered the chance to live and work at the settlement on a permanent basis but refuses to do so. The trio then encounter yet another community, led by a man named Marcel, that is devoted to the idea that the extra-terrestrials that Marcel believes to have encouraged humans to adopt farming and build cities thousands of years ago are due to return soon in order to restore civilisation. When the aliens fail to arrive, the group fragments, and Jack joins the pack of dogs that had accompanied the group. There follows the mysterious ending of the novel, during which Davey and Smithy appear to be struck dumb while the dogs begin to communicate with one another in a strange new language.

The problematic – if not outright dangerous - nature of language reaches a bleak conclusion in *Andromeda* that is prefaced in *The Right Hand of the Sun*. In the earlier novel, the threat posed to the indigenous population of central America by the Spanish is perceived by the Meshica people in terms of a fear of writing instruments and the appearance of Cortés's notary, as if the Meshica sensed that writing signified the deadening commodification of land and people. In *Andromeda*, there are few instances of written language, as if it had already become a thing of the past, its commodifying energies having been spent as social coherence dissolves. At the end of the novel, spoken language follows the same fate as the fragmented communities that are all that remain of human civilisation collapse in on themselves. While Marcel's group await the return of the extra-terrestrials:

*Nobody talks much. People communicate as much by gesture as speech. Words take energy out of you. They also, Marcel says at one the rare evenings when he comes to the campfire, lead people astray.*

*'Think of all the things that were made with words. Empires, wars, histories. Just trouble, all of it. Leading nowhere.'* (Mason, 2017: 123)

The group then abandon conventional language as they begin speaking in tongues, after which they abandon themselves to a 'state of emptiness' (Mason, 2017: 124), following the example of the captive animals at the beginning of the novel.

Another notion voiced in *The Right Hand of the Sun* is that the abandonment of the hunter-gatherer state in favour of settled development was a mistake on the part of humanity. Moctezuma confesses to Geronimo his regret that the Meshica ever left their nomadic existence in order to establish farms and cities, and to pursue the very wealth and power to which the rapacious *conquistadores* are attracted. In *Andromeda*, as the vanners debate the imprisonment of the deer, Smithy argues that, 'if you put a living creature in a cage ... you are putting yourself in a cage at the same time' (Ibid: 76) before later making explicit the connection between the farming of animals and inevitable destruction:

*'Farming,' retorts Smithy, 'is the problem. It's got us here. When people settle down and start to farm, that's all they think about.'*

*'If we went back to being hunter-gatherers, half the world's population would die of hunger.'*

*'From the planet's point of view, that is exactly what needs to happen,' Smithy says. (Mason, 2017: 84)*

## Conclusion

The ambiguous endings of Mason's published novels, with their emphasis on uncertainty and 'doubleness' are reliant on the author's insistence on the importance of constant intellectual rigour and energy. By contrast, the three unpublished novels present a much gloomier and resigned picture of a collapsing civilised order, and of a loss of faith in the human intellect and its creations. One such creation is that of regular, linear time and its importance in the processes of measurement and regulation, or 'parcelling out', as it is referred to in *The Right Hand of the Sun*. For Mason, the meliorist conception of constant progress through linear time, so central to the Enlightenment and modern liberalism, is favoured less than atavistic notions of circular time and eternal recurrence that are accepted by the marginalised indigenous peoples of Latin America. This trope is not uncommon in other contemporary novels: in Jonathan Franzen's *Crossroads*, a Lutheran preacher who spends time on a Navajo reservation speculates that 'while man experienced time as a progression...to God the entire course of history was eternally present...Being in the desert made a mystery like this accessible' (Franzen, 2021: 507), while in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, the indigenous Australian characters accept the existence of spirits from beyond conventional time 'rattling off the local history of centuries in minutes' (Wright, 2008:270). In Mason's published novels, this

beatific portrayal of alternative models of time is applied to the representation of the Chiapas Amerindians in *The Yellow Cathedral*, and to the winic people in *The Right Hand of the Sun*, yet a less positive of circular time emerges in the three unpublished works. In *Chuichui*, Haiti is depicted as a land of recurring damnation in which Western intervention has brought about not progress but entrenched degradation and misery. *Suppose* is another text in which the artefacts of Western civilisation are shown to fall away as the narrator experiences a crisis that affects everything from his love of tea and preserves to his belief in his nation's management of its past and even his confidence in the beneficial powers of artistic representation. Art literally collapses around him as he fails to articulate a redemptive narrative built around Mayan conceptions of time and can only act as a faithless witness to his own dissolution and that of the persecuted minorities who, like the indigenous peoples elsewhere in Mason's works, have been separated from their lands by modern Western notions of settlement, possession and development.

The modern Western insistence on control over the natural world and the living beings within it is another aspect of human agency in which Mason has evidently lost faith. In this regard *Andromeda* is an explicit condemnation of humanity's irresponsible dominion over the natural world. The Mallow community believes that it is a benevolent force in its insistence on the importance of returning to a highly regulated agricultural order and on the privileged status human beings enjoy in relation to animals, but the implication is that they are merely reproducing the unbalanced system that has just collapsed. As Smithy tells Davey, 'There can't be a balance because we've destroyed it. We are the predator and for the past God knows how many thousand years the idea of balance hasn't entered our tiny minds' (*Ibid*: 75, emphasis in original).

Perhaps most significantly for a writer who has in her published work placed such an emphasis on the crucial importance of intellectual activity and agency, *Andromeda* shows humanity being divested of the tools of representation that distinguished it from other animals and with which it constructed civilisation. The implication is that humanity has brought about this fate upon itself; that it has deserved its own downfall. Mason does not make clear the mechanics of the transfer of the gift of language – and perhaps intellect – from humans to dogs: the possibility of God being the agent of the transfer is unlikely in an author whose concerns have always been secular. Mason may be proposing a fantastical version of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis whereby Earth, effectively functioning as a 'self-regulating entity' (*Lovelock, 2000: ix*), rids itself of the highly developed communicative ability of a species that threatens to bring ruin.

A more likely alternative is that *Andromeda* is a fable – not least because of the favoured position accorded to animals in the novel. Its tone is elegiac on a grand scale, leading to the conclusion that it is an ecological warning about the exploitative abuse of the flora and fauna of the Earth by humanity. Alternatively, it may be an essay on fatalism and resignation for a writer who sees in contemporary concerns about climate and the environment a form of reverse metaphor for her own physical decline. It may also reflect a general anxiety about the role of the contemporary writer in which '[t]he novelist's sense of impending obsolescence is bound up with a perceived loss of cultural authority' (Green, 2005: 7). Such a sense stems from marginalisation: a recurrent theme in Mason's work that is represented not only by the isolation that her protagonists experience from mainstream society but also by the conflicted feelings that these characters share towards the alternative communities to which they are attracted. Full redemption rarely occurs in these novels, and it is left for the reader to infer that it is the role of the writer 'to clothe what is essentially inhuman in the trappings of the human, keep the world convinced that it runs on a human principle, without which deluded conviction all culture would fall into utter ruin' (Fitzpatrick, 2006: 51). In these final pieces, Mason's confidence in this dynamic principle breaks down, leading the fable to point at the catastrophe that is widely believed to loom large in our not-too-distant future while at the same time reminding us that it is only through the process of fabulation that we can examine our own fate.

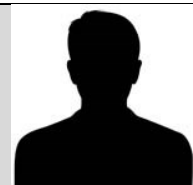
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## **Endnotes**

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<sup>i</sup> For a more detailed assessment of Anita Mason's published work, see (Hutchinson, 2010).